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## **Krempels Center Offers Self-Care Series and Support for Caregivers**

By: Sarah Lovell, Krempels Center

A brain injury can, unfortunately and unexpectedly, happen to anyone, anywhere, anytime. Della O'Shea's life changed when her adult son experienced a stroke in 2019. O'Shea explains, "In the best of circumstances, being a caregiver is a life-altering experience. It requires stamina, flexibility, emotional stability, patience, a positive attitude, creative thinking, organization and time-management skills...I have had to research information, learn new ways of doing things, and be willing to make the needs of my adult son a priority." O'Shea connected with Krempels Center's Caregiver Support group where she met other family caregivers.

Krempels Center, a nonprofit dedicated to improving the lives of people living with acquired brain injury, supports all individuals impacted by brain injury: the survivor, their family, friends, and loved ones. In addition to weekly programming designed specifically for individuals living with brain injuries, Krempels Center offers a monthly Family Caregiver Support group for the families of Krempels Center members.

Since the onset of COVID-19, the Family Caregiver Support Group transitioned to Zoom and attendance has increased. "It has been a lifeline to me to be able to connect with other caregivers who share a common role in caring for a loved one who has experienced a brain injury, even though individual circumstances may vary. The group provides a type of support that other friends and family cannot offer, however well-intentioned they may be," O'Shea describes.

"The emergence of COVID-19 compounded the isolation and eliminated coping mechanisms I used to take for granted, like going to the gym or having visitors at home. It was often a lonely, isolated existence with few people in my sphere able to truly know what I was experiencing," shared O'Shea.

Ernie and Brenda St. Pierre also regularly attend Krempels Center's Caregiver Support Group. "Being a caregiver, especially for an adult child, has been a life changing event. Being at retirement age, we now have to first and foremost make sure [our son] is taken care of and safe." St. Pierre adds, "The person who has [a brain injury] is not the only one that life changes for at the time of their diagnosis. Caregivers' lives change in a different way and they often are the quarterbacks of the team but always remain on the sidelines, unnoticed."

Anna Coleman, a graduate-level Krempels Center intern studying Clinical Mental Health Counseling and Drama Therapy at Lesley University, approached Krempels Center program staff with an idea for an additional resource for caregivers: A Six-Week Self-Care Series. The idea came to Anna after Program Coordinator Kelly Redwine-DePierre led an experiential activity for the interns that highlighted the difficulties of the family caregiver role. It had a profound impact on Coleman.

Coleman explains, "The idea of the Self-Care Series is to provide a consistent time each week where the family member can truly take that time for themselves in a supportive group environment. This will just so happen to, somewhat indirectly, benefit the [family member living with a brain injury] as well. This group also provides time where they can be themselves outside of the role as a family caregiver too."

Donna and David Mills connected with Krempels Center in 2019 after their adult son experienced a brain injury: "We found our lives forever changed. Krempels Center has given us the support we so desperately needed."

While spending the winter in Florida, the Mills family was able to stay connected with Krempels Center over Zoom. "Krempels Center has allowed our son to be a part of a community that supports, encourages, and make social connections he might not otherwise have. Beyond that, participating in Caregiver workshops has given us a healthier perspective on our roles as caregivers."

Mills shared, "Being able to converse with other caregivers gives us insight into different ways to cope with the demands of being a caregiver. It has also taught us that it is ok and necessary to take care of ourselves. The workshops have given us the tools and practices to balance our role as caregivers with our own needs. The support we have received from Krempels Center has been invaluable."

Diane Heselton has been connected with Krempels Center since 2014, when her husband became a member after experiencing a stroke. “It wasn’t until COVID, that I sought out support for myself. Being at home for hours and days on end, showed me just how much caregiving takes a toll...mentally, physically, as well as emotionally. I felt shut off from the world...I had well-meaning friends, loving church family, wonderful therapists, but something was missing - understanding, true understanding - someone who truly ‘got it.’ I reached out to the caregivers’ monthly Zoom meeting. What a blessing! There I met others who shared the same concerns, frustrations, tips, strategies and at times just listened,” Heselton shared. “I find [Krempels Center] right at my side whenever I need them...I feel they are as concerned for [family caregivers] as the [brain injury] survivors.”

*Krempels Center’s mission is to improve the quality of life of people living with brain injury through evidence-based programming, shared experiences, and support in a welcoming community. Established in 2000, Krempels Center has built a reputation for offering high-quality, therapeutic programs for brain injury survivors. Krempels Center is unique to the seacoast; in fact, it is the only service of its kind in New Hampshire, and only one of a few in the country.*

*Brain injury survivors often experience difficulty returning to their previous roles at work, home, and in the community. Krempels Center offers opportunities for social connection, skill building, and exploration of new life interests to improve quality of life following brain injury. In this vibrant learning community, survivors heal through shared experiences, peer support, and therapeutic programming. Research in partnership with the University of New Hampshire has shown Krempels Center members have higher quality of life, lower stress, and stronger social connectedness than typical brain injury survivors.*

Visit [www.krempelscenter.org](http://www.krempelscenter.org) to find out more about Krempels Center.