Program Spotlight: Therapeutic Recreation

Grant Lebs (pictured) is an active member of Krempels Center and an avid music fan. He has just started to relearn guitar at Krempels Center – he hasn’t been able to play since his brain injury in July, 2015. He shares his passion for music with other Krempels Center members, and they bond over favorite songs. With the help of our UNH therapeutic recreation interns, he’s been able to start teaching some songs to interns – something that he feels gives his life meaning and purpose.

Scenes from the 19th Annual Runner's Alley / Redhook 5K

Over 2,000 runners, along with their friends and families, showed up at Redhook over Memorial Day weekend to participate in the 19th annual Runner’s Alley/Redhook 5K. Thanks so much to all of our sponsors, volunteers, families and staff, and especially our partners at Runner’s Alley and Redhook, for another fantastic year! Krempels Center receives all the proceeds for this race - a cornerstone of our income. Enjoy these photos, courtesy of Charlene Lister.
Our motto—"you’re not who you were; be who you are"—is both inspirational and aspirational for many brain injury survivors within the Krempels Center community and beyond. For those living with chronic acquired brain injury from trauma, stroke, or other causes, accepting your new life is a pivotal moment in the healing process. It provides an opening to explore what is possible—such as new friendships and renewed relationships, new recreational interests, new vocational or volunteer pursuits, and new skills to build or to relearn. At Krempels Center, we meet brain injury survivors where they are. Our members visit Krempels Center uncertain about what is next in their new life. Often they heard that the Center might be a good place for them to check out. They arrive with some trepidation and a feeling that "this isn’t for me." But many stay, realizing that they can be themselves here and start to feel whole again. Gradually, a sense of purpose, a sense of community, and a sense of hope emerges.

New research reveals that many acquired brain injury survivors have long-term impairments, while others are unable to return to their old life for a period of time, from months to years. At Krempels Center, there is no membership timeframe. "Once a member, always a member," means that some members are here for a short time, others longer—and the door is always open to return. Living with the long-term effects of brain injury requires a supportive community—and Krempels Center can be a part of a survivor's long-term community, even if it is to stop by a few times each year looking for help or simply to touch base and chat.

In this issue, you will hear from one of our members, Lisa Fish, who includes Krempels Center as part of her new life post-injury. She sees Krempels Center as a stepping stone on her path to returning to the work she loves. Lisa and other members at Krempels Center are living our motto—being the best of who they are in their new lives.  

Meet Krempels Center Member Lisa Fish - Helping Others is in her 'DNA'

In 2013, Lisa Fish (pictured here with her nephew at Krempels Center) was living and working in Boston as a pediatric intensive care nurse. At home with her husband Jason, Lisa suffered a severe headache and actually passed out from the pain. She was rushed to Tufts Medical Center where she was quickly operated on for an arterial bleed from a brain aneurysm. "The only time I was ever in the hospital before then was to go to work," Lisa said. "I was always very healthy." Just twenty-five years old at the time, Lisa spent a month in the hospital, followed by six months in rehab. She explains that there were several trips back to the hospital for additional surgery. She later continued rehab on an outpatient basis. "I graduated from rehab last July," she noted. Her mother, a teacher at the local high school in West Newbury, MA, discovered Krempels Center through her research. How has life changed for Lisa? "It’s very challenging," she answered with a slight smile. "My long-term memory is fine, but I have almost no short-term memory. I can't remember what happened yesterday, or even this morning." A born problem solver with a determined spirit, Lisa developed her own system for coping with her short-term memory loss. Holding up her cell phone, she said: "Everything is done with my cell phone. It acts like my memory with a series of alerts and reminders for everything I have to do through the day." And her schedule is a busy one. She comes to Krempels Center, usually one or two times a week. She enjoys meeting people and supporting other members. "I also enjoy the classes, particularly cooking," she said. "I love to cook." As a nurse, helping others is part of Lisa’s DNA. She now volunteers at the Children’s Castle, a child care center near her home; in nurses’ and secretary’s offices in the high school she attended; and at Anna Jaques Hospital in Newburyport. But Lisa’s focus is on getting back to work as a pediatric intensive care nurse. "It’s what I do - by trade and by love," she said. "They are the best children in the world. It’s very uplifting to see how they deal with everything." She talks about some of her patients and describes them as her guardian angels. Staying involved and challenging herself has been an important part of Lisa’s recovery. She also participates in a brain mapping and stimulation study called ‘Sound Brain’ in Cambridge, MA. Asked if she has seen any improvement in her short term memory, she paused and said, "It's difficult to tell." But her brother Paul quickly responded that he sees a big improvement. Lisa looks forward to getting back to driving. "But most of all, I look forward to going back to work," she said. "It will happen!"

Written and contributed by Portsmouth resident Ruth Maron.