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NEWS

Great Minds: A moment of zen for brain injury survivors

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For nearly 20 years, Krempels Center has held a weekly meditation group facilitated by longtime volunteer Gerry Duffy. Krempels Center is a local nonprofit organization that offers programs and support for people living with brain injury. Through the dedication of staff, volunteers and interns, Krempels Center offers a variety of programs specially geared towards brain injury survivors to help them with skills to enhance their quality of life. The group that Duffy facilitates allows members to practice mental and physical wellness through meditation.

In the past, the meditation group would meet in the library of the Community Campus in Portsmouth and would have gathered in a group of 6 to 20 members. Due to COVID-19 and the concurrent prioritization of the Krempels Center community safety and health, this group now meets weekly on Wednesdays via Zoom, an online meeting platform. Duffy, the group's longtime facilitator, stated that technology "has been essential in bringing the program from the library to online and has helped establish a sense of community" despite the changes that have come to the lives of many throughout the past year.

The meditation group allows for Krempels Center members to engage in the practice of mindfulness. As defined by Duffy, mindfulness "at the simplest is paying attention in the moment without judgment." The meditation and mindfulness skills that are taught during the sessions allow for members to learn "tools for the toolbox" to carry through life. Meditation allows participants to work toward recognizing where the mind is going and bringing it back to where you want it to be. Meditation is a practice that can also help to improve physical wellness. It allows participants to increase awareness of the connection between the mind and the body.

During the session, Duffy leads a guided meditation. The environment that is created is one that is welcoming and safe. It is a relaxing, peaceful time that allows members to be present

in the moment. Over the years, Duffy has used different meditation techniques during sessions but has found the body scan meditation to have the greatest effect. The body scan guides participants toward judgment free awareness of the body. The awareness that results from the body scan can bring attention to emotions, sensations and thoughts.

Krempels Center member Lee Harvey has been attending the meditation group with Duffy for 17 years and practiced meditation even before then. Harvey said, “With a brain injury, it is harder to focus and meditation does help you to focus, so it is able to counteract some of the effects.” Harvey also expressed how meditation teaches “turning off the judgment part of the brain” which is helpful for brain injury survivors. For Harvey, meditation has been a valuable practice that he says “has helped him make it through.”

In reference to meditation and quality of life, Duffy explained how it “is not easily measured, but that if members continue to attend the meditation sessions then there is value.” At the end of sessions when he “looks at faces at the end, people who are in constant pain get some relief.”

The meditation group and all of the virtual programs offered through Krempels Center have a strong purpose to positively impact the lives of members. During an unpredictable and everchanging time, the resilience and innovation of Krempels Center has provided stability in the lives of members.

Krempels Center’s mission is to improve the lives of adults living with acquired brain injury. 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 to find out more about Krempels Center.