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# Great Minds: Book club benefits brain injury survivors

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A key pillar of Krempels Center's approach to helping brain injury survivors heal is providing opportunities for members to gather around a common goal and share in their growth together. Krempels Center offers a dozen or more groups and workshops each week, specially geared toward brain injury survivors. Group topics include cognitive skill building, mental health, creative expression, communication skills and more. One popular group offering - book club - helps participants with all of these themes and more.

Earlier this year, the group embarked on the reading of "The Soul of an Octopus" by Sy Montgomery, a New Hampshire author and naturalist. Each week, the group gathered to discuss the wonder and majesty of octopuses, as well as Montgomery's tales of interaction and connection with these majestic sea creatures at the New England Aquarium, and in their natural habitats in the reefs of French Polynesia and the Gulf of Mexico.

Upon completion of the book, the group reached out to the author inviting her to a virtual visit to talk about "The Soul of an Octopus." While she had to "ink" about it, Montgomery graciously accepted the invite and met with 12 Krempels Center members and staff in June via Zoom. The meeting followed a Q&A style as the members had come up with many questions throughout their time reading and discussing the book together.

Montgomery shared many wonderful sentiments during the meeting. One such story that stood out to the members was her journey of learning how to scuba dive in order to interact with octopuses in their natural habitat. As she described the challenges she faced and how she persevered to overcome them, the members were able to reflect on their own challenges, adaptations and triumphs as they navigate their lives after brain injury.

"I so admire what you have all done," shared Montgomery on the Zoom meeting. "I have immense respect for all of you re-growing and coming back from injury. All great men and

women have come through trial and come out of it as a new person. It is clear you are a community of great healers and I'm honored that you chose my book."

Former Krempels Center intern Mariah Masse returned for the special author meet and great as she facilitated the book club's meetings during her tenure with the organization earlier this year. Masse shared that the group enjoyed fun debates and discussions. They shared tidbits from the book and posed fun questions to the whole Krempels Center membership at their weekly community meetings; trivia such as, "What is the plural of octopus?" Masse wasn't even at Krempels Center yet when the club selected the book, but she was so impressed by its subject matter and the author's authenticity.

"Today was a fun way to come full circle [with the book club]. I have now moved forward from my internship, but love coming back to Krempels Center as a volunteer!" said Masse.

In the wake of COVID-19, the book club and all of Krempels Center's programs and community meetings have gone virtual. Krempels Center continues to work to bring brain injury survivors together in a safe, welcoming community, and are able to provide support for its members who were attending in-person programming prior to the pandemic and also those who could not attend for a variety of reasons, most notably transportation challenges, but are now logging in.

Krempels Center member and book club participant, Scott Ludgin, shared this about the online Krempels Center program, "[Virtual Krempels Center] gives me something to look forward to. I feel that there's something going on that's worthwhile. The thought of having something to do eases my mind. Krempels Center is like family."

*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. Located at the Community Campus in Portsmouth, the 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.*