

Seacoastonline

LIFESTYLE

Great Minds: Zoom lunch connects brain injury survivors at Krempels Center

By Sarah Lovell Krempels Center

Published 1:34 a.m. ET Nov. 15, 2020

PORTSMOUTH - Prior to COVID-19, the cafeteria at the Community Campus in Portsmouth buzzed with activity and conversation when Krempels Center members gathered to enjoy lunch together. For Krempels Center members, lunch at the café offered opportunities to socialize with peers, interns and staff while enjoying delicious meals and freshly baked treats from Café Services. For many individuals living with brain injury, a social lunch hour also offered opportunities to work on their social, communication and executive function goals.

As with many other community-based programs, to maintain the health and safety of the community amid COVID-19, Krempels Center shifted to a virtual program using Zoom. Krempels Center continues to offer eight to ten groups designed specifically for individuals living with brain injuries on each program day over Zoom. Members can choose to attend Zoom groups including yoga, meditation, brain games, music, creative expressions, aphasia and communication support, book club, and men and women's brain injury support groups, among many other offerings.

Zoom lunch is “sandwiched” in the middle of the group choices and continues to be an important part of Krempels Center's daily routine for members, staff and interns alike. Social connection is something we all benefit from in our current social distancing climate, but it is especially important for individuals living with brain injury who often experience chronic social isolation. Krempels Center's Program Director Barb Kresge explains, “Lunch allows for some non-structured time together. It offers an outlet for chatting, developing relationships, and sharing interests and stories.”

While eating lunch on Zoom may lack the ability to see people in-person, it does not lack connection, energy or excitement. Instead of spreading out across 15 or so tables in the cafeteria, Krempels Center members gather on one giant Zoom screen, with the ability to join breakout rooms for smaller group or one-on-one discussions with peers, interns and staff.

Krempels Center member Brie Bourn has been attending Krempels Center since 2006 after sustaining a traumatic brain injury in 1997 when she was hit by a drunk driver. Better known as “BumbleBrie,” Bourn is a social butterfly (or bee) at lunch at the Community Campus. She is known for her bright smile, love of coffee and beautiful handmade weavings. Bourn says about Krempels Center lunch, “You simply go to chat with a friend ... and we choose to be together.”

The ability to make choices following a brain injury is often diminished. Krempels Center is all about choice: members choose when they want to attend, what groups they want to participate in, and how they want to be part of the community.

Bourn is a regular at Krempels Center’s Zoom lunch. She can often be seen on screen working on one of her weavings while in the comfort of her home and the virtual presence of her Krempels Center community. When asked why she chooses to attend Zoom lunch, Bourn explains, “I don’t really know how to eat my meal any other way!”

In addition to social connection, lunch also offers members an opportunity to ask questions and receive support from staff and interns. Kresge explains lunch is also “an opportunity to get business done.” Interns and staff assist members with any technology challenges, offer suggestions to improve the Zoom experience and connect members with resources in the community, including problem-solving concerns around voting most recently.

Program Coordinator and Occupational Therapist Kelly Redwine-DePierre added, “Before when we would eat lunch at the Community Campus, you were limited to who you were sitting with for conversation. Now we dine with everyone.”

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.