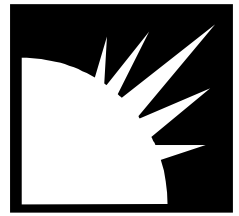


TBI TODAY

NEWS, IDEAS, AND RESOURCES FROM THE VIRGINIA TBI MODEL SYSTEM



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The contents of TBI Today were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number 90DPTB0005). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of TBI Today do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Adjust Your Home Environment To Ease Your Mind

by Michael Cerreto

After a brain injury, your home can be a place of great comfort, caring, and recovery. It can also be confusing, overwhelming, and physically dangerous at times. To encourage effective recovery after a TBI you can change your home environment to better support your cognitive, emotional, and physical abilities.

Any adjustments to your environment require you to first look around your house and ask yourself:

- Are the sounds, lighting, textures, and physical layout overwhelming to my senses or comforting and soothing?
- Does the physical layout make it easy for me to get around, avoid accidents, and make objects accessible?
- Does the home include methods and aides that help me better remember tasks, schedules, and objects?

While there are hundreds of ways to adjust your home to better support your mental and physical challenges after a brain injury, here are ten ideas you can incorporate today:

1. Look at your normal flow from one room to another throughout the day and move anything that inhibits your mobility. Rooms need to be organized to avoid any possibility of a fall.
2. Declutter the refrigerator and countertops, and keep only the essentials visible. Make sure that all appliances and food are at a convenient height and in easy reach. Put labels on any containers with food in order to avoid having to rely on memory.
3. Hang a whiteboard and calendar at eye level and have them list the most important reminders for the week.
4. Attach your glasses and phone to their own lanyards and wear them around your neck so you don't have to search for them.
5. Put a medication organizer and dispenser in a convenient, visible place. You can also ask someone to load it for you once a week and check if you have taken your medication daily, if needed.
6. Create mini command centers next to favorite chairs that include technologies, remote controls, water bottles, tissues, power cords, and chargers all within easy reach.
7. Use dimmers on lights, and avoid overhead lighting if disorienting. Spend time outside during the day to soak up important blue light from the sun that can encourage alertness.

(Continued on page 7)

Michael Cerreto, MS, CPCRT, CSC, LDR is a Certified Cognitive Rehabilitation Therapist with A Talented Mind Clinic in Richmond, Virginia. Learn more about Michael at www.atalentedmind.com.





Mark Your Calendar



HAVE YOU MET KAREN BROOKE?



Karen Brooke, M.T. has been working in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation for over 21 years. She has been a data manager for different databases and her responsibilities have included coding, collection, and reporting of data. She recently transitioned to a new position as Research Specialist. In this role, she conducts follow-up interviews and collects data relating to brain injury and outcomes of recovery for the TBI Model Systems.

Karen grew up in Holland, MI and moved to Virginia where she received her undergraduate degree in Biology and Master's Degree in science education. She spent time working in two different hospital systems before coming to VCU. She has always liked working with health data and on different projects in the health care field.

Throughout the year, Karen is busy attending her daughter's high school volleyball games and track meets. She enjoys spending time with her family and going for walks with her dog, Ruby.

Aphasia Support Group

- **When:** 2nd Thursday of the month, 6-7pm
- **Location:** Wells Coleman office building in Monument Corporate Centre office park, 5004 Monument Avenue, Richmond, 23230
- **Contact:** Susan Hapala at (804) 908-3261 or Jan Thomas at rva.aphasia@gmail.com

Stroke/Brain Injury Survivor & Caregiver Support Group

- **When:** 2nd Wednesday of the month, 2-3pm
- **Location:** Sheltering Arms Rehab Hospital, 8254 Atlee Rd, Mechanicsville, 23116 Conference Rm C OR 13700 St. Francis Blvd, Midlothian, 23114 4th Floor Conference Rm
- **Contact:** Kate Lim at (804) 764-5290 or klim@shelteringarms.com

Support Group for Adults with TBI, Family, and Friends

- **When:** 3rd Monday of the month, 6:15pm-7:45pm
- **Location:** Disability Law Center of Virginia, 1512 Willow Lawn Drive, Suite 100, Richmond, 23230
- **Contact:** Christine Baggini at (804) 355-5748 or christine@biav.net

Supportive Survivors

- **When:** 2nd, 4th, and 5th Tuesdays, 6-8pm, Outings planned for the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays
- **Location:** Regency Mall Food Court, 1420 Parham Road, Richmond, 23229
- **Contact:** Ted Taylor at (804) 781-2144 or taylorted58@yahoo.com

Women's Luncheon Group

- **When:** 2nd Tuesday of the month for lunch, 11:30am
- **Location:** The Mill House, 7812 Shrader Road, Henrico, 23294
- **Contact:** Jen Candela at (804) 386-0926 x 104 or jennifercc@communitybraininjury.org

BIAV Legacy Dinner

- **When:** April 25, 2020. Tickets go on sale March 6th
- **Location:** Jepson Alumni Center, 442 Westhampton, Richmond, 23229
- **Contact:** visit <https://www.biav.net/legacy-dinner/>

If you have an upcoming event of interest to the Brain Injury community in Virginia, we would be glad to consider including it here. Please call (804) 828-3704 or email jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org.

March Madness Match-Up!

Can you match up these NCAA team nicknames to the schools they represent? Check your answers below.

TEAMS

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY

- | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Terrapins | A. University of Virginia |
| 2. Volunteers | B. Duke University |
| 3. Cavaliers | C. University of Tennessee |
| 4. Hokies | D. George Mason University |
| 5. Buckeyes | E. Ohio State University |
| 6. Blue Devils | F. University of Maryland |
| 7. Patriots | G. University of North Carolina |
| 8. Tar Heels | H. Virginia Tech |

ANSWERS:
 1. Terrapins — F. University of Maryland
 2. Volunteers — C. University of Tennessee
 3. Cavaliers — A. University of Virginia
 4. Hokies — H. Virginia Tech
 5. Buckeyes — E. Ohio State University
 6. Blue Devils — B. Duke University
 7. Patriots — D. George Mason University
 8. Tar Heels — G. University of North Carolina



Survivor Story: Shaun Phelps

June 30, 2018 started like any other normal day for me. The phone rang early that morning calling me into work on a day off, like countless times before. I got out of bed, went into work and worked several trouble calls. I ran into my father at some point between jobs and made plans to hang out after work. I finished all the calls for the day and headed home. This is where my memories stop. Over the next couple hours I had left home, went to my dad's, and hung out. In my travels back home I wrecked my truck, went off the shoulder, over corrected, and went across two lanes of traffic head-on into a tree. When first responders arrived the truck was on its side and I was half-way under the cab with it laying across my waist. I was flown to the hospital. I was unaware of all of this chaos.

I woke up in the hospital clueless as to why I was there and what had happened during the previous month. I started physical therapy and slowly got information about what had led me to this point. Hearing the stories of what had transpired, I learned what all the people I truly cared about had gone through while I was "asleep." I refer to the coma and delusion like it was just a nap, because to me that's all it was, a nap, I had slept through all of it. I was clueless as to what was going on around me and what everyone else was going through while I unknowingly struggled. The hospital staff pulled my wife aside to tell her and my children that I'd never be the same, I had suffered too much damage to survive or live a normal life if I was able to pull through. Later on that same night, while my wife was asleep on a cot in my hospital room, she was awakened by strange noises and got up to see me finally awake and rambling on about stuff that didn't make sense. Over the next few days I was awake, but not fully, as I don't have any memories of that time even though I was active with visitors and the medical staff.

My first memory was of arguing with the doctors about how fast I wanted to get out of the hospital. I've spent my

life working constantly, countless hours a week, always staying busy. I've never been one to lay back and take it easy, and I think that drive helped me throughout my recovery process; fighting my way through therapy and getting released from the hospital, continuing therapy for about a month and starting to get back into my old work habits. My prior employer didn't allow me back right away, but I was able to start oystering with my uncle for a couple months. I would leave super early in the morning and not come home until the early evening hours. Working helped me to pull through my recovery process, not laying down and letting my pain and other issues left over from my accident get the best of me. No matter how uncomfortable I got, how much pain I was in, I pushed through.

Finally, after several months and tests, my employer finally approved me to come back to work. Thinking the hard part was finally over with, I was in for a huge surprise. I had missed about 6 months of work but it all came back to me without hesitation. I cared deeply for my job and was very proud of my accomplishments and the work I had turned out over the years prior to my injury. Long before I had any memories in the hospital, my wife said work was all I would talk about when I first woke up. But coming back after all I had been through, people that I had worked around for several years were uncomfortable and nervous around me. Nobody really knew how to handle me, knowing what I had been through and not knowing what would happen to me throughout the day. I felt great and felt like I was doing well, but some of my coworkers were going to management with their concerns about me. That hindered me from getting a promotion I had worked hard to earn. Being held back because of what coworkers were saying behind my back and because of my accident was a hard pill to swallow, one I still struggle with to this day. I feel like my everyday normal life took a beating because I let that event wear away at me. The stress was a burden on me, forcing me to take steps back in

my recovery. My family and friends have done a lot to help me come back from my accident, being supportive in every possible way.

I'm slowly realizing that it's not just you, yourself that changes after a TBI but also those around you. Some friends will stay and some will go. Sometimes it will be easy and other times it will be tough. The best thing for me to do is stay focused on what's really important: those who really matter in my life, to keep looking forward and adapting to the changes that will happen, and learning to accept the path I am now on while bracing myself for the future. Life is pretty tough, regardless, but can be even tougher on a TBI survivor. Be a fighter. When life gives you hell, give it right back, don't lay down for it or it will walk all over you. Every day is a new day, live in the present—don't dwell on the past. Life is new after your accident, what happened, happened, let it be. Live your life. Everyday find ways to be as happy as possible. Stress can bring you down, so limit the amount of things that will cause you stress and keep life as simple as you can while trying to live with TBI.

Survivor Stories Wanted!

Recovering from a brain injury can be very difficult.

Sometimes, one of the most helpful and inspiring things is simply hearing from other survivors who have gone through recovery and faced the same challenges. Are you a survivor with a story you'd like to share? If so, then we'd like to hear it, and it might get into a future issue of TBI Today!

Submit to:

jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org

or

TBI Today, VCU Box 980542
Richmond, VA 23298-0542



DEAR PAT,

I am 35 years old and got a brain injury from being hit by a car while crossing the street about two years ago. I was taking my dog for the usual morning walk in our neighborhood. We were almost back to the house, crossing over from the opposite side of the street, when, unexpectedly, a car suddenly turned the corner and hit me. I don't remember what happened after that, except that I woke up in the hospital.

I had to move in with my parents after I got out of the hospital because I needed help and they were worried about me living by myself. I can't tell you how grateful I am to them for all they've done for me. However, it was hard living with them after being on my own for so long. So, I was determined to get my life back together - I worked really hard in rehab and at home. There are many days I wish I had my old life back. And, there are many days that I just want to give up.

Unfortunately, I am still living with my parents two years later. I haven't been able to go back to work as a computer engineer for a big company. Without an income, I can't afford to live on my own. I'm so frustrated! I just feel like I'm running around in a circle and not getting anywhere. I have all kinds of ideas in my head of what I would like to do but it's been hard to put them into action. Or, I just keep failing when I try to work on being back to normal. No matter how many times my parents tell me that I'm making progress and they're proud of how far I've come, I don't feel like I have accomplished any of the things that I wanted to do.

Pat, I need help in figuring out how to get my life back together. How do I reach my goals? How do I organize my life so I can feel like a useful person again?

Sam



Pat answers your personal questions about brain injury with compassion and practical advice. However, advice from Pat's column should not be substituted for consultation with a doctor or rehabilitation specialist. The identity of individuals submitting questions to

PAT'S RESPONSE:

Dear Sam,

It is understandable to feel frustrated with the speed of progress you are making. It is common for persons with a brain injury to feel like they are not getting better fast enough. Practicing patience is hard when you want to return your life to normalcy. Being independent is obviously important to you. It is great that you have created goals and ideas for future plans. The challenge is evaluating the goals to determine if they are reasonable. Setting reasonable goals can be difficult after brain injury for several reasons. You might still be figuring out how the injury has affected your abilities. The resources might be more limited for persons with a brain injury. And, you likely feel pressured to achieve big goals more quickly than is practical. Here are some tips to consider when setting reasonable goals:

- When setting goals, look at recent progress instead of making comparisons to others.
- Take small steps. If you have a large goal you want to accomplish, break it down into little pieces that you can accomplish. Working one step at a time, you'll come closer to reaching your larger goal.
- Move ahead one small step at a time from where you are right now. For example, if you are thinking about going back to school, start with one class, then add more if you do well. Taking one small step at a time will provide more chances for success. Success will make you feel more confident to handle the next step forward.
- Remember that most people expect too much and set their goals too high. Scale your goals back from what you initially plan.
- Ask trusted family, friends, and professionals for input about whether or not your goals are reasonable.
- Remember that some goals are too big for one person to handle on their own. They may take the help of lots of people. Realize your limitations and ask for help reaching goals when you need it.
- Congratulate yourself and give yourself credit for small successes.
- Remember that setting reasonable goals increases the chances of getting what you want.

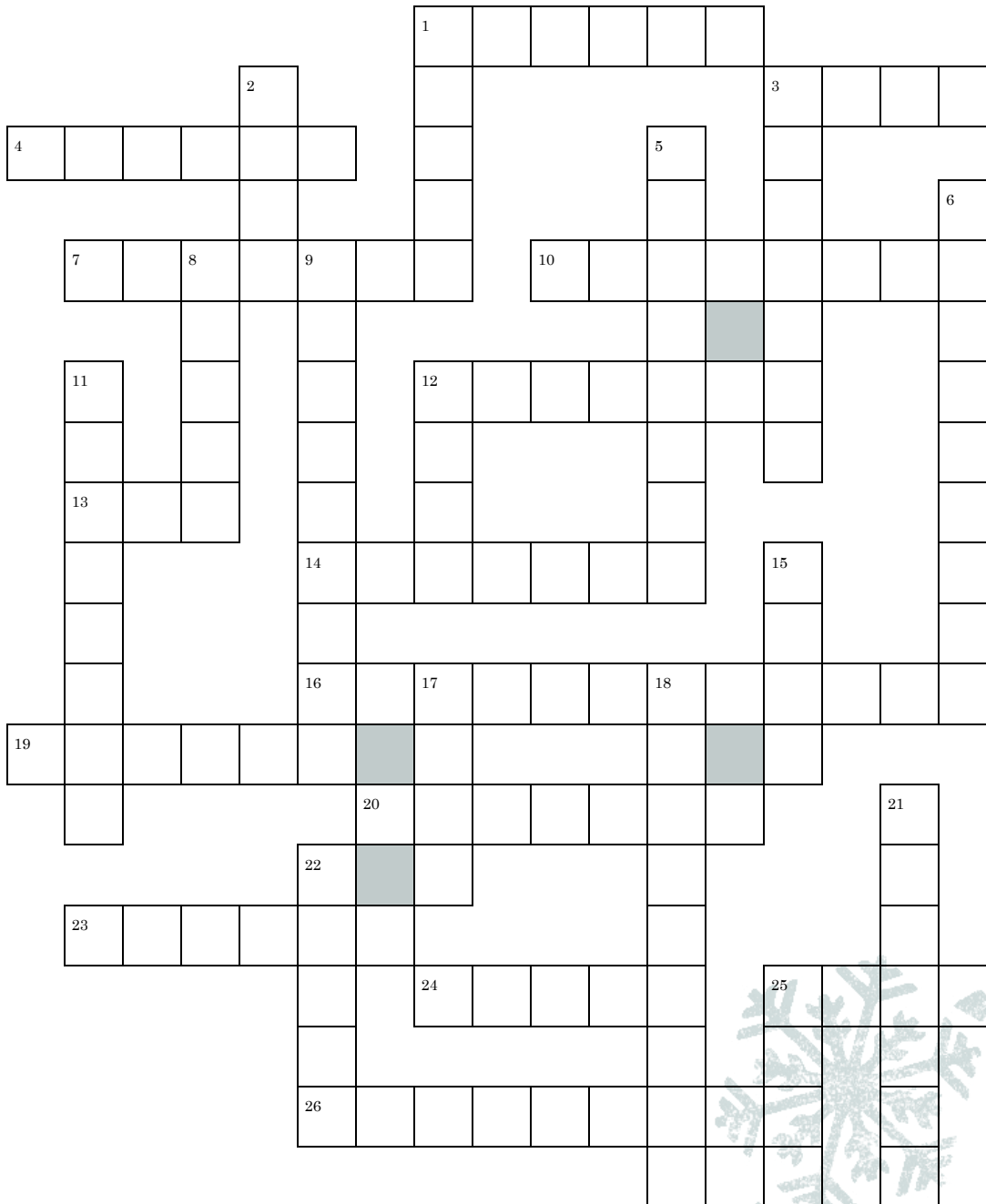
To help organize your daily life, it is a good idea to create a "to-do" list and prioritize each major thing from 1 - 10. A "1" would indicate the highest priority and a "10" would be the lowest. Work on the highest priority first. Check off your accomplishments daily. Doing so will help you monitor progress and develop reasonable expectations. Tasks not completed should be moved to the next day's list. Review the list every day or more often to help you stay on track.

No matter how much you accomplish, you will probably want to do more. You will feel better if you recognize your good intentions and the limitations of being human. Learn to trust your feelings. If you feel like you are doing too much, you probably are.

Good luck! I wish you well in reaching your goals, Sam!

WINTER CROSSWORD

Feeling Stuck?
You can find
the answers on
page 7!



ACROSS:

1. Down-hill Olympic sport.
3. Change ice to water.
4. Something you wear to keep your hands warm.
7. Head South for the winter like birds do.
10. A long break from school or work.
12. A winter person?
13. Frozen water.
14. The Times Square Ball Drop signifies the beginning of the _____.
16. A drink that warms you up in winter.
19. Change water to ice.
20. The first month of the year.
23. Ice hanging from your roof.
24. This covers windows in winter.
25. Something you wear to keep your neck warm.
26. Sleep through the winter.

DOWN:

1. A fun thing you can do on ice.
2. A large animal that hibernates.
3. These keep your hands warm in the winter (Hint; no fingers!)
5. The last month of the year.
6. A piece of snow.
8. Large birds that migrate.
9. Snow crashing down a mountain
11. A snowstorm.
12. White fluffy stuff that covers the ground
15. If you're not careful, you might catch a _____.
17. The opposite of freeze.
18. Merry _____!
21. A warm article of clothing.
22. Wet, partly melted, snow.
25. Something you sit on as you ride down a hill.



Frequently Asked Questions



THE INFORMATION PROVIDED IN THE FAQ IS INTENDED TO FAMILIARIZE THE PUBLIC WITH ISSUES RELATED TO TBI. NO INFORMATION PROVIDED HEREIN SHOULD BE CONSTRUED AS THERAPEUTIC ADVICE OR AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR CONSULTATION WITH A COMPETENT MEDICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL.

QUESTION:

I fell off my bike a few months ago and got a concussion. I thought I would be better by now, but I'm not! I'm still having issues!! How do I get better?

ANSWER:

Following a brain injury, most people do not know what to do to get better. Here are some tips to help you get started:

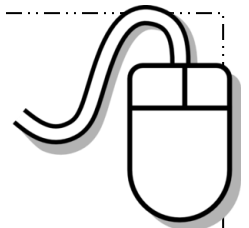
- Learn how and when to ask for help – Don't let your pride get in the way of making your life easier. Seek help early on, before a problem becomes a crisis. 
- Avoid being hard on yourself – Be kind to yourself.
- Learn the art of patience – Count to ten, take slow deep breaths, or focus on accomplishments and improvements.
- Learn from your mistakes – Think of your mistakes as an opportunity to learn.
- Manage stress effectively – Find and master stress management techniques that work best for you. For example, listen to music, take a walk, see a movie, talk to someone, or breathe slowly and deeply.
- Set priorities and focus your energy to succeed – Make a "to do" list, number the items by priority, and work on the highest priorities first. 
- Start with short-term goals – Focus on the most important things you need to accomplish today and tomorrow.
 - Develop and maintain support systems – Caring, helping, and reaching out to other people is a good way to make progress and avoid feeling alone.
 - Define success in your own terms – Everyone has the right to decide how to be successful and whether or not they are.
 - Be as concerned about yourself as you are about other people – Take time out for yourself each day, even if it's just 15 minutes. Set limits and say "no" at least sometimes.



**CHECK OUT
OUR NEW
WEBSITE!**

Our team has been hard at work developing our new website! Come visit us at tbims.vcu.edu.

You can view our archive of newsletter issues at the new website in the "Newsletters" section.



Did you Know? You can subscribe to *TBI Today* by email and get every issue sent directly to your computer, tablet, phone, or any other device that supports PDF. Best of all, it's free!

Email Jennifer.Marwitz@vcuhealth.org to be added to the list!

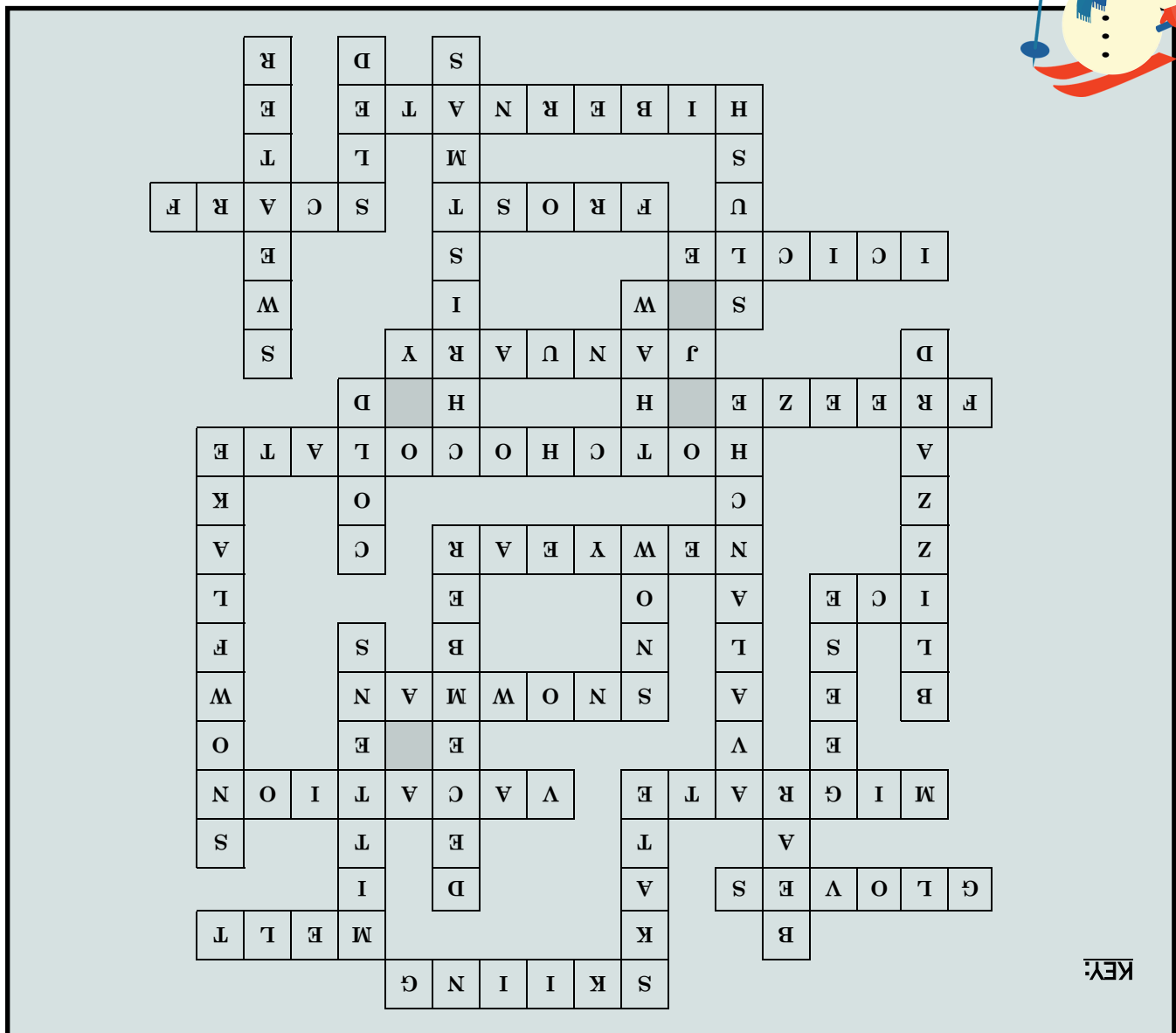
(Continued from page 1)

8. Put closed captioning on when watching TV so you can mute the volume when feeling overwhelmed by the sound.
9. Remove piles of paper, dishes, clothing and other objects so they are not physical hazards or overwhelming.
10. Create a memory hub at your main entry door that is a place to put your keys, mail, coat, shoes, and anything else you need when you come or go during the day.

BONUS IDEA: Use the latest artificial intelligence such as Amazon Alexa or iPhone Siri to use voice commands to turn lights on and off, dial phone numbers, play music, listen to audio books, check the weather, remind you of your schedule or daily tasks, and so much more.



If you look around your home you will see many more ideas to adjust your environment to support your mental and physical challenges after a brain injury. Get creative and experiment to find the ones that work best for you. It can ease your mind and enhance your daily life.



KEY:

VCU, PM&R

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY MODEL SYSTEM

BOX 980542

RICHMOND, VA 23298-0542

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Go to tbims.vcu.edu to access back issues!



Founded in 1983 by families and concerned professionals, the Brain Injury Association of Virginia is the only statewide non-profit organization in Virginia exclusively devoted to serving individuals with brain injury, their families, and those that care for and about them. Over 10,000 people find help from BIAV each year.

BIAV is a chartered state affiliate of the Brain Injury Association of America and exists to be the voice of brain injury through help, hope and healing for Virginians with brain injury and their families. We educate human service professionals and the community on the risks and impact of brain injury and advocate for improved medical and community-based services. Many of our staff members are Certified Brain Injury Specialists (CBIS Certified).

To find out more information about BIAV, contact us at 1-800-444-6443 or 804-355-5748. Or visit our website at www.biav.net.



The Voice of Brain Injury: *Help, Hope & Healing*