



# TBI TODAY

News, Ideas, and Resources from the Virginia TBI Model System

**THE VIRGINIA TBIMS TEAM**

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## Life and Work After TBI

### Tips for Successfully Starting a New Job

Congratulations! You may have applied for, interviewed for, or started a new job. This might be your first job since your injury.

This is a wonderful accomplishment. You are hoping to start off on the right foot and may be wondering if there are ways to ensure doing so.

Every boss watches a new worker carefully for awhile, hoping that they made the best decision to hire that person. Sometimes this time of watching is formally called "probation." This can be a nerve wracking time for any new employee. Many persons recovering from a brain injury have an even harder time overcoming injury-related issues that can interfere with beginning a new job. Transportation problems, fatigue, and the need to keep social security disability payments coming are hard to control. Even if you have planned for these issues, you may still struggle with attention, memory, communication, and behavioral challenges related to your injury. Below are some tips for overcoming these potential obstacles and becoming a successful new worker.

Here is a work readiness questionnaire. Rate yourself from 1 to 5 on each statement in terms of how true it is of you.

**Rate Yourself from 1 to 5 on the Following:**

- 1 — Never
- 2 — Not very often
- 3 — Sometimes
- 4 — Often
- 5 — Always

**1. I am a positive person.**

1    2    3    4    5

**2. I volunteer to help if I see work to be done.**

1    2    3    4    5

**3. If I don't know how to do something, I try to learn about it.**

1    2    3    4    5

**4. I know my strengths and limits.**

1    2    3    4    5

**5. I try to focus and finish each task I have to do.**

1    2    3    4    5

**6. I get along well with others.**

1    2    3    4    5

Add up your numbers. If you scored from 24 – 39 you are likely to have many qualities of a successful new employee. Scores of 23 and below might mean that you need more time to decide if you really want or are able to work.

Read the tips for successfully starting a new job below. Certain behaviors and attitudes are helpful for beginning and keeping a job. Read them over and over. All ideas will help you accomplish your new work and activity goals.

- 1. **Be sure the job is a right for you before you accept it.**
- 2. **Be on time and stay on schedule every day.**
- 3. **Keep to your schedule and avoid taking breaks outside of those that are allowed or necessary.**
- 4. **Know your own strengths and weaknesses.**
- 5. **Be ready to learn. Ask others to help if you are having trouble.**
- 6. **Plan to limit distractions in your work space.**
- 7. **Be polite and listen carefully, let others talk more than you, maintain eye contact.**

*Continued on Page 5*

## HAVE YOU MET TARYN DEZFULIAN

Taryn Marie Dezfulian, M.S., first began her work with the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) as a pre-doctoral fellow for

three months during the summer of 2006. She returned in July 2007 for two more years and plans to continue her work at VCU at least until the summer of 2009. Ms. Dezfulian is a licensed family therapist, and she joined the department, in large part, to work with families and couples after brain injury. Her main responsibilities include providing family, couple, and individual therapy, doing presentations about the impact of brain injury on family relationships, and the Brain Injury Family Intervention (BIFI). The BIFI is a clinical research project that offers five structured sessions for families about common concerns after brain injury including: common symptoms, dealing with intense emotions, coping with loss and change, and sharpening skills such as communication and problem solving.

Ms. Dezfulian was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Prior to joining our research team, she earned her bachelor's degree in Neuropsychology from the University of Michigan. She became interested in working with survivors and their families after her close friend was severely injured in an accident and, as a result, became paraplegic. After watching the extreme difficulty her friend and his family experienced, and the few supportive services they received, she decided she wanted to use her work to support families in their journey after brain and spinal cord injury. Taryn is currently completing her dissertation, a study on how the BIFI helps families after injury, and is looking forward to graduating with her Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, College Park in the spring.

Taryn has many dreams for her future. Eventually, she would like to work at a foundation to provide services across the country for families who have a loved one who sustained a brain injury. She practices mindfulness, meditation, yoga and would like to incorporate these practices to help family members and survivors achieve personal acceptance, stress reduction, and focus after injury.

When she is not working, Taryn enjoys spending time with her friends, family, boyfriend Steve, and her rescued Pekinese dog, Snowball. She also has passions for cooking, eating, travel, ecotourism, photography, running, swimming, hiking, reading, music, surfing, and SCUBA diving. She is most excited about traveling to Lisbon, Portugal this spring to present her work on the BIFI to an international audience.



## Mark Your Calendar!



### FIRST FRIDAY OF EACH MONTH (6:00 PM– 8:00 PM)

- ◆ **Event:** T.G.I.F.
- ◆ **Location:** Belmont Recreation Center, 1600 Hilliard Road in the Lakeside area of Henrico Co.
- ◆ **Description:** the local departments of recreation & parks host this monthly social event for survivors of brain injury
- ◆ **Contact:** Call Kariayn Smith, 804-501-5135, for more information and/or to be placed on their mailing list for monthly reminders

### SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 2008

- ◆ **Event:** BIAV 7th Annual Conference
- ◆ **Location:** Doubletree Hotel Richmond Airport
- ◆ **Description:** *Open Doors: New Answers for a New Era*
- ◆ **Contact:** BIAV, (804) 355-5748, Registration Deadline is February 22, 2008

### MAY 17—MAY 31, 2008

- ◆ **Event:** Camp Bruce McCoy 2008
- ◆ **Location:** Triple-R Ranch in Chesapeake, VA
- ◆ **Description:** This camp is sponsored by the Brain Injury Association of Virginia and is designed to provide an outstanding recreational program with a high level of safety for TBI survivors.
- ◆ **Contact:** contact the BIAV by phone, 804-355-5748 or e-mail: [info@biav.net](mailto:info@biav.net)

### SATURDAY, June 7, 2008

- ◆ **Event:** The National TBI Caregivers Conference
- ◆ **Location:** Hospitality House, Williamsburg, VA
- ◆ **Description:** You will have opportunities to share your most pressing questions and concerns. Practical solutions for commonly experi-

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 contact Mari Rawlings at 804-828-3703 or [mjrawlings@vcu.edu](mailto:mjrawlings@vcu.edu)

# JUST THE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION S

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.

**Q:** Why is it so important to avoid alcohol and drugs after TBI?

**A:** Alcohol and Drug use:

- \* Slows the recovery process
- \* Increases the risk of another brain injury
- \* Makes problems with balance, walking, and talking worse
- \* Worsens disorientation, reasoning, memory, temper, and concentration problems
- \* Impairs judgment and decision-making abilities
- \* Increases the risk of family and relationship problems
- \* Can lead to more problems, including saying and doing things without thinking that worsen your situation
- \* Makes depression worse and causes negative personality changes
- \* Can lead to problems at work or school
- \* Can result in legal problems
- \* Can interact with medication and create additional medical problems
- \* Can increase the chances of seizures
- \* Can cause other health problems



# JUST FOR FUN!

By Mari Rawlings

Working puzzles can help keep you sharp! Just for fun, see if you can unscramble the letters in each word to find ten world cities. If you need a hand, answers are at the bottom. Try to peak only when you're stumped.

1. H A I L P A I D H E L P

2. G I N J I B E

3. H A H A S I G N

4. O X E N H I P

5. E V I N C E

6. C A S I N O F R A N C S

7. L E T S E A T

8. L O N G L E A S E S

9. S H O U T O N

10. I N L A I D P I A N O S

## Support Groups

There are 22 TBI support groups sponsored by the Brain Injury Association of Virginia who meet throughout the state. To find the BIAV support group closest to your location please visit their website at <http://www.biav.net> or call (804) 355-5748.

### Richmond BIAV Chapter Support Group

- ❖ **Days:** Every 3rd Monday of the month
- ❖ **Time:** 6:15 pm– 7:45 pm
- ❖ **Location:** Auditorium of Children's Hospital at 2924 Brook Road
- ❖ **Contact:** Call Christine Baggini at the BIAV office, (804) 355-5748.

### Richmond Supportive Survivors

- ❖ **Days:** Every Tuesday
- ❖ **Time:** 6:00 pm- 8:00 pm
- ❖ **Location:** Food Court at Regency Square Mall
- ❖ **Contact:** Call Ted Taylor at (804) 852-6644 before coming for the first time.

**ANSWERS:**

1. Philadelphia    7. Seattle

2. Beijing    8. Los Angeles

3. Shanghai    9. Houston

4. Phoenix    10. Indianapolis

5. Venice

**JUST FOR FUN!**



## CHAT WITH PAT

**Pat answers your personal questions about brain injury with compassion and practical advice. However, advice from Pat's column should not substitute for consultation with a doctor or rehabilitation specialist. The identity of individuals submitting questions to "Chat with Pat" is kept strictly confidential.**

**DEAR PAT:** I was involved in a motorcycle accident in Mexico and had a brain stem injury in 1993.

I'm now 38 and feel pretty lucky as I feel good all the time. Unfortunately, since 1994, my employment situation has been very rough. The trouble is that nobody understands brain injury and the difficulties I experience daily. Specifically, I have a slow thinking process. As a CAD drafter, my limitations prevent me from performing like before my accident. Over time, my employers see my limitations and then let me go (fire me).

Is there anything I can do about this? Are there any legal actions I can take when my employers know about my disability and penalize me anyway? When starting a new job, what are your recommendations with sharing or not sharing about your disability? What about using a job coach, where could I find one?

When I start a new job, I'm hesitant to tell my employers about my accident, hoping it wouldn't be a factor. For my most recent job, I didn't tell them until it became a problem. After they found out, the company lowered my pay by \$6.00 and took away benefits, which I

guess is better than being fired. In 1997, I started my own company after many job failures, which works pretty good although the money isn't steady. What kind of advice can you give to those who aren't as fortunate as me to be able to start their own company?

Thank you,  
Frustrated Employee



**PAT'S RESPONSE:** Thank you for sharing your story with me. How frustrating! I commend you for not giving up and fighting to make a living for yourself. Starting your own company is quite an accomplishment!

I would suggest to others who find themselves in similar situations to take a look into resources from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) about your rights as an employee. Information about the ADA may be found at most public libraries or go to the following web address, ADA home page: <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm>.

On the right of the home page, there is a link to General Publications: **A Guide to Disability Rights Laws**. a 21-page booklet that provides a brief overview of ten Federal laws that protect the rights of people with disabilities and provides information about the federal agencies to contact for more information. **A Guide for Peo-**

**ple with Disabilities Seeking Employment.** a 2-page pamphlet for people with disabilities providing a general explanation of the employment provisions of the ADA and how to file a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

For those who are self-employed with a small company, you may also find this information useful: **ADA Guide for Small Businesses**. This 15-page guide presents an overview of some basic ADA requirements for small businesses that provide goods and services to the public. It provides guidance on how to make their services accessible and how tax credits and deductions may be used to offset specific costs.

**Toll-Free ADA Information Line:** Call to obtain answers to general and technical questions about the ADA and to order technical assistance materials: 800-514-0301 (voice) 800-514-0383 (TDD)

To find out about **job coaching and other employment services** for persons with disabilities in your state, you may wish to contact the state's Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services.

After understanding your rights as an employee, you can decide on how and what to share about your injury with your employer. You may wish to consult and discuss with your treating healthcare professionals, including psychologist, neuropsychologist, therapist, or rehabilitation counselor, regarding your decision to share or not share information about your injury. If you decide to share, you may wish to share documentations of your disabilities or limitations, such as a neuropsychological report, with your employer or trusted colleagues to prevent problems from arising in the future. Creating a collaborative relationship with the Human Resources department and your supervisor is important to establishing a positive working environment.



Questions for Pat or the FAQ column are welcomed.  
Send them to: "ASK PAT" OR "FAQ"  
P.O. BOX 980542, RICHMOND, VA 23298-0542  
or e-mail: [jhmarwitl@vcu.edu](mailto:jhmarwitl@vcu.edu)



(Continued from Page 1, "Life and Work..")

8. **Keep a low profile at first.**
9. **Avoid complaining and talking too much about yourself and your problems.**
10. **Keep a positive outlook.**
11. **Finish a task before you start anything new (unless told otherwise by your boss).**

(Excerpt from Virginia Clubhouse Vocational Transitions Program, Session 12. Niemeier, Kreutzer, & DeGrace, 2007)

Stay tuned for the next chapter in the series *Life and Work after TBI*.

## CAMP BRUCE McCOY 2008

The Brain Injury Association of Virginia will be hosting the 25th year of Camp Bruce McCoy. The program, named in memory of a former camper, is designed to provide an outstanding recreational program with the highest level of safety possible. Camp activities will be adapted to each person's ability and interest, and are designed to provide challenges, build confidence, foster new friendships, and most importantly, be fun.

**WHERE:** Triple-R Ranch in Chesapeake, Virginia.

**WHEN:** Week 1: Sunday, May 18th - Saturday, May 24th  
Week 2: Sunday, May 25th - Saturday, May 31st

**APPLICATION DEADLINE:** Applications will be taken until May 1, 2008 or until all spots are filled. Apply early!

**CAMP FEES:** \$475.00 per week; (\$75 for weekend mini-camp).

**FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE:** If financial assistance is required, please include a note with the application stating the amount of assistance that will be needed. Do not delay submitting the application because of financial need; your space at camp can be reserved while support is being sought.

If you are interested in becoming a camper or if you are interested in working as a counselor or other helper call Lauren Carter at 804-355-5748. Also, please visit the website at [www.biav.net/campmccoy.html](http://www.biav.net/campmccoy.html) for applications and more info.

## Calling all Caregivers! The National TBI Caregivers Conference

The National Resource Center for TBI is proud and pleased to join with other leading organizations in presenting a national conference for caregivers of persons with brain injury.

**Conference Name:** The National TBI Caregivers' Conference

**Location:** Williamsburg, Virginia at the distinguished Hospitality House Hotel adjacent to the historic area.

**Date:** Saturday, June 7, 2008

**Description:** Family members and caregivers play a crucial role in helping survivors recover after and before discharge from health care settings. With the needs of caregivers in mind, this one-day national conference is designed to provide extensive practical information on achieving recovery. Panel presentations, lectures, discussion sessions, and workshops will cover a wide range of topics including community and home-based rehabilitation, finding and accessing services, recovery, effective advocacy, and rebuilding relationships. Presentations will also cover behavior management, safe driving, return to work and school, emotional recovery, avoiding burnout, and how the brain works. Conference presenters will include experienced caregivers, survivors, and nationally known rehabilitation professionals.

**Registration Fee:** The fee is \$65 for caregivers who register before April 30<sup>th</sup> and \$85 afterward. The fee is \$95 for professionals who register before April 30<sup>th</sup> and \$120 afterward. The registration fee covers the cost of attendance along with lunch, snacks, and refreshments.

**Audience:** Family members and caregivers of persons with brain injury and other neurological disorders; professionals who provide support and other services to family members and caregivers.

**Sponsors and Co-Sponsors:** Virginia Commonwealth University, Brain Injury Services, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Memorial Hermann/TIRR (TX), National Resource Center for Traumatic Brain Injury, Brain Injury Association of Virginia.

**Contact:** Linda Lee, [llee@braininjurysvcs.org](mailto:llee@braininjurysvcs.org); Phone 703-451-8881

## Second Chance at Life: A Survivor's Story

A significant event occurred when I was 10 years old. My family was in a motor vehicle accident. Upon impact I was thrown from the back seat to the windshield. On the way forward I fractured my left femur (thighbone) on the back of my Dad's bucket seat and then hit the windshield. I sustained an open skull fracture, resulting in damage to my right frontal lobe (executive center functioning), a severe brain contusion (bruising of my brain as it was jostled against the inside of the skull), and some brain stem involvement/damage.

I was in a coma for 3 weeks. I underwent testing to determine the damage to my brain, my cognitive skills, and my social function capabilities. The results from these tests were given to my parents. They were told that due to the extent of my TBI I would probably not be able to succeed beyond high school. These results were never shared with me, until after I obtained my Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling.

The accident happened in 1967. At that time, there was a limited understanding of neurological rehabilitation. I was on my own. With the encouragement of my family, I taught myself how to walk, talk, speak in complete sentences and was mainstreamed back into elementary school. I went on to graduate on time from high school in 1975.

Because I was able to perform and succeed academically, the impact and significance of my TBI was not noticed for many years. From the age of 10, I tried to cope with having an invisible disability. I was convinced that I had to be perfect to prove my worth and value. Needless to say, my TBI impeded my ability to be perfect. I developed a sense of shame, a low self-esteem and a lot of insecurities. As a result, I thought that I was on my own to figure out why I never was able to measure up to expectations.

In addition to overachieving, I resorted to people-pleasing and approval-seeking. When this approach proved to be ineffective, I tried to anticipate what others wanted or needed by "reading their minds." All too often I found myself saying, "I am sorry" when I got it wrong. None of these strategies freed me from the shame. They only supported the belief that there was something wrong with me. In my desperation, I set out on a personal crusade to figure out why I consistently seemed to fall short.

In this pursuit, I became obsessively involved with various churches. I spent countless hours involved in bible study, scripture memory and listening to a wide array of teachers – from charismatic, full gospel, fundamental, non-denominational, and denominational churches / leadership. I attempted to apply what I was learning, but continued to fall short. Some would say that I just did not pray enough, read enough, or believe enough.

My interest was to do whatever it took to become a victorious "over-comer." In this pursuit, I went on to obtain my undergraduate degree in theology from Oral Robert's University. I attended Asbury Theological Seminary for 1 year and went

on to obtain my master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Kentucky.

In my attempt to be of service to my fellow man / woman, I have worked as a mental health aide/counselor. I have also worked as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. I have been actively involved in my own recovery process from the impact of the injury to my brain and for my own distorted perceptions. In addition to my spiritual and academic pursuits, I have been actively involved in various 12- step fellowships for the last 22 years.

These varied life experiences, as well as my educational and practical work endeavors have provided a wealth of insight and a foundation upon which I have written my book, **Table Topics for the Soul – Journey to the Heart**. I created the website **Second Chance to Live** to share my experience, strength and hope. Second Chance to Live presents topics in such a way to encourage, motivate and empower the reader to live life on life's terms. Second Chance to Live provides practical solutions and strategies to living those destinies one day at a time.



My hope is that those individuals, who may have lost hope, will see a new light. This light will then guide them to a renewed hope, an array of possibilities, and a new zest for living regardless of any present circumstances, disappointments, or disabling conditions.

Craig J. Phillips, MRC, BA

Craig J. Phillips MRC, BA is the creator and author of **Second Chance to Live**. Our circumstances are not meant to keep us down, but they are meant to build us up! Please visit Mr. Phillips' website at <http://secondchancetolive.wordpress.com>. For an in depth view of his process, please read his post "My Journal thus Far." All material presented on Second Chance to Live is copyright and cannot be copied, reproduced, or distributed in any way without the expressed, written consent of Craig J. Phillips, MRC, BA..

**Want to share your survivor story? If so, please e-mail it to [jhmarwit@vcu.edu](mailto:jhmarwit@vcu.edu) or by mail:**

**TBI Today  
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Richmond, Virginia 23298-0542**

## Predictions - How Well Will My Survivor Recover?

One of the tragedies of TBI is the uncertainty. The brain is an immensely complex, wondrous organ, but remains much of a mystery to doctors and scientists. There are countless variables (biological, chemical, physiological, genetic, psychological, social, financial, family and community) that impact how well your survivor will recover from his or her brain injury.

This uncertainty places an agonizing burden on physicians who face the families of patients with TBI desperate for some glimpse of the future.

Some doctors present a pessimistic perspective. They reason that the family should prepare for the worst and be pleased with anything that exceeds a grim outcome. Many TBI survivors surpass these bleak predictions and their families are often pleased. But this strategy can destroy the hope that keeps the family working to inspire and encourage their survivor, possibly preventing him or her from achieving his or her best possible recovery.

Other doctors offer a more optimistic perspective, for just that reason, to help the family through the difficult months ahead. As one mother told us, "False hope is better than no hope. What ever would I have done without hope these past five years?"

But this strategy also has its downside. A second mother, after being told that her son should be able to return to college, was devastated when his persistent cognitive deficits burst her rosy view of the future. I could easily have been just as distraught, if I took to heart Dr. Thomas's well-intended comment that Jessica (my wife) might be able to return to her career.

While it is impossible to predict with any assurance the future path for any individual patient, the science of brain injury has progressed such that doctors can now discuss probable outcomes with some confidence.

Scientists have identified the factors that are most important to the success of a patient's recovery from a brain injury and reviewing these factors with your doctor can help you begin to paint, at least a hazy, picture of the future.

Bearing in mind, again, that every brain injury is unique and unpredictable, and recognizing that your survivor may well defy the odds—in either a good or a bad way—you may want to reflect on the following list.

### Factors that Impact the Success of Recovery

- ✧ The nature, location, and severity of the injury
- ✧ The quality and speed of the acute care received by the survivor
- ✧ The depth and duration of the coma

- ✧ The length of the post-traumatic amnesia
- ✧ How quickly the patient begins rehabilitative treatment
- ✧ How rapidly the patient advances through the stages of the Glasgow Coma Scale and the Rancho Scale
- ✧ The age of the patient
- ✧ The quality of the patient's health insurance
- ✧ The quality and quantity of rehabilitative care
- ✧ The nature and extent of the other injuries suffered
- ✧ The level and value of the involvement of family and friends
- ✧ The pre-injury physical and emotional health of the patient
- ✧ The personality of the survivor, his or her:
  - ability to cope with adversity
  - self-control and patience
  - flexibility
  - intelligence and intellectual curiosity
  - motivation to succeed
  - engagement in life

The saying "Use it or lose it" applies well to TBI. A survivor who has lived an active, challenging, and full life is likely to have conditioned his or her brain to be better prepared for the rigorous reworking that is required to recover well from a brain injury. A survivor who has the personality traits of a "fighter" is more likely to be able to sustain the strength and willpower needed to overcome the challenge of his or her life.

*This article was written by Garry Prowe, the creator of the website "We Changed Our Minds: Successfully Surviving a Brain Injury." Please visit his website to learn more, <http://www.braininjurysuccess.org>. The site provides survivors and caregivers with opportunities to share their stories, read articles on life after TBI, and discover other TBI resources. **Note: everyone's TBI and recovery is different and unique. If you have questions about your recovery and outlook, please consult your doctor.***

# HOT OFF THE PRESS



**GET TBI TODAY  
E-MAILED STRAIGHT TO YOUR COMPUTER !!!**

Contact Jenny Marwitz at  
[jhmarwit@vcu.edu](mailto:jhmarwit@vcu.edu) or 804-828-3704  
 to sign up for our *TBI Today* mailing list.

# VCU's Brain Injury Family Intervention Project

Virginia Commonwealth University has developed the Brain Injury Family Intervention (BIFI) program directed toward both TBI survivors and their family members. This program is available to families regardless of how long it has been since the TBI. The purpose of the program is to strengthen families and promote long-term recovery after TBI.

Many families have described the program as very helpful. A decrease in depression symptoms and an increase in independence of the TBI survivor are just a couple of the positive outcomes some participants in the BIFI program have experienced.

Several types of families can participate in the BIFI program, and the program is free. If you would like to participate in the BIFI program or learn more, please contact Taryn Dezfulian at (804) 828-3701 or toll free at (866) 296-6904.



VCU, PM&R

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY MODEL SYSTEM

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