



MS Winter 2010 Matters

Workshop: Employment Matters for Those with MS

The last 20 years have brought major changes for people with MS. Medical treatment has helped maintain health and mobility, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has improved access to employment, within State and Federal Government, and to public accommodations. These changes have brought new opportunities for people with MS but challenges remain.

If you have MS and plan to continue or return to work, join us for an employment workshop to discuss these opportunities and remaining challenges. Presenters will provide information on four topics (outlined to the right). We hope to see you there.

Saturday, March 20
from 9:00 a.m. – Noon
doors open at 8:30 a.m.

Exceptional Persons, Inc.
760 Ansborough Avenue, Waterloo

No cost to attend.

Pre-registration is required due to limited seating.

Call (319) 232-6671 to register.

Workshop Topics

- 1. The Americans with Disabilities Act & Human Resources.** Learn about rights & responsibilities of employees & employers.
Presenter: Dennis Stufflebeam, MS, SPHR
School Business/HR Manager
Waverly-Shell Rock Schools
- 2. Vocational Rehabilitation & Other Community Vocational Resources.** Learn about resources available to learn a new job skill, maintain a current job or transition to a new career.
Presenter: Kathleen (Kass) Harper, MA, CRC, (retired)
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
Department Vocational Rehabilitation
- 3. Work Incentive Benefits - Medicaid for Employed People with Disabilities, Work Incentives & Social Security Disability, & Waivers.** Learn about incentives making it possible to keep health insurance while working.
Presenter: Sheila Stoeckel, MS, CRC
Community Work Incentive Coordinator
Iowa Work Incentive Planning & Assistance Project
- 4. MS Services.** Learn how MS Services can help persons with MS and their families successfully navigate the issues associated with MS.
Presenter: Diane C. Holmes, LMSW
MS Services Director
Exceptional Persons, Inc.

Understanding Brain Function Can Improve Your Life

We've all heard having a "good attitude" is beneficial, especially when facing difficulties – Multiple Sclerosis, for example. But what do we mean and how does a "good attitude" help us?

In the January 2010 issue of, *Science of Mind* magazine an article entitled, "Change Your Brain with God" is about the findings of two researchers who conducted neuroscientific research on meditation and prayer. The researchers, Mark Robert Waldman and Andrew Newberg, M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Spirituality and the Mind co-authored a book entitled, *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings of a Neuroscientist*.

They found regardless of religious beliefs, one's beliefs about God can change the neural density and complexity of the brain. For example, if



one believes God has "positive" characteristics such as being compassionate and loving, the brain can restructure itself, thus improving cognition and physical health.

In contrast if one believes God is angry and punitive, that is showing "negative" characteristics, the brain can restructure itself in a way that is socially destructive. Mr. Waldman states, "Spiritual practices strengthen important parts of the brain... If you believe actively that what you're doing will help you, it will help you, physiologically and psychologically."

The use of new medical technology, particularly the functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) has improved understanding of the ability of the brain to adapt. This ability is called neuroplasticity and is good news for people with brain injuries of all sorts who until recently were told recovery was only possible in the first few years after the injury.

We control our thoughts and emotions, thus changing our brain structure. If the change is positive we can become calmer, more compassionate and our

memory skills improve. If, however, we focus on negative thoughts, we can damage areas of the brain that regulate emotions and memory.

Scientists discovered this capacity by having people read a list of positive and negative words while they were monitored with fMRI. Reading the positive list lowered anxiety and depression, while anxiety and depression increased when reading negative words.

This occurs because an ancient part of our brain, the limbic brain is constantly on the alert for danger, which it interprets as threatening to our survival. As a result, negative words, emotions or actions are seen as a danger and have a stronger effect on us than positive ones. It takes more effort, then to embed positive thoughts and feelings in our memory circuits.

Two additional crucial factors come into play. First, our brain makes no distinction between inner and outer reality. The frontal lobes, a newer part of the brain is constantly dreaming up both positive and negative thoughts. When we become conscious of these thoughts, yet another part of the brain, the



thalamus reacts as though the thought is really happening and responds to avoid a perceived danger or relax to a perceived positive situation. Furthermore, our brain is built to understand and reflect back behavior of the people around us.

So, if we are around angry people, we become angry and when around people who speak calmly, we become calm. Therefore, "Consciousness, reality, your mind, and spiritual beliefs are profoundly interconnected and inseparable from the functioning of the brain."

Over time excessive fear and other negative feelings can damage a part of the brain called the anterior cingulate which allows us to experience love and compassion and can over stimulate the amygdala, the part of the brain that creates fear and anxiety. This can cause problems with

memory storage, and other cognitive functions and in social situations. This process then feeds itself causing people to become even more blaming and pessimistic, as well as, losing intuition and the ability to empathize, leading to aggressiveness against others.

The good news is that we can express joy, hope and compassion by strengthening the anterior cingulate part of the brain. With practice we can redirect negative thoughts and feed our brain positive thoughts, which gradually becomes a self-feeding cycle. Regularly practicing the exercises to the right can reduce stress and change our internal reality.

While it is helpful to understand the role complex functions of the brain that develop a positive attitude, most people know they feel better when their attitudes are positive. At a certain point the "positive attitude" becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy with many benefits for ourselves and those around us.

Source: Stahura, B.; Change Your Brain with God; Science of Mind; January 2010

Positive Enhancing Exercises

- Smile - Done frequently can improve social interactions, develop empathy & improve mood.
- Stay intellectually active - The brain functions better when used often.
- Consciously relax - Notice tight muscles and relax them. This intercepts stress hormones before they are sent to the brain.
- Yawn - Yawning relaxes & increases cognitive & self awareness. Research has found students who yawn before taking a test raised their grade point. Yawning also helps reduce anxiety.
- Meditation - It's not necessary for the meditation to be spiritual & can include visualization, guided imagery or self-hypnosis.
- Aerobic exercise - Exercise can be yoga, running or other vigorous exercise. Other benefits include improved cognition, neuroplasticity & healthy immune functioning.
- Conversation with other people, which stimulates brain and cognitive functioning.
- Faith - Beliefs can build optimism & marshal the body's natural placebo which heals.

A Note From Diane

MS is not for sissies! It can be much like an uninvited guest that won't leave. We can and do become angry and fearful.

Sometimes we take our anger out on our kids and spouse. Or give our doctor a "piece of our mind" when the symptoms don't improve. Maybe a friend you've depended on to listen says, "Do you want some cheese with that w(h)ine?"

We may become so grumpy and irritable even we get tired of hearing it. It's often at that point we give ourselves a firm talking to. Much as we feel we are at the mercy of our emotions, they are under our control and we can change them.

The information in the main article in this newsletter, "Understanding Brain Function Can Improve Your Life" can improve your understanding of how the brain functions and give you a place to start to build and maintain a positive, hopeful attitude.

One of my favorite stories as a child was, "The Little Engine That Could." That story teaches the value of determination, perseverance and believing in one's self.

Thank You Supporters

Contributions are vital to the continuation of services provided by MS Services. Thank you to the following for their financial support.

- Ms. Mary Lou Garms
- Phylis Leistikow Memorial
- Marshalltown Area MS Support Group

No matter what the obstacle, we can refocus, gather our dignity and determination, and start over with the perspective that we CAN handle whatever comes our way. "I think I can. I think I can. Choo, choo!"



Informational Meeting

Learn about Ticket to Work, work incentives that allow a person on SSI and SSDI to keep their benefits AND earn a paycheck.

Tuesdays, February 2, 9, 16, 23
from 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Iowa Workforce Development (Conference Room A)
3420 University Ave., Waterloo
Prior registration is not required

Contact Kelly Cook, Disability Program Navigator, at (319) 240-6712 or Kelly.Cook@iwd.iowa.gov with questions.

This program is a joint venture of Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Iowa Department of Human Services, Iowa Workforce Development, Iowa Department for the Blind, Iowa Department of Education, Division of Persons with Disabilities, Governor's Development Disabilities Council.



MS Support Group & Events Schedule

FEBRUARY

Thurs. - Feb. 4	1:30 pm	Buchanan	St. John's Catholic Church Rectory	209 5th Ave. NE, Independence
Wed. - Feb. 10	10:30 am	Bremer/Butler	Redeemer Lutheran Church	2001 West Bremer, Waverly
Wed. - Feb. 17	11:00 am	Waterloo	EPI Office	760 Ansborough Ave., Waterloo
Wed. - Feb. 24	9:30 am	Tama	Senior Center - Community Building	103 S. Church St., Toledo

MARCH

Thurs. - Mar. 4	1:30 pm	Buchanan	St. John's Catholic Church Rectory	209 5th Ave. NE, Independence
Wed. - Mar. 10	10:30 am	Bremer/Butler	Redeemer Lutheran Church	2001 West Bremer, Waverly
Wed. - Mar. 17	11:00 am	Waterloo	EPI Office	760 Ansborough Ave., Waterloo
** Employment Workshop ** Sat. - Mar. 20 ** 9:00 am ** EPI Office ** 760 Ansborough Ave., Waterloo				
Wed. - Mar. 31	9:30 am	Tama	Senior Center - Community Building	103 S. Church St., Toledo

APRIL

Thurs. - Apr. 1	1:30 pm	Buchanan	St. John's Catholic Church Rectory	209 5th Ave. NE, Independence
Wed. - Apr. 7	10:30 am	Bremer/Butler	Redeemer Lutheran Church	2001 West Bremer, Waverly
Wed. - Apr. 14	11:00 am	Waterloo	EPI Office	760 Ansborough Ave., Waterloo
Wed. - Apr. 28	9:30 am	Tama	Senior Center - Community Building	103 S. Church St., Toledo

Multiple Sclerosis Services assists and supports people who have Multiple Sclerosis and those who care about them adjust to life with a chronic illness by providing emotional support, current information and connection to needed community services.



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Multiple Sclerosis Services

Multiple Sclerosis Services, founded in 1980 in Waterloo, Iowa, as Area VII MS Service League, was a non-profit organization created to provide services and information to address the day-to-day impact of Multiple Sclerosis (MS) on individuals and families.

Today's MS Services is a program of Exceptional Persons, Inc and continues to serve families coping with MS by supplying emotional support, current information, and connection to needed community services. MS Services is governed by a volunteer Advisory Committee made up of people who have MS, their family members and community representatives.

MS Services is funded by area United Way agencies, the South Tama United Fund a part of the Northeast Iowa Community Foundation, and private contributions. Funds are used to provide agency services. The annual audit is available for public review.

MS Services impacts over 400 families in Waterloo/Cedar Falls and the surrounding seven county areas. MS Services is not affiliated with, nor supported by, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.



Exceptional Persons, Inc.

A program of
Exceptional Persons, Inc.

MS Advisory Committee

Rudy Bernhard
Todd Evans
Kass Harper
Mary Ann Riensche
Dennis Sufflebeam

MS Services Director

Diane Holmes, LMSW

