



Issue 69

CREATING A BRAINWISE CULTURE THAT PREPARES PREVIOUSLY HOMELESS VETERANS FOR SUCCESS

The following story about BrainWise instructors sharing information is uplifting and gives tips and strategies that can be used not only by health professionals, but by those who teach BrainWise in schools, social service agencies, the workplace, and at home.

In 2016, BrainWise trainer Gary Brayton, Ph.D. gave a copy of *How To Be BrainWise* to a colleague, Melissa Roels, Program Coordinator at Hull Services. This agency is in Calgary, Canada and serves children, youth, and families with complex mental health needs. After Melissa and Assistant Program Director Jocelyn McQuay recognized that BrainWise filled a gap in their services, they started teaching the 10 Wise Ways in their group care and community-based treatment programs.

The program thrived and five years later, they shared their success in a BrainWise newsletter. They discussed how BrainWise helped their clients and emphasized they had fun teaching the skills. They chose three words to describe the program's impact: "Powerful," "Inspiring," and "Life Changing". (See *BrainWise at Hull Services* [Issue 56](#).)



Gary Brayton,
PhD, RSW, MSW



Jocelyn McQuay, MSc.Psych



Melissa Roels, BA

Around the same time and a thousand miles away in Denver, Marilyn Welsh, Ph.D. a national expert on executive functions and a professor of psychology at the University of Northern Colorado, published the results of her [study on BrainWise taught to homeless men](#) living in a residential treatment program (link research paper published on BrainWise and Homeless men.)

Jared Greenberg, M.D., a University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) faculty member

and psychiatrist at the Los Angeles Veterans Administration Medical Center (LAVAMC) read the study and contacted BrainWise.

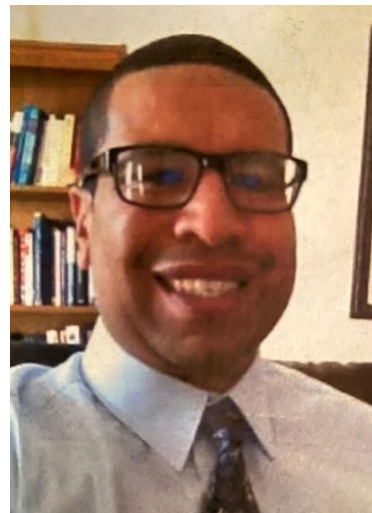
He was treating previously homeless Veterans with serious mental illnesses and was interested in teaching them executive functions (EF). He was familiar with research that found among those who experience homelessness, positive EFs have been associated with improved self-care, less turbulent behavior, positive behavior changes, fewer depressive symptoms, improved physical health, and lower rates of unsafe sexual practices. He assembled a research team, and they submitted a proposal to the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct a pilot test of BrainWise with Veterans ([2018 Newsletter on VA and BrainWise.](#))

His team was awarded a grant at the start of COVID and are wrapping up Phase 1 of the study. They conducted interviews with health providers who work with homeless veterans, leaders of programs that provide homeless Veterans with a range of services, and a group of homeless-experienced Veterans who meet regularly to provide a patient's perspective on activities to improve care. The interviews collected information on teaching content, feasibility, barriers and enhancements to program delivery, number and duration of sessions, and suggested resolutions. The Domiciliary, an LAVAMC inpatient care facility, was chosen as the site for the pilot study.

Although age differentiated the youth at Hull Services from the previously homeless Veterans, both groups had serious mental illnesses and were placed in residential treatment facilities. Dr. Brayton, Jocelyn and Melissa were excited to share their success. Dr. Greenberg, Dr. Barry, and master BrainWise instructor Matt Sena had a Zoom meeting with the Hull Services providers. Jocelyn said, [“We love the community we are building and want to share it!”](#)



Jared Greenberg, MD



Matt Sena, M.S.



Pat Gorman Barry, PhD, RN

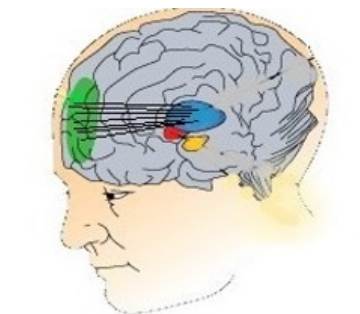


Marilyn Welsh, Ph.D.

What follows are the materials they presented at the meeting. Many of the strategies are universal and can be replicated in a wide range of BrainWise settings.

Key Points for Creating Successful BrainWise Outcomes*

Involve Stakeholders. Involve everyone who has consistent contact with participants – providers, support staff, ancillary staff, volunteers and family. They should be familiar with BrainWise concepts, terms, teaching aids and reinforcement gestures. Use Brain Bucks, Brain Bumps and the BrainWise hand brain as rewards and visual reminders to stop and think. Involvement of stakeholders ensures multiple avenues to **REINFORCE** the concepts.



Build Brain Connections



BrainWise Fist Bumps



[Stop & Think Hand Brain](#)

Create Environment that Supports Success. Provide participants with multiple support resources who know the 10 Wise Ways. Identify key people of influence who support engagement, manage resistance/negativity and reward positive behaviors. Set up everything for success: rules, routines, visuals, motivation systems with privileges, rewards, recognitions.

Offer opportunities for participants to be involved, demonstrate their skills, build constellations of support, feel respected, and give back. Use hands-on activities, celebrate success, have fun, integrate Wise Ways into games and movies, create a routine, include food.

*A thank you to Jocelyn McQuay for her typed answers to discussion questions on advice and tips for implementing BrainWise in a new setting.

Use BrainWise Teaching Materials. Everything you need to teach critical thinking skills is in the curriculum, worksheets, the *How To Be BrainWise* companion book, and teaching aids (10 Wise Ways posters and cards, BrainWise markers, BrainWise CPR Problem Solving Worksheet, Brain Bucks, Brain Bumps, BrainWise Hand Brain.)

The materials can be customized for age, culture, developmental ability, race, sex, and problems. Display the participants' hand-made brains, Emotions Elevators, 10 Wise Ways posters, hand-made BrainWise card set, copies of the brain, brain worksheet.

The BrainWise curriculum and teaching aids are available at www.brainwise-plc.org. Free monthly newsletters, including copies of past issues are available by sending a request to ms.marty.macdonald@gmail.com. These help you **REINFORCE** the concepts.

Address Resistance. Participants have many reasons for acting out and resisting learning new material. Master BrainWise instructors offer these techniques:

- Plan ahead! Anticipate that there will be resistance and decide your response based on the situation.
- Build on what is already in place – rules, boundaries and rewards,
- Use key participants as advocates if appropriate
- Don't change routines or stop what you are presenting – keep going!. If needed, resolve the issue after the session.
- Be creative – initial resistance or “this is boring” always improves!

Engage Participants. Here are suggestions to help engage participants:

Build relationships with group members. For open groups, proactively plan with group members to use their BrainWise skills to welcome a new member. Pair up a new member with a more experienced member. Start each group with participants sharing an example of a Wise Way that they or someone else used.

Make sessions fun by creating games and activities such as awarding Brain Bucks to individuals who recognize Wise Ways used during the group or limit it to behaviors that use one or two higher level Wise Ways such as “I” messages, POV, positive body language, consequences, or goal.

Highlight positive behaviors by asking participant to identify what part of the Brain they were using. Do the same by asking them to identify Wizard Brain behaviors of others, including celebrities or characters in movies and animations. Complete worksheets together and share results.

Make participants feel comfortable getting involved by giving them question(s) they can successfully answer. Use scripted activities or the same content in new ways or with different examples that will help participants respond successfully. Provide food!!

Give rewards such as BRAIN BUCKS for involvement. Again, these activities **REINFORCE** the concepts.

Developing and maintaining successful programs is a complex and long-term process that requires the involvement of stakeholders, consistent support, and program fidelity and reinforcement. A heartfelt thanks to the teachers, instructors, and parents who are sole

teachers of BrainWise in their classroom, groups, and homes as well as to individuals in leadership positions in schools, health and social agencies who introduce and sustain BrainWise.

The teaching tips and strategies will help you create a BrainWise milieu where using executive functions is commonplace. The change process may seem slow, but long-term benefits are worth the effort. Keep going! BrainWise instructors tell stories of meeting BrainWise graduates years later and hearing about how they have used their skills to get and keep jobs, stay in relationships, contribute to their communities, and teach BrainWise to others.

Positive outcomes are rewarding. As shown here, instructors are excited to share their results and tell others how BrainWise can help people make choices that improve their lives. Phase 2 of the study with previously homeless Veterans involves implementing the program and measuring outcomes. When we get the results, we will share them with you.



Please take care of yourself.

Dr. Pat

On a Lighter Note

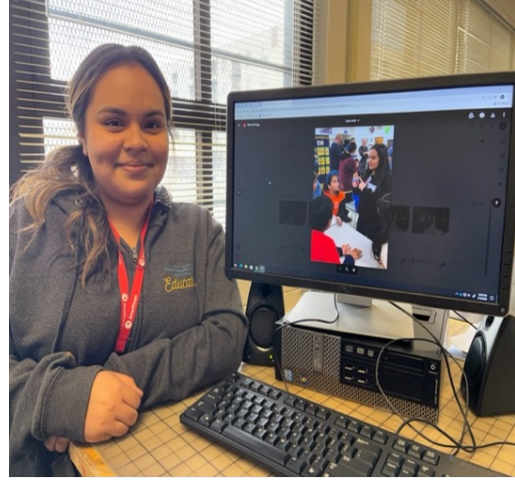
Previous BrainWise newsletters featured stories on high school sophomores who reinforced BrainWise concepts with 4th graders. Anahi Cruz, participated in the Denver Mile High Rotary-supported project (Link to the [first](#) and [second](#) newsletter featuring Anahi).

In 2022, as I met with a new group of high school students as they prepared to reinforce the 10 Wise Ways by reading stories to elementary students on Zoom, a young woman overheard us and said she knew BrainWise. It was Anahi! She pulled up the BrainWise newsletter and posed for this picture.

Anahi graduated from high school and is currently working as an Americorps staff member at her former school and saving money for college. Stacey Hervey, her teacher, continues to involve students in BrainWise and Rotary community projects (Link to [first](#) and [second](#) article on Stacey and BrainWise reading.)



2019



2022

Anahi Cruz teaching BrainWise as a High School Sophomore and Today as a Member of CEC High School's Teaching Support Staff