

SLI Connection



Supportive Living Inc. | Brain Injury Programs | Vol 74 / Winter 2020

GET TO KNOW SLI

Neuro-Wellness Manager

**Kara Lavertu,
MS, CGFI, CBIS**



A 4-sport high school athlete, Kara Lavertu knew she wanted to pursue her interests in sports and medicine in college. After graduating, she looked for the right opportunity to use her training to help people and make meaningful personal connections. When Kara heard about the Neuro-Wellness Manager position, she thoroughly researched SLI. The more she learned, the more con-



vinced she became that this was exactly where she wanted to work. Kara enthusiastically states, "my job is never boring!" Kara holds an MS in exercise and sports science from Merrimack College and a BS in exercise science from Endicott College. She is a Certified Group Fitness Instructor (CGFI) and recently completed a rigorous course of study offered through the Brain Injury Association to become a Certified Brain Injury Specialist (CBIS).

The CBIS program requires passing a comprehensive exam and completing 500 hours of hands-on work with people affected by brain injury. Course work covers anatomy and regions of the brain, effects of damage in specific areas, transition to home after hospitalization and rehabilitation, family challenges and dynamics. Kara explains that this certification prepares her to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each participant and "helps me develop each person's individualized plan. I adapt their Neuro-Fit workout to their specific brain injury to help them achieve their goals."

Kara oversees all Neuro-Wellness program sites and is responsible for the creation of each participant's individualized Neuro-Fit exercise program. She systematically tracks program details, manages the intake and registration of participants and class scheduling. Kara also recruits and trains SLI's year-round corps of

college interns. Kara tells us, "the interns provide each participant with one-on-one attention, encouragement and support." She explains how satisfying it is to manage the Neuro-Wellness Program: "I love the participants - they are so motivated to be here. Though they have had a traumatic life experience, they smile, keep living their lives and work hard to achieve their goals. When they can sit straighter, or stand longer, or their grip is firmer, or they can transfer in and out of a wheelchair - these accomplishments help tremendously with a person's confidence and independence."

BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF MA 39TH ANNUAL BRAIN INJURY CONFERENCE, MARCH 25-26

SLI is proud to support the work of the Brain Injury Association of MA. SLI's Kara Lavertu and colleagues (below) will be presenting. **More info at biama.org/annualconference.**

PIONEERING INTERVENTIONS FOR ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY:

- Kara Lavertu, MS, CGFI, CBIS (SLI):** Neuro-Fit Implementation
- Allison May, MS, OTR/L, CBIS (CRC):** Enhancing Functional Services for ABI survivors
- Urvashi Chogle, PT (SLI) :** Yoga and Healing the Brain
- Stacey Aaron, PhD (Spaulding):** Cognition after Stroke



LIVE AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE

A MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD LEADERSHIP

*Carrol E. Stephens, Founder and Chair
Peter W. Robbins, Vice Chair*

We each have a son who suffered and survived a devastating brain injury. Our involvement in Supportive Living, Inc. grew from the deeply personal motivation to create an environment where our children could live with dignity and as much independence as possible. As Chair and Vice Chair, we are privileged to work with many caring people who share our commitment to SLI. They are donors, volunteers and staff who value the opportunity to make a daily difference in someone's life.

This issue of Connection highlights the involvement, support and impact of some of these people. You will learn about our warm energetic Neuro-Wellness Manager's specialized skills and training; read about a volunteer who brings compassion and culinary skills to Douglas House; and meet generous monthly donors who understand first-hand the need for ongoing affordable, accessible neuro-wellness programs.

SLI had a busy fall with four significant events. None of these milestones would have been successful without the generosity, energy and effort of many people. As a small nonprofit organization, SLI depends on board leaders, volunteers, and individual and corporate donors to raise crucial funds and increase awareness in support of our mission. We can't do it without you. Please consider joining us. Whether you serve on a committee, run or walk with our Battlegreen Team, attend an SLI event, become a corporate sponsor, volunteer directly with residents, or respond generously to an appeal, you make a difference. **Thank you!**



Carrol founded SLI in 1991 after her seventeen year old son, Scott, suffered a traumatic brain injury, leaving him in need of life-long care.



In 2005, Peter's son suffered a devastating brain injury. Peter's search for appropriate and supportive care for Nicholas led him to SLI.



Battlegreen Run Committee member, Hallie Wells (left), on race day with her daughter and sister.

SUPPORTIVE LIVING, INC. BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Our Board of Directors includes family members of survivors, business and community leaders, physicians, and professionals in the field of brain injury.

Carrol E. Stephens | Chair
Peter W. Robbins | Vice Chair
Peter J. Noonan | President
Darryl J. Fess
Timothy R. Kelliher, MD
Krystyn Van Vliet, Ph. D.

THANK YOU DEB AND JJ - FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP, GUIDANCE AND COMMITMENT!

We gratefully acknowledge the extraordinary service of two board members at the conclusion of their terms.



Deb Caldwell found SLI as she searched for information and resources after her son Curt suffered a traumatic brain injury in a car accident. Over the six years that Deb has served on the board, she has contributed in ways too numerous to count. She has been an annual

gala event committee member, a Battlegreen Run team member and, as an eloquent SLI ambassador, Deb has helped SLI secure significant grant funding.



JJ Harris had never served on a nonprofit board before, but he was inspired to take on the new role after learning about the mission and accomplishments of SLI from his friend, Peter Robbins. JJ was instrumental in the fundraising and outreach efforts that contributed to

the success of the 5th Anniversary Old Farm Rockport Founders Challenge Campaign. **We thank Deb and JJ for their many contributions to SLI.**

To learn more about the responsibilities and rewards of board membership, contact our President, Peter Noonan at pnoonan@supportivelivinginc.org

VOLUNTEERING

A recipe for Happy and Healthy Living



For retired lawyer and Lexington resident Howard Cloth, joining the Healthy Cooking Group at Douglas House was a perfect fit - a great opportunity to combine his love of cooking with a passion for volunteerism and connecting with people.

In 2015, Howard's daughter Ali, an educational psychology professor at the University of British Columbia, was hit by a car while in a crosswalk. Ali suffered a traumatic brain injury and was put in a medically-induced coma. Her recovery surpassed all expectations due in large part to the new field of brain chemistry microdialysis being used at Vancouver General Hospital (VGH). It allows frequent monitoring of a patient's brain-tissue chemistry and real-time monitoring of oxygen and blood pressure via a hollowed-out bolt in the brain which permits the delivery of meds with doses tailored to a patient's condition vs. standardized doses. VGH is one of only a handful of hospitals around the world using the revolutionary bolt procedure.

Ali was out of the hospital and into rehab after only six weeks. She was able to go home just four months

later. Though she feels like "only 75% of her old self" and is subject to fatigue, Ali was able to resume hiking and biking. She returned to teaching at UBC in September 2019. Howard is grateful for Ali's recovery and the excellent care she received.

When he heard about Douglas House from his friend Gary Fallick, who had served on SLI's Capital Campaign Committee, Howard knew he wanted to volunteer and 'pay it forward.' He explains, "when you volunteer you make the world a better place. You give but you get more back." Howard learned about the Healthy Cooking Group which meets Fridays and includes Douglas House residents as well as people affected by brain injury who are living at home.

"I'm not concerned with being uncomfortable. Even if someone's speech is difficult, you can see in their eyes and smile that they are getting it. Just be open and listen."

An accomplished home chef with stints on local cable TV, Howard finds cooking relaxing and a wonderful way to support wellness goals. For the Douglas House Healthy Cooking group, Howard selects a range of healthful and delicious recipes and considers the group's important role in preparation. Participants slice, dice, mix and stir. Howard is quick to note if a little adaption is in order. He recently purchased a tomato slicer when he

noticed holding the tomato steady while slicing was tricky. The group has prepared and enjoyed many dishes, including steamed sesame lemon broccoli, turkey burger sliders, raw butternut squash slaw, and swordfish steaks with leafy greens salsa verde. You can check out Howard's blog for healthy cooking recipes and tips: **Waisting Away ... in Nutritionville.**

In addition to volunteering at Douglas House, Howard walks 25 miles a week. For 20 years he participated in the Boston Marathon Jimmy Fund Walk and the Walk for Hunger. He also serves on a Lexington Town Committee and is a member of Lexington At Home, a volunteer social support and resource network for seniors.

When Howard sees his friends from the cooking group in Lexington Center, he stops to say hello and chat. Howard knows that people sometimes worry when meeting a Douglas House resident, "what do I say?" or "what if I don't understand them?" Howard explains, "I'm not concerned with being uncomfortable. Even if someone's speech is difficult, you can see in their eyes and smile that they are getting it. Just be open and listen."



Howard is one of the wonderful SLI volunteers that make a difference. Visit our website to learn more about volunteer opportunities!

JP & ELLIE MONNIN SLI MONTHLY DONORS

Because Every Little
Bit Helps



JP Monnin, an SLI Monthly Donor, calls it, "painless giving." He explains, "part of it is a bit selfish - being able to give back to others who need it provides you with a sense of personal satisfaction. It feels good to give and to help keep the program affordable to everyone who needs it. Fundraising is necessary to help subsidize the program - the fee doesn't cover the services participants receive. Every little bit helps."

JP and Ellie Monnin know from personal experience that a traumatic brain injury changes your life in an instant. In December 2011, Ellie, a 58 years old Marblehead resident, was excited to show her friend the special Christmas gift she had ordered for her husband, a custom-made wine rack stowed in the basement. Walking down the stairs, she tripped

and fell, hitting her head with such force that she suffered a traumatic brain injury. Ellie was rushed to the local hospital and then medevacked via helicopter to Brigham and Women's Hospital. She was put in a medically-induced coma for over a month to allow her brain to rest and lower intracranial pressure due to internal bleeding. Ellie finally left the ICU after four months and was transferred to Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Charlestown. Then she was moved to a nursing home where she lived for 1 ½ years.

Finally, two years after her accident, Ellie was able to return home. During this time her husband JP had renovated their home to make it wheelchair accessible. Ellie is affected on her right side. She has mostly lost the ability to speak. JP explains that, she is "fine cognitively, however her short-term memory is affected." Ellie had been a professional chef who owned several restaurants, then she had retired and became a teacher at a culinary arts school for at-risk youth.

Once home, Ellie continued with her outpatient speech, occupational and physical therapy at Spaulding. However, after several years her progress leveled off and insurance would no longer cover these services. A therapist at Spaulding told Ellie and JP about SLI's Neuro-Wellness Program at the Lynch/van Otterloo YMCA. JP knew that ongoing assisted adaptive exercise was vital to maintaining the progress Ellie had made – without it she would regress.

Ellie joined the SLI Neuro-Wellness Program at the YMCA satellite location. JP explains that working out on a NuStep cross training machine with the support of SLI

interns not only helps Ellie maintain her physical gains, but also helps her psychologically by giving her a sense of control over her well-being. It also provides a positive activity in their weekly schedule.

"Becoming a monthly donor is easy. It's not a ton of money but every little bit helps."

Ellie works hard and so do the SLI interns. JP explains, "SLI provides an invaluable service to us and other people - many who have run out of options or are looking for ways to supplement existing services. It's really a godsend. When we go to Florida for the winter, we haven't found any other organization like SLI."



Why become a monthly donor?

JP explains: "Becoming a monthly donor is easy. It's not a ton of money but every little bit helps. I give \$50 a month. It's easier than one big check and this way I don't forget. It is a way to say, 'thank you' to the SLI staff for doing a great job AND to make sure that these unique services are available to other people."

Become a Monthly Donor! It's an easy and convenient way to make a gift that SLI can count on! Consider a gift of \$10, \$15, \$20 or more per month to make a lasting impact. We will charge your credit or debit card automatically every month with the amount of your choosing. You can stop or change the amount at any time.

Go to Supportivelivinginc.org, click on: **How to help** then select: **Donate** or call us at **781-937-3199**. Thank you!

FALL EVENTS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH - THANK YOU TO OUR MANY WONDERFUL VOLUNTEERS AND DONORS!

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the William P. Van Vliet Wellness Studio - Lexington

Friends of SLI celebrated the opening of the expanded Neuro-Wellness Center. The project was made possible through the commitment and generous support of many individuals, organizations and governing bodies in Lexington and beyond. Board Member, Lexington resident, MIT professor and traumatic brain injury survivor, Krystyn Van Vliet, spoke about her personal experience recovering from a car accident as a teenager. She noted the tremendous support of her family and her commitment to SLI's work.

Boxing for Balance, Core and More - Lexington

This neuro-wellness class, held in the William P. Van Vliet Wellness Studio, provides a great opportunity to increase heart rate, improve strength and practice balance in a dynamic fun environment.

Old Farm Rockport 5th Anniversary Celebration – Beverly



Dedicated supporters gathered for an evening, chaired by Lucy Robbins, to 'look back and look forward' in honor of the 5th anniversary of the unique residential community. Held at the home of board member Dr.

Tim Kelliher and Sandy Freiberg, the event launched the successful OFR5 Founders Challenge Campaign spearheaded by Board Vice Chair, Peter Robbins. The funds raised supported the expansion of the Neuro-Wellness Program.

24th Annual Genesis Battlegreen Run – Lexington

Our team includes brain injury survivors, their families, community members, SLI interns and staff. On race day everyone was ready to run, walk and roll! Thanks to our fantastic committee, amazing team, and very generous supporters – the SLI Neurons raised over \$13,000 and everyone had a blast! **Join the SLI 2020 Team! For information contact Kara at KLavertu@supportivelivinginc.org**

Celebrating Wellness Gala – North Reading

At SLI's annual fall gala, guests enjoyed music provided by national recording artist, Ayla Brown. Pictured here, Carole Compameschi, SLI volunteer and mom of Paul, a Warren House resident, with Ayla.





IT'S TIME TO THINK GOLF!

Please join us on June 22nd for the

**28TH ANNUAL SUPPORTIVE LIVING, INC.
DOUGLAS STEPHENS MEMORIAL
GOLF TOURNAMENT**

Andover Country Club

60 Canterbury St., Andover, MA

**Registration is available online or
by calling 781-937-3199**

CELEBRATING WELLNESS

Our annual fall gala supported the expansion of SLI's Neuro-Wellness Center and Programs. Individual and corporate supporters gathered to enjoy good news, good food and good music - provided by national recording artist, Ayla Brown.

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of our Platinum Presenting Sponsor:

BrooklineBank



Supportive Living, Inc. is a nonprofit organization with a mission to raise the quality of life for brain injury survivors by providing appropriate affordable housing, neuro-wellness programs, collaborative research and education.
781-937-3199 | www.supportivelivinginc.org



Return Service Requested
400 W. Cummings Park, Suite 6100
Woburn, MA 01801



NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
WOBURN, MA
PERMIT NO. 80