

TBI Newsletter

WVU CED TBI Program

The Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Program at WVU Center for Excellence in Disabilities (CED) is proud to serve as the state's designated lead agency for the coordination of services for West Virginians with TBI. The TBI Program is a collaboration between the state-funded Traumatic Brain Injury Services and the federally funded Traumatic Brain Injury Implementation Partnership Grant. According to West Virginia Legislative Code, Chapter 9, Article 10 (3) "Traumatic brain injury" means an acquired injury to the brain, including brain injuries caused by anoxia due to near drowning. "Traumatic brain injury" does not include brain dysfunction caused by congenital or degenerative disorders, nor birth trauma."

TBI Information:

What is a TBI?

A TBI is a bump, blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain. In West Virginia, TBI also includes individuals who have anoxia due to near drowning

Severity may range from "mild" to "severe" based on the level of change to your mental status or consciousness. • Estimates suggest that more than 23 million women in the US are living with a TBI from intimate partner violence. (Ivany & Schminkey, 2016) • Effects of TBI can include impaired thinking or memory, movement, sensation or emotional functioning. • The effects of a TBI can be short-term or lifelong. These issues affect not only individuals but also families and communities.

Services:

The TBI Program is a free service that serves WV citizens with a medical diagnosis of a Traumatic Brain Injury.

TBI services are available through state and federally funded grants. The program provides resource coordination, patient navigation, screenings, and assessments to individuals with TBI of all ages. The statewide program consists of regional TBI social workers and a patient navigator, who use a person-centered approach to help individuals reach their personal goals and achieve independence within their communities.

Services include but are not limited to:

- Person-centered resource facilitation
- Connection to services, supports and resources
- Funds for You (FFY) a grant-funded program that connects individuals with TBI to funding as a payer of last resort to help enhance their quality of life.
- Neuropsychological evaluations
- Regional support groups
- Trainings and technical assistance
- Screenings for identifying TBI
- Research related to WV TBI services and the needs of individuals with a TBI
- Return to Learn
- Mentor and partnership with state TBI programs across the nation
- BIG Brain Outreach providing brain safety education

Meet TBI Staff



**Steven Wheeler, PhD,
OTR/L, FAOTA, CBIS**

**Principal Investigator
(PI) – West Virginia
Traumatic Brain Injury
State Program**

Dr. Steven Wheeler began his role as PI on the WV DHHR funded TBI State Program in January 2020. In

addition to his work as the PI for the TBI Program, Dr. Wheeler is a Professor and the Chairperson at the Division of Occupational Therapy at the West Virginia University (WVU) School of Medicine. He worked at WVU from December 2000 through September 2016, returning in January 2020, following three years at the University of Cincinnati where he served as the Founding Program Director of the graduate program in occupational therapy. For more than two decades, Dr. Wheeler has worked as a clinician, educator, researcher and advocate in the area of TBI. His work has seen him practicing throughout southern WV, eastern KY and southern Ohio with individuals with TBI and families during the recovery process in inpatient, outpatient and community-based settings. He has conducted numerous professional development courses and workshops in WV and has written numerous research articles and chapters on TBI at the national and international level. In 2016, he co-authored the American Occupational Therapy Association's Practice Guidelines for Adults with TBI with our other PI, Dr. Amanda Acord-Vira. His current research focuses on community re-integration following TBI, cognitive and perceptual rehabilitation, contextualized rehabilitation interventions and the process of returning to the classroom and work environments following concussion.

Dr. Wheeler has been the recipient of many outstanding awards and accolades and his accomplishments in the field of brain injury were recognized in 2020 when he was named a Fellow of the American Occupational Therapy Association.



**Amanda Acord-Vira, EdD,
OTR/L, CBIS**

**Principal Investigator
(PI) – Federal Traumatic
Brain Injury Grant
Program**

Dr. Amanda Acord-Vira began her role as PI on the Federal

TBI State Grant Program in January 2020. In addition to her work at the CED with the grant, she is an Associate Professor in the Division of Occupational Therapy at WVU. Dr. Acord-Vira received her Masters of Occupational Therapy and Doctorate of Education in Educational Psychology from WVU. She also obtained her Graduate Certificate in Special Education and Traumatic Brain Injury from George Washington University.

She has been involved in clinical occupational therapy practice, research and education for over 18 years focusing on traumatic brain injury. As an associate professor, her research interests include return to community participation, work, school and occupational performance following brain injury including concussion. She has presented at several peer reviewed state and national conferences and has published several articles on brain injury. She also co-authored the Occupational Therapy Practice Guidelines for Traumatic Brain Injury with Dr. Wheeler. In addition, Dr. Acord-Vira is a co-investigator on a grant for adapting a fall prevention program for individuals with traumatic brain injury and another grant for preparing physical therapy (PT) and occupational therapy (OT) students for their roles in physical activity and life/leisure skills education for persons with opioid addiction. She also served as the editor for the American Occupational Therapy Special Interest Section for Work and Industry and is the co-chair of the WV TBI Advisory Board.

Meet TBI client & caregiver

In the summer of 2017, soon to be high school senior, Allie Gilkerson was a passenger on a motorcycle when the incident occurred that would lead to her TBI. Allie was a responsible kid, a 4.0 student and captain of her color guard team. At the time of the incident, Allie was thrown off the motorcycle and the helmet she was wearing malfunctioned. Allie was taken to Cabell Huntington Hospital where she underwent multiple surgeries. The doctors were not hopeful that she would survive, but after about a week in the hospital, and multiple surgeries, she began responding! After many more weeks of complications and tough surgeries, she could finally go home in March of 2018. Throughout all of the difficulties, Allie and her family never gave up and never stopped fighting.

Allie began to communicate more and more as they continued with various therapies while she was transferred to outpatient – she has been in OT, PT and speech therapy in the outpatient setting for 2 years now. She has been able to regain use of her left arm and can now walk with the help of her PT and assistive devices – surpassing what any of the doctors thought was possible. Allie was able to resume schooling in fall 2018 with the help of her teacher providing homeschooling. She has greatly excelled and has been able to walk at graduation in June this year, earning her diploma. Allie continues with her various therapies at home due to COVID-19, and never gives up. She pushes herself every day to regain her life and achieve her dream of going to college.

“We joined the program in 2018...I heard about it before anyone had ever contacted me. I started trying to get her on the program before they reached out to me because of how amazing it always seemed. Before her accident, I didn't know programs like this existed. And everyone in your alls program is just so nice, and so helpful. You have people like Angela who never get frustrated and are willing to help me and go above and beyond. Honestly, I don't know where we would be without her and this program. I can't say enough good things about this program.”

Norma Gilkerson, Mother, Caregiver.

Expect to see future newsletters created specifically for special projects within the TBI program! Projects and events just like our needs assessment, national mentorship, our return to learn program and more!

Traumatic Brain Injury Services Center for Excellence in Disabilities.

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