

Community Moves with the Dance Conservatory of Charleston

By Elizabeth G. Harvey, PT, DPT, MSR, CKTI; with Marka Danielle

I was recently able to participate in a special dance workshop. The goal? Give ALL children the opportunity to joyfully express themselves through dance. The program's intent was to reach participants who had cerebral palsy (CP) and other neuromuscular disorders. Ella Sanders and Meredith Devine, remarkable high school students and members of the Dance Conservatory of Charleston (DCC), were the push behind this event that included a cast of children, local clinicians, PT students, and professional dancers. Both dancers have gleaned

with the NYCB community, I was able to make sure DCC was tapping in to the best adaptive dance practices.”

Clinicians and therapy students took on the role of dance buddies. We were prepared by meeting with a member of the NYCB and Dr. Emma Carter, a local neurologist, to orient us to the format of the program. The workshop was led by Lily Watkins, a contemporary and ballet instructor at DCC, and began with pairing up participants with one or two dance buddies (clinicians or students), followed by the donning of costumes. Each participant chose their own tutu, crown, or cape of various colors. After dressing up, a ballet demonstration was given, followed by participant led warmups for breath and body. The children practiced two dance phrases, or routines, which were then performed for the families. Each component lasted about 15 minutes for a total of an hour of movement.

Marka Danielle, another teacher, who is a professional dancer and instructor of nearly 50 years, was inspiring, as she has an incomplete cervical spinal cord injury and uses a wheelchair full time for mobility. Marka says that her “passion for movement has never waned and so ballet technique has become a huge part of my rehabilitation along with yoga. My therapists were awesome in thinking outside the box to incorporate traditional therapy with my dance training.” She felt honored to help bring movement in the form of ballet to others.

Participants, dance buddies, and parents were all excited the day of the workshop. Ella stated that “it was incredibly exciting to see the little dancers’ glee and determination in the workshop...even though we collectively set out to inspire these



Therapists, ballerinas, physical therapy students, and children moving together with joy.



A community occupational therapist and her dance partner.

strength, joy, and friendships through dance. They were inspired to share their passion with a broader community by both Ella's cousin and a friend who have a diagnosis of CP. When they approached the director of DCC, Lindy Fabyanic, they found eager support of this vision.

Fabyanic reached out to the New York City Ballet (NYCB) for guidance, as they support both adult and pediatric dance workshops for those diagnosed with CP. Fabyanic said of the event, “The dance community has worked hard to explore the public health benefits of dance...and through my experience

children, I think that in the end, they were the ones who inspired us.” I overheard several mothers say how special it was for them to see their child perform without having to be the facilitator, just a proud parent. The Christmas season was made a little more magical for many by the Dance Conservatory of Charleston. Fabyanic says she plans to make this an annual event for Lowcountry residents as “everyone, no matter their background or ability, should be able to experience the joy of dance.” ■



Elizabeth G Harvey, PT, DPT, MSR, CKTI, is owner of ABC Therapies LLC in Moncks Corner, SC. She can be reached at abctherapy@homesc.com



Marka Danielle is a Ballet, Modern, Yoga and Accessible Yoga instructor in Charleston, SC. She can be reached at magicmarka@gmail.com

My Return to Quality of Life (continued from page 1)

emergency surgery was performed in Lincoln, Nebraska, where I was attending graduate school, so the doctors and surgeon were not my regular doctors. I woke up in a hospital room, where my dad had to tell me I had an ostomy. I do not remember my dad telling me, and I do not specifically remember when I realized I had an ostomy bag attached to my body. I do remember being in a lot of pain and being very confused. I do remember days later being told I would be able to have the ostomy reversed in about six months to a year, and this surgery could be performed at the Cleveland Clinic.

In June of the following year, I returned to Ohio for a visit to the Cleveland Clinic. The surgeon I met told me they wanted to remove my entire colon, which was not a part of the original plan. With this major decision, I decided to wait until after graduate school to go through another major surgery, and this meant I kept my ostomy for another two years. Keeping my ostomy for another two years was an easy decision because I was very comfortable with my situation.

In March of 2019, I met with a different surgeon at the Cleveland Clinic, Dr. Tracy Hull, who would perform my colon removal and ostomy take down. I had my colon removed August 15, 2019. A loop ileostomy was placed and was difficult to get used to because of the small amount of bowel from my stomach to my bag. This made it difficult to stay hydrated and came with complications.

On January 13, 2020, the ostomy reversal surgery was all done through my ostomy. It was like they just pushed my ostomy back in my body because there were no other openings made. Recovering at home was simple compared to the

previous surgery. Recovery was all about paying attention to urgency and resting.

In my day-to-day life, Crohn’s disease has made me more fatigued; some days taking a shower can feel like running a marathon. Since being diagnosed, I have been anemic, making me always cold, so I miss out on a lot of social events. Stress is a big trigger of my Crohn’s, and I was in pain as well as very tired during my final year of undergrad. I had to take a medical leave for the remainder of my first semester of graduate school. After about six hard months both physically and mentally, I had a better quality of life than I could ever image, and this was due to my ostomy. I was able to continue with graduate school as well as travel all over the United States and take my first international trip to Japan for three weeks. This would not have been possible without having surgery and without an ostomy. My ostomy saved my life and gave me my quality of life back. I was able to hang out with my friends and not be in pain or miss out on an event because I was too tired.

Recovery was about taking it slow, resting, and being aware of what my body was telling me. I only had to take off two weeks of work for my final surgery. My life has drastically changed multiple times in the last three years because of my Crohn’s disease, but I am still able to do things I was able to before. ■



Mallory Trecaso lives in her hometown of Akron, Ohio. She makes art, mainly photography, about her journey with chronic illness and you see her work at mallorytrecaso.com or reach her at mallorytrecaso@gmail.com