



THE EMPOWERMENT ZONE

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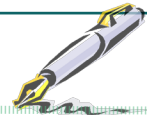
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From The Desk Of

Roberta Kestenbaum



Happy Holidays!

As we head towards the New Year, we turn our thoughts to preparing for the future and what we can do to make our lives less stressful, more fulfilling and healthier. Thus, this edition of the EZ is focused on RESILIENCY and preparing for the future in healthy ways.

Resiliency is the ability to cope with difficulties, bounce back and keep going in the face of stress or adversity. Our feature article discusses how to develop resiliency and use mindfulness techniques to cope with stressful events such as chronic health conditions and medical complications. To further address our focus on a healthy future, our New Year's Resolution article suggests 10 nutritious foods to start your year off in an optimal way. And we also honor Millie Gonzalez who was recently crowned as Ms. Wheelchair New Jersey 2019 with her platform focusing on another aspect of resiliency: "Survival of the Fiercest: Taking Control of Your Life through Self-Care".

Resiliency is an important concept for the SBRN this year as well. Moving into 2019 marks a major transition for our agency, as we will no longer be receiving funding from the state of New Jersey for our Family Support program. Nonetheless, SBRN remains resilient, and as we move forward, we are refocused and ready to continue offering our services and programs including:

- Family Support Services
- Adult Empowerment Retreat
- Walk for Empowerment
- Teleconferences & Telesupport Groups
- Accessible Activities
- Educational Resources
- Empowerment Zone
- Prevention Programs

Let's declare 2019 – the Year of Resiliency!

**Warm wishes for a Happy and Healthy New Year
from all of us at the SBRN.**



Building Resiliency through Mindfulness

People who live with long-term disabilities sometimes experience unforeseen health issues at various points in their lives, which can create unexpected stress. Everybody deals with stress in different ways. One way to cope more effectively with stress is to build up your resiliency.

What is “Resiliency”?

Resiliency is the ability to manage and overcome challenges, recover and bounce back after stressful experiences.

Those who are resilient have ways of thinking and behaving that help them cope and put a positive spin on negative experiences. Research suggests that people can build resiliency through instruction and practice. For example, learning how to set goals, develop more positive thinking, build better relationships and overcome barriers has been shown to improve resilience, increase well-being and even improve mood.

Thus, changing the way you think and react can help you face difficult circumstances with a way to cope. This may not come easily at first, but if you work at it, you may find that you are less stressed and feel better.

How Can You Change The Way You Think And Feel?

- Find positive takeaways from difficult situations – even when dealing with stressful situations, it’s helpful to look for something positive, such as what you can learn from this situation and what you could do differently in the future. Focus on positive feelings in the present (such as humor) and for the future (such as hope.)
- Think challenge, not threat – Change your approach by looking at the situation as a challenge to be conquered, rather than as an overwhelming threat.
- Choose optimism – When something bad happens, you can react negatively to it or you can **choose** to be optimistic and hopeful. Although you may not be able to stop something negative from happening, you can **choose** how you respond.
- Make decisions and take action – Instead of just hoping or wishing things will get better, take some kind of positive action, even a small one, to help you feel better and more in control. Look for solutions to the problem – they may not be perfect but it will give you a sense of control.
- Be flexible – Even before something stressful happens, think about different ways that you can cope. If one way isn’t working, be willing to choose another!

What Can You Do In Your Everyday Life to Help Build Resiliency!

- Build and maintain nurturing relationships – it’s important to not only have support within your family, but to develop supportive relationships outside as well. Being part of a community, such as through community groups, clubs, religious affiliations or other organizations can be helpful during stressful times. Support groups, whether in person, phone or online, can be a great source of comfort.
- Find meaning in your life through hobbies, spirituality, work, volunteering or whatever works for you. Feeling purposeful can keep you moving forward.
- Learn to manage your emotions – Everyone experiences some negative emotion when faced with difficulties and sometimes that can be helpful if it gets you to act. But learning how to bring positive emotions in to your situation can ease some stress and help you recover more quickly. What can you do? Some suggestions: **focus on humor** (watch a funny show, laugh with some friends, read some cartoons, make your own jokes about the situation or simply think of something funny to make you feel better); **give thanks** (focus on what you are grateful for in your life and what makes you happy); **practice mindfulness** (use meditation techniques to increase your well-being).

What is “Mindfulness”?

Mindfulness is the act of intentionally focusing attention on the present moment and accepting it without criticism. The purpose isn't to ignore negative emotions; instead it is to acknowledge them without disapproval. The practice of mindfulness is often associated with meditation and/or yoga.

What are the Benefits of Practicing Mindfulness?

Practicing mindfulness has been shown to have numerous positive effects, including increasing resilience. Mindfulness can help you stop focusing on negative thoughts that increase your anxiety and it can even change your brain so that you will be more resilient to future stressful events. It also improves brain function by helping with attention, focus, memory and performance.

Practicing mindfulness can reduce stress and improve physical health by helping treat heart disease, lower blood pressure, reduce chronic pain and ease gastrointestinal problems.

Mindfulness can improve your mood and increase overall happiness. It can help you appreciate the pleasures in life in the moment and become more fully engaged in what you are doing. Mindfulness is also now being used in the treatment of depression and anxiety, substance abuse and eating disorders.

What are the Essential Features of Practicing Mindfulness?

The basic concept of mindfulness involves several components of concentration:

- **Awareness** – Tuning in to what is happening in the present moment and paying attention to sights, sounds, smells and physical sensations that are going on around you. It involves letting feelings and sensations come and go without latching on to any one thing.
- **Focus** – Paying attention to the current moment, not the past or future. If you do start thinking about past events or planning for the future, gently direct your thoughts back to the present.
- **Observation** – Recognize any negative thoughts or feelings, but think of them as temporary.
- **Acceptance** – Accept what you are thinking and feeling without judging it as good or bad.



It may take a while to get good at staying in the moment and not being judgmental, but the more you do it, the more relaxing the process will be and the more effective it will be at improving your well-being.

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How Can You Get Started? Some Mindfulness Techniques You Can Do At Home

Many choose to learn mindfulness through formal meditation classes. However, you can begin practicing mindfulness during everyday activities. Here are a few common techniques from the University of Washington's Healthy Aging RRTC that people of all abilities can try:

- **Mindful Breathing** – This is a simple and common technique where you focus your awareness on how you are breathing, such as air flowing in and out of your nose or mouth, or the rise and fall of your chest as you inhale and exhale.
- **Body Scan** – While sitting or lying down, focus your attention on one body part at a time. Notice any physical sensations, but don't judge them as good or bad.
- **Mindful Eating** – Take the time to eat slowly and deliberately and pay attention to the activities of eating: what it feels like to hold the food, smells, taste and the sensations of chewing and swallowing.
- **Loving Kindness Meditation** – In a quiet moment, focus positive thoughts first on yourself, then to close family and friends, then branch out to more distant acquaintances (maybe someone you haven't seen in a while) and then finally to all people everywhere.
- **Mindful Movement** – While walking or rolling, pay attention to aspects of what is happening in the moment, such as your breathing, your physical movements and the sights, smells and sounds of your surroundings.

In addition to the above techniques, you can practice mindfulness informally during everyday tasks by “**single-tasking**”: doing one activity at a time and focusing only on what you are doing that moment. So, when you are brushing your teeth or drinking your coffee, pay close attention to the sensations you are experiencing and fully experience the moment.

Keep in mind that the more you practice mindfulness, the greater the benefits will be. If you want to build your resiliency, improve your mood, health and general well-being, start incorporating mindfulness into your everyday life!

Resources

This article was based on information from the following:

“5 Ways to Build Resilience Every Day,” <https://www.mindful.org/5-ways-build-resilience-every-day/>.

“A Group Teleconference Program May Help People Aging with Multiple Sclerosis Build Resilience,” Research in Focus: A Weekly Digest of New Research from the NIDILRR Community, <https://naric.com/?q=en/rif/A%20Group%20Teleconference%20Program%20May%20Help%20People%20Aging%20with%20Multiple%20Sclerosis%20Build%20Resilience>.

“Benefits of Mindfulness: Practices for Improving Emotional and Physical Well-Being,” <https://www.helpguide.org/harvard/benefits-of-mindfulness.htm>.

“How to Bounce Back,” Healthy Aging & Physical Disability RRTC, University of Washington, <http://agerrtc.washington.edu/info/factsheets/resilience>.

“How to Reduce Stress Through Mindfulness,” Healthy Aging & Physical Disability RRTC, University of Washington, <http://agerrtc.washington.edu/info/factsheets/mindfulness>.

This information is presented for the purpose of education and is not meant as a substitute for medical advice or care from a physician or other healthcare providers. Contact your healthcare provider with questions about care.

SBRN Adult Empowerment Retreat: Life, Amplified.

The Spina Bifida Resource Network's annual Adult Empowerment Retreat weekend, exclusively for adults with disabilities, took place at the Crowne Plaza in Edison, NJ on September 14th through the 16th. This year's theme was "Life, Amplified."



Everyone enjoyed meeting new people and socializing with friends. The diverse interactive workshops included: **Intentional Treasure** – Millie Gonzalez; **Put Your Phone Down ... and Explore** – Colleen Roche; **Jiu Jitsu Without Limitations** – Maximiliano Ulloa York; **Psychosocial Approach to Being a Change Agent for Your Own Life** – Dr. Matt Richmond; **Death in Perspective** – Dr. Norma Bowe; **Sexual Health, Pleasure & Intimacy** – Angela Car; **Intro to Filipino Martial Arts** – Jaime D. Morris and **Active Activism** – Maggie Leppert. Thank you to the wonderful speakers who shared their knowledge and enlightened our attendees with these interesting topics.

Thanks to Coloplast and TD Bank for their generous donation of giveaways. Everyone was most appreciative of receiving a "swag bag".

A Special Thank You to Millie Gonzalez, SBRN Board Member, who as always did an excellent job contributing her time in organizing and managing the retreat. Attendees were graciously welcomed by Millie and the positive feedback indicated that the time spent together was both rewarding and fun.

A first-time SBRN Empowerment Retreater summed it up nicely: "The Retreat was awesome! I learned a lot of new things about myself to make my life better. I also made new forever friends."



A Night of Line Dancing in Rockaway Raises Funds for the SBRN

To celebrate Spina Bifida Awareness, on November 3, *Line Dancing in Rockaway* hosted a fun evening fundraising event organized by our friend Steph Lisa. Along with great dancing, there was also a Tricky Tray and a 50/50 raffle, with proceeds generously donated to the SBRN. *Line Dancing in Rockaway* is a unique dance hall with a floating oak floor. Participants of all abilities had a great time dancing the night away.

Thank you to Steph for all of her hard work, organizing and running the event, with the help of Adriana! Thanks also to *Line Dancing in Rockaway* for hosting this fun event!



New Year's Resolution: Which Healthy Foods Should You Eat?

It's the start of a new year – the most likely time that people make resolutions to improve or boost some aspect of their life. A very common resolution, and one that is achievable, is to start eating more healthy foods. But which foods should you choose? Which are the healthiest?

While there is no single definitive list for which foods are the healthiest, and of course it depends on the individual's own personal health needs, there are a lot of lists out there that do list healthy foods. To narrow it down, we surveyed 10 different website sources to see which foods were most often listed as the healthiest or “superfoods”. This isn't a scientific survey, so take it “with a grain of salt”, but it does give some ideas of nutritious foods to choose. Here are the foods that were most commonly listed as the “healthiest”:

Leafy Greens (9 of 10 lists) – Not surprisingly, leafy greens (especially spinach and kale) made almost all of the lists. Dark leafy greens can help lower the risk of type 2 diabetes. They are rich in antioxidants and are high in vitamins A, B-6, C, E, and K, as well as folate, potassium, calcium, iron and more.

Beans & Legumes (8 of 10) – This category includes chick peas, lentils, peas, kidney, black and other types of beans, which are a rich source of protein, fiber, iron, magnesium and potassium. They can help reduce your risk for heart disease.

Nuts (8 of 10) – Nuts, including almonds and walnuts, are packed with polyunsaturated fats and magnesium, which are important for healthy hearts. Nuts are also high in fiber and protein.

Salmon (8 of 10) – Oily fish like salmon are high in omega-3 fatty acids, which are good for the heart and nervous system. They also contain vitamins A and D.

Avocados (7 of 10) – Avocados are rich in healthy fats, high in fiber, B vitamins (including folate), vitamins E and K.

Broccoli (7 of 10) – Broccoli is good source of folate, vitamins A, C and K, as well as phytonutrients.

Sweet Potatoes (6 of 10) – Sweet potatoes are high in dietary fiber, beta-carotene, potassium, vitamins A, C and B-6.

Dark Chocolate (4 of 10) – Yay! Something sweet and delicious made the top 10. Small amounts of dark chocolate may help reduce blood pressure and bad LDL cholesterol. It may help improve mood and memory.

Eggs (4 of 10) – Eggs used to have a bad rep, but now can be considered part of a healthy diet. Eggs are high in protein, antioxidants, vitamins B2 and B12, which are important for energy.

Oatmeal (4 of 10) – Oats are often referred to as a superfood. It's a whole grain that's high in fiber and can help with cholesterol and fighting heart disease.

Runners up included apples, blueberries, lemons, oranges & yogurt (each got 3 of 10).

So, have some oatmeal and eggs for breakfast, include a leafy green salad with beans and avocados for lunch, snack on some nuts (or some fruit and yogurt), and enjoy some salmon with broccoli and sweet potato on the side for dinner. And then of course follow it up with a little dark chocolate for dessert, and you'll have a super healthy day!

Resources: This article was based on information from the following:

“Body Rock,” <https://www.bodyrock.tv/the-10-healthiest-foods-on-the-planet-revealed/>

“Byrdie,” <https://www.byrdie.com/healthiest-foods-nutritionist>

“Center for Science in the Public Interest,” <https://cspinet.org/eating-healthy/what-eat/10-best-foods>

“Eating Well,” <http://www.eatingwell.com/article/290550/10-everyday-superfoods/>

“Fitness Magazine,” - <https://www.fitnessmagazine.com/recipes/healthy-eating/superfoods/the-10-healthiest-foods-on-the-planet/>

“Good Housekeeping,” <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/health/diet-nutrition/a25951/top-healthiest-foods/>

“Mayo Clinic,” <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/multimedia/health-foods/sls-20076653>

“Medical News Today,” <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/245259.php>

“Real Simple,” <https://www.realsimple.com/health/nutrition-diet/healthy-eating/the-30-healthiest-foods>

“the Mysterious World,” <https://themysteriousworld.com/10-healthiest-foods-in-the-world/>



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Millie Gonzalez - Ms.Wheelchair New Jersey 2019

Congratulations to **Millie Gonzalez** – our longtime friend and Board Chair of the SBRN! On November 4, 1018, Millie was crowned **Ms.Wheelchair New Jersey 2019**. She was crowned after an afternoon of interviews and a platform speech, and will serve as titleholder for one year.



Photo by Ms.Wheelchair NJ

In Millie's words: "My platform is **Survival of the Fiercest: Taking Control of Your Life... Through Self-Care**.

We need to honor our lives and listen to our bodies. Take care of our health, face our addictions and plan for our safety in emergencies. I want us to write, play sports, dance, take pictures, listen to music—to do what brings us JOY.

I lost my home in Superstorm Sandy and have had to take a break from work and life to focus on my health on more than one occasion. Among the valuable lessons I've learned is the power that comes from self-care in a world that is not equipped to handle even our most basic of needs. I've learned we can't do anything we love if we're dead.

I believe in living life boldly, in being fearless and unapologetic, and in never settling for less than what you deserve. And what people with disabilities deserve is to **Live Fiercely**.

As Ms.Wheelchair New Jersey, I will serve as a spokeswoman throughout the state, meeting with advocacy groups and making public appearances to spread awareness, acceptance and overall understanding of the disabled experience. I am also available to make presentations to a variety of audiences. In July 2019, I will have the opportunity to compete in Ms. Wheelchair America."

We wish the best to Millie and we know that she will be an amazing ambassador of her message!

ANNUAL APPEAL

Please return your tax-deductible contribution made payable to:
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84 Park Avenue, Suite G-106
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or go to www.theSBRN.org to donate securely online.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS
and a
HAPPY NEW YEAR!



Your contribution this holiday season will make a difference in the lives of those we serve.

SPINA BIFIDA
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The mission of the Spina Bifida Resource Network is to empower the lives of people with Spina Bifida, and promote the prevention of Spina Bifida, through advocacy, education, collaboration, public awareness, research and programs.

We provide individualized services in the home and community, including care coordination, trainings by nurses, advocacy in the schools, financial assistance and educational and recreational events.

*For more information contact our office at
info@thesbrn.org, or call 908.782.7475.
We welcome the opportunity to hear from you.*

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