

A center that gives brain injury survivors new lease on life

Thursday, August 31, 2006 | 4:40 PM

Seven's On Call



By Dr. Jay Adlersberg

(New York-WABC, August 31, 2006) -- Brain injury can mean the end of life as a person has always known it. But with the right help and guidance, there can be another, equally fulfilling life.

Opportunity Project is one of 15 centers in the country which gives guidance to people who have recovered from brain injury, and need support as they reenter the world.

A major auto accident -- the result can be not only broken bones, but brain injury.

Hantz Mautes was hit by a drunk driver seven years ago. His brain injury put him in a coma for two months. But now, thanks to the Opportunity Project, Hantz is sharpening the skills he needs to get back to work.

"When I'm here, I try to make this a job oriented place. I taught myself to type, and use Excel, Word and Powerpoint," Hantz said.

The project goes beyond learning the computer to helping with the simplest of paper and pencil cognitive learning, and using computer games to teach typing and spelling.

The Project is not a medical facility. The people here have already been through rehab. This is an attempt to get them back into their normal lives.

There's an adjustment counselor who works with a member to accept the brain injury and look at how it affects their daily activities. And there's a fully appointed member's kitchen where people learn how to plan meals and carry the information to home.

Carol Albanese, executive director: "Once you're a member, you're always welcome back."

Even after you have a full time job, like Gary Berson who comes back to counsel others on his own time.

"I'm able to help out ... and when we finish our interview, I'll be going back to work where I'm needed," Gary said.

The project is open to anyone over age 18, and is supported by grants from the state and federal government and by fundraising. Members are charged each day they spend at the facility based on what they can afford, up to fifty dollars a day. Some pay nothing, and no one is turned away.

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