



NeuroBalance Center Founder and President Joy Wagner.

Mobility Barriers and Thresholds Affect 25 Percent of Our Population

JOY WAGNER, RN, BSN, a pediatric nurse, was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in 2001; she was a single mom with two children under the age of 10. She was homebound for four months, gave up her job, and needed help caring for herself and her children. For Wagner, giving up was not an option. She returned to nursing training to research what might allow her to reclaim her mobility and independence. The result of her newfound mission was the creation of fitMS® and in 2010, NeuroBalance Center—a resource for people with neuromuscular conditions. Wagner shares some of her expertise here.

NeuroBalance Center opened its newly designed, disability-conscious facility in September 2017.

What have you learned from your new space?

I've learned that creating a one-of-a-kind “ADA heaven” wellness center is attainable. I knew that affordable, available, and accessible programs, surrounded by others in the same boat working together to live better, are more potent than antidepressants. I learned that immersing expert PTs, OTs, trainers, volunteers, and staff in an environment of people living with incurable neuromuscular conditions—Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease, Stroke, Brain Injury, and others—creates compassionate experts who collaborate to create a strong sense of community.

A percentage of the general population cannot attend functions and events due to mobility

issues. How can you help them?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 61 million (1 in 4) adults in the U.S. live with a disability, and over 21 million are 18–64 years of age. A common belief is that the disability itself or difficulty walking is why you don't see people with walkers, canes, and wheelchairs at events and about town. However, it's really because the venue, parking, restrooms, and amenities are not accessible! We, as a community, need to remove barriers and obstacles and build, remodel, equip to be inclusive, and for the most part, that's not happening.

You are hosting your first Virtual Transformational Speaker event in the fall. Why did you choose Lesley Stahl as your guest speaker?

I've been hoping Lesley Stahl would come to the Center since I saw a story on “CBS Sunday Morning” where she interviewed her husband, author Aaron Latham. They discussed Parkinson's Disease and the impact a boxing program had on Aaron and his Parkinson's symptoms. Lesley knows how important exercise and attitude are and how these conditions impact everything about your lifestyle. I hope people beyond our community will tune in simply because Lesley is involved and respect her as much as we do.

You have helped more than 1,000 individuals who live with neuromuscular conditions. How has this journey helped you?

I have a unique advantage as both a patient-in-need and a nurse provider. People trust me because I live it and take advantage of services at the Center just like everyone else. The NeuroBalance Center started because I developed a rehab program for myself when I lost my independence in 2001, and was unable to walk for several months. I experimented and found what worked, shared it, and found it helped them. Every program is constantly being changed and improved as we are always learning.

At what point should someone reach out to NeuroBalance Center for support and services?

They should reach out when they're ready. When someone receives a diagnosis that changes what life looks like, they need support, both physical and emotional. There are questions such as, ‘what does this mean, what will I have to give up, will

I get better, how long before I get worse?' Chronic neuromuscular and degenerative conditions usually result in a change in lifestyle, and it can be a long road ahead from diagnosis to acceptance.

This process is similar to the stages of mourning. Denial can diminish the pain of loss for the life you once knew. Anger acts as a shield against vulnerability while adjusting to the new reality leading to withdrawal and feelings of isolation. Bargaining recognizes how very little can be done to change this life transformation and retaliates against the helplessness with a superficial sense of control over something that feels so out of control. Depression can set in when one understands that this disease and its progression are real, permanent, and inevitable. As the reality of the situation becomes clearer, solace can be sought by retreating from life, family, and society. Eventually, the acceptance of the diagnosis is acknowledged as empowering some to reach out for help searching for support and resources, such as our organization.

How can people donate to NeuroBalance Center?

Please contact Stephanie Bryan Kangas, our Director of Philanthropy and Project Development. Email: stephanie@neurobalancecenter.org. Phone: Office: 847-800-6162 or Mobile: 630-750-5393. 



Save the Date: September 23, 2021, 7 p.m.

Join us for "Lived and Learned: An Intimate Conversation with Lesley Stahl", a Virtual Transformational Speaker event on "How to Live Better with Parkinson's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis and other Neuromuscular Conditions". Featuring award-winning journalist Lesley Stahl and NeuroBalance Center founder Joy Wagner who will be sharing their experiences adapting to and managing Parkinson's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, and other neuromuscular conditions. To register: TBD. For more information visit NeuroBalanceCenter.org.

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