

YOUR SUPPORT CHANGES LIVES

Impact Report 2020



Changing the lives of people with disabilities



You support. You heal. You inspire.
YOUR SUPPORT CHANGES LIVES.
YOU PROVE TO THE WORLD
that only ABILITIES matter.
You are part of something BIGGER.
You drive positive change, transform care and recovery,
make a DIRECT and PROFOUND impact,
and help people with disabilities live better lives.
YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE,
YOU ARE A CHAMPION,
THANK YOU!  **KESSLER**
FOUNDATION

YOU SUPPORT. YOU HEAL. YOU INSPIRE. YOUR SUPPORT CHANGES LIVES

Impact Report 2020

COVID-19 has turned our world upside down. We're living through something unprecedented, together—and together we will prevail. Together we will support, heal, and inspire.

Thanks to your generosity and the ingenuity of our staff, at Kessler Foundation we continue to move our research and grantmaking forward in a landscape that has suddenly and radically changed. This new reality is fostering creative solutions that hold the promise to alter the future.

What remains unchanged is your impact. Your support of Kessler Foundation champions life-changing rehabilitation research and employment for those most vulnerable to today's challenges—people with disabilities.

Inside our Impact Report 2020, you will find stories of what you have made possible and the people whose lives you've changed. Because of your generosity, they—and many others with disabilities—will receive support, healing, and inspiration. For this, we thank you.

In gratitude for changing lives,



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Rodger DeRose and Michele Pignatello

YOUR SUPPORT HELPS ON THE FRONT LINES OF COVID-19

"As COVID-19 spread throughout the nation, necessitating widespread public health and safety measures, the organizations that serve people with disabilities suffered disproportionately," recalls Elaine Katz, MS, CCC-SLP, senior vice president of the Center for Grantmaking and Communications at Kessler Foundation. "Being on the front lines of serving people with disabilities, a population at higher risk for infection and complications, complicated their ability to adapt to this new reality," she adds.

The impact was devastating for job programs, support services, residential housing, and social enterprises, and for the individuals with disabilities who depend on these programs and services.

"The immensity of the immediate needs required immediate response," says Katz. Thanks to your generosity, Kessler Foundation quickly established the COVID-19 Emergency Fund to support nonprofits serving individuals with disabilities in New Jersey. For many, technology needed to transition to operating remotely and maintain contact with clients was the major priority.



Elaine Katz, MS, CCC-SLP

"Despite the hardships, organizations are developing creative ways to minimize in-person contact that promise to transform their futures," Katz notes. "Adopting alternative ways of connecting people with one another and with online resources will encourage acceptance of working from home, telehealth and teletherapy, virtual programming, and remote training and education."

"The landscape of employment has changed for all of us," concludes Katz, "making the work we do more important than ever. We join with our grantees—and our donors—in envisioning a new economy, forged by the talents and determination of every one of us, including people with disabilities."

YOUR SUPPORT MOVES REHABILITATION RESEARCH FORWARD — WHILE SOCIAL DISTANCING

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented myriad challenges to Kessler Foundation researchers. In response, our scientists have been applying creative solutions to move forward under the limitations of sheltering in place. These adaptations hold the promise to fundamentally change our approach to rehabilitation research.

“We focused on projects that didn’t require physical contact. Staff members worked remotely, utilizing technology to connect with one another and maintain communication with their research participants,” explains John DeLuca, PhD, senior vice president for Research and Training at Kessler Foundation.

“Some studies were adapted to tele-studies, allowing people with disabilities to participate from home, without the risks of in-person meetings,” Dr. DeLuca adds. The unseen work of our scientists—analyzing data, writing papers, and submitting grant proposals—also continued—fueling the momentum of our research.

There are lessons to be learned from this experience. “Now that telemedicine is being adopted widely, we are likely to see a shift toward telerehabilitation, with studies designed for remote data collection. What is certain: more research is needed,” concludes Dr. DeLuca.



John DeLuca, PhD

YOUR SUPPORT EXPANDS COLLABORATION AND HOLISTIC THERAPIES FOR IMPROVED COGNITION, MOBILITY, AND WELLBEING

Today, because of your support, Kessler Foundation experts from different fields of rehabilitation research are joining forces to test holistic strategies for improving overall function and wellbeing. These new approaches promise to transform neurorehabilitation for people with multiple sclerosis, brain injury, stroke, and other disabling conditions.

"Our experts in cognitive research are working with our experts in mobility research to create new lines of investigation," says John DeLuca, PhD, senior VP of Research and Training. "We are focusing on the links between the brain and the body to discover approaches that improve both cognition and mobility."

Can Exercise Modify the Effects of MS?

"Right now, we are collaborating with scientists in six countries on a large study, looking at the effects of cognitive rehabilitation, aerobic exercise, and the combination of both therapies on people with MS," he explains. "We anticipate finding convincing evidence that will change how we treat MS." In similar studies, made possible by your support, Foundation researchers are exploring other approaches to improve cognition and mobility.

With generous support from Joy and Avi Avidan, a novel pilot study using a wearable robotic exoskeleton is underway in people with MS with both physical and cognitive difficulties. When Avi was diagnosed with progressive MS in 2012, he and Joy began supporting research in their



Pilar Santianna, who lives with MS, participates in a pilot study using a wearable robotic exoskeleton, funded by Joy and Avi Avidan.

quest to learn the best way of stopping the disease. Introduced to Kessler Foundation through their friend and Kessler Foundation Trustee Dave Gibbons, the Avidans jumped at the chance to advance MS research at Kessler Foundation and make a difference in the lives of people living with MS like Pilar Santianna. Ghaith Androwis, PhD, research scientist in the Center for Mobility and Rehabilitation Engineering Research, leads the study funded by the Avidans.

"Initial findings suggest that training in a robotic exoskeleton improves mobility and cognition. Robotic exoskeletons may play a larger role in the future rehabilitative care of people with MS striving to live life to the fullest," says Dr. Androwis.

How Does Fatigue Impact Recovery After TBI?

Recovery from traumatic brain injury is often complicated by disabling fatigue. Although individuals experience both mental and physical fatigue, each type of fatigue has been studied in isolation, according to Glenn Wylie, DPhil, director of the Rocco Ortenzio Neuroimaging Center at Kessler Foundation. His study challenges participants with activities that cause mental fatigue—a memory task—and physical fatigue—stationary cycling. "Our study is the first to focus on the interaction of these two types of fatigue," says Dr. Wylie. "This is an important step toward finding new treatments for these debilitating symptoms and improving quality of life for individuals and their caregivers."

"We are focusing on the links between the brain and the body to discover approaches that improve both cognition and mobility."

—John DeLuca, PhD



Ghaith Androwis, PhD

PILAR MOVES FORWARD, WITHOUT A WHEELCHAIR

Pilar Santianna, a retired teacher with MS, expected she would live the rest of her life in a wheelchair. The muscle weakness, extreme fatigue, and difficulty remembering caused by her MS made walking and teaching her students difficult, if not impossible. Pilar explains, “Teaching is all memory, and I couldn’t remember my lessons. Plus, I didn’t have the strength to walk. My muscles got weaker until eventually my gait was off. I had no balance and my posture was horrible. I loved teaching but I had to retire, and I thought this is it. The wheelchair is going to be my life.”

Thankfully, Pilar participated in a novel Kessler Foundation research study funded by Joy and Avi Avidan that evaluates the impact of training in a wearable robotic exoskeleton on cognition and mobility in people with MS. Pilar was strapped into the exoskeleton to focus on proper gait, posture, and balance.

“The exoskeleton made me stronger and I developed muscle memory. To this day, it often feels like I’m still in the exoskeleton when I walk. My muscles remember the correct position to take a step and maintain balance. Now, my posture is phenomenal, and I just want to keep moving every day. I’m thrilled. Because of Kessler Foundation and the donors who support it, I can practice yoga, swim, and vacation with my family. I’m staying out of that wheelchair and living life to the fullest.”

“I’m thrilled... I’m staying out of that wheelchair and living life to the fullest.”

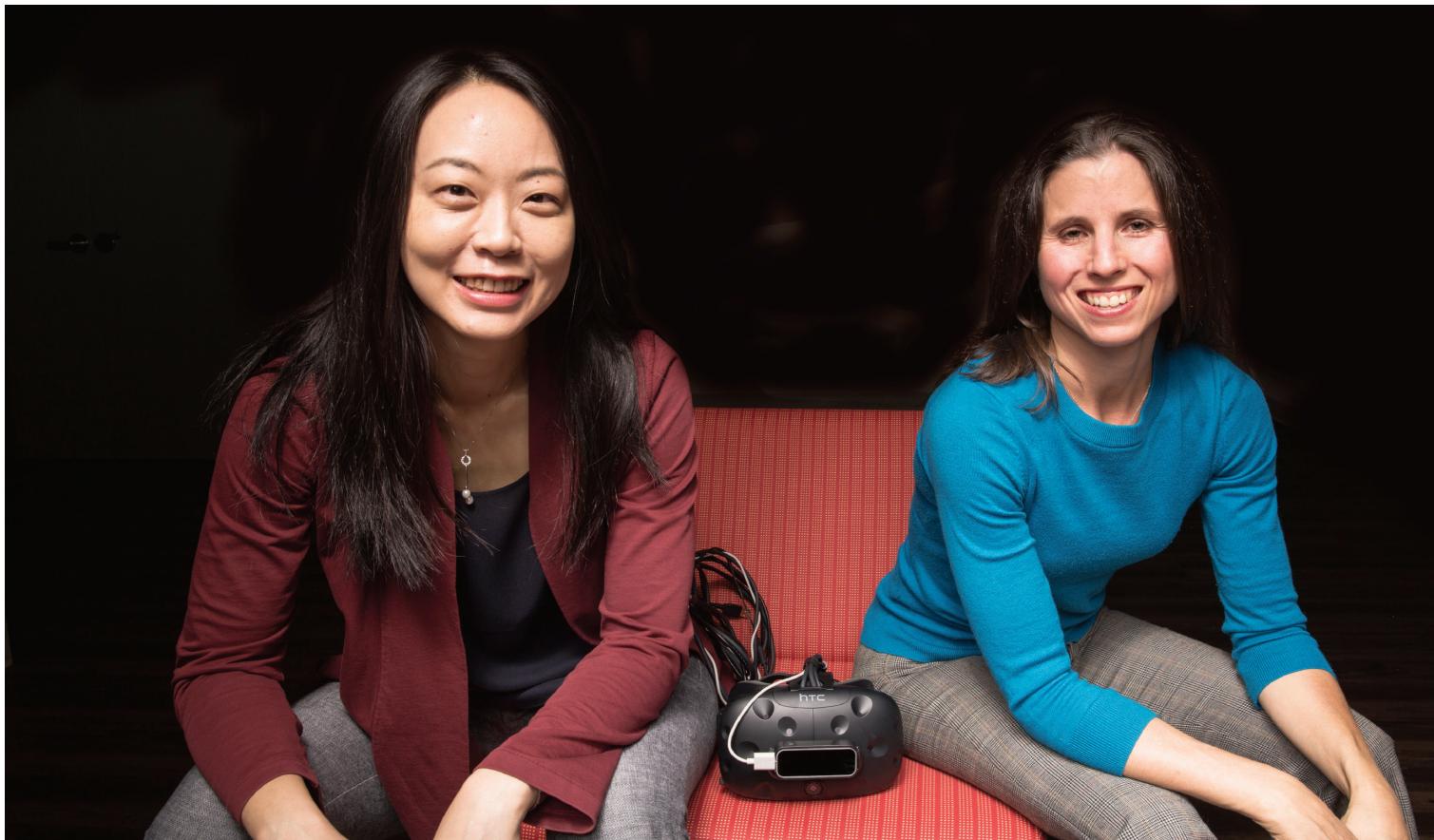
—Pilar Santianna



Pilar Santianna

Can Virtual Reality Technology Help Stroke Survivors?

Through virtual reality technology, scientists are gaining new perspectives on stroke rehabilitation. Senior research scientists Peii Chen, PhD, and Denise Krch, PhD, are working with software developers to create a game-based treatment for spatial neglect for use at home and in the clinic. The experimental treatment, called Virtual Reality Spatial Rehabilitation Training (VR-SRT), uses a head-mounted display to immerse the individual in a safe virtual environment where they can engage in therapy that promotes physical and cognitive recovery.



Peii Chen, PhD, and Denise Krch, PhD

What Kind of Exercise Can Help Cancer Survivors with Weakness and Fatigue?

Scientists are also seeking ways to treat the persistent fatigue that affects many breast cancer survivors. “Our study uses brain scans and brain wave recordings,” explained Didier Allexandre, PhD, senior research scientist in the Center for Mobility and Rehabilitation Engineering Research, “to study how brain activity changes with low-intensity muscle strengthening exercises using a handgrip.” The goal is to determine the kind of exercise that can alleviate the weakness and fatigue that diminishes quality of life for cancer survivors.



Gerard Malanga, MD, injects liquefied abdominal fat tissue into a patient's damaged shoulder joint.

YOUR SUPPORT EXPANDS EXCITING NEW AVENUE OF RESEARCH

Thanks to Jay Lieberman and the Derfner Foundation, as well as donors like you, scientists at Kessler Foundation are expanding their work in the emerging field of regenerative rehabilitation research. With this support, the Derfner-Lieberman Laboratory for Regenerative Rehabilitation Research at Kessler Foundation is in the forefront of an exciting new field that joins advances in regenerative medicine with the expertise of rehabilitation research, fostering the testing of promising new treatments in people with disabilities caused by musculoskeletal and neurological injuries.

Conducting this exciting avenue of research are Trevor Dyson-Hudson, MD, who directs the Derfner-Lieberman Laboratory and the Center for Spinal Cord Injury Research at Kessler Foundation, Gerard Malanga, MD, physiatrist at New Jersey Regenerative Institute and Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation, and Nathan Hogaboom, PhD, co-director of the Derfner-Lieberman Laboratory.

“The minimally invasive treatment we tested in wheelchair users with spinal cord injury shows promise as an alternative to surgery for relieving shoulder pain and immobility,” reports Dr. Dyson-Hudson. For the treatment, called autologous micro-fragmented adipose tissue, doctors

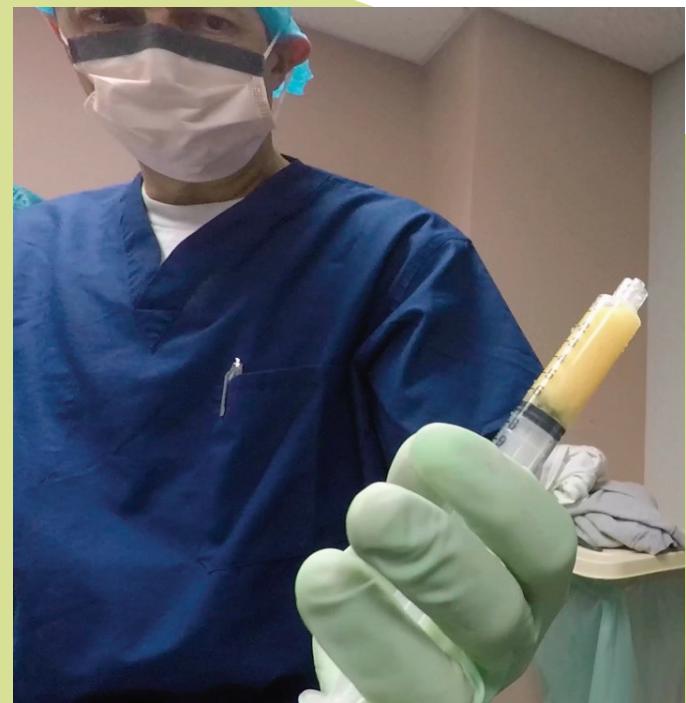
take a sample of the person’s abdominal fat tissue, liquify it, and inject it into the damaged shoulder joint. Compounds in the fat appear to help relieve pain and promote healing, as it did for Pastora Goldner.

Because of the Derfner Foundation’s support, the team is investigating the same technique to help active duty military personnel with disabling knee injuries as part of a national multi-site study.

“The rapidly growing field of regenerative rehabilitation can transform how we approach disabilities caused by injury, disease, and aging,” concludes Dr. Dyson-Hudson.

“The rapidly growing field of regenerative rehabilitation can transform how we approach disabilities caused by injury, disease, and aging.”

—Trevor Dyson-Hudson, MD



Compounds in the fat appear to help relieve pain and promote healing.

PASTORA RECEIVES THE MIRACLE OF PAIN-FREE MOVEMENT — AND PAYS IT FORWARD

Pastora Goldner's story is about miracles. While travelling in Egypt with her family 23 years ago, she sustained a spinal cord injury during a car accident in the middle of the desert. "I was ejected from the car and paralyzed," Pastora remembers. "But I was in the middle of nowhere. Help didn't arrive until 24 hours later when a truck driver found me and brought me to a nearby military outpost. That was the first miracle."

With support from her three daughters, Alana, Taryn, and Rebeca, Pastora adapted to life in a wheelchair. Yet for many years, she continued to experience shoulder pain. "I could barely lift my arm to brush my hair," recalls Pastora. "Propelling my wheelchair became almost impossible."

Pastora heard about Kessler Foundation's regenerative rehabilitation research, joined a study, and received treatment. "That treatment was my second miracle," says Pastora. "I no longer live with constant pain in my shoulder. I've been a supporter of Kessler Foundation's research for more than two decades. I know that my support—and yours—makes miracles happen for people like me."



Pastora Goldner and her daughters, Alana, Taryn, and Rebeca.

YOUR SUPPORT SEEKS BETTER LIVES FOR BABIES BORN ADDICTED

The fallout from widespread opioid abuse affects every aspect of American society. The toll extends to the next generation, with babies born addicted to opioids.

With support from the Reitman Foundation and donors like you, researchers at Kessler Foundation and their colleagues at Children's Specialized Hospital are studying newborns treated for opioid withdrawal in the Hospital's Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Program. John O'Neill, PhD, director of the Center for Employment and Disability Research at Kessler Foundation, and Amanda Botticello, PhD, MPH, senior research scientist in the Center for Outcomes and Assessment Research at Kessler Foundation, will correlate the data collected by the Hospital with the infants' growth and development.

Detailing the infants' outcomes post withdrawal will help researchers understand what affects the severity of their withdrawal symptoms, how newborns respond to treatment, and effects on their long-term health and development. Drs. O'Neill and Botticello expect their findings will interest the larger community of pediatric rehabilitation researchers and clinicians. "The prevalence of drug addiction has resulted in a large population of newborns with neonatal abstinence syndrome," states Dr. Botticello. "This pilot study is an important step toward the larger studies we need to test strategies to treat babies born addicted and help them develop physically, emotionally, and cognitively throughout childhood, and fully participate at home and in school."

"We need to look beyond the immediacy of this crisis," says Liz Lowenstein of the Reitman Foundation, "and find ways to minimize the impact of fetal opioid exposure. Given the productive collaboration of Kessler Foundation and Children's Specialized, we anticipate the discovery of effective interventions to help affected children achieve their full potential."



John O'Neill, PhD, and Amanda Botticello, PhD, MPH



*Jimmy Brown receives spinal stimulation at the
Tim and Caroline Reynolds Center for Spinal Stimulation.*

YOUR SUPPORT RESTORES ARM AND HAND FUNCTION — A PRIORITY IN REHABILITATIVE CARE

Thanks to you, our scientists explore many ways to help people overcome their disabilities and live independent lives. “At Kessler Foundation, we look at how state-of-the-art technologies and novel interventions can improve motor control and function for persons with neurological disability,” says Steven Kirshblum, MD, the Foundation’s chief medical officer and co-director of the Tim and Caroline Reynolds Center for Spinal Stimulation, and Senior Medical Officer and Director of the Spinal Cord Injury Program for Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation. “To achieve the best outcomes, restoring arm and hand function must be a priority in rehabilitative care.”

Small improvements in arm and hand function can have a large impact on a person's ability to take care of themselves and their families, and participate in work, school, and recreational activities. Scientists are accelerating advances by applying electrical stimulation to activate paralyzed muscles, and magnetic stimulation to harness the brain's potential to restore function. Many new studies incorporate hi-tech tools, such as wearable robotics, 'smart' gloves, virtual reality, and video game technology.

The studies underway in individuals recovering from spinal cord injury, stroke, and traumatic brain injury are made possible by your support.

How Can Spinal Stimulation Restore Upper Limb Function?

More than half of individuals with spinal cord injury have weakness and paralysis of their arms and hands. With a goal of transforming care and recovery, The Reynolds Center, named for Tim and Caroline Reynolds, supporters of the Foundation's spinal cord injury research, opened in January 2020, thanks to your support. At the Tim and Caroline Reynolds Center for Spinal Stimulation, participants in a pilot study of electrical stimulation combined with intensive exercise therapy, funded by Richard and Linda Ritholz, are making progress. Jimmy Brown, a participant with spinal cord injury, describes what this study means to him and his family. See sidebar on page 15.

How Can a Robotic Arm Brace Provide Home-Based Rehabilitation?

Ghaith Androwis, PhD, research scientist in the Center for Mobility and Rehabilitation Engineering Research, studies a robotic arm brace called MyoPro (Myomo), one of the few wearable robotic devices designed to deliver therapy to improve hand and arm function. "Our findings will fuel the development of next-generation assistive devices," says Dr. Androwis, "and lay the foundation for home-based rehabilitation for veterans and civilians with loss of upper extremity function caused by incomplete spinal cord injury."

Can Robotics, Smart Technology, and Game-Based Virtual Reality Help Stroke Survivors?

Loss of arm and hand function also hinders rehabilitation and recovery after stroke. In the Center for Mobility and Rehabilitation Engineering Research, senior research



Thakur Singh, stroke survivor, wears a specialized smart glove to improve his ability to use his weak arm.

scientist Karen Nolan, PhD, works with colleagues at NJIT and Rutgers on a stroke research study of hand training using robotics, smart technology, and game-based virtual reality. "Wearing a specialized 'smart glove' on their impaired hand, the person performs a series of video game-like tasks," explained Dr. Nolan. "While wearing an experimental robotic arm, they are able to touch or grasp objects on the screen, which helps exercise the muscles of their arm and hand." Stroke survivor Thakur Singh who participates in the study, is improving his ability to use his weak arm. "My goal is to get back to work," says Singh, "and now I see that this may be possible."

How Can Engaging the Brain Help Restore Function?

Another new approach combines noninvasive brain stimulation with video game-based exercises. Participants wear a special glove that enables them to perform hand and finger exercises to music. Vikram Shenoy Handiru, PhD, associate research scientist in the Center for Mobility and Rehabilitation Engineering Research, is testing this approach for stroke-related weakness, and plans to expand to traumatic brain injury. "With conventional rehabilitation, nearly half of survivors of brain injury fail to regain use of their arms for daily activities," he explains. "Our goal is to develop new strategies for rehabilitation, by learning more about the control of motor activity and how the brain can be engaged to help restore function."



A research assistant demonstrates wearing a robotic arm brace by Myomo.

YOU FUEL JIMMY'S COMPETITIVE DRIVE AND GIVE HIM HOPE

Sustaining a spinal cord injury in 2004 at age 24 didn't change athlete Jimmy Brown's competitive personality. Jimmy approaches his post-injury rehabilitation with the same drive he exhibited on the playing field as a pitcher for St. Peter's University—a Division I school.

"My ability to play competitive sports may have disappeared," says Jimmy, "but my competitive drive remains. Over the years, I've joined many Kessler Foundation research studies, always pushing myself to get stronger," he adds.

Today, Jimmy continues his quest to regain strength and function. He explains how some of the latest research at the Tim and Caroline Reynolds Center for Spinal Stimulation at Kessler Foundation has helped him.

"Because donors like you support advances in spinal stimulation research, I can pour a glass of water smoothly and accurately," Jimmy explains. "That may seem small, but for me, improving fine motor skills in my hands and arms—with stimulation of my spinal cord—is life changing. Now, everyday movements and actions are possible. I can help my wife, Francine, with chores and even play catch with my kids. As a former pitcher, throwing a baseball around means a lot."

Jimmy says the drive he sees in Kessler Foundation researchers and the unending support from donors motivates him every day. "Donors like you not only feed my competitive drive to work harder and achieve more, you fill me with hope."



Jimmy Brown with Fran and their children

YOUR SUPPORT CREATES A NEW VISION FOR LIFE AFTER SPINAL CORD INJURY

Life changes dramatically after spinal cord injury. Finding ways to help people with SCI adjust to their new normal is a joint effort of Kessler Foundation and Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation. With your support, Kessler rehabilitation professionals are creating a new vision for life after SCI.

Two new Kessler research projects rely on the guidance of people who have experienced spinal cord injury, to ease the transition to home and community life for those newly injured. “The impact of spinal cord injury is so great, that there’s really no substitute for counseling by a peer who can readily relate to those new to the challenges and help map a plan for the future,” says Jeanne Zanca, PhD, MPT, senior research scientist in the Centers for Spinal Cord Injury Research and Outcomes Assessment Research at Kessler Foundation.”

Thanks to a grant by The Achelis and Bodman Foundation, peer educators will lead the inpatient education program for spinal cord injury at Kessler Institute.



Jeanne Zanca, PhD, MPT

To complement these classes, The Milbank Foundation is supporting an intensive peer mentoring program to help the newly injured apply what they have learned to their own situations. Each individual meets weekly with their peer mentor for intensive one-on-one sessions during their inpatient stay. One-on-one sessions continue after discharge, to ensure that no question goes unanswered.

"We expect people who receive this kind of support to feel more capable of managing their new situation," explains Dr. Zanca. "As a result, they may experience fewer complications, and be less likely to need re-hospitalization."

For many newly injured individuals, returning to work is a key marker of recovery. To explore new ways to contribute to the workforce, a unique program at Kessler integrates vocational rehabilitation counseling into SCI inpatient rehabilitation. Funded by the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation, this project has resulted in a threefold increase in employment, changing the outlook for people with spinal cord injury, like Jeff McMullen. According to John O'Neill, PhD, director of the Center for Employment and Disability at Kessler Foundation, this successful project is attracting the interest of rehabilitation facilities across the country.



Two new Kessler research projects rely on the guidance of people who have experienced spinal cord injury to ease the transition to home and community life for those newly injured.

JEFF RETURNS TO THE JOB HE LOVES AND A LIFE MORE FULFILLED

"What are your goals?" asked Jeff McMullen's physical therapists. Jeff had no idea what his goals were or what he could hope to accomplish after a SCI left him unable to stand or walk. Before his injury, Jeff enjoyed working with visually impaired individuals and training Seeing Eye® dogs, but the job was physical. "My work required many hours of standing, walking, and practicing street traffic scenarios," says Jeff. "I never imagined I'd be able to return."

In time, Jeff strengthened his legs, stood up, and walked again, but it wasn't until he worked with a therapy dog in rehabilitation did he realize his true goal. "Interacting with the dog was like coming home, igniting my desire to get back to my job."

Jeff received vocational rehabilitation counseling as part of a unique Kessler Foundation research study to improve chronically low employment rates after SCI. Adria DeSimone, MS, CRC, LAC, and vocational resource facilitator at Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation, paved the way for Jeff's return to employment at The Seeing Eye in Morristown, NJ. She visited his workplace and saw firsthand



Jeff McMullen, who has returned to work as a Seeing Eye® dog trainer after his spinal cord injury, practices street traffic scenarios.

the physicality of the job. With this knowledge, she helped Jeff's physical therapists design a training plan to simulate his work activities.

"Adria was the lifesaving bridge between my physical therapy team and my employer, and my inspiration," says Jeff. "Thanks to Adria, my therapists, and donors like you, I've returned to the job I love and a life more fulfilled."

YOUR SUPPORT PROVIDES JOBS WITH REAL PAY AND BENEFITS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Impact of NYC: ATWORK After Two Years



322

PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES EMPLOYED



\$55,000

AVERAGE ANNUAL
SALARY



573

PARTICIPANTS UNDER
CONSIDERATION

Your generosity has made possible a grant-making success story at the New York City Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities. NYC: ATWORK, is a dynamic collaborative that builds on the collective strengths of government, industry, and philanthropy to enable people with disabilities to compete for jobs with major employers across the city.

Thanks to your support, Kessler Foundation contributes to NYC: ATWORK in partnership with Poses Family Foundation, Institute for Career Development, Access-VR, the Butler Foundation, and the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation.

"In our experience, programs like NYC: ATWORK that are based on community partnerships achieve greater success," says Elaine Katz, MS, CCC-SLP. "This program focuses on the talents and desires of the jobseeker with disabilities," she notes, "and offers wraparound services that support people striving to obtain and maintain employment."

"Finding a job is an important step toward independence for people with disabilities, but they need substantial support in order to achieve lasting financial stability," says Commissioner Victor Calise of the New York City Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities. The NYC: ATWORK collaborative provides the support to create roadmaps for success in employment, personal finance, and housing—all essential to achieving independence.

Early results from NYC: ATWORK are attracting national and international attention. To date, 322 people with disabilities, including Dirk Hohenkirk, have found jobs in healthcare, information technology, hospitality, finance, transportation, business services, and in multiple city agencies. Positions range from entry level to management with an average annual salary of \$55,000. "These are real jobs with real pay and real benefits," emphasized Commissioner Calise.



Victor Calise, Commissioner, front right, accompanied by Jonathan Novick, Noel Haight, Arthur Jacobs, and Jennifer Shaoul.

"Finding a job is an important step toward independence for people with disabilities, but they need substantial support in order to achieve lasting financial stability."

—Victor Calise

DIRK WAKES UP TO LIFE AND HELPS OTHERS WAKE UP TOO



Dirk Hohenkirk

“You have to give life a chance and employment is a huge part of fully embracing life.”

—**Dirk Hohenkirk**

Dirk Hohenkirk was 18 years old when he was shot and paralyzed from the neck down. In his hospital bed, unable to move, Dirk initially resisted a therapist's attempts to discuss how he might move forward with his life. “But she never gave up,” remembers Dirk. “She asked if I was going to just sleep my life away. She encouraged me to wake up to life—to use my mind, go back to school, and find a job.”

Dirk followed every word of his therapist's advice. He earned his GED, an undergraduate degree, and finally his master's in social work. Dirk was eager to find a job. His vision was to help people improve their lives. Luckily, he learned about NYC: ATWORK, an employment program supported by Kessler Foundation and donors like you. “The program helped me take steps toward finding a meaningful career where I could help people just like I had been helped,” says Dirk.

Thanks to you, NYC: ATWORK provided Dirk with the career counseling, resume building, and interview coaching he needed to land the perfect job. Now, as a specialist at Transitional Services for New York, he assists people living with substance abuse or physical and mental challenges as they strive to live the best lives they can. “You have to give life a chance,” Dirk emphasizes, “and employment is a huge part of fully embracing life. I'm grateful to that hospital therapist who urged me to wake up, and I'm grateful to NYC: ATWORK and donors like you for helping me secure a job where I can help others wake up too.”



ONLY ABILITIES MATTER AT *Stroll 'N Roll*

and generosity of many inspiring champions, just like you, made this success possible. Two winning teams—and their leaders—were recognized that day.

Bob Dubas, a beloved James Caldwell High School teacher and coach, sustained a spinal cord injury while riding his bicycle. Although he was absent for a semester of the school year, Bob was able to regain function in his arms and legs and return to the job he loves. Kessler was there for Bob when he needed it, and he paid it forward. Bob's Stroll 'N Roll team raised more than any other team so that others in need can get help and rebuild their lives, too.

After sustaining a spinal cord injury a year and a half ago, Sam Good began participating in SCI research at Kessler Foundation. Participating gave Sam hope for greater independence and quality of life. Sam's Stroll 'N Roll team of family and friends—the largest that day—joined together to champion groundbreaking rehabilitation research and support Sam's journey.

Stroll 'N Roll demonstrates that only abilities matter. Join us on Sunday, September 27, from 10 am to 1 pm, either in person in Verona Park, or virtually, to be announced.

Last September, Kessler Foundation's annual Stroll 'N Roll was a record setter. More than 600 people of all ages and abilities gathered in Verona Park for this fun-filled community event, raising more than \$200,000—the most ever—to advance rehabilitation research and employment for people with disabilities. The leadership



Your Support Changes Lives: Impact Report 2020

KESSLER SOCIETY GIVING THAT CHANGES LIVES



*Henry H. Kessler, MD, PhD, founder of
Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation*

As a Kessler Society member, you propel rehabilitation research discoveries and innovative employment initiatives. As a result, people with disabilities reimagine what's possible and realize the extraordinary. Year after year, you champion groundbreaking rehabilitation research and employment for people with disabilities—helping people take first steps, improve thinking and learning, and overcome obstacles to employment.

Kessler Society members honor Henry H. Kessler, MD, PhD, who founded Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation after serving in World War II. His vision was "...to treat the whole individual...to help him or her successfully regain physical, mental, social, vocational and economic usefulness to the fullest possible degree."

Today, Dr. Kessler's vision is reflected in the institutions that bear his name—Kessler Foundation and Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation, which consistently ranks as one of the best rehabilitation hospitals in the nation.

Our donors continue Dr. Kessler's legacy. Membership in the Kessler Society is extended to friends who make annual gifts totaling \$500 or more.

2019 Kessler Society

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