

We hope you enjoy the Fall Edition of our newsletter.

Sent on behalf of the Traumatic Brain Injury Model System (TBIMS) Research Study.



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY  
MODEL SYSTEM

PATIENT CARE • RESEARCH • EDUCATION & TRAINING

## TBI Model System Updates

Fall 2025

Volume 23



Welcome to our Fall Newsletter!

We're still working hard to support people who have had a traumatic brain injury as well as families and caregivers.

This month we are excited to share two inspiring stories from our community, and a way to get involved in more research studies. We hope you enjoy these stories of resilience, dedication, and the power of sharing knowledge to improve lives.

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3. **Violet Climer-Kennedy:** A Gonzaga University student who volunteered with the UW TBIMS team this summer. She shares important take aways from her experience.
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5. **Researchmatch.org:** Learn how to find a research study or clinical trial using ResearchMatch

Thank you for staying with us and being part of this journey!



**BrainNW: Education, Connection, and  
Other Resources**

If you or someone you love has a brain injury, it can be hard to know where to turn for support. BrainNW is a Washington-based nonprofit that may be a good place to start. BrainNW provides resources, classes, and personal support to people living with brain injuries and their families.

BrainNW was previously known as the Brain Injury Alliance of Washington (BIAWA). When funding cuts reduced their staff from more than twenty to just a couple, the team realized they needed a new approach. In 2024, they launched BrainNW to offer what they felt people truly needed. Their main focus is now accessible education, connection, and guidance.

## **Learning Through Classes**

BrainNW now offers about seven classes each month. Topics range from concussion basics to music therapy to live cooking lessons. Most classes are recorded so you can watch them later at your own pace. People who sign up will receive class summaries, slides, and extra resources via email, even if they do not attend the class live.

BrainNW works hard to make classes practical and welcoming. For example, after the first cooking class turned out to be too complicated, instructors simplified future recipes. Teachers include non-providers as well as healthcare providers such as speech therapists and neuropsychologists. Many teachers have personal experience of brain injury.

## **Support by Phone and Online**

BrainNW runs a weekday phone line staffed by Executive Director Justin Taft and Education and Resource Manager Regee Costanzo. They can provide a warm ear, listen to your story, and guide you to useful resources. Resources include things like local rehabilitation programs, support groups, and educational tools for families.

For those that do not want to call, the BrainNW website is full of trusted resources that are helpful for both families and healthcare providers.

## **Support Groups**

While BrainNW doesn't run its own support groups, it helps others organize them. They provide advertising and guidance on starting new groups so that these groups can continue even if BrainNW's funding changes.

## **How BrainNW Stays Funded**

BrainNW is funded through a Pooled Special-Needs trust. This trust protects the money of people with disabilities while allowing them to keep benefits like Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare. Interest from the trust helps pay for BrainNW's classes and instructors. BrainNW's goal is to expand the trust so they can increase the number of instructors and classes they provide.

## **Recognizing Diversity**

BrainNW recognizes that a brain injury can happen to anyone. BrainNW seeks to recognize this through their work. Everyone deserves support and access to resources.

## A Place to Find Guidance and Hope

Every month, BrainNW supports about 500 people. Their focus is on helping people with brain injuries and their families build confidence, make informed choices, and improve quality of life.

To learn more, explore their website at <https://brainnw.org/> or call their support line at (206) 467 - 4800. Whether you're seeking education, connection, or just someone to listen, BrainNW is there to help. Their website is available in English and Spanish. Information can be translated to any other language as well.



[www.facebook.com/BrainInjuryWA/](https://www.facebook.com/BrainInjuryWA/) [www.instagram.com/brainnorthwest/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/brainnorthwest/?hl=en) [www.youtube.com/user/BrainInjuryWA](https://www.youtube.com/user/BrainInjuryWA)



### Q & A with Maria Dalbotten

We asked Maria Dalbotten, a mental health therapist who specializes in brain trauma, to answer questions about her work as a Zen Therapist. In 2006 Maria was in a car accident and suffered from a severe traumatic brain injury, a fractured skull, and a broken neck and jaw. Now she helps others find their inner peace. She has furthered her understanding of the individual healing process by working as an Urban Zen Therapist in the Seattle area. Maria has a Master's Degree in Counseling, is currently a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC), and holds an Urban Zen Integrative Therapy certification.

### Q: Maria, can you tell us a little bit more about yourself and what Zen Therapy is?

In my practice as a counselor, I work with a lot of people with brain injuries. We talk, we process, we identify tools and coping strategies. The Zen part is when we add yoga, breathing, or any tools that help calm our nervous system. Often after TBI our body and brain feel upset or out of whack. Using these tools can really help one's body calm and our brain settle too. I see clients in-person at my office in Ravenna as well as on video. We can incorporate Zen therapy in either setting.

**Q: In the past, you have shared your passion for helping others who have had a brain injury. What are you doing now?**

I continue to work with TBI survivors and their families. I have found that with TBI our friends and family are a big part of our world post injury. Recently, I launched a podcast called TBI TMI, which can be found on YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Podcasts. It is a way for my cohost Zach and I - who are both post TBI - to discuss and educate others on the realities and challenges of living with traumatic brain injuries. I am 19 years past my severe TBI and Zach is just a few years past his mild TBI, so we bring different but well-rounded perspectives. Our show is great for fellow survivors who might feel alone or unable to put into words how challenging living with TBI is.

**Q: You have always been brutally honest about your experiences and reality as a person with a TBI. Tell us about how that approach is going in your new podcast.**

We are trying to bring lightness to the big challenges that we as TBI survivors face. We are friends that want to connect to our listeners and each other and feel understood. Living with a TBI can be soooooo isolating - we understand living with brain injuries can be scary, difficult to understand and exhausting.

**The TBI TMI podcast** has been very difficult to get off the ground. I am bad at social media and technology. My brain injury tells me to "give up" and "I am never going to figure it out." I really work hard to breathe and take breaks while working on this new project. I often feel because of my TBI I can't do certain things, but my co-host reminds me that even neurotypical people feel this way and can struggle with these same kinds of thoughts and self-doubt.

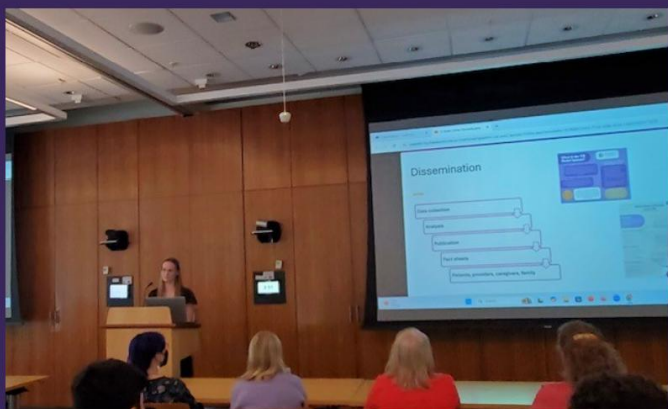
One of my favorite aspects of our show is the questions we get from listeners that we then discuss on the show. **You can call us and leave a voicemail at (774) 246-6835 with questions or topic suggestions.** There's no such thing as a stupid question so if you have one, please do let us know - I guarantee there are others out there who will benefit too!

Find our podcast at Apple podcast, Youtube or Spotify. We come out with new episodes every Tuesday. Just search TBI TMI.

**Apple Podcasts:** <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/tbi-tmi/id1829497475>

**Youtube:** <https://www.youtube.com/@TBITMIpodcast>

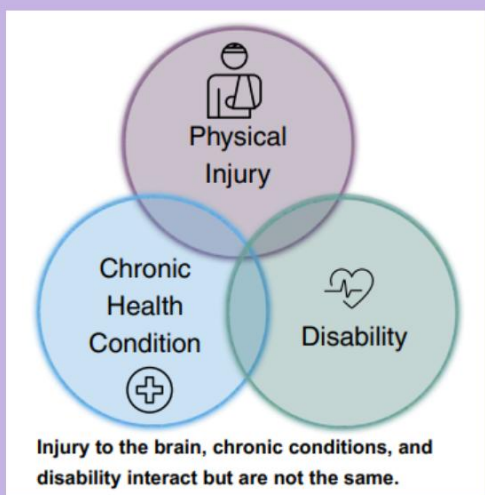
**Spotify:** <https://open.spotify.com/show/70E670CC04wP5BiKfeoDPs?si=a659658f816c4fde&nd=1&dlsi=03666e234a004fa9>



### Violet's Summer Recap

Hi! My name is Violet Climer-Kennedy, and I am a student at Gonzaga University. This summer I volunteered with the UW TBIMS team under Dr. Jeanne Hoffman. During the 10 weeks I was there, I learned about collecting data, recruiting participants, talking with participants and their families, sharing research, and of course, traumatic brain injury. I loved being a part of a team that cares about the participants and believes in the research.

The most important thing I took away from this experience was how important it is to share new information with patients, families, and providers. Research takes a lot of time, money, and teamwork, but it only makes a difference if the results reach the people who can use them. This summer I helped create and share research findings through infographics. We posted them in the rehabilitation unit at Harborview so anyone could see them. This showed me how research matters most when it reaches the people it's meant to help, and it inspired me to keep working on projects that connect science to real life.



### BIAUSA: Communicating about Brain Injury

The words we use to talk about brain injury matter. They affect how people understand and think about injuries, get support, and live well.

Healthcare professionals, researchers, and people with lived experience came together to create new guidance for clinicians, researchers, policymakers, and people with lived experience (survivors, care partners) of brain injury on communicating about brain injury.

Scan the QR code to read the statement!



**Key message: Brain injury doesn't define a person. It's just one part of who they are.**



Have you ever wanted to get involved in other research studies but don't know where to start? ResearchMatch could help! ResearchMatch is funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and aims to bring together volunteers and researchers to discover new treatments for better health.

Follow the steps below to join!

### How do I make a difference through ResearchMatch?

1

Join, there is no cost and it only takes a few minutes

2

Create your volunteer profile

3

Watch for emails about research studies

4

Respond, you decide to share your info with the researcher

**It is always your choice!**

<https://www.researchmatch.org/account/verify/>

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*The Traumatic Brain Injury Model System team does research to improve the health of people who have had traumatic brain injuries. **Structural racism**, which is any policy or procedure that contributes to inequality, can make people sicker, especially people who are Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, as well as LGBTQ+ communities, people with low income, and those with disabilities. We are committed to improve the lives and well being of people who have experienced traumatic brain injuries, and that includes using our research to increase awareness of the effects of racism.*

## Shared Stories

Do you have a story you would like to share?

We would love to hear from you!  
Please email us at [uwtbi@uw.edu](mailto:uwtbi@uw.edu)

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