

BI-INSIDE Magazine

September 2026 16th Issue

Photo taken by Michelle Morris near the lakefront.

Our Mission:

To offer assistance, provide resources and information and reassure survivors that they are not walking this journey alone.

Who we are:

We are all volunteer and run by brain injury survivors and their support persons.

We are a 501C3, Registered Charity 27-4483622, Tax Exempt Organization, and are 100% funded through the generosity of people like you!

Please send submiddions in a standard MicrosoftWord dcument to bi-inside-magazine@bircofwi.org

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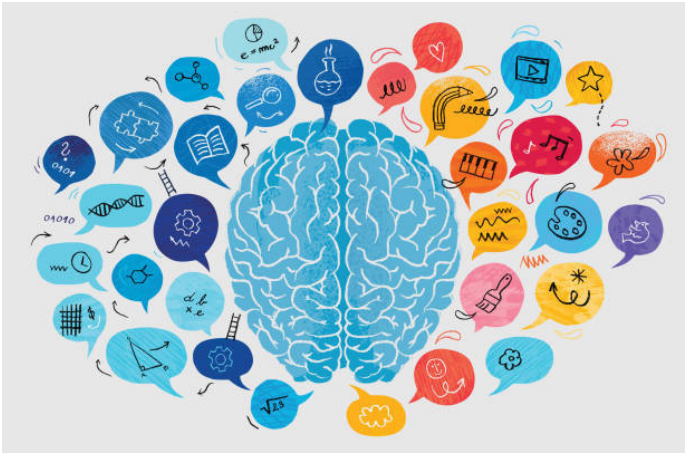
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*Name has been changed

We Energies

My brainy thoughts...



Hi Friends,

Summer is coming to a close, and it has been a great one filled with fun and excitement! Here is a recap of the main events:

- June 27 was the annual picnic (at Blue Lotus Farm and Retreat Center in West Bend). The event brought together old and new friends. The weather was perfect, the food was delicious, and excitement was in the air! First-time attendees were treated to true BIRC hospitality, and new friends were surely made.
- The annual Rummage Sale Fundraiser in Muskego was on Aug 8. Not only is this a great fundraiser, but it is also a chance to interact with and share our goals and mission with members of the local community.
- The Unmasking Brain Injury display is on the move and was exhibited at the Waukesha County Library in August. Watch our website for more locations in 2026!



Lois York-Lewis

Until next time!

Lois York-Lewis







WATERSTONE BANK SSB



Sheri Krahn

Resource Facilitation Issue: Pharyngeal Reflex or Gag Reflex

Is this really an issue after brain injury?



The gag reflex consists of contracting muscles. Starting with a complex of neurological pathways in the mouth and throat.

The job of these muscles is to stop harmful objects from entering your lungs. The reflex is protective and involuntary.

A brain injury can cause a loss or an impairment to the gag reflex.

The muscles could also become oversensitive, if there is damage to the brainstem or cranial nerves that control it.

Dysphagia is the impaired ability to swallow properly. The risk of aspiration is affected by a gag reflex that is not working properly.

Food, liquids and your saliva can cause choking, possibly pneumonia. Coughing is your body's way of protecting the airway.

A healthcare professional may be needed to evaluate the gag reflex. Treatments might include, but are not limited to:

- Speech Therapy
- Exercises
- Desensitizing sprays
- Management strategies

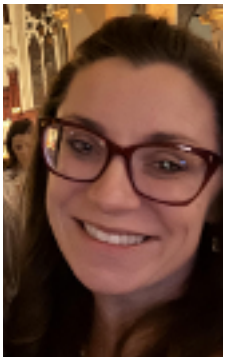
Gag reflex: What it is, why we have it & how to suppress it. Gag Reflex. (2026, February 10). https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/gag-reflex

Proud supporter of the Brain Injury Resource Center of Wisconsin.

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Local Companies Support the BIRCofWI!



Bari L. Rieth

BMO and Sussex IM are amplifying their commitment to brain injury prevention by placing an advertisement in BI-INSIDE Magazine. This advertisement will reach survivors, families, and advocates throughout Wisconsin.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, traumatic brain injury (TBI) is one of the leading causes of death and hospitalization in the state.

The Brain Injury Resource Center of Wisconsin, Inc. (BIRCofWI) is dedicated to offering assistance, providing resources and information, promoting education and awareness, and reassuring survivors that they are not alone on this journey.

By collaborating with local organizations, BIRCofWI aims to broaden its reach and strengthen its impact.

BMO and BIRCofWI first connected through BMO's Wealth Management team. Since then, BMO has supported BIRCofWI clients with a variety of financial services.

For more information about BMO, visit BMO's website.

When BIRCofWI first connected with Sussex IM, we were unaware of the depth of the company's commitment to reducing the risk of brain injury.

Sussex IM partnered with Q30 Innovations to manufacture the Q-Collar, a wearable device designed to help reduce the risk of...

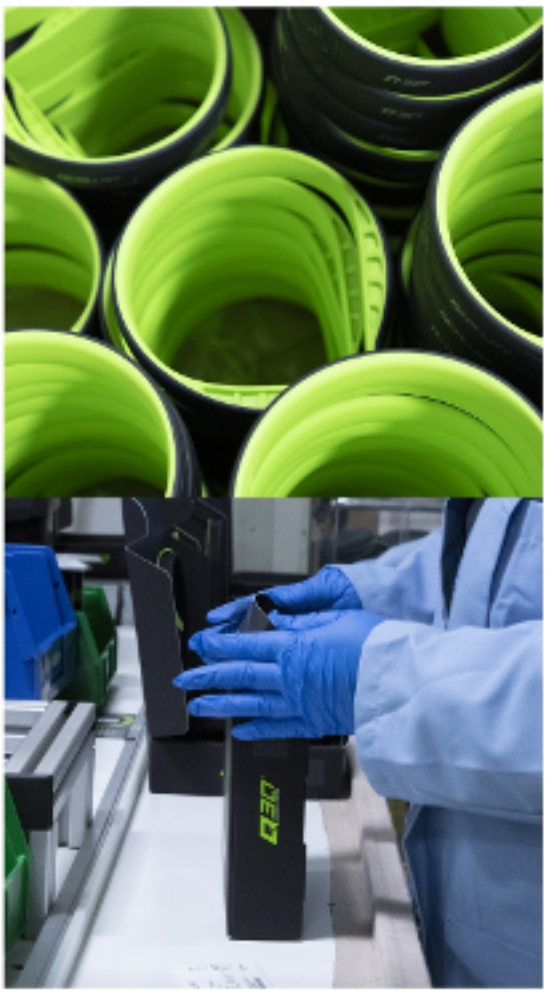
SUSSEX
INJECTION MOLDING

Precision Injection Molding for Products that Protect

Sussex IM has spent years building a reputation across Wisconsin for precision injection molding done right. Our vertically integrated facilities handle everything under one roof so the products we help build go from concept to production without losing quality along the way. We work alongside innovators across many different industries, treating every project with the same level of care.

One of those Products is the Q-Collar. For the past several years, we have partnered with Q30 Innovations, developing, molding, and manufacturing the device from concept to full production. The Q-Collar was made to help athletes and military personnel with brain injury prevention in mind.

Visit our website to learn more!



traumatic brain injury. Through precision injection molding, Sussex IM helped ensure that the collar meets medical-grade standards while remaining comfortable, durable, and reliable for everyday use.

To learn more about the Q-Collar, click here.



Sheri Krahn

Masonry and TBI

Masonry is a common method to use during construction, whether it's buildings, walls, or an Egyptian Pyramid, to name a few. Craft Masonry, Inc. in Jackson, WI is owned and operated by **Wayne Scherwinski** since 1967.

They have established a reputation for being fair and performing quality work. W. Scherwinski is married to **Linda Scherwinski** who is a board member of the *Brain Injury Resource Center of Wisconsin*.

Together, they have three adult children and **Micki**, their youngest, is a brain injury survivor, who has been a client of the BIRCofWI since 2015. The story of how Micki sustained her brain injury is in the third issue of BI-INSIDE Magazine.

Getting back to Craft Masonry, they are happy to report that there "*has not been an employee that sustained a brain injury while on the job*" according to L. Scherwinski. They use Occupational Safety and Health Administration required hardhats on the job to ensure safety.

These helmets keep employees safe as they walk under scaffolding or where there is equipment running in the area. There is also training in place for all employees that ensures safety protocols are followed.

All employees are proactive in the safety of the job sites. If there would be an instance where there is a fall or overhead debris cause an injury, 911 would be called.

Throughout the years, **Craft Masonry** has shown their support for the work we do by first placing an advertisement in our bulletins to now our magazine. They also have sponsored our annual summer picnics at the Blue Lotus Farm and Retreat Center in the past.

Thank you, Craft Masonry, for your continued support!

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Journaling as a Tool for Mental Wellness

Written by: Dr. Amanda Reda-Goglio DNP, APNP, PMHNP-BC Collaborative Solutions Psychiatry



Many people think journaling means keeping a diary or creating something they will go back and read later. While it can be used that way, I often encourage journaling for a different reason: to get thoughts out of your head and onto paper.

When worries, frustrations, reminders, or difficult emotions are constantly running through your mind, they can take up a lot of mental energy. Writing them down gives those thoughts somewhere else to exist.

Instead of carrying them around in your head, you can put them on paper and give yourself permission to stop holding onto them.

The goal is not to analyze what you wrote, review it repeatedly, or even solve the problem. The benefit comes from the act of writing itself. Putting thoughts into words can help organize them, reduce mental clutter, and make them feel less overwhelming.

For difficult emotions such as anger, hurt, frustration, or anxiety, journaling can be a safe way to get those feelings out. Once you've written them down, you can decide what you want to do with the paper.

Keep it if you want, but you don't have to. You can tear it up, throw it away, shred it, or safely burn it.

The purpose is not to create a permanent record. The purpose is to get the thoughts out of your mind so they are no longer taking up space there.

Think of journaling as unloading your mental backpack. Once the thoughts are written down, you do not have to keep carrying them around with you.

For many people, that simple act of getting thoughts out of their head and onto paper can provide a sense of relief, clarity, and calm.

Fun Fact: Which hand do you choose?

More often than not after a brain injury is sustained, a persons dominate hand can change. A brain injury survivor could have been right handed and now they either use both or have changed to favoring the left side.

Your brain adapts and rewires iteself to help you do daily tasks. Different tasks need different brain strengths.

What you should do:

- Notice which hand you use for hard tasks.
- Share this shift with you rehab doctor or therapist.
- Practice helps your brain build strong new paths.

*Fun fact has been shared by Bari Rieth and Sheri Krahn.



Community Coin Boxes Promote Change

Written by: Bari Rieth and Lois York-Lewis

Years ago the BIRCofWI started a coin box donation fundraiser as a means to help our continuous fundraising efforts. Our staff is made up of all volunteers.

To keep our operating costs down, which helps to ensure Wisconsin brain injury survivors recieve the support and resources they need and are looking for.

Starting in July 2026, we have returned to distributing coin boxes as part of our donation collection program.

Adding more locations is a top priority! If you know of a business where one of these coin boxes can be displayed at, contact us by calling (262) 770-4882 or by sending an email, subject line: Future Coin Box Location, to admin@bircofwi.org

History of the Coin Box

Cultural and Symbolic Role:

According to the Heart Thrive Foundation, coin boxes remain a timeless symbol of hope and generosity, bridging ancient traditions with modern fundraising. They are simple, accessible, and often tied to community identity, making them effective for engaging people of all ages in charitable giving.[1]

In short, the coin box for nonprofits has moved from sacred religious vessels to a versatile, community-driven fundraising tool, adapting to the needs of the times while preserving the spirit of compassion.

Reference List:

[1]H. H. F. (2025, August 22). The Heart Behind the Box: How Donation Boxes Have Evolved. Heart Hive Foundation. Retrieved August 17, 2026, from https://www.hearthivefoundation.com/post/the-heart-behind-the-box-how-donation-boxes-have-evolved

Coin Box Locations:

- Jojo's Diner: Lena, WI

-Hair Magic: Muskego, WI







Gratitude Practice: A Simple Habit That Changes Your Brain for the Better!

Written by: James Durham

Did you know: Whenever you express gratitude, your brain physically rewires itself, making you naturally more positive and resilient?

Expressing gratitude physically rewires the brain through neuroplasticity, strengthening neural pathways associated with positive thinking, empathy, and emotional regulation. Regular gratitude practice releases dopamine and serotonin, reduces cortisol (stress hormone), and increases gray matter volume, making individuals more resilient and naturally optimistic over time.

Here are examples of how **gratitude** rewires our brain:

•**Strengthens Neural Networks**: Consistent gratitude practice reinforces positive emotional patterns, decreasing the brain's natural negativity bias.

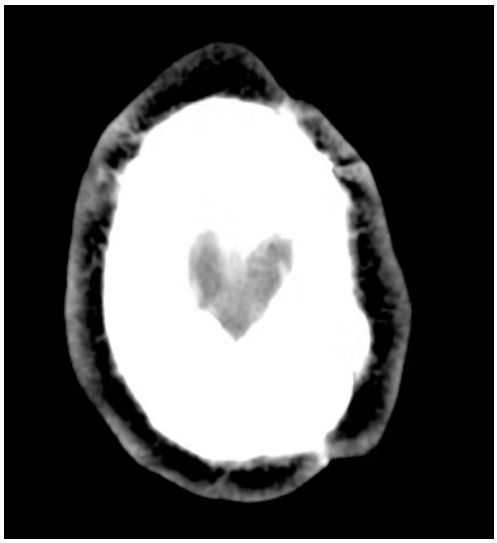
•**Neurotransmitter Boost**: Acts like a natural antidepressant by increasing the production of serotonin and dopamine, responsible for mood elevation.

•**Brain Chemical Balance**: Gratitude increases activity in the hypothalamus, which regulates stress and improves emotional stability.

•**Increased Gray Matter**: Increased volume in areas linked to empathy and emotional regulation, such as the right inferior temporal gyrus.

•**Reduces Stress**: Gratitude helps manage cortisol production and lowers anxiety by shifting focus from threat scanning to positive, present-focused awareness.

Overall, the key is consistency. Practicing gratitude regularly is necessary to physically alter how the brain processes emotions.



The photo of the scan of Durham's brain above reveals a heart at the center. "Immediately seen during viewing of the film/scan, at almost the very end as the skull enclosed over the brain – was a perfectly visible HEART in the last portion of the brain captured."

TBI Love. (07/2026). James Durham's brain. (photograph). TBI Love.



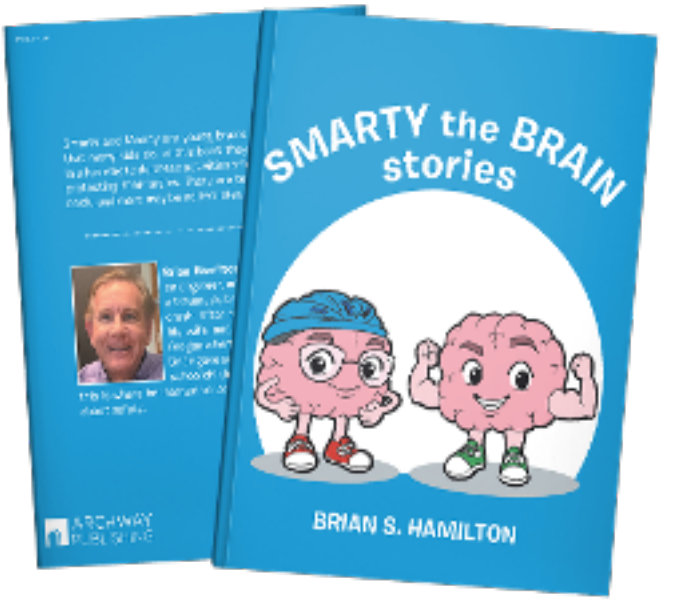
Review: Smarty and Friends & Smarty the Brain

Written by: Bari RIeth and Sheri Krahn

Smarty and the Brain stories are informative and easy to read. It is more than just a children's book; it is great conversation starter.

Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers should pause after each story and discuss the topic to ensure the children know this is more than a fairy tale, these situations can happen to anyone.

The Smarty and Friends book gives many different examples of how brain injuries can be sustained. This book in particular brings to light that brain injuries can happen for numerous reasons and to anyone at anytime.





Brain Injury and Swallowing

Understanding the "Hard to Swallow" Truth

Written by: Lizzy Balsiger, MS, CCC-SLP & Sofia James, 2nd year grad student at UW-Madison



Incurring a brain injury comes with an onslaught of tests, procedures, appointments mental and emotional toll, and a flood of information that can be challenging to make sense of.

Oftentimes, when we think of a brain injury, we think about a change in cognition or communication, challenges with mobility, and a loss of independence with daily tasks.

Swallowing, on the other hand, is an often overlooked function that impacts our overall health, nutrition, and social emotional connection with others.

What is dysphagia?

"**Dysphagia**" is the umbrella medical term for difficulty swallowing. Dysphagia is more than a one off moment of something tickling your throat or "going down the wrong pipe."

Rather, this speaks to potential difficulty with any or all of the swallowing phases, including:

- Oral Phase (food in the mouth)
- Pharyngeal phase (food in the throat)
- Esophageal phase (food in the tube that connects the throat and stomach).

Dysphagia can be characterized by a reduction in safety (risk for choking or aspiration), efficiency (food or drink not moving out of the mouth and/or throat in a timely manner), and/or quality of life (discomfort, increased effort, feelings of embarrassment).

How is dysphagia related to brain injuries? The muscles used for chewing and swallowing are controlled by nerve signals from the brain.

When the brain is injured, it can impact the strength, sensation, and/or coordination of muscles in the lips, tongue, and throat. Additionally, cognitive changes, brain fog, and high levels of fatigue can impact one's ability to safely and efficiently participate in eating.

Do you want to know how to help yourself or a loved on with their dysphagia? Visit:

Wisconsin Speech and Swallow Therapy

Telling of the Tale: Andrea Smith

*This brain injury survivor does not want their full name shared. Out of respect for their privacy, we have changed their name to keep their idenity hidden.



I have brushed my hair many times in my life, an uncountable number. I tend to believe that I am so well practiced in brushing my hair that I could do it anywhere.

This belief remained true for 26 years of my life. In an unfortunate series of events, it now seems that I cannot brush my hair outdoors.

It is important to me that you understand that I went camping yearly as a child. I should be able to brush my hair outdoors.

I had just woken up, after camping overnight and went outside to brush my hair. I have straight, thick hair and prefer brushing it upside down.

As I always do, I flipped my head so my hair would hang and could be brushed. As I always do, I flipped my head back upright, swinging my newly brushed hair with it.

I had not properly checked my surroundings.

CLUNK

I slowly sat myself on the ground, confused and displeased.

At this point I was not quite sure what had happened, I did not lose consciousness, but the world felt... different. It seemed as though things were moving slower and reality felt far away.

The world started to come back to me, bringing with it a headache that seemed different than any other I had experienced up to this point.

The pieces came together. At 4'10" I had done the thing I never had before in life.

I had hit my head on a pole.

The headache remained, but I was able to walk and talk properly. Thankfully I was not responsible for driving that day.

I did not immediately rush to the emergency room, "I had only hit my head on a pole" the doubts told me. "It can't be an emergency, I didn't lose consciousness," the doubts continued.

The world, however, still felt different in a way I still cannot explain three years later. *The headache felt different.*

I decided to trust myself over the doubt and visited the emergency room. I had given myself a concussion.

One very firm hit to the head and I had a concussion. I was sent home the same day, instructed to rest, listen to audiobooks, and enroll in physical therapy.

My brain needed to heal.

I took off work for two weeks before slowly returning. It was at the recommendation of my physical therapist that I scheduled "Quiet Time," during my workday for my brain to relax.

When I first returned to work, I was able to work for two hours a day. Over the course of three months, I was able to build up from working two hours total to taking "Quiet Time," between bouts of two-hour work sessions, until finally I was able to work a full day again in September.

Prior to my concussion, I could balance tasks, open tabs, emails, and messages without a second thought. In this new, post-concussion world, I found



Telling of the Tale: Andrea Smith

contined

myself taking notes about everything.

I would lose my train of thought if I switched from one tab to another. For the first time in my life, I could no longer multitask.

I recall working on reporting for a project, a task that would have previously taken me a single hour to complete now took me three days to submit. I felt robbed of who I thought I was, I felt like I was losing touch with myself.

In addition to dealing with a cognitive load I had never had to balance before; I now had silent migraines. I could be in the middle of a conversation with someone and suddenly, my vision would start to shimmer, and sounds would start to fade, as if I were underwater.

The left side of my face would grow numb, and my responsiveness would diminish.

This was normal I was told.

It was nothing to be concerned about, my brain was healing. Whenever the silent migraines would strike, there was nothing available to me except to lay down.

I spent a lot of 2023 lying down.

The silent migraines continued well past when I thought I had healed, they became yet another feature of the “new” me.

It was a year before I finally felt like myself again. The symptoms slowly improved over time, but I was still dealing with cognitive slowness and increased headaches until the year mark.

I can now say that I live with few impacts from the concussion. The left side of my face will still grow numb when my brain is fatigued or during severe headaches, but I can navigate the world without sticky notes and a pen.

I find myself incredibly grateful that I was in a position where I was able to visit the ER, attend physical therapy, and slowly reintroduce myself to the world. I believe these steps aided me in my recovery, and I remain in awe of survivors of all traumatic brain injuries.

Mine was but a small, frightening glance into that world.

According to the BIAUSA, Brain Injury is known as the invisable disability. This is due to the symptoms of a brain injury not being always visible, to coin the term "it's all in your head." With brain injury, really it is! -Bari Rieth, Layout Editor & Contributor BI-INSIDE Magazine.

Watch your mail/email for more information on upcoming events! If you are not on our mailing list, complete the information below to get started or visit us *online*.

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