

The Building Block

An e-newsletter of the J. D. McCarty Center for children with developmental disabilities

Former patients say McCarty Center's services improved their lives

(Note: This is the third in a series about the 65th anniversary of the McCarty Center and the families and patients who have been served by the hospital.

They describe the McCarty Center as a place that changed their lives.

It's where they met mentors and motivators, where they learned life skills, where they felt like they fit in and where they found friends.

It's a place they still cherish.

Former patients Amy Brown, Keunta McNair, Jim Jolly and Cody Owen say the services they received here at the McCarty Center enhanced their skills and helped equip them to live independently.

The McCarty Center is a pediatric rehab hospital that specializes in the care and treatment of children with developmental disabilities from birth to age 21. The hospital provides medical care and physical, occupational, speech and language therapy for children on an inpatient and outpatient basis.

More than 15,000 children have been served by the hospital, which is celebrating its 65th anniversary this year.

Brown, McNair, Jolly and Owen - who all have cerebral palsy - say they wouldn't be where they are today without the hospital. Here's a glimpse into their stories of success.

A strong support system

Amy Brown has two families.

First, there's the biological bunch, including her parents and brothers. Next are the friends and mentors she met at the McCarty Center.

Both groups represent people who encouraged, guided and inspired her.

"It's not easy living with a disability on your own without a good support system," she said.

The 34-year-old said another source of support was the services she received from the McCarty Center.



Amy Brown, left, shares a laugh at lunch with friend and mentor, Maria Greenfield, the director of occupational therapy at the McCarty Center. Brown is a former patient and said, "Without the center, I wouldn't be where I am today."

"Without the center, I wouldn't be where I am today," she said. "They've taught me my independence. When I wanted to give up on myself, they taught me that I can't give up."

Brown started coming to the hospital for inpatient and outpatient services when she was 2 and a half. It became a second home to her and she especially loved the summer programs, including pool parties and field trips.

But it wasn't all play and no work at the hospital. Brown remembers having to stretch her skills during therapy, such as learning how to transfer from her

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Former patients improve lives

wheelchair to a bed or to get in and out of a car.

“I knew as hard as I worked it was all going to pay off someday,” said the Blackwell native.

One of Brown’s goals was to live on her own one day. It helped that while at home she was taught to be self-sufficient and was given chores, such as cleaning her room, putting dishes in the dishwasher and babysitting her younger brother.

Brown also participated in the McCarty Center’s independent living training program where patients learn such skills as how to care for themselves,

how to manage their time and money and how to travel within their community and use community resources.

In 1996, she moved to Norman, a city she had grown comfortable with after her trips to the McCarty Center.

Brown said it was important to her to live on her own so she wouldn’t be dependent on her family and because she wanted to show younger people with disabilities “that if I can do it, you can do it.”

She lives in an apartment complex with other residents who have disabilities and runs errands or shops using her electric wheelchair or by using the CART (Cleveland Area Rapid Transit) system. Brown has aides that help her bathe, get dressed and get into and out of bed but she takes care of everything else, such as paying her bills.

She also sells Avon and previously worked at the east side Walmart in Norman. She has also taken classes at the Moore Norman Technology Center and has volunteered in the community, such as with Among Friends. Among Friends is a Norman program that gives adults with physical and mental disabilities the chance to meet new people, develop social skills and participate in activities, according to the program’s website.

Brown still visits the McCarty Center and shares her experiences with patients participating in the independent living training program.

Her dream is to open a business to help people with disabilities learn job skills and how to live on their own and “to let them know they can do anything they set their minds to regardless of their disability.”

A connection to others

The photos help capture how Keunta McNair views his time at the McCarty Center.

One is of him as a child sporting a big smile as a speech-language pathologist fits him with a hearing aide. Another is of McNair reading a newspaper with an employee in one of the hospital’s group homes. The last is of him grinning and posing with a younger patient.

McNair came to the hospital for inpatient and outpatient services from his toddler through his teen years and said it was a place where he had fun, met people who inspired him and was taught to never give up.

The hospital was also a sanctuary of sorts. At school, some people bullied him because of his disability, McNair said. At the hospital he discovered other kids with special needs who were also experiencing challenges.

“You start to feel some sort of connection,” said McNair, 21.

His happiest memories are the times spent in the group homes that house inpatients. McNair loved the feeling of togetherness, such as when the group watched movies and played games.

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McNair loved the feeling of togetherness

He also enjoyed cooking for the employees and other patients in the group home and said his specialties were mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese and his own chili recipe.

McNair loved getting to know the other patients and became protective of the younger kids. He wanted them to know they were not alone and that others cared about them.



Former McCarty Center patient Keunta McNair was a guest during a spring dance at the hospital. McNair said he enjoyed his experiences at the hospital and plans to volunteer at Camp ClapHans. The summer camp will be designed and built for children with special needs.

One of his passions is to encourage and inspire children with disabilities, which is why he wants to volunteer at Camp ClapHans. The summer camp will be designed and built for children with special needs. It is expected to open in 2012 on the south side of the hospital's property.

"I just think they need someone there that's by their side that understands and knows what they're going through," he said.

McNair grew up in Oklahoma City but now lives in an apartment complex in Norman with other individuals with special needs, including former patients of the McCarty Center.

On his to-do list is to get his driver's license, buy a car and find a job. He is also a frequent visitor to the McCarty Center and still sees it as a safe place where people care.

"The J. D. McCarty Center is always going to be in my life, no matter what," he said.

An attitude of gratitude

A temporary job made a permanent impression on Jim Jolly.

At age 12, he sold doughnuts door-to-door in his neighborhood to earn money for a new bike. Regardless of the weather - be it rain or icy conditions - he would peddle the sweet treats for a purpose.

Jolly said the experience taught him the value of working to gain something, to do his best on a task and not to give up. He also bought that new bike.

Those lessons, plus ones he learned from his family and the employees at the McCarty Center, have played a vital role in his life, he said.

"I don't think my life would've been as rewarding as it has been with out the center," said the 65-year old.

Jolly was diagnosed with cerebral palsy when he was 8

and his family was referred to the McCarty Center. He came to the hospital throughout his childhood for physical therapy, to evaluate his leg braces to determine if changes were needed and for rehabilitation after surgery.

He enjoyed his visits and interacting with other patients and the hospital employees. "They were all excellent from the maintenance people to the kitchen help to the nurses. Everybody treated all of us like their own kids."

He said the employees worked to make the experience fun for kids, such as with parties and visits to the circus. He remembers the time a nurse took him to a University of Oklahoma football game. She let him go solo to the only OU game he's ever attended. "Even if they did lose, I enjoyed it," he said, with a smile. "It was an unforgettable experience."

While at the hospital, he became physically stronger and improved his social skills. "I learned better how to get along with people, instead of being a wallflower."

Jolly became more appreciative of his abilities after seeing patients whose physical challenges or conditions were more severe than his. His time at the hospital also taught him to rely on himself and his abilities, he said.

Jolly also said his parents motivated him to reach his potential.

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“I believe the good Lord put them in my path”

They told him, “I could do anything anybody else could do if I was willing to make the sacrifices for it.”

They also had certain expectations for him, including that he find a job after high school.

“They never talked like there was any question of whether I would go to work,” said the Oklahoma City resident.

Jolly worked as a truck driver before retiring at 52. He traveled the nation and the trips made for good memories. “I’ve seen sunsets and sunrises that people would pay to see.”

Jolly now volunteers with the Oklahoma County Election Board and works as a precinct inspector. The job includes picking up election materials to be used at precinct headquarters and overseeing the balloting process.

He also is a father of three daughters and has seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild. Jolly said he wouldn’t trade his life experiences and is thankful that he met people who encouraged him to excel, including those at the McCarty Center.

“I believe the good Lord put them in my path,” he said. “I’m so grateful and I’m so appreciative. I thank the Lord every day.”



Jim Jolly came to the McCarty Center for services during his childhood. He said he enjoyed interacting with other patients and the center employees. “Everybody treated all of us like their own kids.”

From encouragement to employment

Cody Owen’s connection to the McCarty Center is personal and professional.

The 26-year-old came to the hospital for services throughout his youth. Now, he works in the hospital’s health and information office as an administrative technician. It’s a fun job at a place that helped develop his independence, he said.

“If I didn’t have the center here back when I was a kid, and even now, I wouldn’t be able to do what I do today.”

What he does today is live on his own and work part time at the center. He also enjoys traveling and is saving money to buy a home. “That’s my big goal.”

Owen came to the hospital on an inpatient and outpatient basis and appreciated the encouragement he received from the therapists.

“They were awesome people,” he said. “They motivate you to do what’s best for you.”

He also had a strong support

system at home. “My parents never really looked at me as having a disability,” he said. “They wanted me to go out and do things as much as possible.”

They also expected him to help around the house, such as with laundry and cleaning his room. Owen also participated in the McCarty Center’s independent living training program.

The Shawnee native moved to Norman when he was 20 to live in an apartment complex with other people with disabilities, including former McCarty Center patients. He started working for the hospital in 2007 after spending two summers as a volunteer in the health and information office.

It’s fun. The people that I work around and the fact I know a lot of people here makes it enjoyable.

Owen’s job duties include assembling and analyzing outpatient records, preparing information for filing and performing quantitative analysis on scanned records to make sure the records are complete before being placed in permanent storage.

Patti Koeltzow, health information director, said Owen did such a great job as a volunteer that she decided to hire him for a part-time position. She said he’s dependable and has a strong work ethic.

“He really appreciates his job. Cody’s here every day he’s scheduled and always prompt. He’s studious and attentive.



Cody Owen came to the McCarty Center for services throughout his youth. Now, he works in the hospital's health and information office as an administrative technician

He's a self-starter," Koeltzow said. "He's definitely an asset to the department."

Owen said when he got the job, his co-workers decorated the office with balloons and a sign that said,"Congratulations."

"It was a good feeling," he said. "I just go in every morning hoping I can help Patti and the girls in here (the office) as much as I can."

Outside of work, Owen enjoys traveling, including visiting his parents once a month and trips to Lake Eufaula. His other destinations have included New York City, San Francisco, Florida, San Diego and the Grand Canyon. He also likes to read, listen to music and watch football. His favorite teams are the Sooners and the Dallas Cowboys.

Owen said he sometimes thinks about how he's transitioned from a patient to part of the hospital's personnel and is grateful for the experience.

He also encourages families

with children with special needs to check out the hospital's services.

It's well worth it. They work so hard to figure out how they can help you that it really benefits you in the long run.

Norman Conquest riders were 650 strong

Conquer the heat. Conquer the hills. That is the ride slogan for the Bicycle League of Norman's annual Norman Conquest bicycle tour that took place Saturday, July 16.

The 16th annual Norman Conquest certainly lived up to its slogan with temperatures pushing the mid 80's at the 7:30 a.m. start, and rushing toward the century mark by the time the last riders came in between noon and 1:00 p.m.

The ride began and ended at the J. D. McCarty Center with a record 650 riders participating. "This ride certainly dispels the notion that Oklahoma is flat," said Michelle Carr, Norman Conquest chairman. "The east side of Cleveland County has plenty of hills to challenge any level rider."

This year riders came from all over Oklahoma, Washington state, South Carolina, Illinois, Texas and Maryland.

This is the fourth year that the Norman Conquest has benefited the Camp ClapHans scholarship endowment fund. This year's event contributed another \$6,000 to the scholarship fund that will help qualifying families to offset the cost of camp tuition.



Cerebral Palsy Commissioner Joe Sher assists an entrant with his registration for the Norman Conquest bicycle tour.



Riders stay focused on the riders ahead of them during the start of the tour. A record 650 riders made the Norman Conquest this year.



SibShop program returns to McCarty Center

Kerri Brooks, Norman SibShop coordinator, has announced the return of the SibShops to Norman for the second year. The program will be held at the McCarty Center once again this year.

The Norman SibShop is part of a statewide program designed to provide peer support and education for boys and girls 6-13 within a recreational context who have siblings with a special need. These workshops are designed to be lively, non-stop fun that acknowledges the many contributions the brother or sister of a person with special needs make.

"We had a good start last year," said Brooks. "We received good marks from both the kids participating in the SibShops and their parents. It was a very nice way to start the first year program here in Norman.

"SibShops are designed to help brothers and sisters of a person with special needs talk about the good, the not-so-good and the so-so things they encounter every day in a safe, non-judgmental, fun environment with kids that are facing the same issues. It lets them know that they aren't the only ones out there facing these issues and feeling these feelings," added Brooks.

The Oklahoma Sibling Initiative was developed from a wellness perspective to address the need of Oklahoma families and provide supportive community-based, low-cost services that are accessible to all families who have

children with siblings with special needs.

Lori Wathen is the state SibShop coordinator. The statewide program is a collaborative initiative funded by the Oklahoma Developmental Disabilities Council. Other partners in the program include: The Oklahoma Family Network, the Oklahoma Family Leadership Council for Learning and Leadership and the Child Study Center at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center's Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics Section.

According to Wathen there will be SibShops in Oklahoma City, Norman, Tulsa, Muskogee, Enid, Piedmont, Guymon, Stroud, Fort Sill/Lawton, Edmond and Tinker Air Force Base this year.

The cost of attending the Norman SibShop is \$6 per child or \$20 per child for attending all four sessions. Lunch is included. There is also a discount for multiple siblings.

The schedule for 6-9 year olds is Saturday, September 17, November 19, February 18, 2012 and April 14.

The schedule for 10-13 year olds is Saturday, October 15, November 19, March 10, 2012 and April 14.

SibShops will be held from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

For more information and to register for the Norman SibShops contact Kerri Brooks at 405.249.1925 or normansibshops@gmail.com.

Paulson joins staff as business manager

A budget is more than facts, figures, dollars and cents.

It also shows the priorities and plans of an organization, said Erik Paulson.

At the McCarty Center, the priorities are on patient care and services, said Paulson, the new business manager for the hospital.

"It's a shining example of an organization putting its money where its mouth is."

Paulson started the position in August and said the job allows him the opportunity to combine his interests in government and public service. As the manager, he plans, organizes and directs the activities of the finance department and tracks the center's finances.

His previous jobs include working as a budget analyst for Oklahoma's Office of State Finance and as the assistant cabinet affairs director for former New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson.

Paulson is from Moriarty, N.M., graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science and master's degree in public administration from New Mexico State University in Las Cruces.

Zumbathon fundraiser results in \$670 for playground equipment

Zumba enthusiasts moved, grooved and raised money for the McCarty Center on Sept. 23.

The Zumbathon fundraiser generated \$670 and will go toward purchasing new playground equipment for the hospital that specializes in the care and treatment of children with developmental disabilities.

The event featured instructors leading about 60 participants in a Zumba workout, which is a popular Latin-inspired dance-fitness program that blends international music with easy-to-follow dance steps. The Zumbathon took place at The Cube in Bethany.

The crowd included a mix of children and adults who smiled throughout the sweat-inducing workout. The group also included those currently taking Zumba classes to others who were trying the exercise for the first time.

Some participants said they came to the event for the fun, fitness and the opportunity to raise funds for patients at the McCarty Center.

"It's just a chance to work out in a group environment and it's all about music and dance," said Dane McKenzie, of Oklahoma City.

McKenzie has been involved in Zumba for three years. "It's a great way to exercise and not realize you're exercising."

Attendees also included employees and patients from the

McCarty Center.

"I had fun sweating for a good cause," said Doneisha Sterling, a direct care specialist at the hospital.

Joan Livesay, one of the Zumba instructors for the event, said it is rewarding to be involved in the Zumbathon and to have a chance to raise money for the McCarty Center.

"I love the work of the McCarty Center. My daughter has special needs, so I understand how crucial it is for families in Oklahoma to have this resource," Livesay said.

She also was excited about the turnout for the Zumbathon.

"At a time when individuals and families are terribly busy with their own schedules and activities, I am pleased that so many participants and instructors voluntarily set aside time to support the McCarty Center. And I was honored to be able to help make the event happen," Livesay said.

This is the second year for the fundraiser and plans are to host another Zumbathon next year, said Phyllis Brawner, one of the coordinators and direct care specialist at the hospital.



Zumbathon co-coordinators Doris Blair (left) and Phyllis Brawner, and Brawner's daughter Doneisha Sterling show off donation boxes they made for the event.



A large crowd moves and grooves to the music at the 2nd annual Zumbathon fundraiser for the McCarty Center held at The Cube on Sept. 23.



Zumbathon co-coordinator Phyllis Brawner (left) and McCarty Center volunteer coordinator Jennifer Giamelle pose for a picture during the 2nd annual Zumbathon fundraiser.