



Issue 78

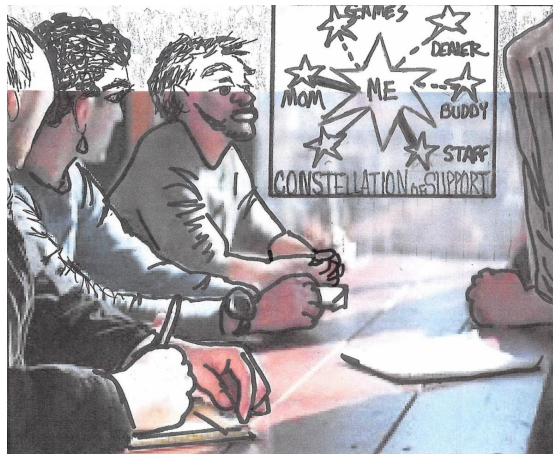
Pilot Test: BrainWise Taught to Previously Homeless Veterans with Serious Mental Illness

To address the multiple needs of previously homeless veterans with serious mental illness (SMI), the Veterans Administration (VA) offers a number of specialized services, some which are imbedded into transitional housing programs that offer treatment for mental health and substance abuse disorders. Despite the variety of services available, many Veterans do not succeed in their goals of obtaining housing and integrating into the community and there is a need for novel approaches that might promote self-sufficiency and goal attainment.

To this end, Dr. Jared Greenberg, a psychiatrist at the Greater Los Angeles VA, contacted us after reading [published research](#) that found the BrainWise program had improved executive functions in previously homeless men.

This finding led him to develop a pilot study to test BrainWise with a small group of inpatient veterans at the Domiciliary, a transitional house and treatment program located on the West Los Angeles VA campus.

Dr. Greenberg completed teaching BrainWise to two small groups of Veterans and he and his research team are now analyzing data they collected from the study. For this newsletter article, he shared his observations teaching BrainWise and how participants reacted to the material.



Teaching BrainWise to Previously Homeless Veterans with SMI .

Dr. Greenberg said the Veterans at the Domiciliary are at a “pivotal time for transition” to receive the intervention programs and tools the Domiciliary offers. None of the offerings specifically teach executive function skills, and testing BrainWise was an opportunity to find out how Veterans would react to the program. His first comments for the interview were: *“Every single participant's reaction was overwhelmingly positive to an extent I could not have expected.”*

Dr. Greenberg said the participants who completed the program – Veterans who have experienced years of mental health issues and treatments – shared their impressions and experiences of BrainWise in focus groups held throughout the course of the study.

The participants indicated that BrainWise was a “life-changing” experience and described how the program helped them pull together skills and knowledge gained from other resources, groups, and treatments. He said, “They really loved BrainWise and felt it should be offered to all Veterans.”

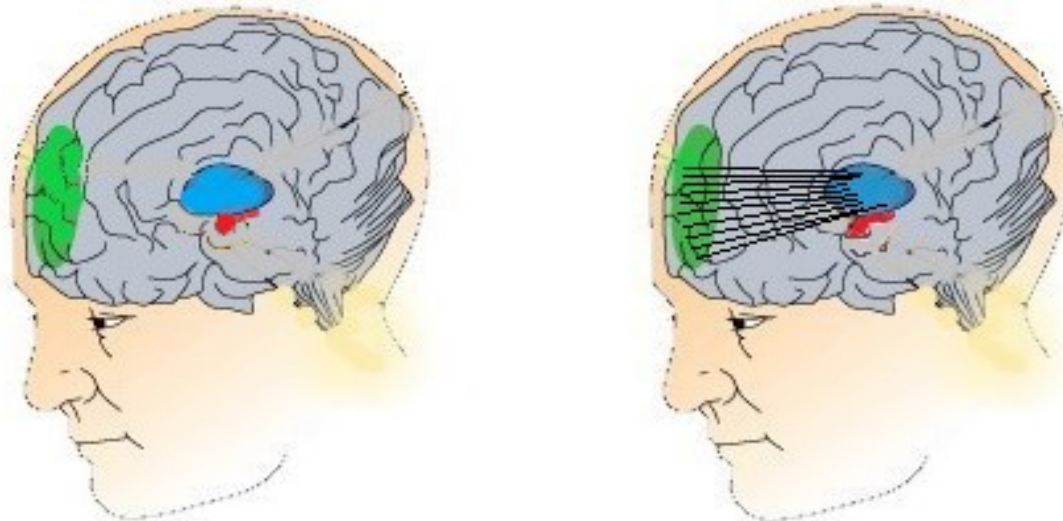
Participants described BrainWise as being different from other interventions, and gave examples of this:

- The program focused on them and their problems. They appreciated that they were asked to identify and list their problems, a request none of them had previously experienced.
- BrainWise was different from other programs and experiences in that it taught about the brain in scientific terms, a focus that they enjoyed and praised.
- They liked being treated and engaged in a way that made them feel intelligent.
- They said the scientific information was given in a way they could understand and use.
- They said the facilitator engaged and interacted with them around the material. This approach was different than other experiences and they found it helped them learn to apply and use the material: “I was learning how to think and be wise.”

Different Wise Ways Resonate with Participants.

Participants also named different Wise Ways and explained why they found them helpful. Some examples are:

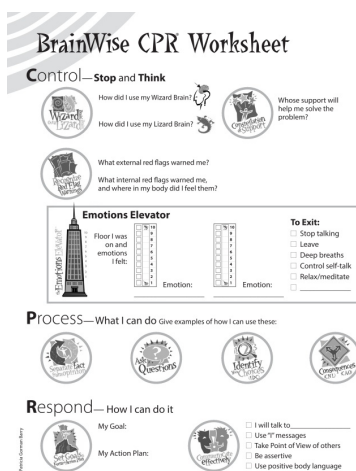
- Recognizing how the Wise Ways are connected with each other, such as pairing Wise Way #1, the Wizard Brain over the Lizard Brain, with Wise Way #10, Communicate Effectively and explaining how these two together help solve problems.
- Using the Emotions Elevator to help control emotions was helpful because, as one participant said, “You can’t do anything productive until you can control your emotions first and then you can think about how to solve your problem.”
- Thinking ahead was valuable when using Consider Consequences. One Veteran compared it to chess moves and how “when I think two and three moves ahead, it helps me think about how what I do will affect what someone else does.”



BEFORE and AFTER BrainWise

BrainWise Teaching Tools

The VA study will describe in detail the worksheets, activities, and teaching approaches the Veterans found most helpful. The following are some examples Dr. Greenberg highlighted. He said the brain lesson and worksheet piqued the Veterans’ interest to learn more about the brain and neuroscience. This led him to enhance the material by showing them a video on neuroplasticity and asking them questions about the need to practice their skills to retain them. “We hammered neuroplasticity, and they got it,” he said.



CPR “Brain” Worksheets (click to download)

He said the BrainWise CPR problem solving worksheet, distributed at the end of the course, was mentioned as a helpful resource. Participants liked how it condensed the 10 Wise Ways under **Control**, **Process**, and **Respond** -- it made them easier to remember and use. Dr. Greenberg was surprised and pleased because he felt that he had not spent much time going over the worksheet.

The Veterans said the Jeopardy game was fun and a great way to reinforce use of their thinking skills. Participants enjoyed playing the game and liked showing others what they knew.

Dr. Greenberg praised the Veterans throughout and called them "amazing individuals." He said their enthusiasm for BrainWise created a positive buzz throughout the Domiciliary,

and this led to “lots of interest” among staff and veterans.

At the end, he said a veteran asked him to “thank Dr. Barry for the effort she made to take a very a complicated subject and make it easy to understand.”

The BrainWise for Veterans project started in 2018 and was delayed because of COVID. Dr. Greenberg, his co-investigators, and other members of his research team graciously adapted to the changing issues. They aim to publish the study’s findings in the near future.

BrainWise team members provided the foundation that underlies the study’s success. I am closing the newsletter with links to articles that provide background information and identifies BrainWise trainers, instructors, and researchers.

Thank you for all you do.



Take care,
Dr. Pat

Background: Teaching BrainWise to Previously Homeless Veterans

The following newsletters provide information about BrainWise increasing executive functions(EF) in homeless men, how the research attracted Dr.Greenberg’s interest to teach the BrainWise program to improve EF in homeless- experienced veterans, and a Zoom meeting that discussed teaching BrainWise in a mental health facility. Participants included Dr. Greenberg (Los Angeles), Matt Sena, M.A. (Grand Junction, CO), Gary Brayton, PhD, Jocelyn Mc Quay, MSc. Psych, and Melissa Roels, B.A. (Canada), Marilyn Welsh, Ph.D.,(Greeley, CO) and me (Denver.) Additionally, Matt Sena trained Dr. Greenberg in delivering the BrainWise curriculum.

Please click on the newsletters below to be linked to the issue.



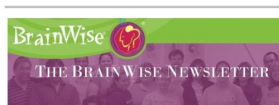
Research on BrainWise Taught to Homeless Men: Improvements in Executive Functions and Coping Self-Efficacy

Marilyn Welsh, PhD, is a professor of psychological sciences at the University of Northern Colorado. An expert in executive functions and a member of the BrainWise Research Team, Marilyn received word that SACF Open will publish our research on teaching BrainWise to homeless men. These findings provide additional evidence that the BrainWise program’s 10 Wise Ways improve decision making and problem solving.

The research was conducted with homeless men living in Transitional Housing Facilities managed by a longtime private social service organization. The paper contains considerable detail, but the following is a snapshot of the study:

Study Design
A pretest-post-test control group design compared 210 men in a treatment group with 61 men who were in a control group. Both groups received the same interventions, but the treatment group also was taught BrainWise.

Measurement Instruments.
1. **BRIEF-Adult:** The Behavior Research Inventory of Executive Functions (BRIEF) is a standardized rating scale containing 75 items. It measures inhibition, emotional control, self-monitoring,

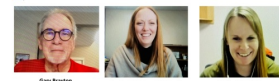


CREATING A BRAINWISE CULTURE THAT PREPARES PREVIOUSLY HOMELESS VETERANS FOR SUCCESS

The following story about BrainWise instructors sharing information is uplifting and gives tips and strategies that can be used not only by health professionals, but by those who teach BrainWise in schools, social service agencies, the workplace, and at home.

In 2018, BrainWise trainer Gary Brayton, PhD, gave a copy of How To Be Grateful to a colleague, Melissa Roels, Program Coordinator at Hull Services. This agency is in Calgary, Canada and serves children, youth, and families with complex mental health needs. After Melissa and Assistant Program Director Jocelyn McQuay recognized that BrainWise filled a gap in their services, they started teaching the 10 Wise Ways in their group care and community-based treatment programs.

The program thrived and five years later, they shared their success in a BrainWise newsletter. They discussed how BrainWise helped their clients and emphasized they had fun teaching the skills. They chose three words to describe the program’s impact: “powerful,” “snapping,” and “life changing.” (See BrainWise at Hull Services [2023].)



Around the same time and a thousand miles away in Denver, Marilyn Welsh, Ph.D., a national expert on executive functions and a professor of psychology at the University of Northern Colorado, published the results of her study on BrainWise taught to homeless men living in a residential treatment program (link research paper published on BrainWise and homeless men).
Jared Greenberg, M.D., a University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) faculty member and



BrainWise and Homeless Veterans

In 2018, Sage Open published research on BrainWise which had been taught to homeless men living in a transitional housing facility provided by an urban nonprofit organization. Marilyn Welsh, Ph.D. and her research team found that men who received BrainWise training, compared with a control group, had significant improvements on all measures on the Behavior Research Inventory of Executive Functions (BRIEF) and the Coping Self-Efficacy Scale (CSE).

Dr. Jared Greenberg, a psychiatrist who works with homeless Veterans at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System (GLA), read the article and contacted the BrainWise team about writing a grant to conduct a pilot program that would teach BrainWise techniques to homeless Veterans.

Although considerable progress has been made to end Veterans homelessness, more than 40,000 Veterans remain unsheltered. VA GLA cares for the largest population of homeless Veterans nationwide; LA County alone has 4,476 homeless Veterans, of whom 70% are still without shelter. This pattern is repeated nationwide.

Dr. Greenberg and his team conducted an extensive review of the literature on the complexity of the problem, including research that found deficits in executive functions (EF) appear to have both direct and indirect effects on housing stability. He gives the example of how poor planning (failure to pay the rent) and poor inhibitory control can lead to risk behaviors that contribute to housing loss and instability. Additionally, deficits in EF are associated with alcohol

