



Issue 93

BrainWise Helps Us Change Lives

My caseload as a public health nurse included victims of domestic violence, child abuse, families of individuals who died by suicide, and people with various treated and untreated mental health disorders. Home visits involved meeting with patients, parents, family members, caretakers, and contacting health professionals and ancillary support sources to help individuals and families get care.

I found that even clients who wanted to improve their health and well-being did not follow up on recommendations or use available support and services. Providing information alone was not working -- they continued making impulsive, unhealthy choices and passed the same behaviors to the next generation. Their behaviors were perplexing because they wanted to improve their lives and those of their children.

Research on brain development helped explain why. Scientists found that thinking is a learned behavior. We are born with survival instincts based on fear, and our brains are hard-wired to trigger behaviors that help us react to danger, like pulling a finger from a hot pot or spitting out spoiled food. However, these instincts harm us when we hit "send" on an angry email or blow up when something goes wrong. We now know that individuals who control harmful reactions have learned decision-making skills that help them stop and think before they react.



Parents Reinforce BrainWise by Asking their Children to Analyze the Behaviors of Characters in Stories

The research is complicated, but this simple explanation helps non-scientists understand how the brain and behaviors are related. The reptilian or Lizard Brain in the back of the head contains our survival instincts. Reacting without

thinking happens when there are no connections to the thinking or Wizard Brain behind the forehead. We are not born with these connections, they are learned.

BrainWise teaches skills, called the 10 Wise Ways, that build these connections. Instead of reacting to the Lizard Brain's survival instinct, participants gain skills that divert alarm signals or red flag warnings to their Wizard Brain. Even young children understand how learning thinking skills helps them prevent and manage problems. The following stories, shared by K-12 educators, health professionals, parents, police officers, and mentors, describe BrainWise outcomes.

Scientific Research. Two giants in public health policies and research, Dr. Robert Putnam and Dr. Thomas Insel, have reflected on their long careers and both observed that mental health outcomes have worsened, not improved over time. (See [Newsletter #90 2024 Reflections on Research and the Impact of BrainWise](#)). This disheartening observation belies the impact groundbreaking research conducted on their watch has had on programs like BrainWise.

BrainWise exists because of research conducted during their tenures and has been taught to thousands by education and health instructors as well as parents, peers, mentors, and advocates. BrainWise Program graduates show improved behaviors and significant increases in executive function skills and use the Wise Ways to stop and think to analyze situations and make better choices ([BW research](#))

The following stories indicate the prevention and intervention success of BrainWise.

BrainWise Taught by Youth and Adult Mentors. It is a joy to watch BrainWise teen mentors teach and reinforce the 10 Wise Ways with children and pre-teens. The older students bask in their unexpected Rock Star status and both groups share a cascade of positive feelings, reactions, and outcomes. (See [2022 -Issue 72: CEC students teaching](#); [2021- Issue 69: CEC students teaching BW](#); [Issue 62 Urban Teens](#); [2018 March Cascading Teaching Method](#)).

Teen Mentors Teaching BrainWise to Elementary Students



Adult mentors also have successful records teaching BrainWise to children and youth, primarily in afterschool programs. The National Police Activities League (NPAL) teaches BrainWise in large and small chapters throughout the nation (See [2024 Houston PAL](#) and [2022 Las Vegas PAL](#)). YWCA clubs, Girl Scouts, schools, churches, and a range of community groups with mentor programs use the curriculum in creative ways, and mentors say they learn thinking skills along with their mentees. (See [2019 BrainWise and Girls Power](#); [2020 Y.O.U. Mentors](#)).



Las Vegas PAL



YWCA -New Bedford, MA



Y.O.U. Mentors
Cleveland

BrainWise Longevity. BrainWise instructors share stories that praise the program's successful outcomes as the reason they have taught it for **ten or more** years. Program instructors include teachers, counselors, psychologists, health providers, teen mentors, adult mentors who teach in the U.S., Canada, China, and on reservations. The following stories highlight some of these cherished teachers:

Alaska Natives. Matt Sena, a 25-year master BrainWise Instructor and Board Member, introduced BrainWise to Chugachmiut, the organization that represents seven tribal villages on the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska. Matt worked with village leaders to provide counseling services to youth and families. He trained educators and counselors in BrainWise for fifteen years, work that was heralded by Indian Health Services when it recognized BrainWise as a program that benefitted Alaska Native and Native Americans (See [BrainWise in Alaska the Melanee Stevens story](#) and [Matt Sena trains KANA Native Leaders](#)).



Matt Sena – 25-year
Instructor

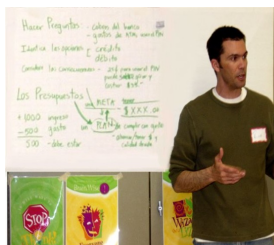


Matt and Kodiak Native Association
BrainWise Instructors

Rotarians Teach BrainWise.

For twenty years, Rotarians with Denver Mile High Rotary and other Rotary clubs have collaborated with schools, youth organizations, and communities on projects that teach BrainWise to children, teens, educators, and parents. (See 2023 [BW and Rotary](#)) The article shares the wide range of projects connecting Rotarians throughout the world with BrainWise, including a health fair in China, teaching BrainWise in Rotary Youth Leadership camps, and young Rotarians--high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors--teaching and reinforcing the Wise Ways with elementary school students. Additionally, Rotarians have taught classes that integrated the 10 Wise Ways into financial skills for parents.

Pictures of Rotarian-led BrainWise Classes



More longevity stories include:

- The celebration of a combined eighty years of teaching BrainWise by four education partners ([2023 Issue #82: 4 Instructors X 20 Years 2023](#))
- Xiaoliang Li, MD, translated BrainWise to Mandarin and she and her team taught it for twenty years to girls and young women targeted by sex traffickers, in addition to at-risk male and female youth. (See [2017 Newsletter on Xiaoliang](#))
- School psychologist Karyn Singley Blair has been teaching BrainWise to special needs high school students for 25 years and has trained her student interns to teach BrainWise. (See [Teaching BrainWise to a Broad Spectrum of Teenagers](#) and [Brain Zone for ACHS Exceptional Teens.](#))



**80Years of Teaching
BrainWise (100 Years if Dr.
Pat is included)**



**Dr. Li and her team in
Kunming**



**25-Years – Karyn
Singley Blair**

Below are sites with stories about the long-term use of BrainWise by social workers and mental health specialists in schools, treatment centers, government social service agencies, and private counseling practices in the U.S. and Canada.

- School District Mental Health Prevention Specialists ([2018 issue July](#))
- Inpatient Child and Adolescent Treatment Facility ([2020 Hull Services Issue #56](#))
- School Interventionist helps expelled students return ([2019 Issue #35](#))
- Social Workers help Parents Whose Children have been Relinquished ([2023 Issue #80](#))
- BrainWise Collaborates with Rotarians to Serve Children and Youth ([2022 Issue #81](#))
- Review of 2023 BrainWise Programs ([2023 Issue #85:](#))
- Gary Brayton, PhD.: BrainWise is the Foundation for My Work ([2024 Issue #88](#))

Technical advances offer opportunities for us to help non-scientists regardless of age, ability, education, sex, and culture to learn about their brains and how they help them stop and think. As AI and future devices make more information available, BrainWise provides a guide that helps us help others make good decisions.

Thank you for your commitment to helping change lives.



**Take care,
Dr. Pat**

On a Lighter Note

People of all ages and abilities are interested in learning about the brain, but scientific research is not easily shared outside academia. I developed BrainWise to bridge this gap and help them make choices that benefit their health and well-being. The preceding stories show that the approach has worked for many.

Access to information once reserved for scientists now is available for everyone. BrainWise instructors are finding videos on the brain discoveries at sites connected with well-known and trusted science resources such as universities (Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Stanford), health care organizations (Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic), and government health agencies (National Institutes of Health). Here are two examples:



How a synapse works (Harvard 5-minute video)



How neurons form brain connections

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