



HEADWAY
OF WESTERN NEW YORK, INC.

NEWSLETTER



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HEADWAYOFWNY.ORG

FROM A BRAIN INJURY SURVIVOR...

"I personally do not see any evidence that your brain ever stops changing after a brain injury and I believe with the right focus and activity, a healthy brain can continue to be reshaped, allowing for it to grow in its capabilities."
- Matthew Faulkner

"My friend had mistaken the turn signal of an oncoming pick-up truck and then proceeded to turn left. Her compact sedan was t-boned by the truck directly where I was sitting in the backseat. My body was thrown from side to side, causing my head to collide with both the window and the head of a fellow passenger. The collision resulted in a severe TBI and left me in a deep coma for 2 months.

[Read Matthew's full story on pages 10-14](#)



Matthew Faulkner
Cheektowaga, New York

Save the Date!

FOR HEADWAY'S LAWN FETE ON THE RIVER FUNDRAISER

October 7, 2026

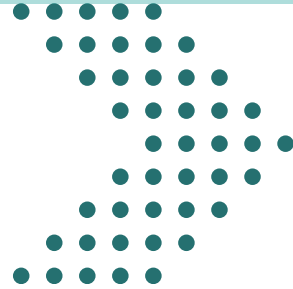
6 - 9PM

Tewksbury Lodge
Buffalo, NY



STAY TUNED FOR TICKET SALES & SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES!

A WORD FROM OUR **DIRECTOR, RON FERNANDEZ**



The warmer weather and the anticipation of summer is lifting the mood of Western New Yorkers. Increased opportunities for outdoor activity and exercise are exciting, but it is important not to forget to wear helmets when bike riding; hydrating; and the effects of medication when the sun and heat increase.

Headway will be having a larger celebration and fundraiser this fall and it will be our first one since the Covid pandemic. This will be on Wednesday October 7th at Tewksbury Lodge in Buffalo, which is a new venue for Headway and offers both outdoor and indoor space for the many planned activities occurring during the event.

Money raised for Headway goes towards all the services we provide, that are not part of the two waiver programs we administer for the New York State Department of Health. Headway offers currently, with no fees, an online support group that meets on the first and third Wednesday of the month.



**Director of Headway of
WNY, Ron Fernandez**

We provide through email or on the phone, navigation services for individuals and/or their families who are looking for help beyond the initial medical care they may have received for Brain Injury or other medical issues that can cause problems with cognition and judgement. In these calls, we use our experience of over 40 years in this field to help families who often are given very limited information as to what to expect or do after injury. We maintain a directory of related services in WNY and identify new services that might be helpful that are now in our area. We present at educational forums regarding brain injury. We provide information on not only our web page, but also Facebook, Instagram and this newsletter. Currently we are the only WNY not for profit agency with this mission. At our roots, we are a community agency that welcomes volunteers and community input to fulfill our mission.

Headway needs to be ready for whom we serve. We help those who never thought that life and circumstances would suddenly thrust them or their loved ones into a situation that was never anticipated. To continue this mission, we need your support.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS!



Headway extends our heartfelt condolences and sincere appreciation to those who have supported our agency through recent donations in memory of Jeffrey Hulme.

Lawrence Bartkowiak
Kim & Kathleen Humphrey
Doug & Valerie Hulme

Thank you to our Friends of Headway for being donors and helping make a difference in the lives of those we serve.

Kevin & Joyce Marracino
Suzanne Pilon

Follow us on social media!

www.headwayofwny.org



[@headwayofwny](https://www.instagram.com/headwayofwny)



[@headwayofwny](https://www.facebook.com/headwayofwny)

STAYING FIT FOR THE GARDEN

Written by Headway's NHTD Lead Regional Resource Development Specialist, *Shawniece Baillie*



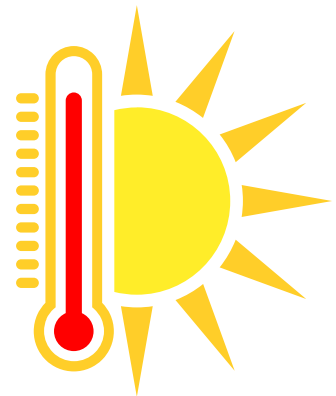
As the sun shines brighter and the days stretch longer as we enter the summer season, many of us are already enjoying the outdoors and what they have to offer. For those of us who enjoy getting our hands dirty in our gardens and yards, it's important to stay safe and strong so that we can continue to do what we love and bring beauty to our homes and community, for years to come. I've put together some basic strategies to not only stay fit for the garden, but to also stay safe while enjoying your favorite outdoor activities and hobbies.



Shawniece Baillie, Headway's NHTD Lead Regional Resource Development Specialist

PLAN FOR THE HEAT!

This can mean doing your favorite outdoor activities earlier in the morning or later in the day when the sun is not at its peak or ensuring that you are wearing proper sun protection if outdoors during the sun's peak hours. There are sun hats and clothing with UPF protection that can keep you cooler and block the sun's harmful rays from your skin. If you are on any medications that can negatively affect how you feel if exposed to too much sun, be sure to limit your sun exposure and talk to your doctor about how to ensure you stay safe outdoors.



STAY HYDRATED!

It's important to stay hydrated, so be sure to bring a cool and refreshing hydration source with you before you head outside to make sure you can do so. Dehydration can happen easily when it is hot outside, but it is avoidable with some conscious planning and sips of fluid while you work or play.



STAYING FIT FOR THE GARDEN

An article from Headway's NHTD Lead Regional Resource Development Specialist, Shawniece Baillie



MAKE YOUR GARDEN WORK FOR YOU!

Gardening can be hard work that requires you to get up and down to weed and take care of your plants. Don't be afraid to find adaptive equipment that makes it easier for you to get up and down, like benches or padding for your knees. There are lots of adaptive equipment that are designed to assist in standing from a kneeled position. You can even use sitting stools to avoid getting fully on the ground, if necessary. If getting up and down is no longer a possibility for you but you still want to enjoy gardening, try lifted beds for your flowers or vegetables which allow you to manage your garden from a standing position.



DON'T GO OUT ALONE!

It's important to be able to call for assistance if ever you experience an emergency while gardening or working in your yard. Keep a phone or Emergency Response Unit on you whenever you are working outside your home so you can call for help if you ever require it.



STAY ACTIVE TO STAY IN THE GARDEN!

There is a lot of time between one garden season and the next. It is easy to lose mobility, strength and overall physical ability if you don't actively maintain your fitness during the months between each gardening season. Try to find a workout routine that works for you that includes some moderate cardio and strength training throughout your week and try to stay consistent with your workouts and movements so that your body is able to get back into the garden, when the time comes. Remember, if you don't move it, you lose it. Stay active and fit so that you can stay in your garden for years to come!



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF EXERCISE AND HOW DOES IT IMPACT AGING?



Exercise strengthens immunity.
Exercise slows 'biological clock'.
Exercise keeps brains young.

7 WAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR WORKOUTS AS YOU'RE AGING

1) **Warm Up:** The warm-up prepares your body for more strenuous work and reduces the risk of injury. As the years go by, all the physiological systems need more time to adapt to the demands of exercise. Start slowly and increase the intensity gradually. Performing any series of rhythmic movements for 5 minutes or so will increase blood flow to your muscles, increase your core-body temperature and lubricate the joints.

2) **Protect the joints:** Anyone who has experienced a neck, shoulder, low back, hip or knee injury knows how painful it can be and how long it may take to recover. Joint injuries pull you off track while you address the individual problem with physical therapy before you can return to a full-body conditioning program.

To protect your joints, learn proper body alignment, perform exercises in good form, progress gradually and do not overload excessively. For instance, in strength training, the last few repetitions of an exercise set should be somewhat challenging while maintaining correct form.



7 WAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR WORKOUTS AS YOU'RE AGING (CONTUNUED)



3) **Stretch:** Just a few minutes of daily stretching can help maintain flexibility, keep the muscles supple and counteract the wear and tear of everyday life, allowing you to maintain a youthful appearance and active lifestyle. By enhancing your mobility, stretching increases your efficiency in all activities so that they require less effort and leave you feeling less tired.

The constant downward pull of gravity and gradual dehydration of the body's tissues cause us literally to shrink over time. Muscles, tendons and ligaments naturally tighten with age, but stretching can help by lengthening them. To avoid tendon ruptures, muscle tears and painful joints from exercise, use gentle, sustained stretches during and after your workout.

4) **Switch to low-impact cardio exercise and add intervals of higher intensity:** Low impact activity is defined as keeping one foot on the ground during the exercise (walking); whereas in high impact exercise both feet are off the ground (running). You can achieve the same physical fitness level without injury by using low impact activities and adding intervals of faster pace.



If you are doing the same kind of steady pace cardio routine over and over, say walking for 30 minutes most days of the week, your body will stop improving because it has adapted to that level of exercise. It's the law of diminishing returns: as your body adjusts to the exercise and adapts to the stimulus, it eventually stops changing.

To give it a boost, using any low-impact cardio exercise – walking, biking, the elliptical machine – break your 30-minute workout into five sequences, three minutes of moderate pace, followed by 3 minutes of higher intensity. Repeat this sequence five times, and then allow a few minutes for your cool-down.

7 WAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR WORKOUTS AS YOU'RE AGING (CONTUNUED)

5) **Build muscle:** At around age 45-50, you start to lose about 1.5% of strength each year, or about 10% per decade. At 65 or 70 the loss speeds up to 3% per year or 30% per decade. The loss of muscle fibers causes you to slow down, lose strength and vigor. Strength training makes you stronger, more stable, more active and energetic. Weight training creates stability in the large muscles of the legs, helps balance and stability. It restores fast twitch fibers and mitochondria, the power engines of the cells, to stimulate muscle growth and repair. It helps maintain healthy joints and prevent falls and fractures.

6) **Cross-train:** Challenge yourself with a variety of activities to keep your workouts fresh and stimulate all systems of your body. Take a dance class or go for a hike. Plan an active vacation and train for it. You don't have to exercise at set times. Think of ways you can fit it into your routine throughout the day. Vigorous housework, gardening, playing with your grandkids can all add up to more activity. Find opportunities to bend and lift, twist and turn, and reach overhead.

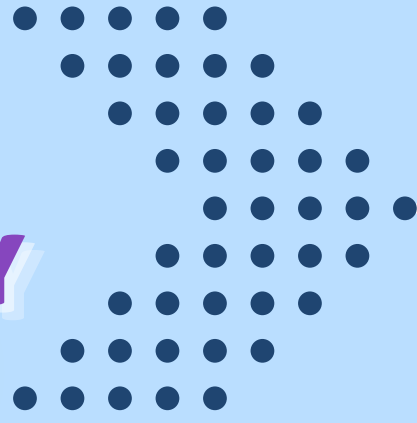
7) **Add balance exercises:** After the mid-70s, loss of balance begins to affect our quality of life. In the U.S., falls are the leading cause of injury for people over age 65. Studies show that much of the sense of balance can be preserved and even restored through exercises that require no special equipment. Add yoga, tai chi or balance training into the mix. Try standing on one leg while brushing your teeth!

Modern aging is optional. It's never too late to begin exercising, and the earlier you start, the longer you'll benefit. Regular participation in cardio, strength training, stretching and balance exercises can delay and may even prevent a loss of physical abilities well into your 90s. Furthermore, regular physical activity has been shown to be the most effective approach to combating cognitive decline.



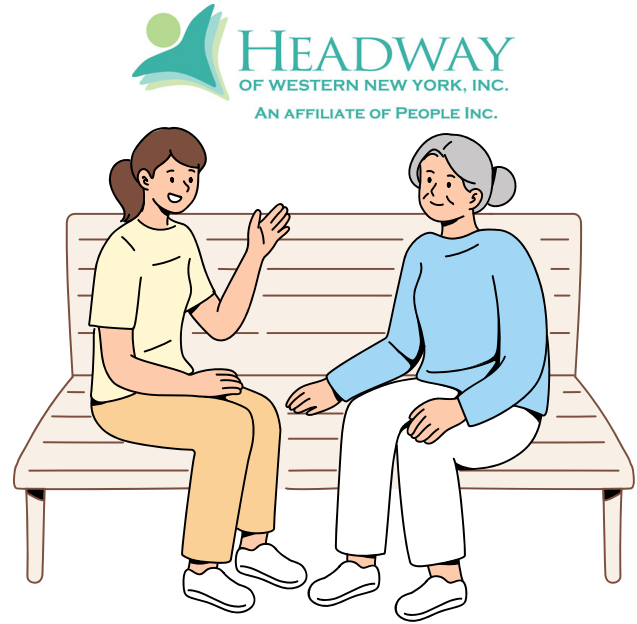
VIP TREATMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS AGING WITH A BRAIN INJURY

VALIDATE, INFORM, PROVIDE



As individuals with a brain injury become older, we may see a decrease in their orientation to the present time and place, ongoing changes to their working memory, and difficulty comprehending information, particularly if it involves changes to their routine.

In an effort to combat these changes, well-meaning family or caregivers attempt to correct a person’s error with regard to names, dates, or details of events. However, we know that this often increases anxiety and frustration, making people less likely to engage in future conversations.



Validation is the alternative to correction that allows folks to feel heard, understood, and valued as a communication partner. The adage that “knowledge is power” becomes increasingly important as individuals age and their abilities change. In order to ensure a person feels competent despite changes in cognition, family and caregivers should aim to share **information** in a neutral way rather than pressing the person for details. If the individual makes an error but maintains active engagement in the conversation, keep it going.

As an individual’s abilities change, their roles are likely to shift as well. For example, those who found purpose in their role as providers may find themselves requiring assistance, and that adjustment can be incredibly difficult. As the professionals who see them through various stages of change, it is our responsibility to **provide** opportunities for connection (e.g., support groups) and resources for assistance (e.g., financial assistance, housing modifications). When we cannot directly provide these services, we can provide access to information; access is an opportunity.



JUNE



PTSD AWARENESS MONTH



PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder) is a mental health problem that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event, like combat, a natural disaster, a car accident, or sexual assault. Anyone can develop PTSD at any age. There are factors that can increase the chance someone will develop PTSD, and these are often not under that person's control.

[Understanding PTSD and PTSD Treatment \(Click for PDF Booklet\)](#)



JUNETEENTH: JUNE 19TH

[Buffalo Juneteenth Festival 2026](#)

Honoring the Past, Serving the Present, Inspiring the Future!

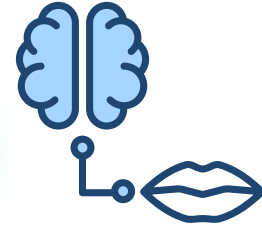
“Juneteenth of Buffalo is approaching a major milestone, a half century of celebrating freedom, resilience, and the rich cultural heritage of Buffalo’s Black community.”

As we approach this historic weekend, we will not forget the deep roots in Buffalo—born from the efforts of dedicated community leaders, artists, and activists who saw the importance of commemorating Juneteenth not just as a moment in history but as a living, evolving testament to Black excellence and unity.”



JUNE

NATIONAL APHASIA AWARENESS MONTH



Aphasia (pronounced Uh-FAY-zhuh) is a communication disorder caused by a stroke, brain injury, or, more rarely, a condition called Primary Progressive Aphasia (PPA). It affects a person's ability to use language. Therefore, a person may have challenges talking, understanding others, reading, writing, and using numbers. Aphasia does not impact intelligence or memory, but is highly dependent on the cause, location, and extent of damage. It is a frustrating impairment as people with aphasia still know what they want to say and can make their own decisions. Aphasia can range from mild to severe and may impact one or several aspects of communication

TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH A PERSON WHO HAS APHASIA

- Be patient and allow time for a response.
- Let the speaker know when you have difficulty understanding them.
- Use augmentative and alternative communication, such as gestures to indicate "yes" or "no" answers, eye gaze boards, or electronic devices (including those that project an artificial voice).
- Make sure you're speaking *with* and not *for* the person.
- Keep conversations simple and direct but at the correct age level.

[Understanding Acquired Aphasia \(Click here\)](#)



PRIDE MONTH



June is Pride Month, a time to recognize and celebrate the contributions, resilience, and diversity of the LGBTQ+ community.

FROM A BRAIN INJURY SURVIVOR...

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- Matthew Faulkner

Matthew's Story

"My friend had mistaken the turn signal of an oncoming pick-up truck and then proceeded to turn left. Her compact sedan was t-boned by the truck directly where I was sitting in the backseat. My body was thrown from side to side, causing my head to collide with both the window and the head of a fellow passenger. The collision resulted in a severe TBI and left me in a deep coma for 2 months.



Matthew Faulkner of
Cheektowaga, New York

FROM A BRAIN INJURY SURVIVOR (CONTINUED)

Luckily, I had a network of resources around me to support my recovery, a great clinical team --and the love and support of my family and friends. But still, most importantly, I had to choose to recover first.

The recovery process began well before I was fully conscious of what was happening. Things started out very slowly so as to ease me out of the acute stage of care when I was unable to move, eat, or breathe on my own. At the beginning, my memories of this were vague and dream-like so I relied on the help of others to reconstruct them. Slowly, I had to relearn how to take care of myself again - speak, feed myself, stand up, walk - all of the things I had done without thinking just a few short months ago.

After 103 days in the hospital, roughly two months of which I was unconscious and had no self-care independence, I walked out of the hospital without the assistance of any medical device. My doctor pushed me in a wheelchair to the front door and--to honor my special request--let me walk out of there, on my own two feet.



FROM A BRAIN INJURY SURVIVOR (CONTINUED)

I went to a neuropsychologist before the end of my first semester at ECC to discuss my prognosis, evaluate my brain function, and determine any academic support that I would require. The neuropsychologist reviewed my background before conducting any testing and advised me again on the poor prognosis. He told me that it would be unlikely I would be able to resume full-time school, hold more than a part-time job, or live independently due to the extent of my brain damage.

After this, the doctor left the room and a psychometric technician performed a range of tests. My family received the results in the mail with an overly frank cover letter that seemed to be written prior to reviewing the results of the tests. The results were written in a code which I wouldn't be able to decipher without a second consultation to review them. The cover letter ended with a statement which I will never forget because it motivated me to ***continue to prove everyone wrong:***

"Patient is a well-intentioned, determined young man who may not respond adaptively to negative feedback about his neuropsychological status."

Before the end of my second semester at ECC, I consulted a different neuropsychologist to go over my test results. She advised me that I would not require any academic accommodations to begin college full-time and study Finance like I had planned.

The next step before returning to school was ensuring that I could drive a car again. I got my license about three years earlier at age sixteen but my parents wanted me to complete a Driver Evaluation with an Occupational Therapist at the hospital. This was to evaluate my vision and reaction time to see if I could still safely operate a vehicle. I passed the test and started driving again, in a brand-new car, before finishing the spring semester at ECC.

FROM A BRAIN INJURY SURVIVOR (CONTINUED)

Fast forward a bit, and I graduated from Canisius University with a bachelor's degree cum laude in economics and finance in 2013, less than four years after walking out of the hospital.

Today, after years of recovery, I will stress that one of the primary reasons I recovered so well was because of the support of my family, friends, and community. My life today is far better than I could have ever imagined—with or without suffering from a TBI.

I still have some difficulty with speaking, particularly in the area of moderating the rate, prosody (such as changes in pitch, loudness, rhythm, and intonation), and intelligibility of my speech. I also have difficulties with certain motor coordination. These are particularly difficult when I have to speak and move at the same time, say, walking and talking.

Despite these small deficits, I choose to get out of bed each day with a smile on my face and a great appreciation for the opportunities I have taken to rebuild my life after being on life support and unable to move.



If you or someone you know has a neurocognitive disorder & would like to share your story, please email us at support@headwayofwny.org

FROM A BRAIN INJURY SURVIVOR (CONTINUED)

I live relatively independently in a home I own with my loving husband, Kyle, who shares my affinity for laughing and enjoying new, but also quieter, non-athletic experiences. We are busy with a 3-year-old son via gestational surrogacy. I am also fortunate to work full time from home in Regulatory Compliance for Voltus, a distributed energy technology platform.

Outside of my full-time job and my personal life, I aim to use my experience in therapy to better the current paradigm of neuro-recovery and rehabilitation by speaking to groups of students and clinicians.





BRAIN INJURY PEER SUPPORT GROUP (VIRTUAL)

**First & Third Wednesday of the
month from 2 to 3pm**

Free to the public!

Apply to join by emailing support@headwayofwny.org
with your name and phone number or call 716-408-3110.

Headway offers a Brain Injury Peer Support Group through our telehealth online platform. The support group is a space for individuals navigating the challenges of brain injury to connect, share experiences, and find strength in community. Through shared stories, members can gain valuable insights, reassurance, and encouragement to persevere through the ups and downs of their recovery process. Within this safe environment, participants find community in knowing they are not alone in their journey.

**Support Headway.
Make a donation today.**

Donations that are \$50 or
more receive a Headway mug!

[Click here to make online donation](#)

**Or mail a check to Headway of WNY at
2495 Main Street, Buffalo, NY, Suite 446**



HELP MAKE OUR FUNDRAISER A SUCCESS!

Lawn Fete on the River October 7th, 2026 Tewksbury Lodge, Buffalo, NY

As we look forward to our fundraiser, we're seeking donations for our basket raffle and silent auction. Your generosity helps make this event a success and supports our mission.

Basket Raffle Donations

We are accepting new, unused items valued at up to \$100 to create themed raffle baskets. Popular items include gift cards, specialty foods, home decor, family activities, self-care products, and seasonal gifts.



Silent Auction Donations

We are also seeking new items, experiences, services, of gift certificates valued at \$200 or more for our silent auction.



If you would like to donate a basket, please email
Support@headwayofwny.org



Thank you for helping create a memorable event while supporting the important work of our agency!