

James Brooks – Rehabilitation Success

When 28-year-old James Brooks had a seizure while stopped at a traffic light in southern Florida, his life changed forever. Sustaining a traumatic brain injury (TBI), coupled with a pre-existing medical condition, caused significant cognitive and emotional problems. After several weeks of hospitalization, he was stable enough to move and be closer to his mother. James arrived at a Rainbow residential home in September 2007. He was still suffering acute effects of the TBI and was unaware of what was happening to him. His diagnosis was unclear. Physically he had difficulty standing and had little control over his quick mood changes. Memory problems were subtle and disconcerting. "I don't remember a lot because I was so messed up," James recalled. "I was just kind of loopy."

James struggled to cope with his condition, facing emotional and physiological challenges. "When I first started having medical problems, I had a walking problem with my left leg," James explained. "I do still have a slight limp. Also, my writing was kind of messed up. I've had to overcome a lot of obstacles."

To overcome these challenges, James participated in active transitional therapy at Rainbow's Ypsilanti Treatment Center and the Residential Adult Levels Program. The Levels Program allows clients to graduate from structured, closely monitored residential environments, to more independent apartment living. Clients progress to more independent living situations once they have mastered fundamental skill areas such as administering their own medications, cleaning shared living spaces and grocery shopping. They focus on a successful day-to-day rehabilitation schedule, aiming to increase behavior responsibility.

The neuro-rehabilitation team's ultimate goal is to have clients



graduate from living in a shared community group home to an apartment with minimal support and structure.

James moved from Level one to three in just one year. As a Level I participant, James lived in a town house with staff present around the clock. After he moved up two levels, interaction with staff was limited to signing in and out when accessing the community. Unfortunately, the recurrence of seizures and



Rainbow's Semi-Independent Adult Levels Program

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resultant behavioral regression caused James to stumble in his progress. “We had to suspend independent community access due to the severity of his seizures.” states Joseph Welch, James’ psychologist. “We have to make sure people are safe to be in the community for extended periods of time independently. He earned independence through hard work, only to lose it due to physical problems beyond his control. To his credit, he worked out the frustration constructively.”

James has always tried very hard to be successful. He takes his rehabilitation seriously and works hard. When things didn’t go well, he regressed and felt like a failure emotionally. However, James was able to get back on track by focusing on his rehabilitation.

In therapy, James worked on controlling his mood swings. He struggled with anger management, and periods of profound grief when there were any delays in his expectations. “He is very goal-oriented and when he gets his mind set on what he wants, hardly anything else matters,” Joe explained.

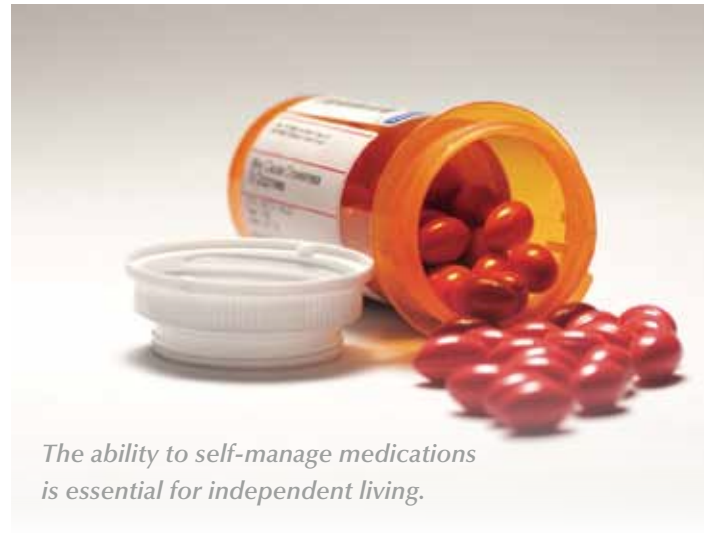
James responded well to newer medication treatment for his injury symptoms. He is now able to administer some medications himself and is moving forward in his treatment once again.

Another area James focused on in therapy was controlling panic. Joe and James went through sessions that focused on relaxation and controlled breathing. “He would have a very panicked response when he missed deadlines in his life. He became very stressed,” Joe said. “It’s very concrete for James — all or nothing. Over time, however, he learned to calm down.”

James’ panic over missed deadlines was reflected in his struggles in speech therapy as well. Angie McCalla, his speech language pathologist, said James struggled the most with flexibility of thought. “Change really throws him; transitions are very difficult for James, even positive change,” she explained. “For instance, past residential changes were very anxiety-provoking. It took hours of working through the change and discussion for him to be OK with it. Structure really provides comfort for James.”

To overcome these challenges, the therapy team developed routines and focused on maintaining a schedule. They planned tasks and activities well in advance and worked to prepare for anticipated changes. An interdisciplinary team approach is essential for successfully implementing behavioral change and progress.

James had always demonstrated a high level of motivation for improving his situation, which allowed him to progress quickly. With assistance, he generated many ideas to enhance



“The transition from a structured to a more independent environment brings challenges — and James has adjusted extremely well. I’m very impressed. In many cases, new liberties can be a stumbling block, but he has approached his liberties with a very responsible mentality. James has a good sense of humor and he keeps an open line of communication. He has a very cordial relationship with both the staff as well as his fellow house mates.”

*Mark Williams,
Rainbow Residential Program Manager*

his life. James benefited from positive feedback and respected the opinions of others. These skills assisted him in persevering through the initial phases of therapy. He stayed on task and improved his impulsive behavior, ability to interpret other’s actions, flexibility and recall.

Today, James is still focused on integrating back into society. “Speech therapy has really been helping me with my cognitive thinking. I’ve been working with my pragmatics group on turn-taking and working with the other clients,” he said, “I’m just trying to integrate back into society.”

Angie agreed. “He is on the right path; hopefully the next task is to get him to a town house or apartment. We encourage James and work with him to look at things from a different perspective

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and gain more community interaction.”

James is able to interact with peers and the community on a regular basis through group speech therapy sessions that focused on social skills, turn taking and reading body language. Those sessions have improved his thought, organization and expression. He also excels at motivation and planning. James uses a daily planner and strategies such as written cues and word association to tie concepts together.

James currently works at Rainbow Industries Productions Company (RIPCo), a non-profit organization that aims to help individuals achieve vocational success through placement in a variety of work settings, such as a sheltered workshop. Behavioral control, anger management and appropriate social interaction are all essential for success at the workplace. At RIPCo, James is able to further improve his social skills, interpretations of peers’ behavior and interaction with the community to move closer to independence in life and work.

“James has shown great improvement working at RIPCo,” said vocational therapist Laurie Cooke. “Initially, he needed maximum assistance and reassurance with completing his work and remaining on task. He now shows more independence at work and is able to work on multi-stepped tasks such as assembling furniture. Soon, we will begin looking for a community job.”

James said the next step for him is to go to school. “I want to get my feet wet and go from there,” he explained. And when asked what he would say to other survivors? “Just don’t give up. Keep on keeping on and remain positive.” ❖

Written by Nicole Bonomini, RainbowVisions Staff Writer;
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