

Brain Injury: Thinking Outside the Box

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It all started with the brain...here at Hinds' Feet Farm our focus is the brain. Our program is based on healing and nurturing the brain. Not everyone in our community has suffered a brain injury – but those of us that have not suffered an injury have the passion and the drive to help others on that journey of recovery. We hold each other's hands and support each other through the trials, tribulations, and triumphs that are involved in that journey. Our central focus is the brain and through this one common thread we learn so much about each other and so much from each other.

In January of 2009 a community member's family came to us with the idea of participating in the StoryBox Project. Upon reading the information about this project we thought it would be a wonderful way to share our stories and to spread awareness of the phenomenon that is brain injury to a global audience. Through this StoryBox process we wanted people to understand who we are as a community and all of the nuances that encompass a brain injury. We signed on immediately, and soon found that the process began to take many twists and turns. We initially misunderstood the concept and thought it was a story BOOK project and so we began compiling things for a book. This got us thinking about how to tell our story...who are we? What makes us special? What do we have to teach the world? We did some phenomenal work and came up with some beautiful art to accompany this work. Pretty soon into the process we learned that the concept was to create a story BOX. This was going to be a challenge – but here at Hinds' Feet Farm we thrive on challenges. How do we take our creative energy and our message and put it into a BOX??? Well, we did what we do best here – we thought outside the box...a BRAIN!! Now, that was a wonderful idea but how would we put that into some tangible box? We took the idea to the community. How can we construct a brain? Initially everyone thought it was an outrageous idea to make a brain box! What did that even mean? How would we make it large enough to hold all of our information yet small enough to travel? There were SO many questions and, initially, very few answers. It required a concerted effort from staff, interns, and members to make it all come together. We decided that we could construct a foam object and then a wonderful student intern carved the block of foam into the structure of a brain. Now our idea had a shape – it was possible to make this happen. Once our idea had an actual shape we went into full creative mode – poetry, art, facts, photos...our main problem was trying to consolidate all of our efforts onto the one brain!!

The actual brain...once we had the brain carved we ran into another instance where we needed a great deal of brain-storming. How would we get our information and creativity into the model of a brain? We spent many brain-storming sessions trying to figure out what would be best. We had thoughts of painting all of the information onto the different lobes of the brain or maybe making the brain open like a box and put things inside the brain. We put all of our brains together and scanned the room to see what resources were available...we saw cups and paper and tape. The cups were made of a sturdy plastic that

we knew they would withstand travel and we realized we could tape all of the information onto the cups! It was decided that, just as the poetry we were using was free-flowing, it would be best if we taped the cups in a haphazard manner to mirror the haphazard nature of brain injury and the recovery process. We also had the idea to have pictures of each Hinds' Feet Farm community member interspersed throughout the poetry and factual information. The pictures needed to be sturdy yet also reflect our creativity, so we decided to refer to a previous project where we had melted colored cups and used them as sun catchers. We had the idea to have double-sided photos and have them in the melted cups – this was also a way to mirror the brain injury experience, as there are considered to be two selves after the injury – the pre-injury and post-injury person. We decided that we wanted to have all community members in the photos – members with a brain injury, student interns, and staff – because, although we have not all suffered an actual injury, we do all walk the recovery journey together. Additionally, we wanted to have an actual box component so that we could put all of the individual member stories inside and also collect any stories along the journey across the world. The community members that do have a brain injury spent a great deal of time writing down their personal stories to share, and are so excited to share their experiences on such a large scale. They really felt some ownership of this brain box and wanted the world to understand the many different sides of brain injury and the personal challenges that come with their injury. We also wanted to provide some factual information about brain injury and some information about Hinds' Feet Farm's unique, holistic approach to the brain injury recovery process.

That is our story and we are so pleased to be sharing the brain with Ohio State University and the world! We spend so much time here focusing on the journey through brain injury recovery and we feel so honored to be sharing our stories with the global community. Every brain injury is different and each person's recovery journey is equally as different. We wanted to share with the world not only the ideas of our community, but the broader ideas behind a holistic approach to healing in general. We focus on healing the mind, body, spirit, and soul – all through the focus on the brain. It was also important to us that we share with the world that a brain injury does not define who we are – it is merely a facet of the journey. Yes, it provides certain challenges and changes but it is not who our community is – it is merely one small thing that makes us special! We are not our brain injuries we are unique individuals that are all focusing on healing ourselves – all parts of ourselves.