Volunteer Spotlight: Susan Selman

Susan Selman is one of our locomotor operators in the Day Program/Outpatient Gym with years of experience, and her history with Shepherd Center spans decades. She was born in Atlanta as the youngest of three children to two proud Atlanta natives. Her grandfather opened a Pepsi plant, which her father took over when he was old enough. Her mother was a full-time mom who ingrained in her children the drive to help others, volunteering at their church and a multitude of Atlanta cultural institutions.

By the age of 10, Susan was immersed in gymnastics, a passion that she lived out well into her 20's. She helped start the Lovett School’s Gymnastics team, taught it in high school and college, and later became a private instructor and judge. She’s grateful for the opportunities through Lovett that promoted helping others, including tutoring students, food drives for the less fortunate in Atlanta, and visitation at homes for the elderly. Entwined in her childhood was having the Shepherd family as neighbors and family friends, so by the time she was in high school James Shepherd’s injury had occurred, Shepherd Center had been founded and she was volunteering with us at least once a week and loving it. This all played a role in deciding her college major would be in the health sciences.

While studying nursing at Vanderbilt University, Susan was active in a sorority and found time to be a Young Life leader and work summers on a hospital orthopedic unit. After graduation, she started her professional career working in orthopedics at Piedmont Healthcare for several years, then completed her master’s degree in orthopedic nursing. While Susan had years of working as a nurse that were very busy, and she couldn’t volunteer at Shepherd regularly, she states, “My heart still belonged there.” She stayed connected to the Center in other ways, and then in 2013, a more flexible work schedule allowed her to sign up as a regular volunteer here again, this time to help with locomotor training for patients. Susan controls the keyboard to operate a treadmill that therapists use for gait training for patients during rehabilitation.

Susan reflects, “I am so lucky to be able to work in the Locomotor department, where the hope is palpable, and inspiration is overflowing. There is a “can do” attitude... everyone from the patients all the way up to Mrs. Alana Shepherd. I always leave Shepherd with a smile on my face... a better person for witnessing the spirit of both the employees and patients.” Susan realizes her volunteer position also gives her a view of her role as a nurse that she would not otherwise have. The perspective she gains motivates her to be the best she can as a health care professional, hopefully reproducing what she sees at Shepherd.

Susan has never wavered in her connection to the mission of the Center that her family neighbors and friends founded over 40 years ago, engaging with us through multiple stages of life. Throughout her volunteer efforts, Susan has fed patients as a teenager, brought Lovett students to serve, joined fundraising efforts by the Junior Committee, and later Women Shaping Shepherd. She continues to assist during day therapy, witnessing patients striving towards walking again after their catastrophic injury. We are so grateful she continues to be devoted to Shepherd Center, contributing her time and care to benefit others. We hope she will always be with us!
Dear Auxiliary members,

We are in such uncertain times right now. Hopefully our new normal is not normal for too long. As much as I’d rather be living my normal life, dropping kids off at school, grocery shopping, going to Shepherd for any number of events or meetings, the best (and safest) place for all of us is at home. When talking with Alex Seblatnigg at Shepherd and our President Elect, Kyle Hinson, about canceling our upcoming Auxiliary events, we discussed if there were still ways to do things like mailings or Sunshine Committee projects. In the end, there was no way of knowing if materials would somehow be contaminated. We not only have to think of the health of our Shepherd Center patients, but the health of our Auxiliary members and their families.

Since we can’t be at Shepherd, school, work or running errands right now, I challenge you all to engage with your families more. That could be in your own home playing games, preparing meals together or going for walks, or maybe it is by connecting with them over FaceTime or a phone call. We all know how hard this is and how tragic it is, but let’s use this opportunity to slow down and concentrate on what is most important – taking care of ourselves and others. Please keep Shepherd’s patients, families, employees and volunteers in your thoughts and prayers during this crisis. Also, we need to remember all those in our community, our country and the world. We will get through this!

With a grateful heart,

Anne
Anne Worrell
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Renewals are due April 30!

**With Gratitude**

Thank you for your continued support of Shepherd Center, our patients and their families.

Because of you, we were able to provide $8,385 in much needed patient aid, making an indelible positive impact during a challenging time for so many.

Apothecary Items ~ Clothing/Shoes ~ Meal Tickets
Assistive Tools ~ Gas ~ Medicine ~ Special Occasion Meals
Cell Phone Mounts/Aids ~ Holiday Gifts
Volunteering to Support Caregivers
Written By Damjana Alverson

If you have ever volunteered for a cause you cared about, you know that giving your time and effort selflessly is rewarding, memorable and fulfilling. Ruth Batchelor can relate. After her daughter Jordyn sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI) in 2016, Ruth began volunteering as a family peer mentor at Shepherd Center. Family peer mentors are caregivers who have navigated a loved one’s brain injury and have valuable insight they want to share with families who are just starting their caregiving journey.

“Being a caregiver can be tricky, tiring and scary,” Ruth says. “The way I took control was by taking an active role in learning everything Shepherd Center had to offer while I was there for three and a half months with my daughter. Now, I find it rewarding to build trusting relationships with family members and loved ones who are going through a tough time. I want caregivers to know that I really want to help.”

Ruth volunteered at Shepherd Center twice a month supporting family members for several years and has since been hired to work part-time on Shepherd’s peer support team. She also sits on the peer advisory board of Shepherd Center’s Brain Injury Family Peer Support Program, an initiative that officially launched in 2018.

“We saw brain injury caregiver burnout happening and wanted to formalize a way to help families prepare for their new normal,” says Pete Anziano, peer support manager at Shepherd Center. “If we can intervene early on to help caregivers see that life can be good and fulfilling even though their loved one may have lasting side effects of their injuries, then we have succeeded.”

The Brain Injury Family Peer Support Program is run by Claire Holley, acquired brain injury peer support coordinator, and Mariellen Jacobs, peer liaison – two women who know what it’s like to be the family member of a brain injury survivor. At age 18, Claire’s daughter Amelia had a stroke after one of many brain surgeries. Since her stroke, Amelia has experienced improvements, returned to school and continues to work to get better each day. Mariellen’s son Clark was injured after he fell, sound asleep, from his loft bed which did not have a safety rail to the hard floor below, causing a brain injury and stroke.

“Being a caregiver for someone with a brain injury is difficult,” Mariellen relates. “You are constantly navigating between grief and gratitude. On the one hand, you are grateful that the person is still alive. On the other hand, you experience profound sadness like you’ve lost a piece of them.”

Mariellen and Claire work tirelessly to educate and support family members who have begun their caregiver journey and may be experiencing similar hardships. “We work with the rest of the rehabilitation team to augment the work they are doing,” explains Claire. “We are not there to make diagnoses or to give medical advice. We are there to relate to people through shared experiences and help them feel heard and supported.”

At any given time, the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Program serves approximately 60 patients on an inpatient basis and an additional 25 on an outpatient basis at Shepherd Pathways. “Our volunteers provide an invaluable service,” Mariellen says. “We are recruiting family peer mentors to help as many caregivers as possible. Ideally, we will build a volunteer pool with a diverse set of experiences so we can relate to patient families no matter what brought them to Shepherd Center.”

Volunteers must complete an onboarding process including face-to-face meetings and online training. Once this is complete, they are cleared to be matched with one of Shepherd’s families currently experiencing a similar injury and prognosis.

“Being a volunteer is so rewarding,” Ruth says. “There is an initial time investment to get started, but the satisfaction you get from someone trusting you and knowing you are there for them is well worth it.”

If you or someone you know would be interested in becoming a brain injury family peer mentor at Shepherd Center, contact Mariellen Jacobs at mariellen.jacobs@shepherd.org or 404-603-5012.
Spotlight on YOU!

The pictures above represent just a small part of our volunteer corps. We are so grateful for each of you - for your kindness, your dedication to Shepherd Center and our patients, and your continued support. Even though we’re not together during Volunteer Appreciation Week this year, you are all in our hearts. Thank you!