Many thousands of people with special needs have found in the Feldenkrais Method a path back to healthy functioning. In The Case of Nora, Moshe Feldenkrais presents a fascinating description of his thinking and work with Nora, a woman who had suffered a stroke.

The stories which follow in this issue illustrate the many ways that people with special needs benefit through this Method. As always, each story is tantalizing, for each person finds a new, more satisfying way to live.

## Moving in Spite of Post-polio Syndrome

Being a polio survivor and self-propelling a wheelchair for 40-plus years can leave one with lots of shoulder problems. Add to that a job in a library requiring lifting and carrying books and we get a recipe for over-worked and painful arms.

Carole contracted polio when she was six years old. The doctors diagnosed bulbar and spinal infantile paralysis. Her respiratory system returned with some weakness but she was paralyzed from the waist down. Her right arm was impaired so that while she could write and do delicate manipulation, she could not raise it above her chest. Thus she used her left arm for all the power movements of lifting, reaching and, of course, propelling her wheel chair. Through her adult life, Carole had thought that everything was fine. Then about four years ago her left shoulder and arm muscles became so painful she could not lift anything of weight. The doctor called it ‘post polio syndrome’.

“My doctor tried several methods to ease the pain… they all worked for a while but the pain returned and always worse.” During his research for geriatric patients the doctor found a reference to the Feldenkrais Method and suggested she try it.

Carole contacted Sharon S. de Moyano (<smoyano@sciti.com>). Sharon was very receptive to Carole's situation. In the first session, Sharon perceived that underlying the pain was a pattern of extreme overuse. Carole’s strong left arm, for years her resource for mobility, strength and support, was lacking functional support. Further, there might be new ways for the left arm to move — without pain.

Sharon found that Carole’s left arm, shoulder and shoulder blade were painful to touch, even with the gentle way of a Feldenkrais practitioner. She looked beyond the arm to the natural sources of support in the muscles in the spine, ribs and pelvis. Observing the pattern of constant strain, Sharon began working with...
ATM Classes for Persons with Multiple Sclerosis

The Southern California Chapter of the MS Society has been running an Awareness Through Movement class almost continuously since early 1997 with the help of Feldenkrais practitioner Beth Rubenstein.

The day-time class size is small, allowing individual attention. Five students have been coming regularly since the beginning, and others drop in as they are able. The regulars bring their friends to classes. “They really want more people to come and do it,” says Beth.

All functional issues are addressed. The students learn simple and elegant ways to climb stairs, get in and out of the car, and balance when walking. The students learn to their great surprise that they can feel comfortable being on the floor. In the past, when it was so difficult, getting up from the floor was their enemy. As Beth has observed, “Getting up from the floor is really important, because the person now knows that if they fall, they can get up with ease and dignity.”

A great challenge for those with MS is the variability from day to day. Through the Feldenkrais Method they learn a process to scan themselves and evaluate what is working best; further they learn they have options for alternatives each day.

Arnie was an engineer for a large toy company. He has had MS for quite a while. Now retired and avid skeet shooter, he found that the disease was limiting his satisfaction with this hobby due to reduced balance and fatigue. Since taking the class, his balance and fatigue are better. Further, he finds that the scientific aspects of the course are very satisfying.

Some people with MS appear quite functional; thus their families may expect them to keep up with a day’s activities. However, the next day they are bed ridden, exhausted. Through the ATM class, the students learn the early signals of fatigue; they then can take this learning back into their activities and can stop and rest before exhaustion.

Beth says, “The LA MS Society loves the classes and wants them all over.” They invite her regularly to speak at large conferences. Other classes around LA are also being advertised by the MS Society.

Beth adds, “I really believe that this is the best for people with MS because the FM addresses the personal differences. The person can learn to be aware of their fatigue and thus have choices for enriching their lives.”

Regaining Balance

She couldn’t run. She couldn’t keep her difficult. For the last 33 years, Holly S. has suffered from a disease that attacks the nervous system, causing extreme incoordination of the limbs.

“At first I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, but then my doctors discovered I had Friedreich’s Ataxia,” says 78 year old Holly. Not wanting to rely on a wheelchair, as do most with this disease, Holly decided to try Feldenkrais.

After more than twenty Functional Integration lessons with practitioner Paris Kern, (<ParisKern@aol.com>) she joined an Awareness Through Movement class. Holly found that she could loosen her muscles, create new patterns of movement and then allow her nervous system to recapture balance. “These exercises carry over a lot into my day to day life,” says Holly. “Before I started them, I would lose my balance and fall a lot, but now I rarely do.”

“I once enjoyed walking, but began to detest it as my disease progressed, so I started to use a wheelchair more and more,” she explains. “I now enjoy walking again after taking the Feldenkrais class.” Holly walks between an eighth and a quarter of a mile a day to visit others in her retirement community who can’t leave home. She still relies on canes for support.

“One reason I chose this method is because it’s not invasive or medication - it’s just a way to help the muscles to do their job more efficiently,” explains Holly. “I only wish I had tried it sooner.”
FELDENKRAIS for Children with Cerebral Palsy

The first scholarly research paper on the use of the FELDENKRAIS METHOD with children was written by Chava Selhav Silberbush (<shellhavc@netvision.net.il>) in 1987. This was her thesis for her Masters in Education from Boston University in 1987.

Chava identified several ways in which the FELDENKRAIS METHOD develops neuro-logical functioning for individuals who were not able to develop these functions in a natural way due to the disease. First, a FELDENKRAIS practitioner interacts with the whole being of the child, observing and responding to the developmental, emotional and social needs of the child. Second, the practitioner immediately works to “instill confidence in the child,” so that the child looks forward to each session. Third, the practitioner looks beyond the achievement of passive motor patterns towards “giving the child the possibility of learning to integrate existing patterns and to create new patterns by using other alternatives to serve the need of the moment.” Thus, the Method helps the child to enable themselves.

One of two case studies presented in detail was about a boy who had received conventional therapies since he was diagnosed with CP at three months of age. Yet, at six years of age the boy was unable to sit unaided, to crawl, or to lie on his back with his knees bent. He lacked motivation to draw or to move by himself.

The boy received ten FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION lessons with Chava over the period of a year. At the end of the year, the head of the boy’s school reported that he “no longer needs special care. He can sit freely, alter his position and return to sitting without assistance... He has learned to relax and to move separately parts of his body at will.”

The report continues, “He is now capable of sitting... His ability to paint and the enjoyment he derives from it have greatly increased... He has manifested for the first time the desire to move.”

According to the boy’s mother, the former methods created an atmosphere of tension; he was forced to remain in fixed positions causing him pain. Then, after participating with the FELDENKRAIS METHOD, the mother could work with the child in a way that was enjoyable for both. She reported, “He has changed, not only physically, but also in his whole being. He has found faith again... he himself has discovered his potential and this gives him self-confidence... Our relationship has become wonderful.”

FELDENKRAIS with Atypical Children

For the past several years, FELDENKRAIS Practitioner, Linda Flanders, (<info@taproot-inc.com>) has been working with atypical children; those who have complex learning and behavioral problems which traditional therapies have not been able to help.

“All of our children have psychiatric diagnoses and come from some sort of abusive past,” says Linda. “We work through the behaviors first and then sort out the educational problems. I primarily use AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT lessons until I gain enough trust with the child to get them on the table for a FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION lesson.”

The children come to stay with Linda at Taproot, Inc. headquarters, where Linda lives and works. They usually come with their parents and stay for a twenty-four hour period. The work with these children, in the beginning, is based on custom-designed AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT lessons that are built around a functional goal.

Rosa was one of these children. She was adopted at age five, with a past history of abuse, neglect and abandonment. She was on several different medications and was physically violent with her family. At Linda's center, she learned quickly from ATM lessons. When she made the transition to FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION lessons, her progress increased. She is now doing well at home, much better in school and is off all medication. “I like to come and visit Linda because I learn a lot of things about myself. I learned what your past can do to your body but that you can change it. Linda teaches me how to make my dreams come true. I want to keep coming back - always!” says Rosa.

Over the summer, Linda has been working with autistic children who have suffered from some sort of past trauma and cannot move past it. Their home life has suffered dramatically because they cannot move on. AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT lessons were introduced to the children, with their parents often acting as participants. A bodily/kinesthetic experience worked well for these children. In each case, their behavior changed immediately. One 16-year-old autistic boy had been seeing a psychologist for quite some time. Upon returning home, he was released from further treatment. His psychologist told the boy’s mother, “I don’t know how they did it, but he no longer needs to see me.” The boy’s mother is now working with a local FELDENKRAIS practitioner to continue making gains with other, new functional goals.
Healing the Heart: the FELDENKRAIS PART

Kenn Chase (<KVChase@aol.com>) has been on the leading edge of treatment programs for people with heart disease for almost 20 years. In the early 80s, he was part of an innovative team that integrated eastern approaches and western mind/body methods.

Recently he joined with a doctor and nurse to create the TAM (Total Artherosclerosis Management) program. The TAM program is an aggressive risk factor reduction program for coronary artery disease. It is an interdisciplinary approach, utilizing physicians, nurses, dieticians, mental health professionals and Ken, the stress management consultant. Ken provides a blend of ancient Chinese philosophy, T’ai Chi, and AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT (ATM) lessons.

Kenn chooses his ATM lessons with care, recognizing the special needs of cardiac patients. His aim is to improve the functioning of the back, chest and pelvis, as many patients complain of pain in these areas.

Kenn illustrates the effectiveness of the Method with the following story. Vince joined the TAM program in 1994. He was nearly gray in color; his movement was rigid and awkward, especially in the chest and thoracic spine. At the beginning of his first ATM class he said, “I can barely move, I may not last the whole program, but I’ll give it a try.” Kenn invited him to sit in a chair and simply imagine that he was on the floor doing the movements.

Vince was able to do a few of the movements suggested in the class. At the end, he felt softer, lighter. He reported less pain in walking and turning. Thus, even a partial approximation of the ATM seems to have improved Vince’s situation. Instead of months of slow recovery, Vince was on the floor with the class within two weeks of open heart surgery. He is now one of the TAM program’s most successful graduates.

Kenn has found that the FELDENKRAIS METHOD had powerful benefits for this population. Cardiac patients are most willing to accept gentle, relaxed and competent teaching. They do not need competitive, forceful or pushing approaches to learning. He says, “Given any ATM, the accomplishment of a movement is not the critical factor. Rather, it is the entire process of moving; awareness of how we learn is the unique thing. As a result of this context, learning is non-competitive, easy and elegant.”

Resources available through the FELDENKRAIS GUILD of North America. (800)-775-2118.

Books

The Case of Nora by Moshe Feldenkrais.
Mindful Spontaneity by Ruthy Alon.
Relaxercise by David Zemach-Bersin, Kaethe Zemach-Bersin and Mark Reese. Also available in audiotape format.
Awareness Heals by Steven Shafarman.