



# Mid America MS Achievement Center News

## Making Magic and Caring for Dogs is Therapy????

By Bria Heymach - Recreational Therapist

The MSAC is always looking for new ways to provide therapeutic services for the participants. Two of the more unusual involve volunteers from the Healing of Magic program, and visits by therapy dogs from the Delta Society, who participate in our Recreational Therapy group once a month.

Each MSAC participant attends one hour of Recreational group a week. This time is one in which the participants plan activities that incorporate many of the physical skills they work on during their occupational and physical therapy groups, along with activities to provide cognitive stimulation, social interaction, and time to just have some fun. During monthly visits from the Healing with Magic magicians, the participants learn to do magic tricks that have been designed to improve physical and cognitive skills; and probably also help everyone's lung capacity based on the laughing and talking that goes on during these sessions. Participants can then go home to wow their family and friends with their own private magic shows.



Bria Heymach, our Recreational Therapist, joined the MSAC team in November of 2003. Bria graduated from Indiana University (Bloomington) with a Bachelor of Science in Park and Recreation Administration, with an emphasis in Therapeutic Recreation and a minor in Psychology. Bria was also assisted in creating a new study abroad program with the University of Wales Institute Cardiff, United Kingdom. During her 5-month stay she traveled throughout Britain assessing its accessibility, as well as studying adaptive physical activity classes. Bria did her internship in the summer of 2003 in San Diego with the VA Healthcare System's Spinal Cord Injury unit.

On a personal note, Bria has two cats (Stubbs and Smitty) and is training to ride in the MS 150 in September! When asked about being involved with the MSAC program she stated, "I am so thankful to be apart of such a wonderful and unique program; which provides such a holistic approach. My passion is to help people achieve a high quality of life and the life that they want for themselves."

Another time during the month, the Newfoundland dogs from Delta Society or the Border Terrier belonging to come for a visit. They are all such beautiful and friendly dogs, that everyone wants to help groom and play with them.



The dogs love to play fetch and know how to get everyone involved with them. This is also a time when the participants learn about dogs and have a chance to talk about their own pets. As with the magic tricks, activities with the dogs are designed to improve physical skills.

One of the best things about these and the other activities done during Recreation group is that the participants get to just have some fun and do things that don't seem like therapy. Our Recreational Therapist, Bria Heymach, likes to think of these activities as "hidden therapy."



**I'm Dr. Carrie Pawlowski**, a staff psychologist at The Rehabilitation Institute of Kansas City. I received my Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln.



I then completed an internship in clinical psychology at the VA Medical Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico and a postdoctoral fellowship in geriatric neuropsychology at the VA Medical Center in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. (I am glad to be back in the Kansas City area, which I consider my home!)

I have training and experience in rehabilitation psychology, nueropsychology, and pain psychology. I have a particular interest in working with individuals with MS, which I have the chance to do through leading psychology groups for the MS Achievement Center. I believe that the MSAC staff provides a great opportunity to help the participants help themselves. I am impressed by the dedication and the enthusiasm demonstrated by all of the MSAC staff, and I feel lucky to be part of such a wonderful interdisciplinary team.

Above all, I am truly impressed with the courage and the perseverance I see as the participants actively work toward their own physical and mental well-being despite the many challenges they face in coping with a tremendously life-challenging disease process.