In The Spotlight

Associate Board Supporting Seed Grant Program

The Brain Research Foundation Associate Board was established to increase awareness of children’s brain disorders and the important work of the Foundation. The Associate Board focuses on making a positive difference in the lives of children with brain disorders and their families through public educational programs, professional education, and now, by helping to fund cutting-edge neuroscience research by sponsoring a seed grant.

One way the Associate Board generates awareness and support is through its annual event Rockin’ on the River. Its most recent event was extremely successful with net proceeds totaling nearly $50,000. With these funds, the Associate Board is taking its commitment to a new level by supporting research through funding of a 2012 Fay/Frank Seed Grant. The Associate Board seed grant recipient will be a researcher specifically advancing the understanding of a children’s brain disorder. As always, the seed grant proposals will be reviewed by our Scientific Review Committee, a national group of well-respected neuroscientists, that evaluates each grant proposal to determine the most promising new research projects in the field of neuroscience. The Committee selects those projects that will likely lead to extramural funding from the National Institutes of Health or other outside funding sources.

Once the winners are identified, the Associate Board will select the project it wants to support. The Board will follow the recipient’s progress and be able to experience—first-hand—how its investment is making a scientific difference.

My Passion for the Foundation

A story from Andrew Swigart,
BRF Associate Board member

Statistically, over 50 million Americans are affected by brain and nervous system disorders. In my case, as may be the case for many of you reading this, that statistic is a part of my life.

The lives of both my sister and mother were irreparably altered by neurological disorders and the mysterious factors that cause them. My sister is a childhood cancer survivor. She survived an ependymoma tumor—a malignant growth in the central nervous system. Those of you with a similar experience know that childhood cancer traumatizes the patient and her family in different ways. I was in second grade when my sister was diagnosed so her illness impacted a majority of my childhood. Like many young siblings of those who have had severe childhood illnesses, I grappled with a lot of complex feelings. It was difficult for me to wrap my mind around the attention and centrality of my sister’s situation. My parents had to make life or death decisions for her and at the same time provide some normalcy for me. It was a lot for us all to handle.

My sister suffered, struggled, and has overcome many of the ramifications of her treatment with a graceful strength, a subtle toughness and iron grit. I am very pleased to say that her cancer has been in remission for over 25 years.

Years later, another neurological disorder called Creutzfeldt–Jakob Disease (CJD) struck my family. CJD is like an accelerated version of Alzheimer’s disease. Slowly, malformed proteins clogged my mother’s neural pathways affecting her higher reasoning skills, memory, motor functions, and ultimately her body’s most basic functions. We lost small parts of her on a daily basis and her passing was a slow process to watch: physically painless but emotionally wrenching.

My family’s experience has provided me with a passion to support the advancement of basic scientific research and the perspective to appreciate the direct correlation between that research and hope. The BRF seed grants push forward the frontiers of medical science. The answers derived from the research the Foundation funds will benefit us all, and provide other families some much-needed hope.

I was profoundly shaped by both illnesses; they are inseparable from my life. I am grateful for the BRF for providing me the opportunity to help support the advancement of research that will one day prevent other families from experiencing the trauma that affected mine.