



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Madonna to host final public showings of “Pathways” before film festival circuit

Lincoln, NE – Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital is hosting two showings of the documentary “Pathways” before the film is submitted national film festivals. The showings are free and open to the public. Guests will enjoy tours of newly renovated therapy areas and refreshments following the film:

Sunday, November 8, 2009
1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Saturday, November 14, 2009
10 a.m. to Noon

at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital
5401 South St.
Lincoln, Nebraska

RSVP to Sherry Taylor at staylor@madonna.org or call 402-483-9524.

“Pathways” follows the journeys of four individuals — Alexis, Derek, Mandy and Christian — as they find their way from the tragedy of brain injury to new hope through rehabilitation. Though each person is unique, with different types of injury, they all share the same path toward recovery.

Brain injury is a topic that has received national attention due to high profile cases involving well known media figures, national athletes and military personnel injured in combat. Although there have been amazing recoveries, like that of TV news journalist Bob Woodruff, little has been shown of medical rehabilitation’s vital role in helping achieve these breakthroughs.

“People see Bob Woodruff back on the news or see photos of a smiling teenager who survived a terrible car accident and assume they just walked out of the hospital and returned home. No one sees the intensive medical rehabilitation involving advanced equipment and specialized therapy. It takes months of rehabilitation to help them relearn to talk, see, walk or even feed themselves again,” said Marsha Lommel, president and CEO of Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital.

To capture the courageous moments that are at the heart of brain injury rehabilitation, Lommel decided to develop a documentary feature film for the hospital's annual GOAL Awards event. It seemed a serendipitous decision when she met Brandon and Tiffany Verzal, award winning videographers who were beginning work on a documentary of their daughter's recovery at Madonna.

The Verzals were working for the Texas A&M sports media department in April 2008 when they received a call that their one-year old daughter, Alexis, was limp and unresponsive at her daycare provider's home. After immediately rushing to meet the ambulance at the nearest hospital, the young parents discovered the shocking news that Alexis had suffered injuries at her daycare consistent with Shaken Baby Syndrome.

Brandon and Tiffany turned to the CARF accredited pediatric brain injury program at Madonna to help their daughter make the best possible recovery. Encouraged by Alexis' improvement, they decided to stay in Lincoln so Alexis could continue her outpatient rehabilitation at Madonna.

The Verzals started their own video company, V2 Content, and after discussions with Lommel, the "Pathways" documentary project was born. What began as a personal project to document their own daughter's progress, expanded to include the journeys of three other remarkable young people at Madonna. The documentary features four individuals with different types of brain injuries, but all sharing the same path to hope through rehabilitation.

"It's our dream that this film will earn national exposure through film festivals and media coverage," said Tiffany Verzal. "We don't know why this terrible event happened to Alexis, but maybe through her story, people will better understand the causes of brain injury and the amazing improvements that are possible through rehab."

Four brave brain injury survivors



Alexis Verzal

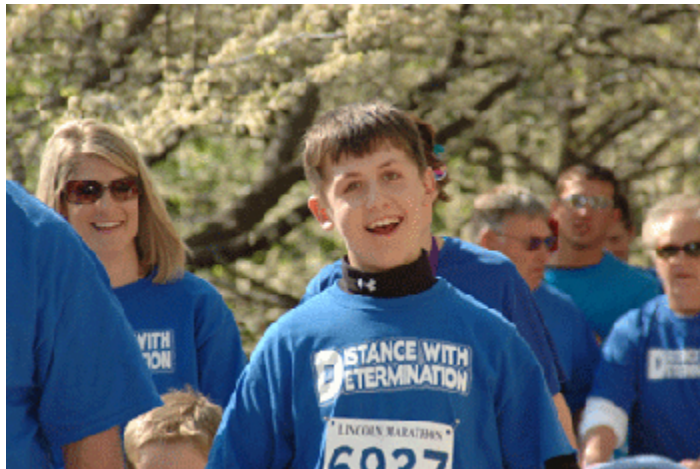
When Alexis arrived at Madonna on April 28, 2008, she couldn't see, talk, move or do anything independently. The girl who's angelic smile and growing vocabulary delighted family and friends, and who had just recently learned to run, was now like a rag doll left behind after a tea party. Rehabilitation was hard. Unable to find words, Alexis would scream as she worked in therapy. The progress seemed slow, but it was evident. Intensive, consistent rehabilitation

helped Alexis' brain rebuild broken connections. With the extensive damage to her visual cortex, Alexis was blind when she arrived at Madonna. But with innovative vision therapy using prism glasses, her unfocused eye movement became more purposeful, her eyes working in unison to

look up at her parents' faces and watch her therapists. Alexis delighted in the applause she earned for turning a book page or sitting up with support.

Though tragically injured, Alexis never lost her loving spirit and soon was charming other patients, families and staff at Madonna with her radiant grin and laughing blue eyes. Alexis worked tirelessly with her Madonna pediatric therapy team, parents and grandparents to keep making progress, step by thousands of steps.

Today, she loves to sing Johnny Cash songs, talk about "Dora the Explorer," play with her puppies and zoom around using her walker. She is finally regaining many of the physical skills she effortlessly enjoyed up to the day she was hurt, though her right side continues to have less control and mobility than her left. Cognitively, Alexis is advanced for her age, as her pediatrician, and either of her grandmas, will tell you.



Derek Ruth

Thirteen-year old Derek Ruth of Malcolm, Neb., is a champion to those who know him, both on and off the football field or baseball diamond. During a midget football game on Sept. 6, 2008, Derek ran with the football toward the end zone, when he suddenly straightened out his arm and dropped the ball.

His mother, Jennifer, said, "I remember thinking that was strange because he wasn't even near another player."

One of the coaches pulled Derek from the game as a precaution, since he'd been tackled in a couple plays during the game, and Derek responded appropriately to questions. But, a few minutes later, Derek removed his helmet and fell from the bench, clutching his head. An emergency crew responded within minutes, providing medical care and transporting Derek to BryanLGH West where a CT scan revealed a devastating traumatic brain injury. After two surgeries to save Derek's life, which involved removing portions of his skull on both sides, he was transferred to Madonna's inpatient pediatric rehabilitation program.

At first, Derek was so weak, just sitting in a wheelchair was a strain after short periods of time. He was unable to walk, verbally communicate or eat on his own and was not fully aware of his surroundings. He could, however, respond to his mom and dad, with a weak thumbs up or down to their questions.

With the help of his Madonna team, the constant support of his family, and his faith and determination, Derek has made incredible progress. He struggled to stand with support, then took a few assisted steps, then used the body weight support treadmill to relearn proper gait positioning and regain strength. By the end of December 2008, Derek's therapists had to keep up with him as he

quickly crossed the Therapy Gym on his own. He achieved one of his first goals: to discharge from inpatient treatment and return home for Christmas.

In January 2009, Derek returned to Madonna for outpatient therapy in the Rehab Day program. He made great gains in his physical strength and coordination and focused on his cognitive and communication skills. He became lightning fast with his letterboard, spelling out answers to homework questions in Madonna's Kit Scott Therapeutic Learning Center and joking with his parents and four brothers.

Friends organized "Team Derek" to celebrate his achievements by participating in the Lincoln Marathon on May 3, 2009. Derek cheered on his supporters, including several Madonna employees, and crossed the finish line with his family -- running the last few yards. His winning smile said it all.

Derek returned to school this fall with the rest of his eighth grade class and is determined to keep his straight "A" average. He continues outpatient rehabilitation at Madonna after school.



Mandy Kays

It was only 8 degrees the night of Jan. 14 when seventeen-year old Mandy Kays from Shawnee, Kans., lost control of her car and slid off of I-435 into the freezing water of Cedar Creek. The car submerged upside down, making it difficult for rescue workers to get her out of the vehicle. When she arrived at Overland Park Regional Medical Center, her body temperature had dropped to 82 degrees.

Though she survived the near drowning, Mandy suffered a hypoxic brain injury, which caused serious physical and cognitive impairments. When Mandy transferred to Madonna two weeks later, she was ventilator-dependent and minimally responsive. The girl who excelled in her homeschool studies and was preparing to take the GED exam could not move, speak in full sentences or remember the current date.

Each day, Mandy's care team focused on improving her cognitive and physical skills. She studied math and worked on computer skills in the Therapeutic Learning Center, built up her strength during physical therapy to walk with assistance, learned to find her voice in speech therapy and enjoyed a community outing to Target where she picked out some earrings with her favorite symbol – stars.

On June 20, Mandy celebrated her return home to Kansas and her 18th birthday surrounded by her family and friends. Not surprisingly, most of Mandy's gifts involved stars, but none shined as brightly as Mandy.



Christian Brinson Stokes

Twenty-eight year old Christian Stokes thought he was pretty lucky while serving as an Army sergeant in Iraq. Though he

had several close calls, he was never hit by enemy fire or injured during his two years of duty. He returned home to Kansas City in Jan. 2009 and, despite the worried admonition of his mother, bought a motorcycle to enjoy riding with his friends.

On April 8, 2009, Christian was riding on I-635 North when he noticed his rear tire was unstable. In seconds, Christian's motorcycle slid out from under him and he jetted from the seat at 70 mph.

Christian's mother, Cora, immediately flew from South Carolina to be by his side during the four weeks he lie in a coma with pins keeping his shattered left arm in place. When Christian came to Madonna on April 24, he slept in a net bed to protect him while he worked through the predictable early stages of brain injury recovery, involving agitation and confusion.

His soldier's determination and excellent physical conditioning helped Christian make incredible progress in rehabilitation. Christian called his physical therapist, Scott, the "repo man" for taking away his wheelchair. But Christian was ready for it all – taking steps with assistance, then on his own, then moving like a football player in training, shuffling quickly to the left and right.

On July 17, Christian discharged from Madonna and returned to home duty in Kansas City, where he is enjoying time with his daughter, Destiny, and planning his next mission – to finish his bachelor's degree and possibly work toward becoming a physical therapist.

Trailer

A trailer for "Pathways" is available on YouTube at <http://bit.ly/Pathways>.

Capital Campaign

Madonna launched its 50th anniversary capital campaign in the summer of 2007. In the past two years, generous donors have stepped forward with gifts totaling \$6,440,000 — the largest amount in Madonna's history. The public phase of the campaign is in progress. For more information, or to contribute to the campaign to drive rehabilitation forward, please see the Madonna Foundation Web site at http://www.madonna.org/giving_volunteering/foundation/index.html.

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Through nationally accredited programs and services, Madonna offers individualized rehabilitation treatment to help every patient heal in mind, body and spirit – and ultimately live life to the fullest. Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital is located at 5401 South Street in Lincoln, Nebraska, 68506; 402-489-7102; www.Madonna.org.