I have just successfully completed my ninth week at Supportive Living Inc.’s Brain Injury Wellness Center in Lexington, MA (SLI). As a reminder, SLI is a Boston-area company that provides housing and programs for people with brain injury. My internship there this summer was within their Fitness Program, where individuals with brain injury come three times a week to improve their physical health. The hope is that improving their fitness level will ameliorate lost neurological functioning. Additionally, we expect that improving participants’ fitness will lead to fewer health problems in the future, therefore saving the participants from unnecessary illness and its associated costs.

Even though only one of the three expectations I had for this internship became a reality, it has been a fantastic experience for me. The two “busts” were (1) shadowing numerous healthcare professionals and (2) developing data analysis skills and my knowledge of policy. Since I only worked closely with a recreation therapist, the first expectation was not met. Also, while I learned a lot about policy regarding the assessment of people with brain injury, I wasn’t exposed to any broader disability policies. I also wasn’t able to begin data analysis since the research and oversight needed prior to implementing such an assessment was too expansive and left no time for actual implementation. While this is disappointing, the work that I did researching the best tools for assessment of the participants are sure to be valuable to the person who continues this project.

This internship was also valuable because I learned a number of things that can be used in other situations, both professional and personal. Firstly, it was a great representation of the inner workings of a rehabilitation facility. Being there three days a week, I saw first-hand how programs are developed, funded, executed, and assessed. I also realized that, regardless of how organized a facility is, there is always day-to-day reshuffling of priorities. Working with SLI showed me how to deal with these changes in a composed, appropriate manner. Another thing this internship taught me was the importance of collaboration and cooperation. In addition to knowing what I was doing, I also needed to know what others were doing in case they needed support. And, at times, I relied on them for support. Interning at SLI provided a great example of how an encouraging vision and proper teamwork can lead to great outcomes.

This internship also greatly informed my career trajectory. Going into this internship, I thought that I wanted to work as an occupational therapist. While what I did during the internship wasn’t exactly the job of an occupational therapist, it was close enough that I was able to realize this isn’t what I would like to pursue in the future. Working with the participants was very enjoyable and I liked the change I
was making in their lives, but I realized that I prefer more independent work at a higher level. I am so glad that I did this internship because it helped me to get a much stronger idea of what might not work for me, professionally speaking. And it also exposed me to several aspects of healthcare administration, a new potential occupational pursuit.

For any other HSSP student looking for an internship, I would certainly recommend this one. If you enjoy working one-on-one with people, and making a difference in others’ lives, SLI would be an amazing organization for you. Consider it if you’re interested in any of the affiliated rehabilitation fields (e.g., physical therapy, occupational therapy, or speech language pathology) or in working for a health care facility in a managerial position. The knowledge I am taking from this internship has greatly shaped me and my future, and I hope you consider it as I’m sure it can do the same for you.

My internship at SLI’s Brain Injury Wellness Center was an experience I am so lucky to have had. It taught me that working with people with brain injury is a dynamic and adaptive process. The participants that I worked with had such varied abilities and disabilities, showing the true spectrum of brain injury. This meant the day-to-day work was quite variable and I really needed to be on the ball to be effective. As I worked with the participants – BH, CK, and BW (see my previous blog) – I saw the impact of my (well, our) efforts over time. BH can now walk thirty times farther than he could when I first started working with him. CK has resumed his pre-accident hobby of weight lifting, and he greatly looks forward to improving his physical and emotional health. And BW has gone bike riding for the first time in a decade, and more thoroughly enjoys the Fitness Program for its physical and social benefits. These successes are extremely positive, and are precisely the purpose of the Fitness Program. I am very happy with my decision to take part in this internship since I was able to experience significant growth, both my own and that of the participants, as we created new paths for ourselves.