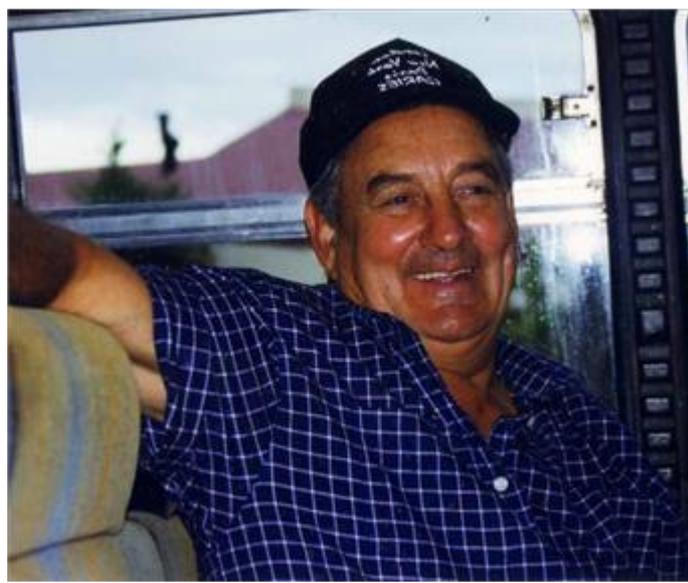


BabyGym[®] for a 78 year old Stroke Patient

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Mr. Robert De La Porte's family contacted me after Discovery Medical Aid had referred them to BabyGym. He was a 78 year old man who had suffered a stroke and was at the time receiving physiotherapy and speech therapy. I arranged to meet Robert and the family so that I could determine our plan of action. When I met him I was able to note the following: the left side of his body was mostly affected by the stroke; he was able to speak, but very slowly; his eye sight was very badly affected; he kept his left eye closed most of the time (an attempt to help his right eye to focus), he wasn't allowed to drink from a straw but he was able to eat on his own using his right hand. I did a finger test on his left and right side to see if he could place his thumb against each finger for 8 seconds but he unfortunately couldn't and needed assistance with this exercise. I now new that BabyGym would benefit Mr De La Porte so we agreed that I would do BabyGym with him for 1 hour daily, for four consecutive weeks; and Robert's sister (who was staying with him at the Oasis Care Centre at the time) offered to help by repeating some of the BabyGym exercises with him in the evenings.

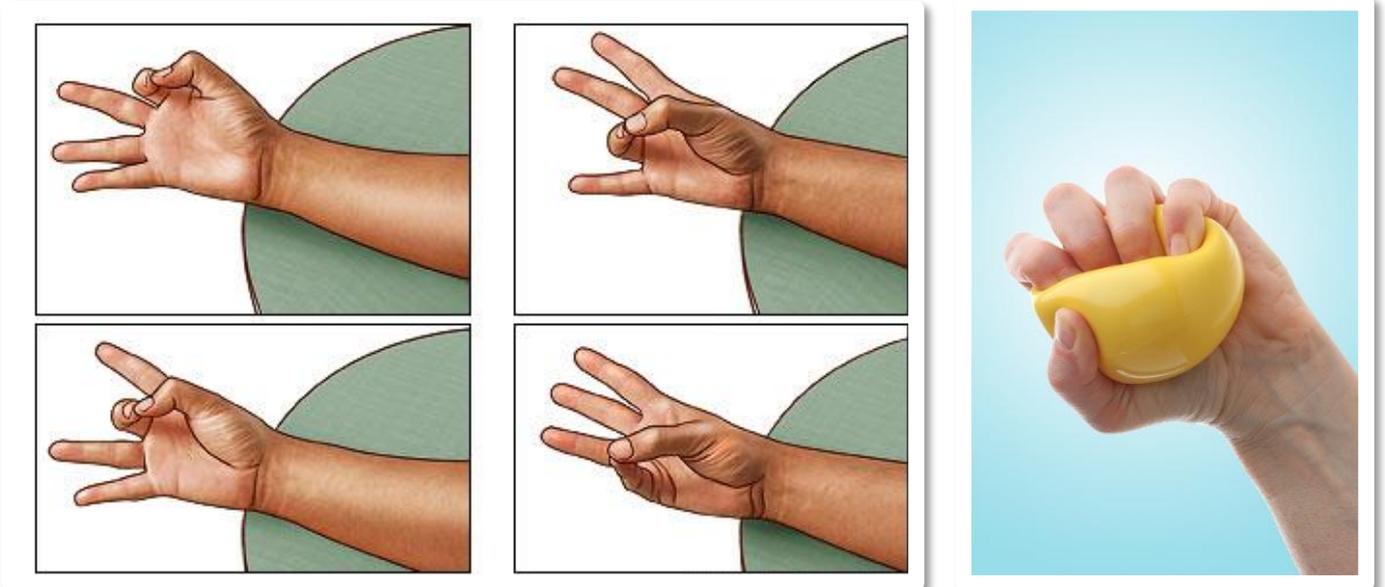


Robert and I had our first BabyGym session on 19 January 2015 and Robert responded very well to the exercises. When there is an injury to the brain, the map of the body in the brain becomes distorted and hence body awareness and bodily functions are affected. For that reason BabyGym Instructors always start a session with massage to make sure the brain's map of the body is complete and accurate. While playing classical music I placed him in a comfortable position, lying on his back flat on the ground. Tracing the outlines of the body can also be done while the person stands upright with arms stretched out to the sides, but Robert wasn't able to stand on his own and I couldn't support his weight so massaging him on the floor was the best position for him to be in. Following the BabyGym 2 massage sequence, I started with the ear massage and continued to outline his entire body (from top to toe) 3 times. Massaging the ears and drawing the outline of the body helps the brain to become aware of the entire body, the ear massage also awakens the vestibular system so that balance and movement is improved. Next, I gently massaged the Vagus nerve to help Robert to relax. The Vagus nerve is a wandering nerve but can be stimulated under the left collarbone, in line with the left eye.

Once he was calm and relaxed we could progress to the face massage, so I asked him to open his mouth wide so that I could massage the jaw joints, I used various textures against his cheeks to increase awareness of his mouth so that feeding and speech would improve, and I also gave him a dummy to suckle on. It takes a brave grown man to suckle a dummy but I explained the wonderful benefits the dummy provides emotionally (a sense of wellbeing) but also how it boosts the immune system. He would suckle the dummy 10 times then rest, and continue for 2 more sets. After the dummy exercise I asked him to perform a series of tongue exercises. Once again the tongue exercises help the mouth muscles to strengthen for clear speech and pronunciation.

I massaged his hands and squeezed the finger tips to increase awareness of the body's extremities; I also named the body parts as I went along with the massage. After his hands I moved down to the feet, I massaged his feet and again squeezed the tip of each toe to increase awareness. I would then lift his legs and rock him forwards and backwards, this activates his vestibular system (balance) and helps the patient to respond to his inside senses. The inside senses include the proprioceptors (in the skin, muscles, joints and ligaments) that provides the brain with information about the body's position, the vestibular system (located in the inner ear) provides the brain with information about the position of the head and how to maintain balance, and the 3rd part of the inside senses is kinesis and involves how the muscles need to expand, contract, anticipate weight, speed and direction to maintain balance and avoid falling over. Throughout the BabyGym sessions Robert had such a good attitude, even after his daily physiotherapy, speech therapy, and visits from the nurses he still did all the BabyGym exercises with a smile.

After 1 week of BabyGym I could see changes, Robert didn't need my help with the finger exercises and they had added toast and rice to his diet as he was able to chew and swallow better; the daily foot massage also worked great- his blood circulation and lymph drainage had improved and the puffiness of his feet had gone down considerably. During the second week of our sessions we followed the same routine as the previous week but with many repetitions as we know that repetition forge stronger neural pathways in the brain. I would have loved to take Robert for walks in his wheelchair as the movement over different terrain and surfaces also activate the inside senses, but the wind unfortunately never allowed it. As the time progressed I included visual exercises and asked Robert to follow objects with his eyes while keeping his head still. After 2 weeks of BabyGym there were more improvements: Robert's speech was clearer and he was able to pass a ball from one hand to the other (crossing the midline) without any assistance.



The following week, Robert unfortunately had a falling accident at the Centre and had to be taken to hospital. This set back was hard on Robert and his caring family and therapists as he had shown so much improvement over the last 2 weeks. Robert was moved in and out of hospital that week and very sadly passed away shortly thereafter. It was a terrible loss as he had crept into my heart so quickly.

Working with someone with special needs is challenging but extremely satisfying and this journey has taught me to be patient, persistent, and what is practically needed during a BabyGym session with an adult (like someone to help you to lift the patient).

Robert's smile touched my heart. He was the first stroke patient I had worked with as a BabyGym Instructor and the experience has encouraged me to work with more stroke patients like him.

