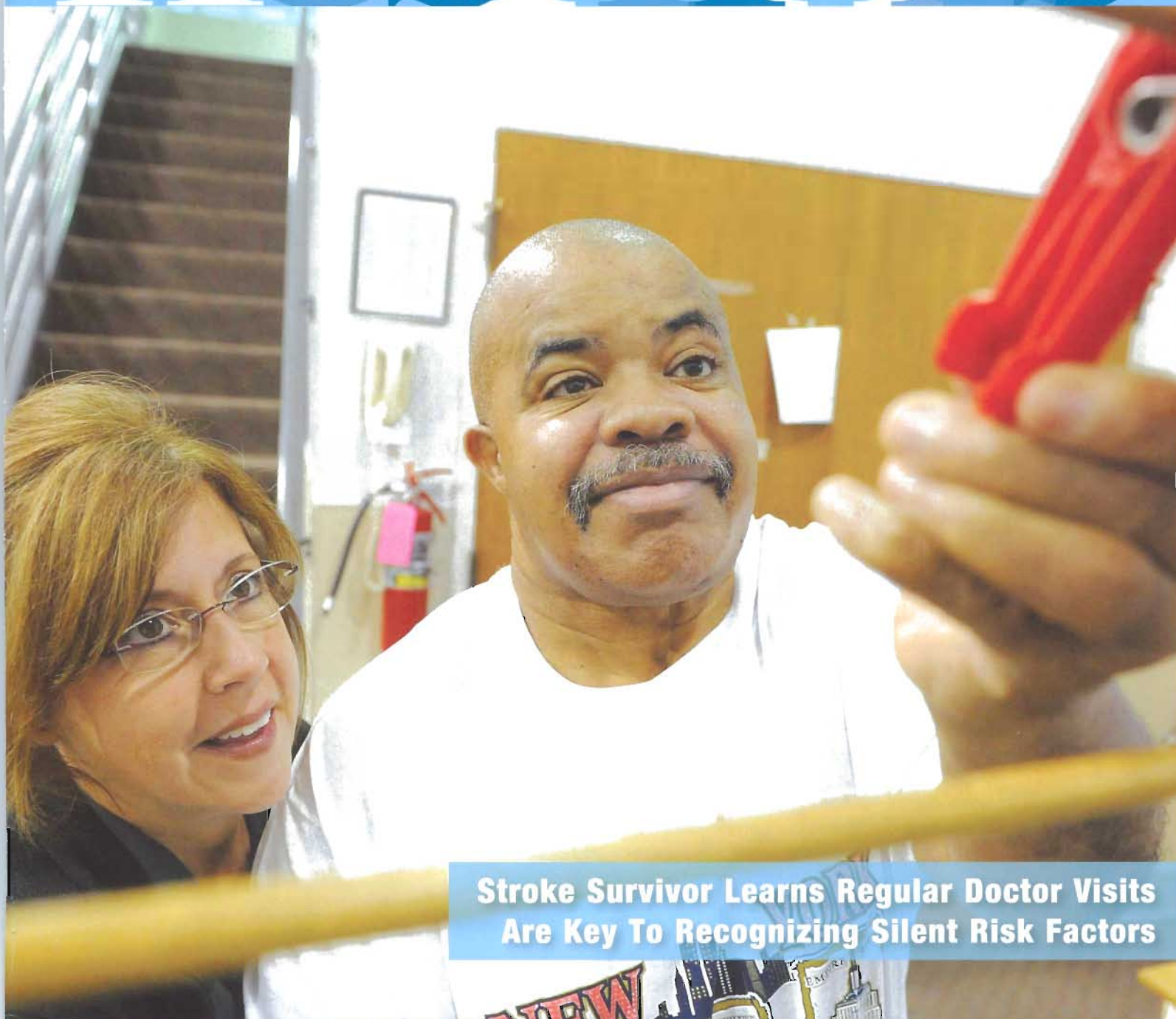


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Volume 17 • Number 2 • Fall 2012

'Mean Girls Aren't Cool' Program Comes to Mississippi State Hospital

Young girls at Oak Circle Center, Mississippi State Hospital's child and adolescent unit, heard a special presentation from a nationally recognized speaker in June.

Kelsey Jackson of Brookhaven spoke to girls at Oak Circle Center (OCC), presenting information from her "Mean Girls Aren't Cool" program, a female anti-bullying initiative that draws from Jackson's own personal experiences being bullied in middle school. Now 20, she developed "Mean Girls Aren't Cool" when she was only in ninth grade and has since travelled around the country telling her story and educating young girls on why others bully, how adults can identify bullying behavior and helping girls empower themselves to make it through bullying.

"Bruises, scrapes, broken bones, they go away. They may hurt, but they go away," Jackson said. "This is something I will never forget. For the rest of my life, I'll remember. I know how you feel, and I promise you, you are not alone."

As much as she was hurt in her middle school years, Jackson said she is now thankful for the experience, because without it she would not have the opportunity to help other young girls handle similar problems. And, she said, bullying is indeed a major problem, with someone being bullied in school every seven minutes throughout the day.

As far as female bullies go, Jackson told the children and teachers at

OCC that many of them are popular, pretty and well-regarded by many of their peers and teachers. She also said that while males sometimes deal with bullying by getting physical or fighting, girls will get more hurt emotionally and may hold grudges for years.

In her case, she was able to change schools and get in other social activities outside of school that proved to be a big release and help her cope with the other problems she was going through.

"I joined the show choir. I saw that as an escape, and it really helped my self-esteem to just be able to hang out with people who liked the same things I did," Jackson said.

She also encouraged girls to do

something when they knew someone else was being bullied, whether it was directly intervening or going and befriending them later.

"If you stand up for one girl and help her out, you are making a difference," she said. "You are making a difference in her life, and she will remember it forever."

Jackson herself has done something to help prevent bullying; she lobbied for a bill that passed the Mississippi Legislature in 2010 that requires all schools to have a written policy addressing bullying.

"You are who you are for a reason," Jackson said. "Don't let anyone else put you down for who you are."



Kelsey Jackson spoke to a group of young girls at Oak Circle Center, Mississippi State Hospital's child and adolescent unit, on Wednesday, June 20. Jackson has travelled the country with a bullying prevention and education program called "Mean Girls Aren't Cool" that is based on her own experiences in middle school. Jackson (center) is pictured with teachers Teresa McNeese (left) and Jill Breland (right).