

Friends, area business coaxing Middletown 21-year-old with TBI along slow path to recovery

By Cassandra Day

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MIDDLETOWN — The day before Thanksgiving was an emotional roller coaster for the Obi family.

Nneoma Obi, a former University of Connecticut student who just turned 21, finally arrived home from the health care center she called home for two years following an accident that left her in a coma suffering a traumatic brain injury. On Oct. 24, 2015, she was at the family's Wanda Lane home during a wake for a relative, said her mother Nnoyne Obi, when she choked on a piece of meat. It had lodged in her lung.

At Hartford Hospital, medical personnel put Nneoma Obi on life support. Eventually, she was moved to Water's Edge Center for Health & Rehabilitation on Church Street in Middletown. She became the youngest ever long-term care patient at the facility, said Donna Gecewicz, a massage therapist who owns Body Harmony Therapeutic Massage on Newfield Street. "Massage is great for brain stimulation," Gecewicz said. "Her muscles are so contracted so I wanted to get her hands released."

Knowing that the only way the family could only bring Nneoma Obi home was if the house were equipped to accommodate her needs, Gecewicz contacted Home Depot's regional office to find out if the company could help. Home Depot crews renovated the bottom level of their home. What once was an unfinished basement is now Nneoma Obi's entire suite.

"Her brain was deprived of oxygen for an unknown amount of time," her mother said, so Nneoma needs around-the-clock care and many therapies.

"The neurologist thinks something might click at home. Being at home is the best environment for her," Gecewicz said. "The one thing about the brain is it heals very slowly. It's a slow process, but look where she's at. She can open her eyes, she can see you. She was in a total coma before."

When insurance stopped paying for therapy, the family started a Go Fund Me drive to help with mounting expenses. The crowd-funding page has raised \$28,364 of its \$100,000 goal. The family needs a handicapped van to transport Nneoma to her appointments, said her mother.

To try to pay for some of her expenses and make ends meet, Nneoma's father works two jobs. Her mother spent the better part of the last two years living at Water's Edge, right beside her daughter, and was unable to work.

Her daughter aspired to be a physician, Nneoma Obi said. "She is a hard-working, outgoing, charismatic young woman who always is looking to help others."

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