BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF VERMONT

Headlines

Spring 2019

Creating a better future for Vermonters affected by brain injury through prevention, education, advocacy and support.

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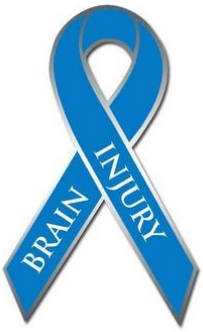
Helpline

Toll-Free
1-877-856-1772

Brain Injury Awareness Month



March is Brain Injury Awareness Month. Brain injury is a term that can be as mysterious as the injury itself. What experts agree on is that no two brain injuries are the same and treatment is different for each patient, depending on the type and severity of the injury. Annually, there are over 4,000 Vermonters diagnosed with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and more than 10,000 Vermonters are currently living with long-term challenges directly related to brain injury. According to the CDC an estimated 2.5 million people sustain a TBI nationwide each year. Of those individuals, 52,000 die.

Brain injuries can be classified as mild (concussion is the most common), moderate, or severe. The cause of injury can be traumatic or non-traumatic. A traumatic brain injury (TBI) as defined by the Brain Injury Association of America is "an alteration in brain function caused by

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A Survivor's Story..

By Jane Hulstrunk

In late November of 2001, at the age of 49, I was in the Washington DC area learning a new computer operating system for the mainframes I managed for my employer in Burlington, Vermont. I had been in this same area for a previous class, the week after 9/11. I had hoped this week wouldn't be as emotional as the earlier one. Seeing the Pentagon still burning and all the flowers and memorials around that area was heart breaking! On the 2nd day of class, I was walking back to my hotel at lunch break, when I was hit by a car taking a right turn on red. I don't remember much except the pain of my head violently hitting the pavement. In that instant, my life was forever changed. As I was to find out in the months and years to come, traumatic brain injury (TBI) is life altering! I had suffered a previous traumatic brain injury in 1980 when I was 27. I was living in my native state of Massachusetts and was hit head on by a car full of drunk teenagers. I have no recollection of this accident as I was unconscious while they removed me from the car with the jaws of life. In the hospital, I was told I had a concussion and would eventually heal although it took months for my memory issues to resolve. I did seem to have ongoing issues, but was told that they would go away. (Brain injury was not well researched at this time) Several years later, I studied computer

Continued Pg 3

Awareness Month Cont.

an external force and may be caused by a fall, motor vehicle accident, gunshot wound or another forceful event". An acquired brain injury (ABI) results from and internal force, such as a stroke, tumor or lack of oxygen. Brain injuries can result in devastating physical, mental, and emotional impairments that can prevent a person from participating in regular daily activities.

Unlike many conditions that have much more noticeable effects, brain injury often remains invisible. It is unpredictable in its consequences, it affects who we are, the way we think, act, and feel. Brain injury can change everything about a person in a matter of seconds. Diagnosis and recovery can be a difficult journey for an individual and their loved ones. However, the human brain is amazing in its capacity to heal or compensate. In fact, even if certain areas of the brain remain damaged leading to a "new normal", with the right help, a survivor can overcome these challenges.

The Brain Injury Association of Vermont is dedicated to creating a better future for Vermonters affected by brain injury through prevention, education advocacy and support. BIAVT is encouraging people to learn more about causes of brain injuries, how to recognize a possible injury and to prevent them.

BIAVT Advocating for brain injury in our community

BIAVT serves on a multitude of advisory boards, committees and task forces bringing a voice to the challenges faced by the brain injury community.

- **Chronic Disease & Disability Advisory Board** –increasing the access to healthcare for people with disabilities.
- **Injury and Violence Prevention Advisory Board**
- **State Health Improvement Advisory Committee** – All people in Vermont have an equal opportunity to be healthy and live in healthy communities.
- **State TBI Advisory Board** - supporting the development of a State TBI Action Plan.
  - **Concussion Task Force**— developing reference materials for schools.
- **Safe Kids VT Coalition** - keeping kids safe with car-seat checkups, safety workshops and sports clinics, that help parents and caregivers prevent childhood injuries.
- **VT Coalition for Disability Rights** -Advancing the human and civil rights of people with disabilities ensuring full and equal participation in all aspects of community life and the political process.
- **Pediatric TBI Follow Up & Referral Project** - Improving the process for follow up care for pediatric patients with brain injury.
- **Military Family Community Network**—Develop and maintain a multi-group community network amongst the community, government and private sectors that creates an awareness of programs and provides services to all returning service members and their families.

In addition, BIAVT travels to our State and National Capitals to speak directly with representatives, sharing stories of challenges and survival to further legislation favoring brain injury awareness and governmental support.

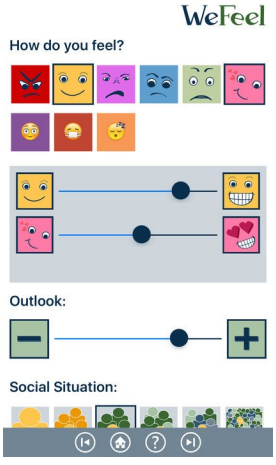
Survivor Cont.

programming and went on to become successful in that field! My immediate recovery from the 2001 accident was long and difficult, lasting several years. The TBI caused fatigue, chronic pain, migraine headaches, dizziness and balance issues, cognitive issues, and problems with my vision. The DMV eventually revoked my driver's license which left me depressed for losing my independence. I also could no longer go back to the work I had done for the previous 20+ years.

A big part of my recovery was doing meditation, yoga, and bi-weekly acupuncture treatments. A vocational rehabilitation counselor realized that I had an interest in plants and natural healing. She suggested I consider studying herbal medicine. This was a turning point in my recovery. I studied with the well-known, local herbalists Rosemary Gladstar and Guido Mase. I learned about growing and harvesting native plants and how to make tinctures, salves and tea blends using these plants. During these years of study, I cultivated many new friendships. They only knew the post-TBI Jane, so didn't see all of my deficits as some of me pre-TBI friends did. Several years later, I became part of the LoveYourBrain family, an organization founded by brothers, Adam and Kevin Pearce. I participated in the LYB pilot program which studied the efficacy of meditation and yoga for brain injury survivors. Yearly I attended a LoveYourBrain week-long retreat with a group of 35+ brain injury survivors from all over the country. Practicing daily meditation, yoga, and participating in various activities including art therapy, nutritional classes, nature walks, and learning about compensatory strategies. We have become like a family and keep in touch via local get-togethers and social media. My brain injury changed me, changed my life. It's often difficult for others to understand because it's a somewhat invisible injury. But, I have come to enjoy my life and appreciate it more. I have a part-time job working from home, I have a loving family and friends, I spend as much time outdoors in nature, and I continue to use natural plant medicines and bi-weekly acupuncture treatments to manage my chronic pain and cognitive and balance issues. Now, after a couple of years of vision therapy, the DMV has restored a limited driver's license, allowing me to drive during daylight hours. I am very grateful to the Brain Injury Association of Vermont for their assistance over the years to me and hundreds of other brain injury survivors.
Thank you for your support.

There's an App for that...

WeFeel *Free (iOS & Android)*



WeFeel is an app that people can use to track their emotions and monitor how they change over time. This app can help manage emotions by allowing the user to visualize their anger, fear, stress, etc and then offer coping strategies. **With a subscription, a counselor, therapist or caregiver will be able to monitor the users recorded emotions in real time from their own smart phone.

**If you are interested in a subscription but are unable to afford it, contact admin@biavt.org to qualify for a free "Pay it Forward" subscription.

BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF VERMONT

Caregivers Corner

After injury, many survivors and their family members feel overwhelmed by life changes and losses. Family members often say that they feel like all of their energy goes to helping others, and they don't have the time or energy to take care of themselves. Others feel guilty if they take time to do something fun. Many people put others' needs way ahead of their own. Realize that you need to be at your 100 percent best to deal with the many injury-related challenges. Take the quiz below, count up the number of Trues and the number of Falses. The more Trues, the better you are doing at taking care of yourself. *If you have marked many items false, you may need to take better care of yourself.*

How well are you taking care of yourself?

- ❑ I try to get enough sleep at night.
- ❑ I take time out to rest and relax.
- ❑ I have hobbies or other activities that I enjoy on a regular basis.
- ❑ I get together with friends/family regularly.
- ❑ I monitor my stress level and emotions and seek support when I need it.
- ❑ I ask others to take on responsibilities when I am not able to handle them.
- ❑ I avoid taking on new responsibilities when I feel overwhelmed or stressed.
- ❑ I let others help me.
- ❑ I have a fitness or exercise program.
- ❑ I eat things that are good for me.
- ❑ I avoid alcohol and drugs.
- ❑ I talk to people I trust about my worries and concerns.
- ❑ I set small goals for myself that are meaningful.
- ❑ I monitor my health and seek medical care when needed.
- ❑ I give myself credit for reaching my goals and taking small steps forward.
- ❑ I recognize my limits and adjust my activities accordingly.

Laura Taylor and Jeffrey Kreutzer, The National Resource Center for Traumatic Brain Injury, Virginia Commonwealth Model Systems of Care www.brainline.org

Memory is one of the most important human functions and one that is often impaired after a traumatic brain injury. Memory helps us respond to the environment, use our experiences to change our behavior, and relate to other people. Living with a memory problem can be challenging. Try to work up the courage to tell friends, co-workers and family members that you have a memory problem so that they don't become frustrated with you. Just like many things after brain injury re-learning basics that were taken for granted prior can be frustrating and even infuriating at times. Try using these tips to help with the challenges of trying to remember.

Survivors Section

Learning to Remember

1. Write everything down.

This won't make your memory better, but it will help you get things done. It often helps to have a structured notebook to write everything so you are not searching for papers left lying around (or you can use an electronic device, some of which are designed for people with brain injury).

- Things I have to do
- What I did today (so you can review if you tend to forget)
- Important phone numbers and addresses
- A journal for writing ideas and feelings
- What to do in an emergency

Try to link looking in your notebook to things you already do each day. For instance, whenever you eat a meal--check your notebook! And remember, learning to use your notebook requires memory too, so give it practice and time.

2. Repetition, repetition, repetition.

Did I mention repetition? The way the brain knows something is important to remember is through repetition, so the more times you repeat something, the better your chance of remembering it. But the practice must be targeted to a meaningful skill or task that you need to perform in your life. It is better to practice or study one hour per day for seven days than to practice for seven hours on the same day.

3. Adjust the environment.

If you keep turning on the wrong burner on the stove, try using color codes to match the burner to the knob. If you often forget what you need to bring with you, place it in front of the door the night before, so you have to trip over it to leave without it. If you have specific tasks to do each day, like homework, set aside an hour that is only for that task and do it the same time every day.

4. Try the PQRST technique.

For remembering something you are reading, try the PQRST technique. This stands for *preview, question, read, state and test*. First, preview, or skim, the material to get a sense of what it is about, then generate a set of questions you hope to answer in the reading, read the material carefully, next state in your own words what you just read, and finally test yourself and go back and look up anything you could not remember.

Outside Perspective

It's Personal

Excerpt from "Chicken Soup for the Soul" - Recovering from Traumatic Brain Injuries

It has been eighteen months since my daughter suffered a traumatic brain injury falling down the basement stairs. She was given little chance to survive. But, through surgery, and later, therapy at a rehab hospital, she miraculously lived and is physically fit and as beautiful as ever. She was blessed in this regard and we choose to focus on this instead of dwelling on the significant cognitive problems and not just a speech impairment with which she still struggles. I've learned to deal with the speech and cognitive issues myself, but the reaction from her friends has been tough. I admit it's difficult to have a conversation with her, as she doesn't always understand what people are saying and tries to sort it out by asking them questions again and again.

At first she was surrounded by friends who offered encouragement and support, but once they met her for lunch or talked to her at their children's school events, the began to vanish. At her son's basketball and baseball games, my heart broke watching the other mothers ignore her, when before the accident they would sit with her and enjoy laughter and good conversation. When my daughter tried to be a part of the group, they would tell her they had to go, or simply stare at her. It wasn't long before her friends no longer called to visit or go places

For me, it has taken months, and I admit it is still a constant struggle to give her friends the benefit of the doubt. After all, when she walks into a room, no one would ever suspect there is anything wrong with her – that is until she talks. I suffered from a combination of hurt, bitterness and the emotions of a lioness trying to protect her cub. Days and weeks stretched into months with no word from her friends. The, one day, a friend from childhood whom she hadn't seen for many years began calling. My head swelled with gratitude. She came by weekly and took my daughter for walks, shopping and lunch. I marveled at the gesture, and it was heartwarming to see my daughter's eyes light up each week. The woman treated her the same as she always had, as if nothing were amiss. She didn't talk over her but straight to her, and seemed unfazed by any deficits.

Today, my daughter is making a new life for herself, surrounded by a supportive family and a few new friends plus her loyal childhood friend. She volunteers, works out at the local gym, and participated in her son's school activities – even though many people are reserved around her. For me I've learned that you cannot make people do what you want them to. But most of all I've learned to take things one day at a time and to focus on the positive, like that dear friend who chose to help instead of withdrawing. She will never truly know what a difference she has made just being there for us, reminding us that there are folks out there who overlook deficiencies and focus on friendship.

~Arlene Rains Graber

BIAVT Staff

Trevor Squirrell
Executive Director

Jess Leal
Operations Director

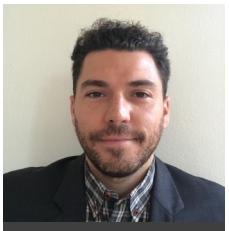
Barb Winters
Program Director

Carla Tepper
Office Administrator

Thank you to our Volunteers!

We cant do this all by ourselves, volunteers are the heart and soul of an organization like BIAVT. They make our events run smoothly, they facilitate our support groups, they advocate for people affected by brain injury when joining our voice within the community. Volunteers give of themselves with no expectations in return. For that we thank you. Thank you for your support, thank you for your skills and most of all we thank you for sharing your time to help us be the best we can be for the brain injury community

Special Shout Out



"I am especially inspired to aid this cause because of the large gap between the prevalence of cases and public awareness of the issue."

Frank Holiber: Columbia University premed graduate. Frank recently moved to Morristown to get away from the hustle and bustle of New York City. He loves skiing, hiking, camping and spending time with his wife and new puppy, Fang. Frank has helped the team update their LinkedIn page, create an Instagram account, and start a YouTube channel. The YouTube series allows survivors to tell their stories, caregivers to tell how brain injury has affected their lives, and professionals to discuss the challenges faced when treating someone with a brain injury. In Frank's words *"It has been an inspiration and a real privilege to speak with so many who want to help raise awareness for Brain Injury."*

Michael Paddock: Art Director at Rome Snowboards. Michael lives and works in the Waterbury community with his girlfriend and two Chihuahuas. During his free time Michael enjoys the many outdoor activities that Vermont is so well known for. Most will see him behind a camera at BIAVT events, assuring we have photos to share of each special occasion. Most recently he designed the new logo for our annual Walk & Roll fundraiser. Michael has helped the team many times both behind the scenes and as an integral part of our many events. *Michael says "*I've seen too many people get head injuries over the 25+ years I've been snowboarding. Volunteering is an easy and fulfilling way to give back to my community."

"Helping out the BIAVT is my way of giving back for all the education and outreach you do."

THANK YOU! For all of your effort on behalf of BIAVT and the brain injury community. We could not do this without you!

BIAVT needs you!

Do you have a special talent or skill that could benefit our organization?

If you are interested in helping to create a better future for Vermonters affected by brain injury. Contact admin@biavt.org.

Benefits of volunteering

- Volunteering connects you to others
- Volunteering is good for your mind and body
- Volunteering can advance your career
- Volunteering brings fun and fulfillment to your life
- Volunteering increases self confidence
- Volunteering provides a sense of purpose

BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF VERMONT

Thank You to our Donors!

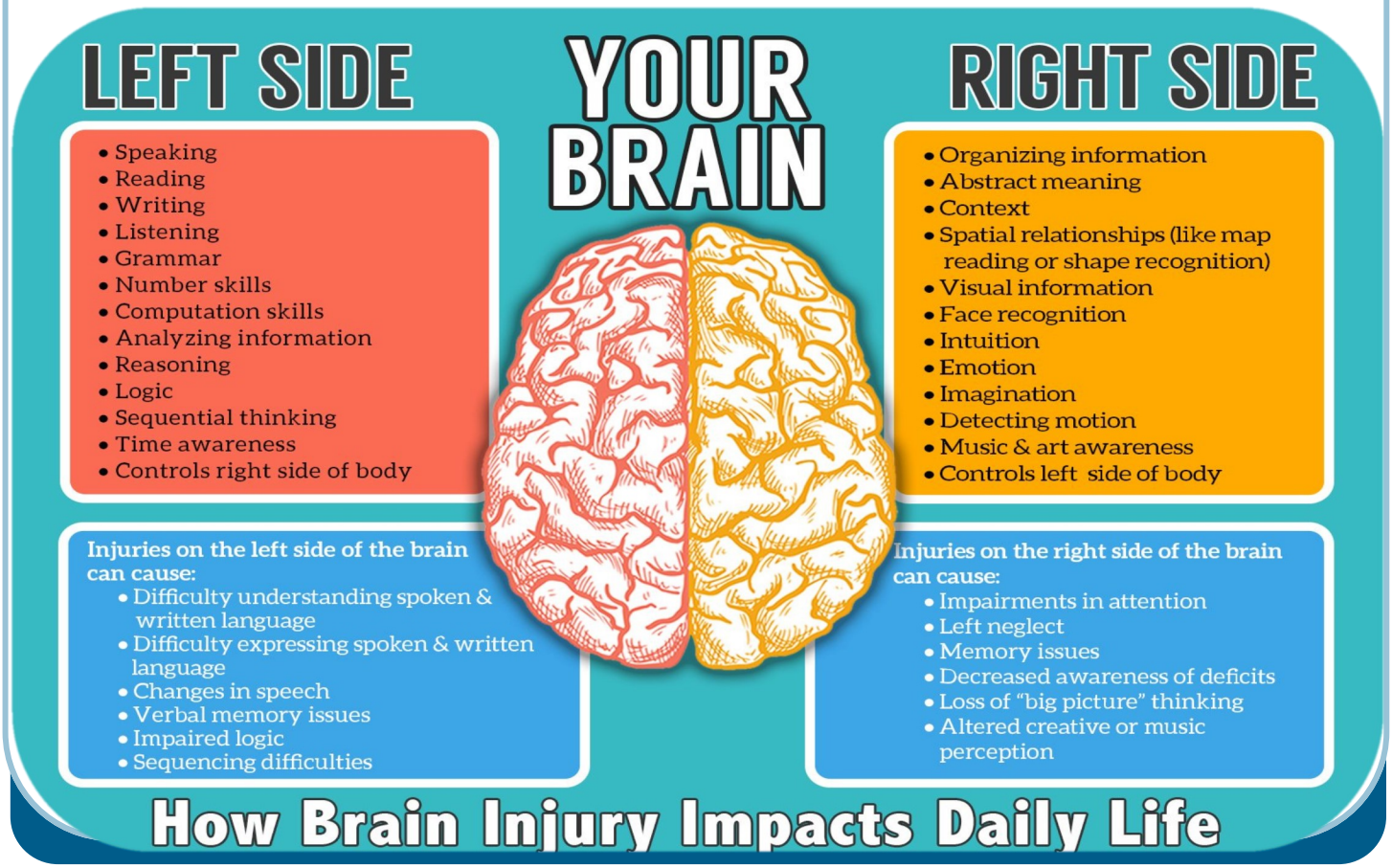
IBM Charitable Contribution
Lorraine Wargo
Tricia Long
Darby Thorndike Kolter & Nordle, LLP
Emma Burke
T.K. Moore
The Reservoir Restaurant & Taproom
Michael Fanning
Nancy Dawson
Theodore & Carol Bloomhardt
John Lynch
Arthur & Elizabeth Schmidt
Aida & Bob Luce

How YOU Can Help!

Donate Now!

Join us at one of our events!
Sponsor an event.
Donate a prize
Donate a monetary gift.
Leave a bequest.
Honor a loved one
Volunteer

Walk & Roll
– FOR –
BRAIN INJURY
SATURDAY, MAY 18, 2019
Montpelier High School
12:00pm
REGISTER NOW!



Brain Injury Support Groups

Living with a brain injury can feel isolating. A group of people that share similar challenges can be a way of once again feeling connected to those around you and not so alone in your journey. Gathering with people that are experiencing similar challenges can help you find ways of adapting that are practical and empowering. Insight from others that face a common problem can help you heal and grow.

BIAVT Support Groups

More Information: www.biavt.org

Bristol
Howden Hall
19 West St, Bristol
3rd Monday
5:30 - 7:00pm

Burlington
Department of Labor
63 Pearl St, Burlington
Last Friday
12:00 - 1:00pm

Colchester
Fanny Allen Hospital
790 College Pkwy
(Rte 15), Colchester
First Wednesday
5:30 - 7:30pm

St. Albans
Northwest Medical Center
Conference Center,
260 Crest Rd, St Albans
3rd Tuesday

VCIL Support Groups

More Information: www.vcil.org

Rutland
Rutland Free Library
3rd Friday
2:00 - 3:30pm

St. Johnsbury
Grace Methodist Church
36 Central St, St. Johnsbury
3rd Wednesday
1:00 - 2:00pm

New Hampshire (Border) Support Groups

More Information: www.bianh.org

Manchester
Grace Methodist Church
36 Central St, St. Johnsbury
3rd Wednesday
1:00 - 2:00pm

Lebanon
Dartmouth Hitchcock
Medical Center
2nd & 4th Wednesdays
6:00 - 7:30pm

Keene
Monadnock Pacers
63 Community Way
4th Tuesday
6:00pm-7:30pm

BIAVT will provide assistance in forming support groups in areas that are not currently being served. For more information or to facilitate a group contact ***support1@biavt.org.***

~ All days and times listed are each month unless otherwise indicated. ~

92 S. Main St. PO Box 482
Waterbury, VT 05676
Phone: 802-244-6850

BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF VERMONT

Helpline

Toll-Free

1-877-856-1772

Coming next issue...

Annual Brain Injury Conference
October 8, 2019

What a Walk!
Photos from our event

New Events!

New Trainings

Survivor & Caregiver Tips