

focus
on

Serious Injury Care

Ideas, trends and solutions in serious injury care | June 2006 | www.bayshore.ca

Associations strive to help Canadians with serious injuries cope with daily life

When a person sustains a traumatic injury, such as a spinal cord injury (SCI) or an acquired brain injury (ABI), his or her life is turned upside-down. There may be a long and painful recovery in the hospital, followed by numerous medical appointments and therapy at a rehabilitation centre or at home. The person's mobility may have been affected, and he or she may need an assistive device, such as a wheelchair or cane, or require expensive structural modifications at home. Work or school may be put on hold, perhaps indefinitely. They may have to re-learn tasks and actions that used to be second nature.

It can be a tumultuous and overwhelming time, filled with uncertainty and difficult decisions. People who have been seriously injured must also deal with the emotional and psychological effects of what has happened to them as they adjust to life with a disability. They may feel sadness, anger or grief because they are no longer completely independent and cannot do many tasks and activities they enjoy. Depression is not uncommon.

Fortunately, people who have an SCI or ABI and their families need not struggle alone. During difficult times, non-profit organizations dedicated to improving the lives of people who are living with serious injury offer information, support, services, referrals and advocacy. As people with serious injury learn to live with a disability, these organizations can be a powerful ally.

The Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia (BIANS) in Halifax is an example of a serious injury organization that has made a positive difference in the lives of many people. Its mission is "to promote and contribute to an environment in Nova Scotia which is responsive to the needs of all persons affected by brain injury, and

which results in brain injury prevention." Since the late 1980s, it has provided peer support, information and referrals, held conferences and workshops, and advocated for legislative change.

"Traumatic brain injury has many causes, including accidents, strokes, aneurysms, brain tumours and anoxia (lack of oxygen to the brain)," says Mary Bourgeois, BIANS' newsletter editor and spokesperson. "We're basically a support group supporting people with ABI and their families."

BIANS runs Aiseirigh House, a transition home that provides individualized rehabilitative programming so that clients can gain skills to live successfully in the community. It also offers Inroads, a free program that helps clients improve their literacy, memory and cognitive skills, and boosts confidence and self-sufficiency in the process.

Similar organizations across Canada also help people cope with serious injury, including the Ontario Brain Injury Association (OBIA), based in St. Catharines with several community associations across the province. "OBIA's mission is to enhance the lives of Ontarians living with the effects of ABI through education, awareness and support," says John Kumpf, the organization's executive director.

Like BIANS, the organization offers programs, services and education. It publishes a quarterly newsletter with articles about neuro-rehabilitation, prevention initiatives, research news, legislative issues and legal information, as well as encouraging stories about brain injury survivors.

The Canadian Paraplegic Association (CPA) has offices across the country that respond to the needs of people who have sustained an SCI and helps them achieve



John Kumpf, Executive Director,
Ontario Brain Injury Association (OBIA)

independence and full community participation. CPA promotes understanding and awareness of the issues affecting people with physical disabilities by sponsoring, developing and implementing programs that reflect the needs of its members and the community.

For example, its Alberta branch offers programs and services to help hundreds of clients each year regain health and independence, handle family and finance issues, access needed goods and services and secure employment. The organization tailors services to meet individual needs and delivers them at the community level. Many of the staff have an SCI themselves.

Serious injury organizations also play a key role in educating the staff who serve and assist people who have been injured. OBIA, BIANS and CPA have all undertaken

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initiatives to reach out to health care workers and increase awareness about serious injury.

“There is no doubt that ABI clients can present special challenges to those who work with them,” says Kumpf. “It is terribly important that these workers be prepared with some knowledge of these challenges and strategies to deal with them.”

For the past 12 years, OBIA has offered training for professionals working with ABI. More than 3,000 people have completed the courses, which are taught by instructors from North America and Wales.

Kumpf says that about three years ago, he was approached by Conestoga College to develop an introductory program for service providers who would work in the home setting with people who had an acquired brain injury.

“I met with the managers of the companies that were requesting this and determined that they were looking for something less detailed that would not focus on rehab, but on awareness of and managing the special challenges that people new to ABI might encounter working in the home,” he explains. “With some help from professionals in the field, a two-day course was developed and presented at Conestoga College to 54 personal support workers last fall.”

The feedback about the course was extremely positive, and word quickly spread. “I had calls from three other community colleges and two companies expressing interest in offering the course,” says Kumpf. He chose to work with Bayshore Home Health because he admires its commitment to excellence and preparing its staff to meet the challenges specific to ABI.

This summer, eight Bayshore staff members will be trained to become trainers themselves. Ann Fontaine, an RN and area director for Bayshore Home Health in Hali-

Bayshore Home Health – a leader in serious injury home care

Bayshore Home Health is a Canadian-owned company and has been a trusted provider of home and community care services since 1966. It operates more than 30 offices nationally and works with many organizations that deliver specialized home care services to clients with serious injuries, including workers compensation boards, auto insurers, rehabilitation service providers and government care agencies. To learn more about any of the services listed below, please call 1-866-265-1920.

Brain and spinal cord injury care • Wound and burn care • Fracture and amputation care • Palliative care • 24-hour nursing • Personal care and home support • Serious injury care planning • Safety assessments • Teaching • Care coordination with third parties

fax, says that the trained staff will educate home support employees, nurses, allied health workers and family members.

Kumpf is enthusiastic about the program. “This is a tremendous opportunity to enhance the quality of care offered to the ABI population who are receiving care in their home,” he says. “I would hope that, working with Bayshore Home Health, we can eventually spread this training across Canada, not only with Bayshore’s staff, but others working in the field, and with family members.”

Bayshore Home Health has also participated in educational programs, such as one-day workshops, involving representatives from BIANs and CPA. Speakers also included health care professionals, such as a nurse educator, dietitian, occupational therapist and an expert in behaviour management.

Bourgeois attended a workshop at the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax. “It seemed to be beneficial for the staff,” she says. “When they’re dealing with clients with a brain injury, it’s good for them to know what community supports are out there so they can suggest, help or do whatever is needed. I think it went over

well and BIANs was very pleased to be part of it.”

Kumpf says that the training programs offer an opportunity to create valuable partnerships between non-profit organizations that assist people with serious injuries and agencies that provide health care services. “The programs offered by brain injury associations and the services offered by Bayshore Home Health are complementary, and I can see some great value in having the two working together.”

Fontaine agrees. “I believe these associations and relationships will enhance the quality of care for our clients,” she says. “Provision of care needs to encompass the patient’s perspective, be client-driven and kept up-to-date through comprehensive staff education.”

For more information about the disability organizations mentioned in this article, please visit their websites:

Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia:
www3.ns.sympatico.ca/bians1

Canadian Paraplegic Association:
www.canparaplegic.org

Ontario Brain Injury Association:
www.obia.on.ca

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