

MIND MATTERS SUMMER 2005

A Newsletter from the Brain Injury Association of Washington

Open letter to brain injury survivors

Dear fellow survivors and family: Either you are living with it or someone close to you has suffered from it. We are talking about brain injury. Both of us – Julie Seserko and Bill Nelson – have brain injuries.

Julie had a stroke. Bill was hit by a car at a young age. We know first hand that your world is turned upside down in a matter of moments and it can last a lifetime. Our message today is not about what has happened but about what we can MAKE happen – by working together so that brain injury issues are more visible and better understood by police, ambulance workers, emergency room personal, family doctors, medical specialists, other health care providers, attorneys, insurance companies and those within the legislative bodies.

Our numbers are growing and we cannot waste anymore time in getting the word out. The Brain Injury Association of Washington belongs to each and every one of us. If we want to make a difference on the issues affecting us as survivors, we need to get busy and become involved with this association. With new leadership and a newly formed Executive Board, BIAWA is revitalizing and renewing its position in our community and giving voice to brain injury survivors.

As you may have heard, we have moved from Redmond to Seattle, in a building directly across from the emergency room of Harborview Medical Center. With a more central location, we want to be of better service to more people. We are organizing educational seminars, have revamped our quarterly newsletter, cleaned up our Web page and organized a new activist-oriented Executive Board. We are making a lot of progress and great things are beginning to happen. But we need you to step forward!

From the calls we get, we know there are many of you hurting. In addition to suffering the injury, some are homeless or facing the possibility of homelessness, and some are in despair. This is not right and needs to be changed. But it will take courage, time, energy and opening doors. Please sit down and think about our message to you. Please step forward, and let's work together to put dignity back in our lives.

Remember, you are not alone! You do have choices. The next move is

yours.

Please call us so we can get to know what you need. Please come see us and become a volunteer of this association.

Call us at 206-388-0900 or 800-523-5438.

Sincerely,



Julie Seserko
Brain Injury Survivor
and BIAWA Member



Bill Nelson
Brain Injury Survivor
and BIAWA Member

[Helmet Day for Unicycle Club](#)

March 21 was a Blue Helmet Day for the Fife-Milton Schools' Unicycle Club. The Puyallup Area Brain Injury Support Group, under the leadership of Kent and Heather Hamilton, provided helmets to every

elementary school child who is a member of the Unicycle Club team, 55 strong. To provide maximum protection, no helmets are given without a safety message and an individual fitting.



The helmets were purchased with generous donations from the community, the local Lions Club and employees of PRO-RIDER, a local distributor of sports helmets. The Hamiltons and their support group were assisted in the helmet fitting by members of that same Lions Club and by good friend Bob Lambert, who had partnered with them on many past "helmet events. Thanks to generous funds from individuals and community organizations, Kent and Heather and their Support Group members have over the last several years provided free helmets to and fit thousands of young citizens in King and Pierce County.

If you want to know how to run a safety helmet program and do it right, Kent and Heather would be pleased to share their expertise with you. Just call 253- 922-9184 or email kenthamilton@comcast.net

Thank you, Kent and Heather, for preventing head injuries to our precious children.

[UW Traumatic Brain Injury Model System update](#)

Seizures after TBI One of the most serious complications of TBI is epilepsy (or more than one seizure). If you look at all persons with brain injuries, about 4 percent will have epilepsy. The rates of seizures are very different depending on the severity of injury. Persons with mild TBI have almost the same risk as people without TBI. A moderate brain injury will raise the risk to almost three times as frequent and severe

brain injuries to 17 times the risk of the general population in the U.S.

People with a moderate to severe TBI will often have a seizure in the first week after injury, but that does not mean they will have epilepsy. However, if a person with a TBI has a seizure after the first week, it is very likely that they will have more seizures over time and need to be treated.

Seizures can look very differently in different people. About half the time, post-brain-injury seizures can look like the seizures we all think about, in which the person loses consciousness and has jerking of the arms and legs. About half the time, however, people have "focal" or partial seizures. In some partial seizures, people lose consciousness but in many types, they stay awake. Only one arm or leg may jerk. Other types of seizures can be very striking. Some people will only have a smell or a sense of déjà vu (a feeling that they have been in the present situation before). Seizures can be behavioral and look like aggression or anger, or involve some sort of stereotyped (repetitive) behavior like making a particular movement over and over again.

If someone has a late seizure (beyond the first week after injury), it is important to treat the seizures. Repetitive seizures can cause further brain damage if uncontrolled. There are many different types of anti-seizure medications available nowadays, and usually you and your doctor can find one that controls the seizures without serious side effects.

For more information, visit the Web site of the Epilepsy Foundation at www.efa.org or the Epilepsy Foundation Northwest at www.epilepsyfoundation.org or call toll-free at 1-800-752-3509.

BIAWA Briefs

Research subjects needed Does exercise work to improve the mood and overall quality of life in persons with TBI? You can help the UW answer this question by participating in a research project. All participants are offered a free 10-week guided exercise group at North Seattle Community College's Wellness Center. To be eligible for this study, you must have had a brain injury in the last six months to five years, have symptoms of depression and be able to walk. Please call 206-685-8354 for more details or visit the UW TBIMS Web site at

<http://depts.washington.edu/rehab/>

Survivor enters writing contest! Brain injury survivor Dana Lough has entered The Helen Keller Foundation's disability writing contest for those who live with a physical or mental disability. In her entry, Lough briefly describes her stardom in several sports, the accident that changed her life and the painful rehabilitation that followed, finding new friends with The Brain Injury Association and meeting her future husband. She also talks about her efforts to improve life for the BIAWA members by serving as a support group leader, as well as the challenges of holding down a full-time job for over 20 years and dealing with fellow employees.

Results of the contest will be reported in a future newsletter issue. New support group coordinator Valerie Wootton has been selected to be Support Group Coordinator for BIAWA. She is currently in the process of contacting all group leaders to update locations, times and days of meetings. She is also asking the groups what kind of information they would like to have available and how the BIAWA can better serve them. If you attend a support group and have suggestions or requests, please contact Valerie at 360-387-6428, send an email to: tbiarms@earthlink.net or call the BIAWA office at 206-388-0900 and leave a message.