

Why Mentoring for Brain Injury Survivors?



After a brain injury, life changes. One day, everything is fine, and then suddenly one has to deal with a comprehensive shift in reality - neurologically, psychologically, emotionally, socially and even spiritually. Survivors go from life as “normal” to dealing with deficits that extend into all aspects of their existence.

Without helpful interventions, brain injury survivors have their deficits predominate in their personalities. This often renders them socially unacceptable, awkward and unemployable. Many tend to withdraw and isolate themselves. Others may act out or exhibit behavioral issues. When left to deal with the complications of brain injury alone, the burden on the individual can be overwhelming. Studies also have shown that the tendency for survivors is to self-medicate with drugs and/or alcohol. This suggests an urgent need to consider early-intervention when brain injury survivors enter back into the community.

Gray Matters – Brain Injury Support Initiative

Gray Matters provides group support twice a month in San Diego and in North County. This group has existed for over ten years. Another level and means of support is the Gray Matters Mentor Program.

The mentors will be trained and made available to work with survivors after they leave the hospital or after having struggled with living independently for some time. In reaping the benefits from this Mentoring Program, divergent behaviors can be “nipped in the bud.” Gray Matters’ Mentoring Program can be a genuine resource for people who have sustained a brain injury. The Mentors are long-term survivors of brain injury, themselves. Just their simple presence and understanding serves their partners in helping them to cope! Mentors can share what helped for them in regaining daily living skills and help their partners to figure out what would work best for them. Mentors can familiarize their partners with the suitable accommodations, so that they will be able to use them on their own. Additionally, the Mentors can refer the partners to local resources for services.

To further a person’s sense of wellness, Mentors will help their partners cope with their condition and approach psychosocial issues. Many of the psychological or social symptoms are less obvious to the average eye, they are more enduring and hard to address. Psychosocial distress is emotional, social, psychological, and behavioral. Working together one-on-one via Mentoring, one survivor may mirror or help to identify issues that would otherwise be difficult for the survivor to be aware of on their own. Sometimes, awareness of the problem may resolve it; if not, once the issue is identified, it can then be addressed with useful interventions.

A mentoring relationship can be a catalyst that helps brain injury survivors rejoin the world. In interacting with the Mentor, they will learn to proactively communicate and

socialize. Mentors are not therapists, they are there to listen. In personally getting to know their partners, they can help to individualize strategies that will work for their partner. Mentors have a feel for what their partners are going through, because they have walked a real similar path themselves. Mentors can be the connection for their partners to come to cope with their new selves.

Gray Matters Mentoring

This country is searching everywhere for solutions to brain injury. Gray Matters utilizes an effective solution that is right in front of us and available in bulk; that is, other brain injury survivors. Long-term survivors are trained in working one-on-one with other survivors – what to do and what not to do.

The intervention of Mentoring touches areas that are hard to reach (areas such as social skills, personal attitudes, etc.) and if they are not intervened on, they can become problematic. Survivors are more willing to trust someone who has walked the path they are on. The training for Mentors involves teaching strategies and interventions, as well as learning to be an “active listener” and other communication skills.

The protocol for Gray Matters’ is empowering for the mentors and serves in healing for them, themselves. “Give, and it will be given to you.” (Luke 6:38). In the giving one is restored - in better socializing, ability to communicate, in building confidence and self-worth. The process of mentoring is a “win-win”, for the one being mentored and for the Mentor her or himself.

Heidi works with Warriors Live On in presenting a mentoring program for veterans with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Stresses can be minimized with Peer Support. <http://warriorliveon.org/>

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