

THE
University of Vermont
MEDICAL CENTER

trauma survivors
network
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SURVIVOR NEWS

Newsletter for Resilience and Rebuilding

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SURVIVOR SPOTLIGHT



Survivor Spotlight: Mariah Mitchell

Hello, my name is Mariah Mitchell and I am quite literally a walking miracle. On November 1, 2019 I was crushed by a large pine tree while working on the front lawn of a preschool. It blew over and I just so happened to be standing in its path.

I heard a crack and in less time than it took my brain to acknowledge what was happening, I was crushed face down in the dirt with the weight of a tree on my body. I screamed for help repeatedly until I saw feet running toward me. I remember feeling a branch on my head and watching the blood drip down onto the ground below my face. As a first responder, I knew that staying calm in this situation was crucial to my survival. (continued on page 2)

Vermont Adaptive Ski & Sports

By Kim Jackson



According to the U.S. Paralympics, less than 10 percent of people with disabilities participate in physical activity or sports. Many times, this is due in part to the financial limitations. Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports is committed to getting folks involved with healthy activity by removing the barrier of the cost for participating in its programs. Programs are based on a sliding scale fee and scholarships are available.

In addition to sports, year-round programming options integrate environmental, holistic wellness, and competitive training philosophies for people of all ages with cognitive, developmental, physical and emotional disabilities, and includes those who have experienced a serious traumatic injury. More than 400 volunteers are highly trained each season to understand and work with various abilities and different adaptive equipment. Lessons and outings are personalized to the individual, allowing folks to truly feel comfortable even if they're outside their comfort zone.

To learn more and register for programs, visit www.vermontadaptive.org.

Survivor Spotlight Continued

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But, when I glanced down and saw my right leg up over my left shoulder and had no sensation from my waist down, I began to panic. I realized that if I made it out alive, I would most likely never walk again. I watched my life slip away before my eyes. I remember very vividly, while firefighters were cutting chainsaws through the wood above my head, saying “I need to get out, I can’t breathe.” My lungs were collapsing among my broken ribs.

I was rushed to UVMMC and had sustained multiple open pelvic fractures, lacerations to my organs, fractured lumbar spine, respiratory failure, etc. I was in an induced coma for a week while surgeons performed an exploratory laparotomy and a 20 hour pelvic reconstruction. I spent over three months inpatient. Initially, I was told 2-4 weeks and I would be back home. But, right before the holidays I was rushed to Mass General from Spaulding Rehab with VRE in my pelvis that I was told if had gone untreated another day would have killed me.



Since my accident, I have suffered with severe depression, anxiety, and PTSD. For far too long I put my mental health off and primarily focused on my physical recovery until I hit rock bottom. In January of 2021 following another pelvic surgery, I admitted myself into a psychiatric hospital because I knew I needed help. The emotional and mental pain I was feeling during that time was unbearable. While I was admitted, I read about PTSD, anxiety, depression, and grief, trying to understand my brain. Immediately following discharge, I was enrolled into a daily Intensive Outpatient Program for over three months.

2021 pushed me to my breaking point and taught me lessons that have changed my life for the better. I am more aware of the correlation between my mental health and chronic pain which allows me to begin taking my life back. Many times I have been stuck in a vicious cycle where my pain plummets my mental health and vice versa. On these dark days, I try to ground myself in nature doing things I love such as hiking, paddle boarding, and hunting.

I have come to realize the impact mental illness plays in my everyday life as well as those around me. Managing my mental health over the last two years has been extremely difficult. Life is all about peaks and valleys; there will be days full of light and joy, and there will be days full of darkness. But trust me, it is worth the climb to watch the sunset from the top of that next peak.



Chronic Pain Self-Management Program

By My Healthy VT



If you are living with long-lasting (or “chronic”) pain—from an injury, surgery, or health condition like arthritis, multiple sclerosis, or fibromyalgia—you are not alone. About 100 million Americans are living with chronic pain.

There’s a lot you can do to manage your pain and related issues—so you can live a healthier, more productive, and more enjoyable life.

The Chronic Pain Self-Management Program meets for 2.5 hours, one day each week for a total of 6 weeks.

The workshop leaders and fellow participants will help guide and support one another in learning to:

- Manage common problems that can come with chronic pain—like fatigue (feeling tired), trouble sleeping and being socially isolated
- Work through the emotional challenges of living with chronic pain—like frustration and feeling alone
- Exercise in ways that improve your strength, flexibility, and endurance—while pacing yourself between activities to get enough rest
- Be an active partner in working with your doctor and other care providers
- Help your friends and family better understand your pain, and how it affects your ability to participate in activities
- Manage your medications to get better results and stay safe

Our workshops are free of cost for all participants. That’s because we’re committed to making sure all Vermonters have access to expert advice and proven strategies to take control of their health.

Contact your Self-Management Regional Coordinator to Register.

Visit MyHealthyVT.org E-mail: SelfManagement@UVMHealth.org Call: 802-847-7255

VT Brain Injury Support Programs

By Sara Lane

There are two types of acquired brain injury: traumatic and non-traumatic.

A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is defined as an alteration in brain function, or other evidence of brain pathology, caused by an external force. Traumatic impact injuries can be defined as closed (or non-penetrating) or open (penetrating).

A non-traumatic brain injury, often referred to as an acquired brain injury, causes damage to the brain by internal factors such as lack of oxygen, exposure to toxins, pressure from a tumor, etc.

Vermont Medicaid Brain Injury Program Eligibility:

- Age 16 years or older.
- Eligible for Medicaid or Long- Term Care Medicaid.
- Individual has a diagnosed moderate to severe acquired brain injury.
- Individual needs daily 1:1 support to re-learn and/or learn strategies to manage daily life skills as independently as possible.
- Individual is motivated to be an active participant in the programming.



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Vermont Brain Injury Support Program

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Neuro psychological evaluations are always helpful to develop programming based on cognitive strengths and deficits.

Services and supports include:

- Case Management
- Direct Life Skills Aid Support
- Shared Living Arrangements
- Residential Living
- Employment Supports
- Assistive Devices/Technology/Home Modifications
- Respite
- Specialized Psychology & Counseling Supports

To be screened for eligibility and to find out about other resources please contact the Brain Injury Association of Vermont. The helpline staff at the Brain Injury Association of Vermont can confidentially help you find the resources and support you may be looking for.

Visit: biavt.org Email: support@biavt.org Helpline: 1 (802) 244-6850

Resolutions and Goals for the New Year

By Abby Beerman

Tip 1: Pick goals that are performance-based instead of outcome-based. This makes your resolution seem more achievable and less abstract.

Tip 2: Set 'SMART' Goals. 'SMART' stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. For example, a resolution to be more active is not a 'SMART' resolution. A goal to take part in a physical activity for 15 minutes three days a week starting January 15th until December 15th is 'SMART'er because it is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant (if it's actually a goal you want to do), and time-bound.

Tip 3: Short term goals are a great way to build motivation towards long term goals! Or in other words, big goals can be even more achievable when broken down into smaller steps or sub goals. Think about setting goals that can be

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NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Abby Beerman, TSN Coordinator

ACUTE CARE SURGERY INJURY PREVENTION

111 Colchester Ave
Smith 240
Burlington, VT 0501

PHONE

(802) 847-2291

E-MAIL

TraumaSurvivors@UVMHealth.org

Website

UVMHealth.org/TSN

met on a daily or weekly basis instead of just monthly or annually.

Tip 4: Set up a way to record and monitor your goals. It can be as simple as check marks on a calendar, a spreadsheet, or something more fun like a reward-based system!

Tip 5: Find support for your goals. The support can be from friends or family, or it can be an app. The type of support you need to achieve your goal will depend on the type of goal you set.

Tip 6: Don't be afraid of failure! Not reaching the goal you set for yourself is okay. You don't have to love failure, but you can be okay with it. Maybe you made an amazing amount of progress, but didn't quite reach your goal. Perhaps the goal was not the right goal for you. You can use it as a learning experience or a time for personal reflection.

