New Year, New Goals

UVMMC officially became a TSN site in the Spring of 2020. The last three years have been slow progress with unexpected barriers and limitations. As the world returns to a new normal, our program has decided to make clear goals for the new year to continue growing and improving. Below we have outlined our three goals with each one focused on what we can do to provide a better experience for survivors and their families or connect them with resources and supports they may not have previous known about. We hope you will support us in making these goals a reality!

1) Build connections with programs and services that can benefit traumatic injury survivors and their families
2) Offer in-person and virtual workshops or webinars focused on education, resiliency, and skill development
3) Expand in-hospital support and resources to traumatic injury survivors and their families

The Speech-Language Pathologist’s role in Trauma Survivors’ Recovery

By Lakshmi Joshi Boyle, MS., CCC-SLP

Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP) are an essential part of the treatment team for those who have suffered from a brain injury. As the name implies, SLPs have an expertise, not only speech production, but also in language - how it is processed (by understanding of what someone has said or written), how someone expresses themselves (the words they use, how they use those words, when they use those words, how fluently they say things, and the way they use those words, either by talking or by what they have written). The brain has to take information in, make sense of it, then react to it in some way. Similarly, when we want to say something, we need to think about what we want to say, how we want to say it, and say it in a way that makes sense. When someone has a brain injury, these abilities can get damaged at any point. The SLP helps to figure out where in the brain’s path this happened and what needs to be done to help make it better. (continued on page 3)
Peer Visitor Program

**Description from the Trauma Survivors Network**

Trauma can be an isolating experience. In addition to being injured and in pain, patients surviving a trauma are thrust unexpectedly into a world with strange rules, systems, and people. Trauma alters all routines, roles, and relationships, and can leave the patient lost and bewildered. Few trauma survivors have friends or family who share their experience, so while a wife, father, daughter or nurse may be at the bedside, many patients continue to feel quite alone.

Starting this year, the University of Vermont Medical Center will be offering the option of peer visiting to our trauma patients. TSN visitors have survived similar experiences and have gained wisdom and perspective during their recovery. They are in a unique position to normalize the trauma patient’s experience, and to offer hope and perspective. Hearing, “Hang in there - it'll get easier,” sounds different coming from another survivor than from, say, a sister. A peer visitor understands feeling overwhelmed and having feelings of despair; his or her presence also demonstrates hope and resilience.

Some benefits and goals of talking with a peer visitor include:

- Sharing your experience with someone who can directly relate to what you are going through
- Learning some practical tips on moving forward
- Receiving encouragement and support
- Getting answers to questions from the perspective of someone who’s ‘been there’
- Feeling less anxious, afraid and alone

**WHO ARE PEER VISITORS?**

TSN peer visitors have experienced a traumatic injury, such as a car crash, fall, gunshot wound, or work-related injury and have made a successful adaptation to their life after injury. All TSN peer visitors have completed a training program. Peer visitors are not professional counselors, therapists or advisors (medical, legal, or otherwise). They volunteer their time because they want to help others like themselves.

**HOW DO I BECOME A PEER VISITOR?**

If you have experienced a traumatic injury and would like to become a peer visitor, e-mail TraumaSurvivors@UVMHealth.org. Remember, to become a peer visitor you will have to participate in introductory training to make sure you are ready to help others and develop the skills to make you the best peer visitor possible.
TSN Research Study Results
Matt Price, Johanna Hidalgo, Abby Beerman

The UVMMC Trauma Survivors Network & UVM Department of Psychological Science conducted a survey of traumatic injury survivors to better understand the process of recovery after a traumatic injury, services used after discharge, and what factors helped with their recovery process. A total of 145 surveys were completed by individuals who were treated for traumatic injuries at the University of Vermont Medical Center. The results are still being analyzed, but the research team wanted to share some of the preliminary findings with our TSN members!

One aspect of recovery examined by the survey was the prevalence of mental health concerns among survivors. Screening questions for PTSD, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and Depression were part of the survey. The results so far show that 28% of respondents meet criteria for PTSD, 29% for Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), and 15% for depression. For comparison, in the general U.S. population, 6% of adults are estimated to meet the criteria for PTSD, 2.7% for Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and 8.4% for major depression.

When the data was examined further, the researchers found younger individuals reported greater symptoms of PTSD, GAD, and Depression than older respondents. And overall only 42% of individuals are not receiving any form of treatment. When treatment was used, the most common was prolonged exposure therapy, which is a type of cognitive behavioral therapy that teaches individuals to gradually approach trauma related memories, feelings, and situations, and seeking safety therapy, which is a present focused evidence-based treatment program.

The research team is still analyzing the results and finalizing the findings, but their hope is to use the results of this study to improve services and therapies available to survivors post injury or to remove hurdles that may exist for gaining access to resources. Overall, the research team is grateful to the traumatic injury survivors who took the time to complete the survey.

The Speech-Language Pathologist’s role in Trauma Survivors’ Recovery

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After a brain injury, some people may have trouble understanding, talking, reading, and/or writing. Others may have trouble with organizing their thoughts into language, and yet others may have trouble with remembering those thoughts or making sense of them. An SLP can work with you to improve how you communicate thoughtfully, accurately, and efficiently. It is like physical therapy for the brain! We help to rebuild neural pathways so thinking and communicating become easier. It may not be exactly the way it was before, but we can usually help with getting things better than they currently are working. To set up appointments with an SLP, talk to your primary care provider for a referral.
Meet the Trauma Team
Abby Beerman, Injury Prevention Coordinator
Abby Beerman, MPH, CPST-I, has been with the trauma center as an Injury Prevention Coordinator for four years. Before that, she worked in public health in infectious disease and preparedness. She jokes she picked the right time to transition from disease to injuries! Now her job is to identify and prevent mechanisms of injury that bring individuals to the trauma center.

Additionally, Abby coordinates the Safe Kids Vermont coalition which focuses on pediatric injury prevention as well as the Trauma Survivors Network at the University of Vermont Medical Center.

Upcoming Events
The Trauma Survivors Network along with the Osher Center for Integrative Health is hosting a Self-Care Workshop series! These monthly 1-hour workshops are completely free for traumatic injury survivors and 1 support person, family member, or friend.

Be sure to register as the classes are capped at 25 participants! https://forms.microsoft.com/r/D0sasmCPzX

FINDING RHYTHM IN RESILIENCY, THE ROLE OF MUSIC AND MUSIC THERAPY
Jen DeBedout, MM, MT-BC
• Tuesday, January 10th at 6 pm

YOGA FOR HEALING FROM TRAUMATIC INJURY
Jen Peterson, Yoga Teacher, Ayurvedic Health Counselor and Reiki Practitioner
• Tuesday, February 14th at 6 pm

Thank you to the American Trauma Society and national Trauma Survivor Network program for providing the funding to allow us to host this Self-Care workshop series.

New Resources
The UVM Medical Center TSN Family and Friends Facebook support group is now live! This private Facebook group is a place for family and friends of survivors to connect with other individuals and find support and community. Join by scanning the QR code!