

HeadSTRONG

The Brain Injury Alliance of Colorado is the go-to resource for help and services for survivors of an injury to the brain, their families, and providers.

A Survivor's Story

An interview with survivor Julian Vega

His second motorcycle accident in 2014 left Julian with spinal injuries and another TBI. Despite having worn a helmet, Julian wound up in the ICU and was hospitalized for several weeks. His injuries left him unable to return to his job, and he was counting on a disability award to sustain him; but his claim was denied, and things began to spiral down from there. His job was gone, and soon after, his van and everything in it. He was homeless.

Then he met a new companion, Julie, at the Denver Rescue Mission and made plans to move out of the shelter. He asked Julie to go with him.

Equipped with only a tent and a flashlight, they spent the next 13 months sleeping in the elements in the Denver area, changing locations when the cops asked them to move along. Julian says the thing he was most afraid of during that time was "running into the wrong kind of people". Running into skunks at night was a close second!

Setting up camp in the dark and living in fear of someone coming along and taking what little they had, takes its toll, physically and emotionally. One morning Julian awoke to find Julie shivering in her sleep. He wanted to take her back to the shelter, but she refused. They have been together ever since.

Julian was referred to the Brain Injury Alliance of Colorado (BIAC) by the hospital at discharge. When a BIAC case manager called him and asked how she could help, she thought he would ask for an apartment or a hotel voucher.



*"Work hard, make money
and live a happy life."*

Instead, Julian asked only for two sleeping bags.

Shortly after that contact, Julian landed a job. He remembered the challenge of getting ready to go to work in the morning when you are homeless. "I would wash up in the park fountain to look presentable. When it was cold, I would only wash from the knees down!"

With regular phone calls and encouragement from BIAC, Julian's life slowly began to move forward. His hard work and persistence was rewarded when he and Julie moved into their first apartment. Counting every penny, the couple slept on the floor in their sleeping bags until they were able to obtain a bed (with the assistance of BIAC). They have

a true appreciation for the simple things in their life now, like hot showers and homemade food.

As a result of his brain injuries, Julian suffers from memory problems and anxiety issues. He is aware of his forgetfulness, but grateful to Julie for her patience and support. They were married earlier this year. Julian plans to prepare a candlelight spaghetti dinner on the patio to celebrate their 6-month anniversary.

"Don't underestimate him", Julie cautions, "if Julian is determined to get something done, he will find a way to do it. He always figures it out." His BIAC case manager asked him about future goals. Julian responded, "Work hard, make money and live a happy life." There is no doubt he will make this happen. ■

Resource Highlight

Non-Emergent Medical Transportation

What is Non-Emergent Medical Transportation (NEMT)?

Non-Emergent Medical Transportation (NEMT) is transportation to & from covered non-emergency medical appointments or services, and is only available when a Health First Colorado (Colorado's Medicaid Program) member has no other means of transportation.

Who is eligible for NEMT services?

Most Health First Colorado members who have no other means of transportation may qualify.

What services are available?

Types of transportation available vary by location and may include:

- Mileage reimbursement
- Private vehicle
- Bus tokens and passes
- Mobility vehicle
- Public transportation
- Ground and Air Ambulance

For more information and for scheduling:

[Colorado.gov/pacific/hcpf/non-emergent-medical-transportation](https://colorado.gov/pacific/hcpf/non-emergent-medical-transportation)



Support Group Spotlight

Northern Colorado Brain Injury Support Group

What is the main goal for the members?

"I think our main goal is to support our TBI community of individuals with brain injury through whatever they are dealing with," says Rich. "We also want to inform the community and the supporters so that they can understand a little more what happens after a TBI." Each meeting is an opportunity for individuals with brain injury, their family and friends, medical professionals, and other interested parties, to learn more about what it's like to live with brain injury, to learn from others, and to connect and socialize with others touched by brain injury.

When and where does the group meet?

In the summer of 2016, the decision was made that we should have a group in both Ft. Collins and another one

in the Loveland area. Now, we hold our second-Monday meeting at The Matthews House, located at 220 N. Grant Avenue in Ft. Collins, and our fourth-Monday meeting at Northern Colorado Rehabilitation Hospital, located at 4401 Union Street in Johnstown, CO. Meeting time at both facilities is 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

How can people get involved?

We are fortunate that we have several people involved in facilitating the bi-monthly group meetings. For more information or any questions, please contact Rich Spears at 970-218-9744 or spearsmorbis@aol.com; Mindy Cooper at 970-217-5439 or mtrcooper@gmail.com; and Scott La Point at 970-292-8360 or slapointpsyd@gmail.com.

Mindfulness Offers an Opportunity for Healing and Peace

By Jennifer Medina, Ph.D.

Mindfulness, often described as *present moment awareness*, can be a valuable source of comfort and well-being for individuals affected by brain injury. Mindfulness is effective for stress reduction as well as coping with pain and other medical conditions. Mindfulness helps with observing thoughts and feelings without judgment so we can approach challenges with compassion and acceptance rather than fear or criticism.

We often experience difficult situations in life that cause us to worry about the future, imagine worst-case scenarios, and obsess about the “What ifs” that lie before us. Similarly, events can cause us to review what has occurred in the past, and all the ways we “Should Have” done something differently. Reminiscing about the past and imagining the future causes us to lose control of the present, taking away our ability to recognize what is occurring *right now*, and invites negative emotions into our current mindset. This often results in behaviors that are fueled by anxiety, sadness, and fear, that take away the opportunity to show up as our best selves.

Brain injury survivors experience these patterns in the same ways that other individuals might, with the added struggle of symptoms related to the injury. This might include feeling overstimulated by lights and sounds, becoming easily distracted, and feeling like emotions are uncontrollable and fueled by irritability and shame.

By practicing mindfulness, survivors can begin to experience more control of their emotions and thoughts. Mindfulness practices provide tools to allow us to pause and observe situations without criticism, and offer a kinder way of thinking about difficult situations. Breathing and body awareness allow us to stay in touch with how stress affects us physically and emotionally. This awareness gives us the opportunity to make choices about how to *respond* in a difficult moment, rather than *react*, and to be at peace with *what is*.

A simple mindfulness exercise is the **STOP** practice. When experiencing a challenging situation:

Stop what you are doing, pause for a moment.

Take a deep breath to send a calming signal to the body and slow down the mind.

Observe your thoughts, feelings, and body. Draw awareness to what you are thinking and feeling without judgment. Say something kind to yourself such as, “This is really difficult.”

Proceed by choosing how you want to continue. Perhaps you need to walk away, call a friend for support, engage in another activity, or simply offer compassion to yourself in this difficult time.

By using the mindful STOP practice, we can begin to feel in control of difficult situations by drawing awareness to what’s occurring in that moment, paying attention to how we feel in mind and body, and moving forward with more control.

Mindfulness practices are lifestyle habits.

Check your local community for classes, read books, use apps, and search websites that support mindfulness in daily life.

BIAC offers a monthly Mindful Brain class for survivors that offers support for building a mindfulness practice in daily life. ■



Upcoming Events and Classes

Classes and Workshops

For registration and questions, contact Heather at 720-907-1455 or Heather@BIAColorado.org.

Unless otherwise noted, classes and workshops are held at BIAC's Denver office at 1325 S. Colorado Blvd, B-300, Denver, CO 80222.

Art Classes - Denver

Every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month
10:00 - 11:30am

Art Classes - Colorado Springs

Every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month
1:30 - 3:00pm

HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital
325 S. Parkside Dr.
Colorado Springs, CO 80910

Grief & Loss Group

Every 2nd and 4th Wednesday of the month
1:30 - 2:30pm

Music Therapy

Every Thursday
10:15 - 11:15am

Needlework

Every 3rd Tuesday of the month
January - June 2018
10:00 - 11:00am

Neuropsychology 101 Workshop

Friday, August 24
10:00am - 12:00pm

Community Foundation of Northern Colorado
4745 Wheaton Dr., #100
Fort Collins, CO 80521

Recreation Programs & Social Activities

For registration and questions, contact Linda at 303-562-0401 or Linda@BIAColorado.org.

Challenge by Choice #4

August 12 - 17
Cost: \$1,890

River rafting, ropes course, hand cycling, wall climbing, theme dance. Program staffed by volunteers, registered nurse, and Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center (BOEC) experienced staff/instructors and interns. Accommodation is at the Griffith Lodge in Breckenridge.

Ruby & Horse Thief Canyons Canoe Excursion

August 27 - 31
Cost: \$970

Join us for a gentle float downstream and enjoy the scenery you only thought existed. Rumor has it you might see a bald eagle or two. You will experience team building, rafting, camping on shore, cooking, fishing, swimming, splashing, and star gazing. The journey begins and ends at the

Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center (BOEC). Accommodation at the beginning and end of your trip will be at the Griffith Lodge in Breckenridge.



Creative Minds

September 7 - 10
Cost: \$990

Cooking, hiking, field trips, poetry, painting, journaling, movement, karaoke, laughter, dancing and socializing. Program staffed by volunteers, registered nurse, and Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center (BOEC) experienced staff/instructors and interns. Accommodation is at the Griffith Lodge in Breckenridge.

Brain Injury Professional Networking (BIPN)

The Brain Injury Professional Networking (BIPN) groups seek to "improve the availability of services and supports for individuals with brain injury, promote the ongoing sustainability of community support systems, and share resources."

For information, visit BIAColorado.org/brain-injury-professionals-network/ or contact Liz Gerdman at Liz@BIAColorado.org or 303-562-3298.



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**ARE YOU UP FOR THE
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September 8, 2018

Brain Injury Alliance of Colorado proudly presents
the 33RD annual Pikes Peak Challenge



REGISTER TODAY! PikesPeakChallenge.com



BIAC

Staff in the Spotlight



Ellen Kordonowy, CBIS
Brain Injury Resource Navigator

What three traits define you?

Colorful, inquisitive, easygoing.

What has been your favorite project at BIAC?

I've recently had the opportunity to engage in some work with the corrections program and it's been fascinating to learn more about the impact of brain injury in the criminal justice system. I appreciate the chance to expand my knowledge while providing education to vulnerable populations.

What is your favorite thing to do outside of work?

Anything involving the outdoors! Whether it's hiking, biking, swimming or just hanging out, I love taking advantage of the nice weather. Add on yoga, live music and family time and I'm set!



Edna Lugo, CBIS
Brain Injury Resource Navigator

What three traits define you?

Motivated, organized, and kind.

What would you tell someone that is thinking about donating to BIAC?

Donating to BIAC helps the organization have the ability to help survivors of brain injury find a voice. It seems like everyone knows someone who has been affected by brain injury in some way. BIAC is working to spread the word about brain injury, provide supports, and to help survivors thrive in their community.

What is your favorite thing to do outside of work?

Long walks exploring the city, movie nights or days, haha and spending time with my peeps! I enjoy any time that involves good food and great company!



JoDee Hambright, CBIS
Brain Injury Resource Navigator

What has surprised you most about working with BIAC?

What has been most surprising about working with BIAC is that despite how prevalent brain injury is, there is such little awareness from society about it. There is still so much work to be done on providing education and making brain injury survivors, their stories and experiences understood by the outside world.

What is your favorite thing to do outside of work?

I really enjoy performing. I have been a part of some kind of performance since I was a kid. I love being a part of something bigger than myself and creating something for others to enjoy. I have been in choir for many years and I find so much joy in creating and sharing that side of myself.

Cathleen's Cause

GOLF TOURNAMENT

Benefiting the Brain Injury Alliance of Colorado

Thank you to all the sponsors and golfers for making the Cathleen's Cause Golf Tournament such a great success.

The date for the 2019 event will be announced soon.



Brain Injury Research

Craig Hospital Research Department - Self Advocacy for Independent Life

Seeking individuals with a history of TBI to participate in a study on advocating for yourself after TBI. Some participants will take part in a 4-session workshop in their hometown area, and all participants will receive an advocacy workbook.

If you are interested in learning more, please contact: Clare Morey 303.789.8621, cmorey@craighospital.org

Acceptability and Feasibility of a Computerized Cognitive Behavioral Therapy among those with Moderate to Severe TBI

Seeking individuals who have a history of TBI and insomnia to participate in a research study. The study at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus plans to learn more about using a computerized insomnia program among those with a history of TBI. If you join the study, you will first be asked to meet with a member of the research team to complete a baseline assessment which will take approximately 90 minutes. Afterwards, you will receive access to your computerized insomnia program for 9 weeks. After 9 weeks, you will be asked to complete a post-intervention assessment in person or over the phone, which will take approximately 70 minutes. All assessments will include questionnaires about your mental health and related behaviors. Compensation will be provided.

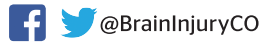
If you are interested in participating, please contact Dr. Lisa Brenner at 303-724-4588.



Brain Injury Alliance

C O L O R A D O

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