

# 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

# My New Normal

Written by Tamara Wilkinson

**I**n February 2018 while at work, I had an arteriovenous malformation (AVM) rupture, subarachnoid brain hemorrhage, and stroke. I was in the Neurological ICU of Swedish Medical Center for 3 months with extreme brain pain and brain vasospasms. Before I left, I learned to walk again, take care of myself, and had intense speech therapies. When I got home, I needed to navigate and find my own therapies and treatments to help create my “new normal”. For example, I was working with many doctors in Denver, yet not one was helping me with mental health issues during this life change. Finally, I was in cognitive testing with Dr. Medina and she mentioned the Brain Injury Alliance of Colorado (BIAC).

In October 2018, I started taking classes such as The Mindful Brain taught by Dr. Medina, Grief and Loss, art and poetry classes, and I also attended the BIAC support group. Every one of these classes and groups immediately made me realize I wasn't alone anymore. I met people that looked just like me who had little or no obvious brain injury impairment or scar. I would hear about the challenges of other brain injury survivors and feel less lonely because they were my challenges and symptoms as well. This helped me understand that what I was going through with this new brain was a normal part of my new life. I was greeted with open arms, unconditional love, and tremendous support. Since then I have utilized different types of support at The




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Brain Injury Alliance of Colorado and they all have made a tremendous difference in my life. My goal is to work with doctors and brain injury survivors of all types and bring them to BIAC. If I had not found my new tribe at BIAC when I did, I would have fallen into a deeper depression or worse, they saved my life!

My “new normal” is something that has taken me time to understand and create, it still changes as I move further away from my brain break. My husband reminds me constantly that my ONE job is to focus on anything that will help me feel better, get better, and create positive development in my journey. I have spent a good year creating my process of a daily schedule and finding the doctors and therapies that can aid in my development and new world. These include attending weekly classes at BIAC, vision, mental health, speech therapy, as well as scheduled rest and down time too. I now struggle with debilitating head pains and memory loss and both

have made me feel pretty lonely and confused at times. My repetitive daily schedules and habits allow me to remember and share my day as well as create my “new normal”. I have realized that this journey is slow to develop, and I have had to take breaks trying to create my new life. I will take time to stop to practice and enjoy a new process or therapy before adding a new one. My “new normal” is 100% different from my old life, but I am slowly learning how to appreciate it and stop to smell the roses too. ■

# Upcoming Classes and Events

## Classes and Workshops

For registration and questions, contact our main line at 303-355-9969, toll-free 1.800.955.2443 or [Info@BIAColorado.org](mailto:Info@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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month**  
**10:00 – 11:30am**

### Art Classes – Colorado Springs

**Every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month through June**  
**1:30 – 3:00pm**

Encompass Health  
325 S. Parkside Dr.  
Colorado Springs, CO 80910

### Grief & Loss Group

**Every 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month through June**  
**1:30 – 3:00pm**



### Music Therapy

**Every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of the month through June**  
**10:15 – 11:15am**

### The Mindful Brain

**Every 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of the month through June**  
**10:00 – 11:15am**

### Winter Green Program

**Friday, February 21**  
**10:00 – 11:00am**

## Paperwork Assistance

Free assistance with filling out and organizing legal, financial, health, end-of-life, and other paperwork, with Orbitron Document Assistance, LLC. Call 303-355-9969 for more information.

## Recreation Programs & Social Activities

For registration and questions, contact Linda at 303-562-0401 or [Linda@BIAColorado.org](mailto:Linda@BIAColorado.org).

### Frozen Assets Ski Outing

**January 6-10**  
**Cost: \$1,390**

An adaptive ski program for all levels of skiing ability. Equipment is provided. Two days of skiing and riding, 1 day of adventuring through Breckenridge with options to snowshoe, explore town and the Breckenridge Recreation Center, practice yoga, enjoy home-cooked meals, and spend time with old and new friends. Accommodation is at the Griffith Lodge in Breckenridge.

### Boulder Film Festival

**March 5-8**  
**Cost: Free**

BIAC will have 12+ tickets available for one-day admission one of these dates. Please contact Linda at 303-562-0401 or [Linda@BIAColorado.org](mailto:Linda@BIAColorado.org) for more details as we get closer to March.

## 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/](http://BIAColorado.org/brain-injury-professionals-network/) or contact Ellen Kordonowy at [Ellen@BIAColorado.org](mailto:Ellen@BIAColorado.org) or 303-562-3298.

# Self-management/ Skill Building Program

*Do you struggle with making appointments or forget to ask the doctor important follow up questions about your care?*

*Are you able to successfully manage a calendar or plan your day well?*

*Do you have difficulty finding and locating important documents?*

Through BIAC's Self-management program, we help survivors of brain injury live more self-sufficiently by building skills and strategies in these specific areas that can be challenging after a brain injury: Communication, Scheduling/Planning, and Prioritization/Organization.

- BIAC advisors will work one-on-one with each participant during this **six-month program**
- Participants will meet with their Advisor for an average of **4 hours per month**
- Advisors can meet participants in their home and/or somewhere in the community where they feel comfortable (i.e. Starbucks, library, etc.)
- Regular homework outside of meeting times

## Areas of focus for Self-management

Participants can identify up to 3 specific tasks listed below which they would like to work on during the six months in services

### Communication:

- Calling and scheduling appointments
- Pre-planning for meetings with professionals

### Scheduling/Planning

- Using a calendar
- Managing schedules
- Meal planning

### Prioritization/Organization:

- Organizing and managing paperwork
- Managing important contacts
- Sorting mail and understanding its contents
- Creating a prioritizing a to-do list

## What Participants Are Saying

*"You have been my rainbow after the storm! Many thanks and much gratitude for all your above and beyond detailed, supportive, hard, and kind work!"* - Carrie, self-management program participant

*"Before the Self-Management Program through the Brain Injury Alliance, my life and home were a disaster; total chaos and it was miserable. With the help of my Brain Injury Advisor through the program, my life has become more organized, joyful, and I am able to better manage it. It has been a true blessing. When there was nobody else to help me, BIAC was there for me. Thank you for giving me my life back, BIAC!"* - Julie Ann, self-management program participant

If you are a survivor of a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and are interested in participating in our Self-Management program or learning more, please contact BIAC for an application: [Info@BIAColorado.org](mailto:Info@BIAColorado.org) or **303.355.9969**, toll-free **1.800.955.2443**. Application assistance is available upon request. ■



# Staff in the Spotlight

**Katarina Fisher**, *Youth Services Coordinator*



## What is your favorite thing about working at BIAC?

My favorite thing about working at BIAC is the warmth and passion of the staff. Love and kindness fuel every interaction, making people with a brain injury feel genuinely cared for. The 'heart' of BIAC is evident in every conversation, fundraiser, project and symposium.

## Describe your role at BIAC.

Here at BIAC, I am the Youth Services Coordinator. My role is to help create a brain injury-informed, academic support system for youth with a brain injury. I work hard to encourage a strong collaboration between family members, school teams, and hospitals, in order to appropriately support the student in the school setting. My goal is to aid in student success in a variety of different ways: I frequently visit hospitals to talk to families before their student returns back to school, I communicate with families and school teams regularly to stay up to date on how the student is doing, and I regularly attend school planning meetings including IEP meetings, 504 plan meetings, transition meetings, MTSS meetings, and other student specific meetings. I also do trainings for school staff and other professionals.

## What three traits define you?

Loyal. Passionate. Hardworking.

# Youth Services

## Education Consultation

After a brain injury, children and youth may have challenges in the classroom and their families may need support navigating the education system.

BIAC has a Youth Services Coordinator specialist on staff who provides free, statewide consultation and support services to children and youth, aged 0-21, with a documented brain injury.

### Examples of Support

- Providing parent/guardian education of services and programming options available in schools
- Assisting in the partnership between parents and schools
- Educating parents and school teams on how a student has been impacted by their brain injury

- Collaborating with schools on intervention planning
- Attending transition, IEP, MTSS, and other planning meetings
- Partnering with hospitals to help with transition to school
- Any other student specific educational needs/concerns/questions

### How to Apply

If you are a parent or professional working with a child or youth with brain injury, please contact BIAC to request an application for education consultation: **Info@BIAColorado.org** or **303.355.9969**, toll-free **1.800.955.2443**



## Support Group Spotlight

# Otero Support Group



We as a group strive to help and teach those with brain injuries by providing education, speakers, lectures, workshops and study groups. We encourage members to reach out and seek new healing techniques. We encourage our members to move on from the trauma that caused our injury by living life to its fullest, knowing that a brain injury can't slow us down.

### What are the main goals for the members?

Our goals for members are for them to live independently, improve cognitive abilities, and improve education on: social skills, decision making, new healing techniques, memory techniques, healthcare and nutrition.

Improve education on: social skills, health care, nutrition, new healing techniques, memory techniques, and decision making. We also want them to have fun activities: Art Show and Sale in February, Brain Injury Awareness Games in May, History Trivia Contest in November, and Christmas Luncheon in December.

### When and where does the group meet?

The Otero County Brain Injury Support Group meets 9 months out of the year. We meet the first Thursday of the month at 1:00 PM sharp in the conference room of the Rocky Ford Library at 400 S. 10th St., Rocky Ford, CO 81067.

Meetings last between 2-2 ½ hours. To attend our meetings, please call the leaders at 719-254-7631 to find out about dates and Multiple Chemical Sensitivities issues as to what to avoid.

### How can people get involved?

People can get involved by attending and learning the successes and setbacks of our journey through life with a brain

injury. Get involved through donating, volunteering, attending meetings or special events with family or friends that a group has. Support is the greatest thing brain injury survivors can receive from the community and from each other.

We provide activities and events that test our physical abilities, and more importantly, our cognitive abilities to improve memory, problem-solving skills, and overall mental health. We share information of services that can be found in Colorado. Our art show and sale exhibited annually is an example of how members with a brain injury can show that they still have many wonderful talents and are willing to share these talents with society. Brain Injury Awareness Games is another example of how we use our physical and cognitive skills. Games such as balance walking, hula hoop toss, ring toss, rice bag toss, and shoe throw show how we use our abilities despite our disabilities and boost our confidence with everyday life. We get to share our athletic prowess with the community with pride and confidence.

Our annual History Trivia Contest boasts our ability to answer tough questions regarding America as well as honors our veterans. These multiple choice and true/false questions use our thought processes to reason out the correct answer and have fun at the same time.

Our annual Christmas Luncheon allows us to socialize and enjoy each other's company outside the meeting realm and share our blessings and friendships with each other. ■



# New You, New Normal

Written by Kate Kerkmans, LCSW, CBIS, *Director of Client Programs*



I often talk with my clients about the “new normal”. What does that really mean? Life can look very different after a brain injury. For many an injury to the brain is the beginning of a roller coaster of life changes, and for some their new lives are barely recognizable from the life they once had. In

each stage of recovery, brain injury survivors must confront what life looks like now, identify what changes have occurred, and what may be still to come.

I once heard a client say that his new normal was “like driving someone else’s car”. He went on to elaborate that he meant that all the regular parts were there, but he felt unfamiliar and uncomfortable driving the car. If you’ve ever borrowed a car from a friend, you’ll know exactly what this feel like. You know where the gas and brake pedal are located, how to make the car go faster or slower, but perhaps the gas pedal is more sensitive on this car than it is on the one you are used to, and you unwillingly make the car lurch forward much faster than you intended. For many this is the experience of working towards a new normal. You know where all the parts are, you know how to try to remember something, but now, you cannot recollect things

that you used to know. Perhaps it takes a much longer time to find the words you need to communicate with others.

In my experience when I drive a car, I’m not familiar with, the experience starts out nerve-racking and can be intimidating because you probably don’t drive as well as you do with the car you know well. As you learn the new car, you become more familiar with how it operates, and the experience gets better. I think this is true of brain injury as well. As survivors enter the different phases of recovery, they start out feeling uncomfortable, in pain, disoriented, and frustrated. We can acclimate to these changes and learn how to adapt to our new environment, even if that new environment is our own brains and bodies.

At some point on the journey, survivors reach a place where they may feel that they are as recovered as they going to be and they are looking at, for the most part, what life will be like from now on; they are looking at their new normal. That does not mean that we give up on getting better. Perhaps your memory is as good as it’s ever going to be, but there are always ways to continue to improve by learning new skills and coping mechanisms. Perhaps you will not be able to return to your previous job, but you can find ways to add meaningful contributions to your community. You may have reached the final point of your recovery, but you can always find ways to improve your new normal. ■

**Interested in  
Advertising in  
Head**STRONG**?**

Contact Gavin Attwood, *CEO*  
at 303-562-3199 or  
[Gavin@BIAColorado.org](mailto:Gavin@BIAColorado.org)



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Since 1985, the attorneys of Purvis Gray Thomson, LLP, have provided compassionate, knowledgeable legal advice and representation to people who have been seriously injured throughout the state of Colorado, including numerous people who have suffered brain injuries.

**Call for a Free Consultation 303-442-3366**

**PURVISGRAY.NET**

## Research Participants Needed

### 2019 National Survey on Health and Disability

We want to know how your access to health care and insurance may be affecting your life. The NIDILRR-funded Collaborative on Health Reform and Independent Living (CHRIL) at the University of Kansas is looking for adults with disabilities to complete an online survey about health insurance and health care services. Whether you have private insurance, insurance from an employer, TRICARE, Medicaid, Medicare or no insurance right now please complete the survey.

- Adults, 18 and over, with any type of disability, chronic illness/disease, mental or physical health condition
- The survey should take about 20-30 minutes to complete
- Responses are anonymous

**To complete the survey, to go: <https://tinyurl.com/NSHD2019>**

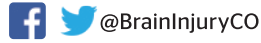
Whether or not you complete the survey, you can choose to enter a drawing to win one of ten \$100 gift cards. If you prefer to take the survey over the phone or have any questions about participating, please call toll-free 1-855-556-6328 (Voice/TTY) or email [healthsurvey@ku.edu](mailto:healthsurvey@ku.edu).



# Brain Injury Alliance

C O L O R A D O

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