



Photo by Leita Cowart

Volunteer Profile: **ANN BORISKIE**

Brain injury survivor directs peer visitor program.

BY LAUREN ANGELO

After sustaining a brain injury, patients at Shepherd Center require a tremendous support system as they work toward recovery. Sometimes, however, the greatest encouragement comes from someone who has survived a similar injury and can relate in a way that others cannot.

Thanks to volunteer and former brain injury patient Ann Boriskie and her development of the Brain Injury Peer Visitor Association, patients at Shepherd now benefit from the support of people who have recovered from a brain injury and can share their experiences and empathy while providing patients with renewed hope.

The journey that led Ann to found the Brain Injury Peer Visitor Association began in 1998 when she was seriously injured in a car accident. Doctors treated Ann for multiple injuries, but did not diagnose her with a brain injury until a year after the accident. Ann had trouble remembering things from her past and often got lost while driving familiar routes. She says she felt completely alone, even contemplating suicide at one point.

As she worked through her grief, Ann began to realize she could be a great champion for the brain-injured. “When I went through this, I had no one,” Ann says. “It became my mission to help others going through the same ordeal. It’s what kept me going.”

Today, the Brain Injury Peer Visitor Association has 65 trained volunteers who conduct peer visits. All have either recovered from brain injuries themselves, or are family or caregivers of a brain injury survivor. They visit patients who have sustained any type of brain injury and lend support and encouragement from the perspective of someone who has “been there, done that.”

The scope and depth of the volunteer work that runs the Brain Injury Peer Visitor Association is remarkable. As of January of this year, 3,210 peer visits had been completed and 7,500 volunteer hours had been donated, with Ann Boriskie personally donating more than 4,000 hours. The volunteers lend a supportive ear to patients and their family members while modeling how it is possible to thrive after sustaining a serious brain injury. Volunteers also distribute packets of information about brain injuries that Ann developed after struggling to find information about her own injury.

When describing what peer visiting means to her on a personal level, Ann says, “It is one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had.” As the director, Ann has worked with many different people, including hospital coordinators, survivors, caregivers and her entire team of volunteers.

Ivy Oxendine, manager of Shepherd’s Volunteer Services, shows much appreciation for the work Ann does to train and coordinate Shepherd Center’s peer visitors. “Ann’s passion for helping other brain injury survivors shows through in her dedication to the Brain Injury Peer Visitor Association,” Ivy says. “She applies her own experiences with the recovery process to provide the best encouragement and support she can to patients and their families.”

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— Ivy Oxendine, *Shepherd Volunteer Services*

Ann emphasizes to brain injury survivors that they will continue to see improvement in themselves for many years after their injuries. “I can do more now than last year and the year before that,” Ann says. “Even 12 years after my brain injury, I am still getting better. You can get better if you want to – if you push yourself and keep trying to learn and do things that you cannot do. Also, part of your improvement is confidence and believing in yourself. You can do it.”

Above: Brain Injury Peer Visitor Association founder and director Ann Boriskie trains volunteers, such as Allen London, as peer visitors for brain injury patients at Shepherd Center.