

STEP-A-HEAD



Northland Incorporated

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EDITORIAL

Community

A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. Other words for community -

Brotherhood, group, company, set, circle, clique, gang, bunch, camaraderie, fellowship, society.

It is the condition of sharing or having certain attitudes and interests in common.

The thing about the brain injury community is that it was probably not a community you knew much about or even wanted to be part of. All brain injuries are unique. Known as the “silent epidemic” as one occurs every 15 minutes and is invisible.

Our organisation is here to make you feel part of the wider community. We offer support, education, advice and direction in your day-to-day life that means you can hopefully live and manage your life better. Not just to the person with the brain injury but also their extended community. Our support groups for clients and carers are there to help connect with people who “Get” what you are going through, they are also a safe place to ask questions and share ideas.

March is Brain Injury awareness month, lets get out there and celebrate while raising awareness.

Vikki

LATEST NEWS:

Online support groups

Support groups are currently being held in person. Check your emails for the invite. We are also working on putting together a carer support group.

Our website has officially been launched in January

This is an important and exciting milestone for organisation. We are embracing the digital world and we are hoping that you will benefit from this too. We have added lots of resources for you to browse through, information about our organisation and a list of upcoming events. Please make sure you share the link with your network.



www.braininjurynorthland.org

SUPPORTING BRAIN INJURY AWARENESS MONTH – MARCH 2022

Brain injury
Need to
learn more?



we
Listen
Support
Educate



www.brain-injury.nz Free call for support **0800 272 466 (BRAINNZ)**

concussion & other traumatic brain injury, hypoxia, tumours, meningitis, encephalitis, stroke

BRAIN INJURY AWARENESS MONTH

"What's Under Your Hat?" campaign

We have lots in the pipeline to help raise awareness of brain injury. Below is a list of events and check the media too as we will have a few features in the local papers and on the radio. For more information, check our [website](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS



Sausage Sizzle

Sat, 05 Mar | Whangārei



What's Under Your Hat Day

Tue, 08 Mar | Location is TBD



Seminar - Raising Awareness

Fri, 18 Mar | Whangārei



Quiz Night

Tue, 22 Mar | Whangārei



Getting Out There Exposition

Fri, 25 Mar | Whangārei

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More information on each of these events is available on our website

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WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

Volunteering

We need the help of volunteers with a few upcoming events, if you have a bit of time to dedicate to the organisation, please get in touch:

northland@brain-injury.org.nz

Fundraising

Do you participate to an event that could be used as a fundraiser or are you interested in simply getting a fundraiser off the ground? We can easily help you link your project or fundraiser to our [Give A Little](#) page.



CURRENT ACTIVE FUNDRAISERS



Across NZ the Hard Way



Rainbow Chasers



Weird Wonderful Brain Following Encephalitis

UNDERSTANDING THE BRAIN

The Social Brain



It's no secret that human beings are social creatures. Despite social interaction being so essential to the human, it isn't always easy. Did you know that it takes almost every part of the human brain to work and play well with others?

Ways in which social interaction are challenging for someone with a brain injury?

The next basic step in social interaction is deciding whether a social signal matters.

- **Amygdala:** Involved in selecting which of the myriad incoming social signals are the most important. People with damage to their amygdala have a harder time recognizing fearful faces, and they don't watch the eyes of others to perceive emotions.
- **Insula:** Important in assigning the emotional value of different stimuli, such as deciding when something is disgusting. Lesions in this area of the brain will lead to a lack of concern about inappropriate situations.
- **Anterior cingulate cortex:** Generates reactions in response to different situations. People with a stroke in this area may have profound apathy, even to the point of akinetic mutism, where someone lacks the motivation to even move or speak at all.
- **Medial prefrontal cortex:** Tells us what emotions we're feeling. People with lesions in this area don't know how they feel. As a result, they also have a hard time regulating or controlling their emotions.

An entire neural network is also devoted to **language**. So if your language center is affected by the brain injury, it can lead to additional challenges when socialising.

Although socialising after a brain injury comes with clear challenges, it is not impossible and has clear benefits.

- Social contact can help to improve memory formation and recall and protects the brain from neurodegenerative diseases.
- As a result of social interaction, "dopamine is also generated, which gives a little high and it kills pain, it's like a naturally produced morphine."
- People experiencing challenging situations tend to fare better if they have access to social support and interaction, suggesting that just by being around family, friends, or peers going through similar experiences can strengthen us both mentally and physically.
- People socialising will likely enjoy better mental health. Interacting with others boosts feelings of well-being and decreases feelings of depression.

If you are recovering from a brain injury, try to seek activities which would keep you involved in the community, you will find great benefits in doing so.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

"The need for connection and community is primal, as fundamental as the need for air, water, and food" – Dean Ornish.

Social isolation is a common long-term consequence of brain injury and can occur because people experience a decrease in existing friendships and social support, but also because they may have fewer opportunities to make new friends or social connections. People with brain injuries may be unable to return to leisure activities they previously participated in (e.g., contact sports) and they may be unable to return to their jobs. Additionally, impairments such as communication, cognitive and physical difficulties may make socialising difficult. Social isolation can lead to loneliness which can have a



detrimental impact on a person's physical and psychological wellbeing. Alternatively, being social connected after brain injury has been linked with positive outcomes such as faster and more extensive recovery and improved life satisfaction.

If people with brain injury can connect to their wider community this can be very effective in reducing social isolation. Brain injury support groups can be a useful starting point as they allow participants to practice social interactions with others in a safe place. Through sharing experiences participants may learn new ways of managing the impact of brain injury and feel understood which can lead to an increased sense of acceptance and belonging. Participants may form friendships with others in the group and then move onto to do things together outside of the group.

Participation in other types of groups such as the creative arts and sports can also be valuable in developing a sense of community connection and self-worth. While emotional barriers (e.g., anxiety) and physical barriers (e.g., transport) can make it difficult for brain injury survivors to participate in community activities it can help to view these barriers/obstacles as challenges which can be overcome with the support of others, rather than giving up. For example, a family member or friend could initially attend a group with you to help alleviate your anxiety and provide practical support if required (e.g., putting on sports equipment). As a family member or friend of someone with a brain injury your support in helping someone overcome emotional and practical barriers can be invaluable and may have a positive impact on your own wellbeing.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION CONTINUED...

Another great way of connecting with the community is through volunteer work. Helping others can lead to volunteers feeling better about themselves and feeling that they are making a worthwhile contribution to society. Like participation in other groups volunteering can provide opportunities to interact with other people and develop friendships which may extend beyond the volunteering role. There are a wide variety of volunteering opportunities which can be explored on sites such as [Volunteering Northland](#) and [Seek Volunteer](#)

Written by Nikki Geeson

TIPS TO SOCIALISE AFTER BRAIN INJURY

- Find an environment that works for you.
- Schedule interactions
- Learn something new. for example: Signup for a class, learn something at a local community centre, join a book club, join a craft group, join a walking group, take lessons for art or music or join a fundraising group.
- Ask a caregiver for help
- Talk to your local brain injury association
- Create a guide for friends. Share what you like to do and what activities you need to avoid or limit. This could include loud noises, bright lights, or overcrowded spaces. Sharing this guide will give them a helpful resource when planning social events.
- Practice common social interaction
- Take breaks
- Volunteer
- Come up with signal to alert people that you need support in a certain situation.

Isolation is really detrimental, so be inventive and find ways to remain social without triggering your symptoms too much.

HELP is available:

ACC: 0800 101 996

Your GP

24/7 Service if you need to speak to someone: txt 1737

ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA

If you haven't already, please join us on [facebook](#)
We are working hard on bringing topic of interest to you and
encouraging open discussions.



[The Introvert and Extrovert Challenge After
Brain Injury](#)



[Comparison the Thief of Joy](#)



[Fitting In](#)

UPCOMING SUPPORT GROUPS

Until we reach Level 1,
Support Groups will be
occurring via Zoom. Check
your inbox for the
meeting link.

COMMUNITY CONTACTS

Emergency: 111 White Cross Whangarei: 470 1083

Kamo Police: 435 1759

Whangarei Police: 430 4500

Whangarei Hospital: 430 4100

Kataia Hospital: 09 408 9180

Kawakawa Hospital: 09 404 0280

Dargaville Hospital: 09 439 3330

Ministry of Social Development: 0800 559 009

ACC: 0800 101 996 Lifeline: 0800 543 354

Alcohol Helpline: 0800 543 354

Arataki Ministries: 430 3044

OUR SUPPORTERS

We greatly appreciate the support of our community funders and local businesses for their contributions to our organisation. This is a list that continues to grow every month. Without this support we would truly be struggling through each day. Thank you once again, and we look forward to working with you in the future.

