

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services and Head Injury Association of North Dakota

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Peer Mentoring: A New Source of Support for Individuals with Brain Injuries *Governor Jack Dalrymple has proclaimed March as Brain Injury Awareness Month*

BISMARCK, N.D. – Emotional support, guidance, communication and education are the cornerstones of a new program benefiting individuals and families impacted by a traumatic brain injury.

The Peer Mentor Support Connection program offered by the Head Injury Association of North Dakota (HIA-ND) matches individuals who have sustained a brain injury and their caregivers with a trained volunteer mentor who has first-hand experience in coping with the effects of a brain injury.

Peers and mentors connect by phone or e-mail for up to one year to share challenges and accomplishments with each other to gain a better understanding of adjusting to life with a brain injury.

“This one-on-one communication is vital to the recovery process,” said Richard Ott, executive director of Head Injury Association of North Dakota. “Being able to talk to someone who has been through a similar situation in life is both comforting and encouraging.”

There are 12 trained volunteer mentors participating in the program. They reside in Bismarck, Dickinson, Fargo, Grand Forks, Langdon, Leeds, Mandan, McClusky and Valley City. Each mentor attended a two-day workshop focusing on strategies to enhance communication, listening and coping skills, increasing knowledge of traumatic brain injuries, and navigating the supports and services available in North Dakota.

Ott said the Head Injury Association provides on-going support, ideas, and training to mentors to ensure that the peers are empowered and have a better understanding of brain injuries.

To participate in the program, both peers and mentors complete a short application and interview with program staff to determine their level of support and suitability for the program. If they meet the program criteria, peers and mentors are matched based on similar life experiences, location, and personal background.

The Peer/Mentor Support Connection program is funded through the N.D. Department of Human Services, the lead state agency serving people dealing with traumatic brain injuries and their families.

Individuals with brain injuries and caregivers who would like more information on the Peer/Mentor Support Connection program are encouraged to call the Head Injury Association of North Dakota at 877-525-2724 or 701-255-2120 or via e-mail at rdott2@bis.midco.net.

For more information about brain injury services and support, contact the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Division of the N.D. Department of Human Services at 701-328-8920, toll-free 1-800-755-2719 or TTY: 1-800-366-6888.

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