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/'karita:s/ (noun) love of humankind, charity

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Volume 3 Issue 3

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Cigna applauds the outstanding efforts of Junior Achievement of Utah on behalf of students throughout the state. We're honored to work with Junior Achievement on programs including their experiential learning site, JA City, where students build such skills as critical thinking, collaboration and problem solving. Together, we're creating a stronger, healthier future.



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Every child deserves a childhood

The Christmas Box International partners with local, national and international communities and groups to prevent child abuse and to improve the quality of life for children, teens and young adults who have been abused, neglected or are facing homelessness

Every year, the state of Utah receives between 20,000 and 21,000 reports of child abuse, neglect and abandonment. The state investigates every report and, in many cases, the children have to be removed from their homes. But not every child removed from his or her home has a safe place to go right away.

As a foster parent, Lisa McDonald remembers what it was like to get a call in the middle of the night to come pick up a child from a police station or caseworker's office. Now, as executive director of Christmas Box House, she welcomes them into a stable environment where they can stay for a few hours — or a few weeks.

"It's a safe place for them to be until a longer-term placement can be found," McDonald said. Since the organization was incorporated in 1998, around 1,700 children have come through the houses.

Christmas Box House — and its parent organization, Christmas Box International — is the brainchild of

Richard Paul Evans, author of the No. 1 best seller *The Christmas Box*. After the success of his book, which was released in hardcover in 1995, Evans and his family decided to share some of their good fortune, but they wanted to put their money where it was needed most. After meeting with various state agencies and social workers, an idea emerged: a short-term emergency shelter for kids. And the Christmas Box House was born.

Christmas Box Houses are currently operating in Salt Lake City, Moab and Ogden, each as a public/private

partnership. The Salt Lake House operates as a partnership with the Salt Lake County Division of Youth Services.

In Ogden, the Christmas Box House operates through a partnership with

the Division of Child and Family Services.

The Moab Christmas Box House also operates as a Family Support Center.

In addition to a safe place to stay, staff members ensure children have access to all the resources and support items

they need, whether it be a new pair of shoes or a group therapy session.

"The vision of the Christmas Box House is to bring the services to the

kids," McDonald said.

For example, the Salt Lake and Ogden Christmas Box Houses both have therapists on-site, McDonald said. The Salt Lake Christmas Box House also has a dental office. And while most children staying at Christmas Box House are transported to school every day, the Salt Lake location also has an on-site classroom for kids who are struggling to attend public school.

Christmas Box International had an operating budget of \$1.3 million in 2016, including more than \$700,000 in in-kind donations, which represents more than 50 percent of the organization's annual revenue. The organization doesn't receive any federal funding, but other revenue comes from grants, state funding and individual donations. Corporate donations account for 20 percent of the budget. Of the organization's total revenue, 89





In-kind donations received by Christmas Box International include experiences for children staying at Christmas Box Houses, such as trips to the zoo, circus and other recreational opportunities. In 2016 Christmas Box Houses served a total of 805 children. Photo courtesy of Christmas Box International

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percent goes directly to programs.

In addition to the Christmas Box Houses, Christmas Box International also operates two other main programs in Utah: Christmas Box Resource Rooms and Project Elf.

Christmas Box Resource Rooms are located in each Christmas Box House as well as in partner agencies such as the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS). In total, there are 10 resource rooms around the state that have served between 37,000 and 40,000 children.

“The reason they’re there is to make it easy for caseworkers to get items for these families, these children,” McDonald said.

Resource rooms are stocked with new, donated supplies, including clothes, bedding, school kits, books and toys. Children, families and caseworkers can take what they need when they need it. Leftover items are distributed other partners who can use them.

“These resource rooms are unique,” McDonald said. “We don’t want to replicate. If someone else is doing something, we don’t want to do it, too. We want to fill gaps. Everything we do is guided by the need.”

Christmas Box International also helps meet the needs of children and families through Project Elf, which provides Christmas gifts for families with open cases with DCFS. Through Project Elf, Christmas Box International partners with 40 other agencies and children’s charities to

provide 2,700 kids with three presents each. This year each family will receive gift cards to shop for and choose their own presents.

“We give the gift cards to those parents so they get to have a more traditional experience and be part of that for their kids,” McDonald said.

In addition to in-kind donations that help Christmas Box International’s programs run, the organization also depends heavily on community volunteers to execute their mission. Last year the organization benefitted from help from more than 800 volunteers who did everything from sorting donations, to landscaping at Christmas Box House locations, to organizing resource rooms.

Troy Apolonio first heard about Christmas Box International when Richard Paul Evans made a presentation to owners and operators of local Chick-Fil-A restaurants. As a survivor of childhood abuse, Apolonio, who owns two Chick-fil-A franchises in the Salt Lake City area, was immediately drawn to the organization’s mission.

“I thought it was so cool to hear his story and it sort of lit the spark for me to think, ‘How can I align myself with an organization like this?’” Apolonio said.

Every quarter, Apolonio chooses a community organization to support — his restaurants donate a percentage of their profits and employees carry out a service project for the organization as well. Providing assistance to Christmas Box House seemed like a natural fit, both on a personal and professional level.

“I think it’s really cool that an organization would want to help kids

when they are in the most need,” Apolonio said. “Christmas Box House aligned with our passion for taking care of people. And taking care of kids is always top of mind.”

Quarterly service projects are also a way for Apolonio to take care of his own employees, and the community that supports his business.

“I think it is my responsibility to help grow the people who work for me,” Apolonio said. “I am trying, in an active manner, to demonstrate how to be an active part of the community.”

But communities aren’t the only ones that benefit when companies get involved in supporting local organizations — the companies benefit, too, said Brooke Winters, an attorney on the in-house legal team at Allstate Insurance. As coordinator of volunteer opportunities for the eight-person litigation services team, Winters recently organized a project with Christmas Box International — a flower planting at one of the Christmas Box House locations. The team enjoyed learning more about the work done at Christmas Box Houses and also enjoyed working toward a common purpose.

“It brings us together as a team on a different level, in a way that we all see the bigger picture and get exposed to different organizations and the needs they are meeting,” Winters said. “Corporations have a responsibility to give back to their local communities. I think it’s always worth the time.”

While many companies make financial donations to organizations such as Christmas Box International, sometimes creating opportunities for employees to give their time can be just as useful. At Goldman Sachs,

employees can spend one paid working day per year volunteering through the Community Team Work program. When Diana Wilson, who works in risk engineering for Goldman Sachs, was reviewing the list of approved organizations looking for volunteers, Christmas Box International jumped out.

“My first volunteer experience as a child was at a shelter for girls,” Wilson said. When she learned more about the mission of Christmas Box Houses in particular, “it really struck a chord.”

Wilson and her colleagues spent the first half of their day doing some yard work at a Christmas Box House location and the second half of the day organizing craft supplies.

“It was really nice for us to put everything in its place and create a

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Most children staying at Christmas Box House locations are transported to school every day, but children at some locations also have the option to attend school at the Christmas Box House itself. Photo courtesy of Christmas Box International



Christmas Box House locations are equipped with all the amenities to help children feel at home, including craft rooms, gardens and playgrounds. Photo courtesy of Christmas Box International

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space where kids can come and do something they like,” Wilson said. Wilson said it is also nice to be part of an organization that helps employees prioritize giving back to their communities.

“As individuals, we don’t have enough time and resources to make a big change ourselves, but when you are part of a big organization you can really work together to make a difference,” Wilson said.

According to McDonald, the executive director, Christmas Box International simply couldn’t succeed without volunteers and corporate partners.

“It was always the vision of Richard Paul Evans that this would be something he would start and the community would continue,” McDonald said. “We can’t do what we do without our community. They make all the difference.”

And that difference is felt not just by the organization, but by the individual children it serves.

“It matters a lot to these kids that the community supports them,” McDonald said. “It means a lot to them that there are people out there who say, ‘We care about you and we want you to have a good childhood.’”

“We asked the question, ‘What is the most important thing we can do for at-risk children?’ The answer to that was The Christmas Box House.”

— Richard Paul Evans,
Founder and Board
President



Stories from the Christmas Box House



Jensen

Jensen, a 9-year-old boy, arrived at the Christmas Box House just before school started for the year. When he came to us, his shoes were literally falling apart. We didn't have any shoes his size. As the staff helped him to get ready for the first day of school, they had to wrap duct tape around his shoes to keep the soles attached to the tops of his shoes. It was very sad to send him off to school in this condition.

Luckily, within a few days, a generous donor dropped off a local store's gift card and we were able to purchase a new pair of shoes for Jensen. When we arrived with the shoes for this boy, he said that he wanted to sit down on the floor, close his eyes and have the box of shoes placed on his lap so that he could be surprised. As he sat there, tightly closing his eyes with the box on his lap, he trembled with excitement! Jensen could hardly wait to receive his new pair of shoes. He didn't care what color they were or the brand. Instead, he was just thrilled that someone cared enough about him to provide him with some new school shoes.



Christmas at The Christmas Box House

At the Ogden Christmas Box House, a group of siblings arrived in December. They were very excited to see the Christmas tree, all of the decorations and the many fun Christmas activities taking place. They were told that on Christmas Day, there would be wrapped gifts around the Christmas tree for all of the children staying there.

These children talked to the staff and requested that they be able to stay there for Christmas because they had never received a wrapped gift before. They were anxious to have this opportunity! As things worked out, they were still there on Christmas Day and they were finally able to see what a real Christmas morning looks like with wrapped gifts for everyone.



Tommy

When the circus comes to town, the children at the Christmas Box House have the fun experience of going downtown to see the "elephant walk" which takes place at the Gateway Shopping Center. The children love to go and watch the huge elephants walk along the street right next to them.

A little 5-year-old boy, Tommy, was especially interested when he had this opportunity. When he arrived back at the Christmas Box House after the event, he walked up to a staff member who wasn't able to go along for the fun. He put his hands on his hips and confidently said, "Did you know that elephants are real?" It is wonderful to be able to take these children out into the community and give them opportunities to find out what it truly means to be a child! Our motto is "every child deserves a childhood."



Siblings

A sibling group of seven stayed at the Christmas Box House. Two of the brothers had birthdays coming up within a few days. When the boy turning 7 was asked what day his birthday was, he had no idea. In fact, he didn't even know how old he was! He didn't have a clue what a birthday was. As their birthdays rolled around, they had the wonderful opportunity to see what that could really be like. Their birthdays were complete with crepe paper and table decorations, wrapped gifts, party favors, cake, ice cream, big smiles and lots of fun.



Blythe

It was junior prom season at the Christmas Box House. A darling 16-year-old girl was so excited to have the chance to ask her boyfriend to her first prom. There were many preparations to be made and our community stepped right up to make it happen in a big way. Our Christmas Box Club volunteers donated money they had raised so that Blythe could be taken to the mall to choose the perfect dress and shoes. She was very proud of her beautiful yellow gown. She thought that she looked just like her favorite princess, Belle. A salon donated hair care services and a staff member did her fingernails.

The evening was complete success with transportation donated by a limousine company, dinner from a local restaurant and a donated boutonniere for her date.



Jenni

Jenni, a 9-year-old girl staying at the Christmas Box House, loved listening to music and making up dances. It was very apparent that she had some incredible natural abilities. She had never been given the opportunity to take dance lessons. Two girls from a local high school dance company were invited to come and provide dance instruction to this girl along with a few other children at the Christmas Box House. The young girls loved this attention and were excited to show off their new dance choreography skills.

These girls were then invited to attend the high school's dance concert. This nine-year-old girl was enjoying the music and dancing so much that she could hardly stay in her seat during the concert. At one point during one of the dances, she stood up and said in a loud voice, "That's going to be me!" It is such a treat to be able to help these children explore their interests, recognize their talents and give them a chance to see who and what they can become. These opportunities definitely give them hope for a much brighter future.



Blake

Turning 6 years old is a big deal — especially when you've never celebrated a birthday before. We didn't want to miss a moment of Blake's sixth birthday. His party had everything from ice cream cake to a brand-new football. It even had an extra awesome, super-guest: Batman.

We hope Blake always remembers his birthday, and not because he was in a shelter. Instead, we hope he remembers meeting a super-hero, eating two pieces of cake and unwrapping his very own birthday present. As Batman said, "A hero can be anyone, even a man doing something as simple and reassuring as putting a coat on a young boy's shoulders to let him know the world hadn't ended."



Sean

We needed just the right word to celebrate 5-year-old Sean's adoption in October, and there was only one word that best describes our feelings: Cowabunga!

Sean came to The Christmas Box House after gang-related issues threatened his safety. It was at the shelter that he found his foster mom, the woman who would become his adoptive mom. During the adoption process, The Christmas Box International provides children like him with a stuffed animal they can "adopt" to help them better understand what their own adoption means. When asked what special animal he would like to officially adopt, his answer was simple: "I want a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle!"

The court date came, and Sean held up the stuffed turtle Raphael with pride for the judge to get a better look. He even wore his special TMNT sweater to match his stuffed hero. The judge signed Sean's paper stating Raphael was his, and then the judge signed the next slip of paper. The inseparable duo formally joined a loving family with a mother, a father and four siblings.



The Christmas Box House and Project Elf Success Story

During this past December, a single father contacted child welfare authorities to indicate that he was feeling suicidal and homicidal but wanted to have somewhere for his children to go so he would not be a risk to them. The three children, aged 4 through 7, were brought to the Salt Lake Christmas Box House, where they were able to stay together as a sibling group while their dad was able to access services to help him. A week before Christmas the children were able to return home to their father. However, during the process of the father receiving the treatment he needed, he lost his job. Through our Project Elf we were able to send Christmas presents home for the children so they could have a fun Christmas morning. The father was very grateful for the support and help, and that the children could stay in a child-friendly environment that took care their needs while he received help.



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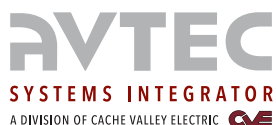
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Dr. Amy de la Garza and Dr. Jonathan Bone participate in Recovery Day at Gallivan Plaza earlier this month. Equilibrium provides holistic, outpatient treatment for substance use disorder and opioid use disorder, specializing in the use of medication in recovery. Photo courtesy of Equilibrium.

'You don't have to put your life on hold for substance use disorder treatment' - That's the promise of SLC's Equilibrium

Opioid use across the United States has reached epidemic proportions, but, as a medical resident, Amy de la Garza discovered that treatment for opioid use disorder and other substance use disorders wasn't delivering the results patients needed.

What was missing, she said, was an evidence-based, integrated and functional medical approach to treating substance use disorders. So, she opened her own practice, Equilibrium.

Open since 2017, Equilibrium provides outpatient medical and behavioral health treatment for substance use disorders and specializes in using medications as part of recovery.

Abstinence-based recovery programs, such as 12-step programs, have created a stigma around the long-term

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EQUILIBRIUM TEAM



Amy de la Garza, M.D.
MEDICAL DIRECTOR

Dr. de la Garza attended the University of Colorado and has been working with substance use disorder patients since completing her residency in 2010. She's a member of the American Society of Addiction Medicine and the Institute of Functional Medicine. In her free time, she enjoys running, skiing, and traveling with her husband and three kids.



Jonathan Bone, PsyD
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH DIRECTOR

Dr. Bone graduated as a doctor of clinical psychology from the University of Denver and has worked with substance use disorder patients since his internship. He returned home to Utah in 2008 to open a private practice and continue his psychotherapy work. When Dr. Bone has free time, he spends it with his family and in the outdoors.

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use of medication in addiction recovery, de la Garza said.

“There are people who say, ‘You’re on medication? You might as well be using heroin.’ But that’s just not true,” de la Garza said.

For example, the use of medication in addiction recovery has been shown to reduce mortality by 50 percent, in addition to reducing the transmission of HIV and Hepatitis C.

Other programs, such as residential recovery programs, give medications used for recovery a bad name by using them incorrectly. For example, when an individual suffering from opioid use disorder checks into a residential treatment program, de la Garza said, they are often given a medication to minimize withdrawal symptoms and manage cravings. Then, after a few days, individuals are subjected to what is called a “rapid taper” off the medication. Suddenly, all they can think about is getting high.

When they leave treatment after a few days or a few weeks, they use the same dose of heroin they had been using before they entered treatment and die of overdoses. While correct use of medication in recovery reduces mortality by 50 percent, incorrect use of the same medication can increase the risk of mortality by 50 percent.

“Treatment programs are not providing care with integrity,” de la Garza said.

At Equilibrium, de la Garza and her business partner Jonathan Bone, a clinical psychologist, provide a holistic, functional approach to substance use disorder treatment that embraces medication as one of the many tools available to individuals in recovery.

“I’m a physician, so I approach substance use disorder the same way I would approach any chronic disease, and that includes evidence-based medicine,” de la Garza said. Each client first receives a full medical exam, including a substance abuse history, a physical, hormone evaluation and diagnostic testing. The comprehensive medical approach includes assistance such as nutrition counseling, access to personal trainers and exercise opportunities, sleep assessments and help with smoking cessation.

Clients are also prescribed a medication such as Suboxone to address the more severe symptoms and cravings experienced by individuals in recovery. Suboxone binds to the same receptors in the brain as

opioids do, de la Garza said, but they don’t bind completely so while they decrease withdrawal symptoms and cravings, they do not create the same psychoactive experience as drugs, or put patients at risk of respiratory depression or overdose.

“It gives the brain a break from

an accounting of co-occurring conditions such as PTSD and a diagnostic interview to identify any other mental health conditions such as depressive or mood disorders that could be contributing factors to substance abuse.

Throughout the whole process, Bone said, he is careful to remind

whole person, not the addict, not the disorder.”

Therapeutic support includes individual and group therapy rooted in mindfulness practices that help participants become more aware of their cognitive patterns.

“If you can change patterns of thinking, then behavior changes,” Bone said.

This medical and behavioral healthcare is all provided in an ultra-private environment on an outpatient basis. It was important to both de la Garza and Bone that clients be able to receive the care and support they needed without having to put their whole lives on hold.

“Only one in 11 people with a substance use disorder access treatment,” de la Garza said. “There is this idea that the only way to get help is to disengage from your life for 30, 60 or 90 days, and most people just can’t do that.”

The other misconception that Equilibrium is working to combat is that recovery that includes medication is not a true recovery. To de la Garza, treating substance abuse disorder is just like treating any other chronic disease. If she were treating a person with diabetes, for example, she would encourage lifestyle and diet changes, but she would also prescribe medication to help control the patient’s blood sugar.

Once the patient’s blood sugar was under control, she might take them off the medication. But if their blood sugar went back up she would put them right back on the medication without a second thought.

“We take people off medicine when we feel like all the other parts of their life are stable and ready,” de la Garza said any medication in substance abuse recovery should be no different. “It’s managing a disease. It’s just a disease of the brain, not a disease of the pancreas.”

Part of removing the stigma of medication in substance abuse recovery is removing the stigma of seeking any kind of help for substance abuse disorder. There is a long way to go, de la Garza said, “but I think it’s slowly changing.” Treatment options are evolving and improving, for example, and legislatures are starting to advance evidence-based treatments.

For its part, Equilibrium is using every recovery tool available — as long as it is medically indicated — and focusing on the outcome of treatment rather than how the outcome was achieved.

“The most important question is, ‘What does your life look like?’” de la Garza said. “‘Can you hold a job?’ ‘Take care of your kids?’ ‘Stay out of prison?’ Then who cares if you are using medication?’”



Our outpatient substance abuse treatment helps those with substance use disorders:

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Equilibrium is a clinical practice that blends together medical and psychotherapeutic disciplines equally. Our scientific approach, holistic philosophy, and private, outpatient setting assists clients in continuing their daily lives while pursuing treatment.

Clients are served by clinically trained doctors, psychologists, therapists and other professionals who use effective, scientifically based treatment practices. We apply evidence-based treatment for all physical, mental and emotional needs of our clients. This approach gets our clients the results they desire and need.

Our values are an integral part of our identity and approach to treatment. They enable us to deliver the highest-quality services and make a long-term impact on people's lives. We believe in:

Integrity to deliver the best services to clients while holding true to the values of ethics, honesty and care.

Scientific to apply evidence-based treatment for all physical, mental and emotional needs of our clients.

Compassion to listen and engage with our clients and build relationships that effect positive change.

this constant message of, ‘I need to be full, and I need opioids to fill me up,’” de la Garza said.

That break also provides time and space to evaluate the root cause or causes of addiction and substance abuse, and to create a plan to deal with triggers, stressors and cravings.

That’s where Bone comes in.

After the medical evaluation is complete, Bone conducts a behavioral health intake assessment that includes a psychological profile evaluation,

clients that they are people with substance use disorders, not “addicts.”

“You are effectively saying, ‘You are a person with a lot of dynamic characteristics and you have this medical condition,’” Bone said. Changing the language also helps clients accept responsibility for their recovery by removing the excuse of “once an addict, always an addict.”

“People argue with me about that all the time,” Bone said. “But that’s OK. We are really trying to treat the

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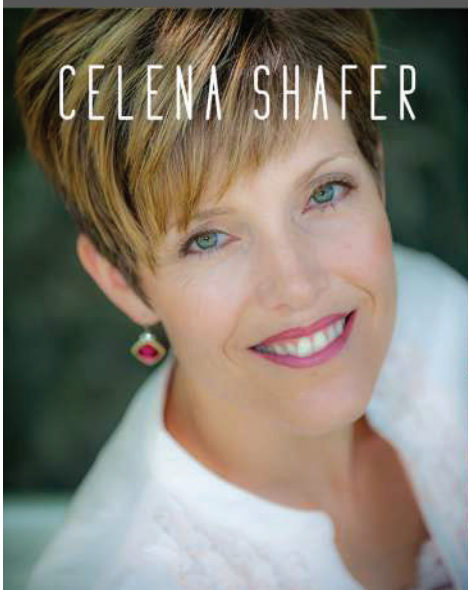
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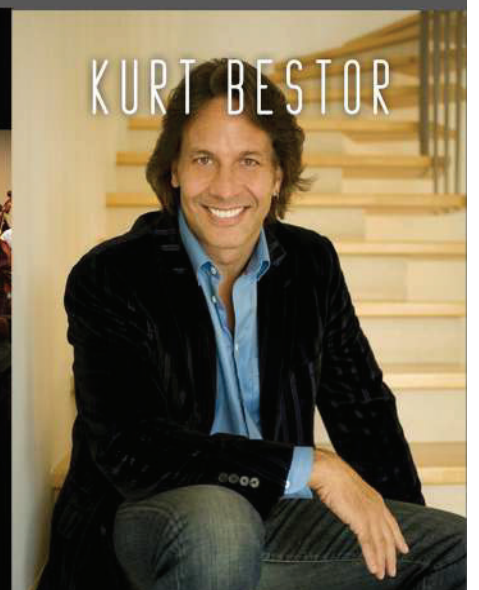


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KeyBank thanks Brain Injury Alliance of Utah for making a difference.



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EDUCATION, SUPPORT, PREVENTION

These are the goals of the Brain Injury Alliance of Utah

Greg Jorgensen was 23 years old when he was in a rollover car accident that left him in a coma for three months. When he woke up, he did a few months of speech, physical and occupational therapy and headed back to college at Utah State University.

That was 2001. But 17 years later, Jorgensen was still suffering from the effects of a traumatic brain injury he sustained during that accident, including problems with his memory and difficulty modulating his emotions. So, last year, Jorgensen reached out to the Brain Injury Alliance of Utah (BIAU).

Founded in 1984, BIAU is the only nonprofit in Utah dedicated exclusively to the education, support and prevention of brain injuries. The organization operates with one full-time and three part-time employees and an annual budget of \$200,000. One-third of BIAU's funding comes from the state, with the balance coming from grants, foundations, corporate donations and fundraising events such as a 5K run each spring and an educational conference each fall.

The first goal of the organization is to stop brain injuries from happen-

ing in the first place.

"Our tagline is, 'There is no cure for brain injury other than prevention,'" said Glen Lanham, executive director of BIAU. "Once it's happened, it's too late."

BIAU's prevention efforts focus on educating groups such as ER staffs, first responders, athletic coaches and others about minimizing the risk of brain injuries. Over the past three years, BIAU staff members have made 250 presentations to participants all over the state.

Many times, preventing brain injuries can be pretty simple. For example, Lanham said, half of all traumatic brain injuries are the result of a fall and those falls usually involve an elderly person. So, at an assisted living facility, Lanham said he would emphasize the importance of having well-lit hallways, railings and no-slip carpets.

"They're kind of straight-forward pieces, but they often fall through the cracks," Lanham said.

BIAU also operates Head Smart, a school outreach program that encourages kids to wear helmets for activities including biking, skiing and riding scooters and skateboards. In 85 percent of accidents, a helmet will save your life, Lanham said.

The education BIAU provides also emphasizes the importance of early intervention once a brain injury has occurred.

"When it comes to intervention, the sooner the better," Lanham said. In fact, 70 percent of traumatic brain injury survivors who receive appropriate intervention will recover, he said. "If there is any suspicion that a concussion or traumatic brain injury has occurred, get it checked out right away."

In Utah, 70 people land in the emergency room every day with a traumatic brain injury. Across the United States as a whole, the number of traumatic brain injuries reported annually is eight times higher than the incidence of breast cancer, HIV/AIDS and multiple sclerosis combined. But Lanham said those numbers represent

only a fraction of the brain injuries actually happening. For example, nine out of 10 sports concussions go unreported and untreated.

Part of the problem, Lanham said, is that many people don't really understand what a brain injury is or what the signs and symptoms are. For example, it's common to hear people say things like, "My daughter just got a small concussion." But, Lanham said, there is no such thing.

"One of our big messages is that a concussion is a traumatic brain injury," Lanham said. Minimizing the severity of concussive events prevents people from seeking and receiving the treatment they need, he added.

Getting the necessary treatment for survivors of traumatic brain injuries is the next part of BIAU's mission. Through a partnership with the Utah Department of Health's Violence and Injury Prevention Program and the Utah Brain Injury Prevention Fund, BIAU can provide access to neurological and cognitive testing that can often be cost-prohibitive, even

for people with insurance. This testing helps officially diagnose the brain injury and helps healthcare providers determine the best course of treatment and therapy moving forward.

BIAU also connects survivors and families to additional community and medical resources they need.

For Renee Casati, a cognitive evaluation arranged by BIAU was the first step in a life-saving healing process. A victim of domestic abuse since the time she was a child, Casati sustained a traumatic brain injury five years ago when her father beat and strangled her. Because of the circumstances of the injury, Casati did not immediately receive the diagnosis or care she needed. But that did not stop the symptoms of her injury from interfering with her life in significant ways.

Once an articulate and polished communications executive, Casati started struggling to translate her thoughts into coherent speech. She also suffered from post-traumatic stress symptoms stemming from the circumstances of her injury. Abandoned by her family once she finally went public about her injury

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LEADING CAUSES OF TBI IN UTAH

Falls:

46.3%

Motor vehicle accidents:

16.5%

Assaults:

6%

Recreational activities:

6%

Bicycle accidents:

5.7%

ATVs:

5.1%



Did you know?

- Every 23 seconds, one person in the U.S. sustains a brain injury.
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is a silent yet serious epidemic currently leaving 5.3 million Americans with disabilities. This represents over 2 percent of the U.S. population; 56,000 victims in Utah alone!
- Falls are the leading cause of TBI. Rates are highest for children aged 0-4 years and for adults aged 75 years and older.
- Motor vehicle-traffic injury is the leading cause of TBI-related death. Rates are highest for adults aged 20-24 years.
- There was a 62 percent increase in fall-related TBI seen in emergency departments among children aged 14 years and younger from 2002 to 2006.
- Every seven minutes, someone dies of a brain injury.
- One death every day and one brain injury every four minutes can be prevented by the use of helmets in recreational activities, including skiing and biking.
- An estimated 1.7 million people annually sustain a TBI.
- 52,000 die, 275,000 are hospitalized, and 1.365 million - nearly 80 percent - are treated and released from an emergency department annually.
- In Utah, 500 die, over 2,000 are hospitalized and 20,000 are treated and released from an emergency department each year.



Through the HeadSmart program BIAU conducts outreach in schools about the importance of wearing helmets during recreational activities. Helmets prevent one brain injury-related death every day in the U.S. Photo courtesy of Brain Injury Alliance of Utah



BIAU's annual 5K is a chance for the organization to raise money to support its programs, and also a chance for survivors of traumatic brain injuries to celebrate their new normal. Photo courtesy of Brain Injury Alliance of Utah

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and its cause, Casati even found herself homeless for a time.

“My identity before — I was smart and put together. I was living in Beverly Hills — and now I can’t formulate a sentence,” Casati said. “But I have a level of compassion I never could have achieved.”

After her cognitive evaluation, Casati started speech and occupational therapy. She also discovered a new purpose: to share her own story in an effort to end the suffering of other brain injury survivors, particularly those who are also victims of domestic violence.

“You become what you didn’t have,” Casati said. “From my injury came my purpose. Your life is your message. So, what is that message and who can you help?”

Providing help and support for survivors of traumatic brain injuries is the final part of the BIAU mission and, for many brain injury survivors, the most important part.

Take the case of Greg Jorgensen. Though he received an accurate diagnosis and therapy after his accident 18 years ago, once his rehab was done he went back to his normal life. Except that there was no such thing as “normal” life anymore.

“Your brain injury doesn’t just go away. It’s a new part of your life,” Jorgensen said. “The hardest part after my accident was, I was walking around with people who were normal and they were treating me like I was normal, but I was different and I didn’t know how to explain that.”

Finding the BIAU community was the first time he didn’t have to explain himself or what he was going through even all these years after his accident.

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“It’s nice as a recovering person with a brain injury to have someone who understands,” Jorgensen said. “It validates that there’s something to discuss and things that can be done.”

The sense of isolation Jorgensen experienced is almost universal to survivors of traumatic brain injuries, Lanham said. And it affects family members and caregivers of brain injury survivors as well.

“These injuries impact everyone,” Lanham said. “People will tell us things like, ‘My husband used to be the life of the party but now he won’t leave his room,’ or, ‘My son used to be so polite but post-injury he is aggressive and profane.’ Many people call us at their wits’ end.”

In addition to support groups for survivors, BIAU also runs groups for these family members and caregivers. The groups provide peer support and coping skills and give caregivers permission to get mad about their circumstances, do something for

themselves and ask for help if they need it. Ultimately, the goal is to provide some hope that there is life after brain injury.

“We want people to leave here with a feeling of, ‘I’m not alone,’” Lanham said. “We want to help people get back to some quality of life that’s meaningful to them.”

Part of finding that meaning is accepting that your old life is gone, Jorgensen said, and embracing your new life is the only way to move forward.

“I fought forever trying to go back,” he said. “But the old reality is no longer a thing. The kid who got in that accident is gone. What I really need to be doing is embrace the new person that I am.”

Or, as Casati describes it, “Pain pushes until purpose pulls.”

“There’s some new gift here and I want to explore that,” Casati said. “I’m grateful that now I can look into people’s eyes and understand the value that was taken from them. I can see the strength it takes them to survive what they are surviving. I can finally see myself.”

What is traumatic brain injury?

Each year, 1.7 million Americans sustain a traumatic brain injury which requires hospitalization. Traumatic brain injury is an insult to the brain, not of a degenerative or congenital nature but caused by an external physical force or by internal damage such as anoxia (lack of oxygen) or tumor. It may produce a diminished or altered state of consciousness, which results in impairment of cognitive abilities and physical functioning. These impairments may be either temporary or permanent and cause partial or total functional disability or psychosocial maladjustment.

What is a concussion?

A concussion results from a blow to the head which causes the brain to strike the skull. A concussion does not cause any structural damage to the brain but can cause temporary loss of functioning. Headaches, memory loss and sleep disturbance may be some of the problems suffered after such an injury.

What is a contusion?

A contusion is a more serious blow to the brain, which results in bruising of the brain and more-noticeable loss of functions. More comprehensive care is required for a contusion. Follow-up treatment and evaluation are required on a regular basis.



After she sustained a traumatic brain injury as a result of domestic abuse, Renee Casati found herself isolated and even homeless for a while. After finding a support community through BIAU, she now uses her experience to help other survivors of traumatic brain injuries and domestic violence. Photo courtesy of Renee Casati

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