

NASHIA's March 2022 Brain Injury Awareness Month Campaign begins today. This issue features resource facilitation provided by the Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska and a resource facilitator with her own story.



## Working Together Promoting Brain Injury Awareness Month: Spotlight on Nebraska

Dear NASHIA Member,

During the month of March, the National Association of State Head Injury Administrators (NASHIA) is featuring articles about individuals living with brain injury; State resources and services and initiatives promoting awareness and improving service delivery. This week, NASHIA features resource facilitation provided by the Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska and a resource facilitator with her own personal story to tell.

Have a story to share? Send to Susan Vaughn at [svaughn@nashia.org](mailto:svaughn@nashia.org). Meanwhile, you may access NASHIA's Awareness Campaign materials [here](#).

### **Meet MenDi and Kristen: *Life After Brain Injury -- Twice!***

"Looking at my 16-year-old daughter laying on a stretcher with a neck brace on was scary, but I had no idea how much our lives would begin to change from that moment on. My daughter, Kristen, was a fun-loving teenager who was carefree, big hearted, and loved to tell jokes," said MenDi McCuiston. The first of two separate car crashes, Kristin began the downward spiral after being sent home with a diagnosis of a "concussion" or mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI). After a few weeks, Kristen began complaining about the lights in the classroom and the constant ringing in her ears. Her grades began to slip, homework was incomplete, and many assignments were



not turned in. Kristen changed her group of friends and started smoking marijuana. "At this point, the court system had become involved, her counselor was getting nowhere with her, and my marriage was suffering," MenDi explained. Kristen was sent to a group home where she was seen by different professionals, the pieces were put together, and coping skills were developed so she could learn to cope with the short-term memory loss and mood swings left behind from the brain injury.

MenDi then received a call at 2:30 a.m. regarding a roll over car crash involving a fatality. "When I was taken to the trauma room, I almost did not recognize my daughter," she said. Once she was released, Kristen struggled with headaches, depression, and memory loss. But since she had the tools in place to help her cope, she faced each day with a positive outlook, until she felt that she could no longer manage the pain and succumbed to self medicating with marijuana consistently. At that point, MenDi said, " We lost Kristen." Over the next two years she received three possession charges, spent time in jail, and was the complete opposite of the girl from four years ago.

After the third possession charge, she began to work on herself, cooperating with her counselor and asked her mom for help with finding a job. Eight years later Kristen is still struggling with maintaining sobriety, but she has cut off those who do not support her decision. MenDi and Kristen work together to keep her calendar in order so she can remember appointments due to the short-term memory loss. She has a beautiful one year old daughter who keeps her pushing forward to be the best version of herself that she can be. "Some days are harder than others, but each day after a brain injury is a gift and we see the positive in all the negative she has endured over the last eight years," explained MenDi.

Peggy Reisher, Executive Director of the Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska, added that this personal experience has led MenDi to her call to help others. "We are very blessed to have MenDi on staff. Although I wish their family wouldn't have had to go through what they went through, they are a beacon of hope to those around them," she said.



## **BIA-NE Offers Resource Facilitation for Families and Individuals with Brain Injury**

MenDi's story emphasizes the need for families and individuals to have assistance in navigating services and supports and to have information regarding brain injury symptoms. The Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska's (BIA-NE) Resource Facilitation program is a free service that assists individuals with a brain injury, families, caregivers, and healthcare professionals by providing resources, education, and support. Resource facilitators serve as points of contact for families and individuals across the state who seek assistance with brain injury. This assistance takes many forms such as making referrals to service providers, developing personalized plans for symptom management or recovery, or providing informational resources and handouts. Additionally, resource facilitators network with community providers and services systems to educate others about the unique needs of people with brain injuries.

BIA-NE expanded its Resource Facilitation staff to five Resource Facilitators to make it easier for individuals and families across the state to access resources and services. Two of which include MenDi McCuiston and Shir Smith, who serve as the primary points of contact for the western half of the state. Both McCuiston and Smith have felt the effects of brain injury on a personal level – giving them common ground and a better understanding of the realities faced by the people they serve.

For more information about the program contact Peggy Reisher, Executive Director, Peggy @biane.org or call (402)-890-0606.



## Leading causes of concussion

(seen in emergency departments):

- falls
- motor vehicle-related injury
- unintentionally being struck by or against an obstacle
  - assaults
  - playing sports

Concussions occurs from a blow to the body that causes the head to move rapidly back and forth. Healthcare providers may diagnose injuries as “mild”, although the effects can be serious.

## Symptoms of concussion

(usually fall into four categories)

- 1) **THINKING/REMEMBERING**, such as difficulties remembering recent events (even those immediately before and/or after the concussion), or feeling mentally “foggy”
- 2) **PHYSICAL**, such as headaches or difficulty with bright light or loud noises
- 3) **EMOTIONAL/MOOD**, such as irritability, sadness, or nervousness
- 4) **SLEEP DISTURBANCE**, such as sleeping more or less than usual

Taken from:

### **Facts about Concussion and Brain Injury: WHERE TO GET HELP;**

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[website](#)



## Congressional Brain Injury Task Force Awareness Day Briefing (virtual)

The Importance and Value of Advocacy:  
Engaging with Policy Makers

**March 16, 2022**  
2:30-4:40pm (ET)

**Register [here](#).**



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF STATE HEAD INJURY  
ADMINISTRATORS**

The National Association of State Head Injury Administrators assists State government  
in promoting partnerships and building systems  
to meet the needs of individuals with brain injuries and their families.

**Support States. Grow Leaders. Connect Partners.**

[Visit our website](#)

National Association of State Head Injury Administrators | Phone: 202-681-7840