

## Community Updates:

**Ability Online** is a free and safe online internet community designed to connect young people with disabilities. Members can register using only their real names and contact information. It is available 24 hours a day and monitored by a team of trained staff and volunteers.



**BC Easter Seals Camps** offer free overnight summer camping opportunities for children and teens with physical and/or mental disabilities throughout British Columbia. Camps are offered in three locations: Shawnigan Lake, Squamish and Winfield. Registration is done on a first come first serve basis and there are no fees to attend camp. Applications are available online at [www.eastersealscamps.ca](http://www.eastersealscamps.ca). If you have any questions, feel free to contact the Administrator at 604-873-1865.



Swim BC invites interested children and young adults to become involved in our swimming program. We have Para-swimming as part of our Provincial program from the grassroots level up through the Provincial Championships. Athletes with varying disabilities have been participating in our programs for 15+ years.

For more information on our programs or where to find a club, please contact:

Rosalyn Fast  
Para-Swimming Recruitment Coordinator  
604-365-0593  
[rosalynfast@swimbc.ca](mailto:rosalynfast@swimbc.ca)

## Contact Us:

**Joshua Myers - Program Coordinator**  
[josh.myers@bc-cfa.org](mailto:josh.myers@bc-cfa.org) – 604-630-3009 or 1-877-451-5511, Ext. 1272

**Valerie Upton - Supervisor, Community Brain Injury Program**  
[valerie.upton@bc-cfa.org](mailto:valerie.upton@bc-cfa.org) – 604-630-3010

[www.mybrainonline.ca](http://www.mybrainonline.ca)  
[www.centreforability.bc.ca](http://www.centreforability.bc.ca)



**The meaning of things lies not in the things themselves, but in our attitude towards them.**  
*Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

# Brainbridge

## The Newsletter



Community Brain Injury Program for Children and Youth in BC

Issue 1 – April 2013

## Program Updates:

This has once again been a very busy spring for us here in the Community Brain Injury Program.

## Staffing:

The Community Brain Injury Program wants to wish Barbara Borsutzky the very best as she explores new adventures and leaves the CBIPCY in May, 2013. Barb has been with the program since July, 2012 and with the BC Centre for Ability since 1997. She has been a tremendous asset to the program, as well as the BC Centre for Ability and she will be greatly missed. We would like to sincerely thank her for all of her work with our families and wish her the best in the next chapter of her career.

## Dining for Dreams:



“Sammy is a very happy kid, regardless of everything she’s been through; she’s bright, cheerful and wakes up in the morning happy, faces the day and works through her therapies.”

“My hope for her is that as she continues on this journey and faces the fact that she has burn scarring to 30 percent of her body, that her speech may end up being slow, that she may not walk exactly like the other kids, is that she will always carry on with that positive outlook and always feel loved and valued.”

The Irwins look forward to sharing their journey at the BC Centre for Ability’s Dining for Dreams fundraising dinner and auction, when Sammy and four other Heroes of Ability will be celebrated.

Aja says it’s a wonderful opportunity for Sammy to be recognized and to inspire others to support the BC Centre for Ability and Community Brain Injury Program, so they can continue to have a positive impact in people’s lives.

Bright, happy and interactive, Sammy has far surpassed the prediction while in hospital that she would live in a vegetative state.

“That’s so far from where she is,” Aja says. “She has lots of areas to work on, so we focus on a few of those things at a time, and we’ll get there.”

Aja credits Sammy’s feistiness and will to be independent for helping her to reach this point, as well as all of the support of the Sunny Hill and BC Centre for Ability teams. Family members, too, have been by the Irwins’ side throughout their journey. Aja says her husband has been her rock.

“He had the attitude of, we will just do whatever it takes, take it one day at a time, and together we’ll work through it and give this little girl whatever she needs,”

**\*\* To see of this story please visit [www.bc-cfa.org](http://www.bc-cfa.org) \*\***

## Maintaining Skills over the Summer:

Summer is a great time for families to take a little bit of a break from formalised rehabilitation services. Children learn through play and therapeutic opportunities can be easily infused into a number of fun family activities. Rather than you as the parent taking on the role of events coordinator, have your child be the planner. Not only does this alleviate the pressure on you, it engages your child and gives them ownership over family time, and there are a number of therapeutic benefits inherent in the planning process, as well as in the activity itself. Have your child come up with a plan; help your child put it together by discussing some of the following questions.

- **Where do I want to go?** (this question may need to be narrowed down with a list of reasonable options)
- **Who do I want to go with ?** (Do they need to be invited in advance)
- **What do I need to take with me?** (i.e. clothing, supplies, money, food, medications, games and entertainment etc.)
- **How will I get there?**
- **When do I want to go?**
- **What will make it fun?**



A number of every day activities have significant therapeutic benefits. For example:



### Going to the beach:

Swimming is beneficial for muscle strength, body/spatial awareness, bilateral coordination and gross motor development. Playing in the sand at the beach is great for sensory stimulation, creativity, two-handed play, balance, manual dexterity. Make sure you bring lots of toys and shovels for sand play. Walking barefoot on the sand helps with balance and coordination.

### Family Games Night:

There are a number of therapeutic opportunities in playing board games. Board games by their nature are a social activity requiring participation, cooperation, and turn-taking. They are a great, low pressure way of working towards skill development. Some of the therapeutic benefits of specific games are:

- **Battleship:** planning, problem solving, responding to feedback visual scanning and discrimination, and strategising.
- **Guess Who:** reasoning, problem solving, sequencing, categorising, memory, and vocabulary.
- **Jenga:** fine motor skills, planning, problem solving, cognitive flexibility, responding to feedback.
- **Scrabble:** calculation of simple numbers, sequencing, scanning, word retrieval.

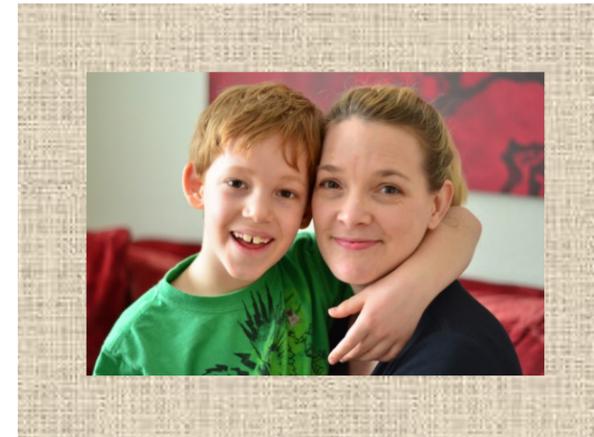


### Camping:



Involves a multitude of therapeutic opportunity, from planning and organising, to following directions and sequencing (required for putting up the tent, and making meals.) Going on day hikes and boating can work on gross motor skills, endurance and coordination. Bring arts and crafts supplies and digital cameras to foster creativity, self expression, and fine motor skills. Use the arts and crafts projects and photos to create memory books of the time spent away. This can provide your child with the tools to tell friends what they did while you were on vacation.

## A Family's Story of Resilience and Love:



My family and I have, and are continuing to experience the most difficult time in our lives. Fifteen months ago, Rupert, my then 7-year old son, suffered a brain injury and physical trauma as a result of three unexplained falls. At first our team of experts told us he had a concussion, as time wore on they added second impact syndrome and then he was given the long term prognosis of post concussive syndrome.

The first half of 2012 was a blur of hospital, doctor, specialist and rehabilitative appointments, often five to seven a week. In between appointments, Rupert would rest in bed or he would struggle in his Grade Two classroom. Every day we questioned "Why him?" Every day, through the fear and exhaustion of our heartbreak, we recommitted to support him in any and every way possible during his time of recovery.

Rupert, always highly motivated and good natured, has worked diligently to achieve modest to moderate improvement in differing areas. Even though the work is laborious, repetitive, physically and mentally exhausting he never complains, even when he has every right to. Rupert knows that he is a different boy now. Just over one year ago he could write, spell, speak and think clearly, do mathematics, remember things with great ease, and possessed limitless energy, optimism and confidence. The reality of this change has taken a great psychological and emotional toll on the whole family. (Parenting a young child who is experiencing an existential crisis, not to mention a brain injury, was not in any of the parenting handbooks I read!) The past months have taught us that we can not fix him or go back. After a lot of work, we have let go of all expectations that Rupert will wake up and be who he once was. After much grieving, we can now wholeheartedly accept and lovingly embrace the new Rupert. He is still having a hard time accepting this but we have faith he will...someday.

As one knows when one is faced with extraordinary challenge, extraordinary things result. We are actively trying to find clarity and perspective so that we might see the gifts that we were given in exchange for the hardship endured. With some reflection, we have concluded that we, collectively and independently have grown a tremendous amount with regards to strength, focus, skills, and wisdom. Our priorities are aligned with our values and, although we are frayed around the edges, the fabric of our family is a tighter knit than it was before. As we navigate the next couple of years of his recovery, our approach will be holistic and our focus healing. Our new goals are to give Rupert the tools and opportunities to find happiness, success and health on his new trajectory.

For months and months, my family put our shared life on hold - not so patiently waiting for things to get back to normal. We now know that we are not on a detour slowly weaving our way back, but on a new road. As we say good bye to what once was and what will never be, we are heartened by thoughts of what is and what shall be. No, we can't yet see the light at the end of the tunnel, but knowing that it is ahead, our path is brightened. My family and I have, and are continuing to, experience the most difficult time in our lives – full stop. It is also necessary to add, that my family and I day to day, moment to moment are choosing to learn, to grow, and to see the good and the beautiful that dwells within us and that surrounds us. A brain injury is a tragedy, but for us it is also an invitation to live a life of greater depth and breadth. For that we give thanks.