



ANNUAL

REPORT

For the year ended March 31, 2014

OUR MISSION



To support, educate and advocate
for adults with
acquired brain injuries
and their families; and to
increase community awareness
about acquired brain injury



OUR BOARD of DIRECTORS



*Murray Langdon
Board President*



*Don Anderson
Board Vice-President*



*Patrick Corney
Board Secretary*



*Stephen McKenzie
Past President*



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Director at Large*



*Ian Armstrong
Director at Large*



*Natalie Foley
Director at Large*



*Anne Wrona
Director at Large*



*Lia Graham
Director at Large*

OUR STAFF



*Nicole
Nelson
Executive
Director*



*Kathy
Smith
Client
Services
Manager*



*Anna
McLauchlan
Manager of
Administration
and
Volunteer
Coordinator*



*Leah
Gabriel
Intake
Coordinator*



*Alex
Gilchrist
Case
Manager*



*Leidi
Fortner
Case
Manager*



*Emily
Steeves
Accounting
Clerk*



*Katusha
Dmitrieva
Facilitator,
Creative
Arts
Program*



*Carmen
Eisenhauer
Facilitator,
Music Program*



MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

This has been an exciting and inspiring year at the Victoria Brain Injury Society. Helping our clients navigate through trying and challenging times continues to be a driving force behind our efforts and keeps us focused on the most important thing: those people with acquired brain injury.



*Murray Langdon
Board President*

The year started off strong as VBIS managed to establish and independently fund the position of Executive Director. Combining it with the Director of Resource Development role, VBIS has launched itself into a new realm of stewardship. This has enabled us to mirror other organizations and help focus our efforts into devising a strong and sustainable structure. Through the work of Nicole Nelson, we have been able to secure more funding, establish and strengthen existing partnerships and improve our ability to maintain a safe and client-centric environment.

Joining VBIS part way through the year was our new Client Services Manager. We sought a skilled and practiced individual to fill this badly needed role; one that combines the strength of a practitioner with the savvy of an administrator. We were lucky to find that and more in Kathy Smith. She has proven to be a real asset on many fronts and has blended in superbly. Making that transition happen smoothly and effectively was our ever-accommodating and incredibly talented staff. Alex, Leidi and Anna welcomed Kathy with open arms. Together, they all provide first-class service, with compassion, to our clients.

Thanks to our dedicated and determined team we continue to attack our wait-list with vigor, however the challenge before us does not abate. Our goal of having little, or no wait-list remains unmet. Fundraising efforts from our signature event “An Evening of Black and White . . . Because Grey Matters” is bringing in more revenue and more community awareness. In conjunction with our marquee event, successful grant applications have bookended it, enabling us to create and fund an Intake Coordinator position. This will help improve our resource allocation and provide a smoother and quicker process for new clients. We are grateful for every dollar our organization receives, especially from our key partners, such as Island Health and others noted on page 11. That funding has provided us the ability to create and provide our core programs; and it is from there that our strength comes.



It should be noted that a massive component of our “team” is our contingent of dedicated volunteers. Working side-by-side with our staff, these people are a

central part of the friendly, warm and welcoming atmosphere we have become noted for. Without them, we would struggle to maintain our level of service. We are indebted to them for providing strength, support and empathy. Those traits are also on display at our external events such as the Victoria Day Parade, our Annual Summer Picnic and our year-end Holiday Celebration. It is truly inspiring to laugh and to share success stories with them. They are, whether they realize it, true difference makers.

This year, the board of directors welcomed several new faces. Their knowledge, expertise and perspective (especially those who are survivors) have brought even more strength to an extremely competent and committed cohort. We welcome them and are thankful for the efforts they have already extended. They are not only key players in our current structure, but undoubtedly our leaders of tomorrow.

I want to pass on a sincere thank you to our departing Board Members. Natalie Foley, who has been a tireless and superb champion of this organization, has spent an amazing amount of her own time in making this organization sustainable. She has done everything one could ask of a board member and more. Her guidance has helped mitigate risk for our organization and she has complemented that with her generous financial support. Her exit from the board is completely understandable and we will genuinely miss her. But we know she is part of our family for life and are thankful that she will remain a strong supporter.

Also, we owe a multitude of thanks and gratitude to Stephen McKenzie. Steve joined this organization in perhaps one of its most trying chapters. Thanks to his resolve and single-mindedness, he helped buoy this society. He not only provided structure, he helped rebuild and re-shape it. He started our gala event and has been the backbone and principal organizer ever since. He has defined what it means to be a leader. Through a decade of service, he has driven institutional change; a task that cannot, nor should not, be taken for granted. He has made this organization better and stronger. We can never repay him for the enumerable hours he put into VBIS. All we can do is appreciate what he has done and use that example as motivation to continue.

We look upon the next year with hope and determination. We can see an even brighter future for those we need to help, and those who have not yet come our way. Our work is far from done, but has never meant more, meaning we must continue to fight for those who come to our door and extend a hand for help. Survivors are living proof of what can be done when we support and advocate for those with a brain injury. They are worth every penny we raise and then some. They are the reason we are all here, the reason why we know our work must continue. We cannot, and will not, ever lose sight of that.

MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

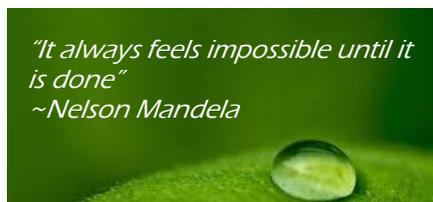
You know that feeling you get when you are passing through a really difficult time, and you have just seen the light at the end of the tunnel for the first time? The weight hasn't quite lifted yet, the anxiety is still there and your shoulders still feel a little heavy, but you have hope, and it's growing. You can see the path forward, you finally have all the pieces in place and you are ready come out the other side: stronger, wiser and more complete.



*Nicole Nelson, MA
Executive Director*

Whether you are a brain injury survivor moving through the challenges of your injury, learning about your new self and striving for your new normal, or, in our case, an organization dealing with the growing pains that come with increased awareness, it is always darkest before the dawn. But when you see that light over the horizon, boy does your heart sing.

During the past year, with only one full time and two part-time case managers and over 800 clients, new clients wanting to access our services had to wait upwards of four months to have their first appointment.



You can imagine the pressure this put on our staff, who are acutely aware of how detrimental it can be for a survivor to wait that long to receive support. So the staff worked tirelessly: much like the clients they serve, they were resilient, persevering and went above and beyond to meet the challenges they faced. Our volunteers supported them with their dedication, passion and selflessness. The Board of Directors stepped up, providing steadfast guidance and leadership. We doubled our fundraising efforts and our donors answered our call.

Thanks to the tremendous efforts of our entire team, we have taken huge strides forward. We survived – and now we can thrive. We have increased staff hours, and for the first time in VBIS history, we have hired an Intake Coordinator. I am thrilled to report that we are well on our way towards not having a waitlist at all. When a new

client calls, we can offer timely care and support.

New clients will have a case manager who is there to guide them through the challenges of their injury with compassion and empathy, to advocate for them and empower them to discover a positive way forward. Our case managers provide an all-encompassing safety net that cannot be found elsewhere – you'll find an amazing example of this on page 8.



They will have access to peer support: brain injury survivors who are there with a hot coffee, a listening ear and an understanding voice. They can sign up for one of our educational programs, or rediscover their creative spark in our music or creative arts programs. Most importantly, they will find themselves in a safe, welcoming environment where they are free to come as they are – on good days and bad – and can rest assured that they will be met with openness and acceptance.

I want to thank our staff, for their strength and determination and for providing such outstanding service each and every day. Thanks to our volunteers, for their endless enthusiasm and willingness to learn. Thanks to our Board of Directors, for their mentorship and for always ensuring the clients' needs are our top priority. And my endless gratitude to our donors – to the individuals who give their hard-earned dollars so willingly to a cause they whole-heartedly believe in, and to the businesses and community foundations that provide essential funding where it is needed most.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole Nelson".

Nicole Nelson, MA
Executive Director



MESSAGE FROM OUR CLIENT SERVICES MANAGER

I began my work at VBIS as Client Services Manager in July 2013. For the first two months of agency orientation, I was witness to an atmosphere that I'd never before experienced. Having worked and grown accustomed to a loud, chaotic office space within a local social service agency, I was somewhat taken aback by the ease with which one could enter VBIS space and settle into an atmosphere of calm acceptance.



*Kathy Smith, MSW RSW
Client Services Manager*

Then came orienting to staff, clients, volunteers and programs. Great, comfortable relationships were flourishing between staff and clients. Volunteers staffed the peer support program and supported admin as well as assisting with client programming. Daily, I witnessed an open sharing of stories between all; stories of experience, strength and hope for survivors of brain injury. Music filled the air Tuesday afternoons; people came through the office to attend ACE, ABI 101 and Coping Strategies; family members found support through the evening groups; and off-site the Creative Arts Program hummed along in Fernwood village. And although I didn't attend a Youth Supporting Youth session, I had the great honour of meeting with young brain injury survivors who showed an interest in reaching out socially to their peers who share similar life events.

I began walking with the Walk & Run Program and am still enjoying our weekly strolls through the local parks and neighbourhoods. I was introduced to families at Victoria General Hospital's support group where family members and loved ones

learned how best to support their members through their healing and rehabilitation.



When I began to work with individual clients surviving brain injury and their caregivers, I heard stories of resilience, recovery, loss, frustration, love, anger and acceptance. How social services both supported and challenged the recovery process; how people change post injury and how they manage the changes to their physical, emotional, social and spiritual health.



Almost one year later I am much busier with the daily functioning of the agency. I am still learning so much about brain injury from all of the teachers here. I continue to witness the ebb and flow of human strengths.

I've had the great pleasure to be part of a gigantic picnic with far too many wasps; a holiday celebration; a touching and thoughtful memorial service for a wonderful client; informative educational workshops on community resources; and appreciation events that filled the rooms with food and laughter.

The first large group undertaking involved co-organizing workshops for all of the volunteers to learn "Verbal Self Defense"; where we were instructed on the fine art of compassionate communication with people in distress. These sessions were well attended and well received.

Family Caregiver week, May 3-9, was a great exercise for my organizational skills and the payoff was ample as I attended three workshops focusing on self-care and compassion for the caregiver. One can never have too many tools for self-care in their tool kit!

Going into my second year with VBIS, I am ready for more learning, laughter and love. Thanks to all who make this agency what it is.

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

*Stephen McKenzie & Natalie Foley
Recognizing Service & Excellence*



*Murray & Daughter
enjoying the
VBIS Annual Picnic 2013
Brenda & Greg BBQ (below)*



VBIS at Spring Sprint 2014



*Volunteer Appreciation Week 2014
Cake and Volunteers!
Becky, Meaghan, Caitlin, Leah & Bob (below)*



Holiday Celebration 2013



*Alex Gilchrist remembering
Peter Steel...
Celebrating the life of a
good friend and a long-time
client*



*Andy & Anna
Halloween 2013*



Victoria Day Parade 2014



MESSAGE FROM ONE OF OUR CASE MANAGERS

“Safety Net”

My client had strange symptoms and no diagnosis of ABI from his family doctor. In fact, other doctors he had been required to see had labelled him “mentally ill” or “a malingerer”. His union was asking if he should be recommended for long-term disability. His symptoms were definitely different, and he described himself as a “strange guy”. What kind of strange guy? I asked. “Well, I like didgeridoo music. That’s pretty strange, people tell me.”

He was being provided with rehab to treat vision loss caused by his fall, but no one would say “brain injury”. He had slipped on ice at work, and fallen hard. His feet were pointed to the sky, others told him. He knew he had landed hard on the back of his neck, and the back of his head.

I did an online search, specifically for descriptions of brain-stem injury. When I had a list, we agreed to see his doctor together. We didn’t get to see the doctor because he had forgotten what time his appointment was, and we were 4 hours early. We went for coffee instead, and I asked him again to describe his experience after his fall. I was check-marking the list of symptoms I had copied from the internet source while he talked. I must have been smiling because he stopped and asked “This is funny to you??” It was not funny at all, of course, but now I knew what this fight was going to be about.

I started by asking his doctor for a new neuropsych exam, focusing specifically on brain-stem injury, and he referred me to the previous negative one. I spoke at length to his union, urging them to contact his doctor and ask for a new exam. I wrote letters to his doctor and I spoke on his behalf to his insurance company assessors. Nothing helped. He used up his savings and went hungry. In order to forestall being homeless for one more month, he sold his old jeep and his computer. The insurance company told his union that they would base their decision on the only neuropsych assessment done. (Remember, that was the one calling him either mentally ill or a malingerer.)

At his next appointment with me, he said he had been told the final decision from the



*Alex Gilchrist
Case Manager*

insurance company was three days away. I wrote again to the doctor, informing him of this, and asking that he call the insurance company to offer a dissenting medical opinion to counter the one they were basing their decision on. I said that if they decided against him, I would be seeking his support in applying for social assistance, PWD status, and subsidized housing for this client.

A few days later, my client called to tell me he was denied long-term disability but that someone had offered him a job doing deliveries by car. Remember the vision loss. I asked him if he could drive. He said “...or be homeless?”

After I explained the ethical requirements of my position, he promised not to drive without clearance by the motor vehicle branch, and I made an appointment for him at an agency specializing in retraining the disabled, and one that provides housing.

He had two weeks left before he would be evicted, and he was losing weight. He was unsteady on his feet, and not seeing well, and didn’t feel safe to go to places where he could get food.

A week later, he called me and said that the insurance company had revised their decision. Apparently, it was a locum that had received my last

letter to his doctor, and the letter was simply slipped into his file. When his GP came back from holidays, he read the letter and made the call to the insurance company. In doing so, he has given my client the opportunity to continue his recovery safely housed, and with proper nutrition and medical care. The doctor may have saved his life.

In time, he will recover as much as nature allows. He will adapt and retrain, and I have every confidence he will be employed in some way in the future. There is, however, no known solution for the didgeridoo music!

It took six months from the day this client walked into VBIS until he was given long-term disability status for an injury no one understood or wanted to talk about at all. It is 2014. Brain injury is on the map. This was not the case when I started working at VBIS. We called ABI the invisible epidemic, but veterans of two wars and an army of injured athletes have brought brain injury into the spotlight. Still, medical professionals trained 20 years ago learned significantly less than we now know about brain injury.

(continued on Page 9)



We will be one place where brain injury survivors can count on being seen, understood, and respected.



MESSAGE FROM OUR VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

“Safety Net”

by Alex Gilchrist

(continued from Page 8)

Government, crown corporations and insurance companies, have been slow to recognize brain injury as the complex and long-term medical issue that it is.

MRIs and cat scans often do not reveal brain injuries, and while survivors are waiting for the world to catch up to the reality of their injuries, their lives fall apart. No one should lose a leg because a broken femur was not set. No one should die from an abscessed tooth, and in today's medical system, no one would. But people can still lose everything from an undiagnosed and unsupported brain injury. Our streets and prisons are full of people who needed help and didn't get it.

The growing awareness of ABI is a positive thing, and it gives me hope. I see a future where a client with “strange symptoms” will never go hungry or face homelessness. But that day is yet to come. Awareness of brain injury by society in general, even by the medical community, is still very limited. Every day at VBIS people walk through the door looking for support that no other agency provides.

In the future, we will know much more about the brain and brain injury. We will know more about the part of us that makes us who we are. Hopefully, our medical system and social safety network will catch up to this knowledge, and will put an end to the tremendous waste and human suffering that comes of untreated, unsupported brain injuries.

Until then, the Victoria Brain Injury Society will continue to do what it always has: we will be one place where brain injury survivors can count on being seen, understood, and respected.

It is said that the administration office is the hub of an organization where everything ties in; this is true. At VBIS it is also true to say that volunteers are an equally major hub of our organization. With six staff members, from part time to full time and up to 100 volunteers at any time... well, the math is simple!

We have an amazing team carrying out a multitude of tasks for us. Over the past 12 months alone our volunteers have recorded over 5550 hours! Our team comprises of professionals in the community, students at UVic and Camosun, individuals with brain injury themselves, retirees and everyone in between. When I meet potential volunteers for the first time, I always ask what they hope to gain from their experience and they have a multitude of goals. I find it heartwarming to see people learning ‘the practical’ to balance off ‘the theory’ of their studies and to be part of an organization; people just wanting to give back to their community and have some input while they are at it.

But the biggest glow in my heart has to be being witness to the individuals with brain injury who volunteer so that they can ‘find their own new level’ – or as one volunteer would term it: “to get to know and understand my new brain.” They have numerous goals from re-discovering and building on old and new skills, to building confidence, to



Anna McLauchlan
Manager of Administration
& Volunteer Coordinator



giving back to VBIS and the clients here, to being able to return to work themselves. As much as I hate to lose them to the latter – way to go! Our newest employee was one of these volunteers – how great is that!

Over the past year the volunteer intake system has been re-vamped, as has building the database capacity. We have also had a re-organization of the reception/admin area with the incredible help of our volunteers in these areas. We have also offered training in Verbal Self Defense and seizures for our volunteers.

Our volunteers take part in other one-off activities throughout the year – the Annual Gala in the fall being the largest.

We also have a number of events at VBIS: the Annual Picnic, the Victoria Day Parade, the Volunteer

Appreciation

Celebration, the Holiday

Celebration, as well as this AGM, to name but a few. Not only do we rely on volunteer help to make these happen; we also have incredible supporters in the community and I would like to take a moment to thank you for all you do for us throughout the year.

We have more changes and evolutions to come in the next 12 months, of that I am sure. I am also so very proud of our volunteer team who will continue to help .

*Those who can, do. Those who
can do more, volunteer.*



FINANCIAL SUMMARY



	2014	2013
REVENUE		
Brain Injury Program—VIHA	136,886	123,869
Grants	126,787	100,755
Fundraising	70,088	61,007
Donations	20,208	16,606
Contract Funding	6,759	8,070
Advertising	2,880	4,446
	363,608	314,753
EXPENSES		
Wages and Benefits	226,164	228,948
Rent	31,417	31,505
Fundraising	23,186	22,095
Office	21,509	34,897
Contract Facilitators	6,995	3,420
Program Support	4,364	3,898
Amortization	3,851	0
Utilities	3,058	3,045
Insurance	2,178	3,281
Repairs and Maintenance	2,131	2,001
Professional Development	1,160	985
Dues, Fees and Licences	820	773
Interest and Bank Charges	778	1,259
Advertising and Promotion	755	1,819
	328,366	337,886
REVENUE IN EXCESS OF (LESS THAN) EXPENDITURES	35,242	(23,133)



THANK YOU TO OUR MAJOR FUNDERS

The generosity of our major funders is the lifeblood of the Victoria Brain Injury Society. All of our programs, as well as the personal growth and recovery of our clients, are dependent on the continued support of the businesses, agencies and charities listed below. We thank you!



Each year the Victoria Brain Injury Society hosts and/or participates in a variety of events.

The following businesses have been instrumental in providing services, products and donations that have made these events possible for us during this last fiscal year.

Art's Bakery
B&C Food Distributors
Boston Pizza (Blanshard/Hillside)
Bubby Rose's Bakery
Caffe Fantastico
Cobs Bakery (Harris Green)
Cobs Bakery (Shelbourne Plaza)
Domino's Pizza (Quadra/Pandora)
Fairway Market
Foi Epi Bakery
Lighthouse Bakery
Market on Yates
Mediterranean Specialty Foods
Patisserie Daniel

Pepper's Market
Red Barn Market
Save on Foods (Fort/Foul Bay)
Save on Foods (Tillicum)
Save on Foods (University Heights)
Save on Foods (Uptown)
Save on Foods (Vic West)
Tim Hortons (Blanshard/Hillside)
Thrifty Foods
Vegas Convenience Store
Walmart (Langford)
Wellburn's Market
Wilson's Transportation



Victoria Brain Injury Society

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