

A Brain Injury Support Group Could Be One of The Best Things That Ever Happens To You!

Barbara Webster Shares Her Experience

I never thought I was a “support group person”. I thought support groups were more for people who wanted to talk about their problems instead of doing something about them. In 1991, when a car skidded into mine on a slippery road and my life was turned upside down, little did I know that a support group would be one of the best things that ever happened to me. I looked okay after the accident, no obvious head wound, but inside I was far from okay. Prior to the accident, I was a problem-solving, multitasking, goal-oriented, career woman, wife and mother. Now I struggled with simple everyday tasks - and I didn’t know why! It felt like I was going crazy. After over 2 years of confusion, frustration and despair, I attended a program at my son’s school featuring a speaker from the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts. I remember trying to hide the tears that ran down my cheeks as I listened and realized that finally I was not alone!

I have been participating in brain injury support groups ever since, first as a member and later as a facilitator. I still remember the person who greeted me at those first meetings. That simple, friendly gesture was the highlight of my week that was otherwise filled with frustration and failure as I tried and failed to do the things I used to be able to do with such ease. Support groups also helped my husband understand that I wasn’t “losing it”; I had a problem, and we began to work together. They literally saved my marriage!

What I continue to hear regularly from support group members is that the most important, priceless, benefit of a support group, is in finding a place where you feel comfortable, where people “get it” and truly understand your issues. No need to explain yourself, apologize or make excuses, you are accepted and understood as you are. What will probably surprise you is all of the additional ways that I found a brain injury support group to be helpful.

I discovered “strategies” through support group members, those amazing little tools that help you do something you couldn’t do otherwise. I love strategies! Each one feels like a little light bulb inside my head, an “aha moment”, a mini miracle! Instead of dwelling on all of the things that I couldn’t do, I began thinking about how to do them. I began to feel hopeful.

It was through support groups that I discovered that there were professionals who could actually help me! I learned that there was such a thing as cognitive rehabilitation. What a revelation! What a relief! Those therapists, “my earth angels”, helped me start the long process of putting my life back together. Finally I had HOPE!

I think the most unexpected benefit of participating in a support group is the inspiration I received from observing other survivors accomplish things I wouldn’t have considered doing before I witnessed their successes. Time and time again, I still find myself thinking: ‘If they can do it, I should at least try, maybe I can be successful too?!’ We inspire confidence and courage in each other just by witnessing each other’s journeys.

Healing from a brain injury takes a long time. My insurance coverage and therapies stopped long before I was ready and I would have been lost if I had not been part of a support group. My support group helped fill the gap. Most brain injury support groups offer much more than a forum for listening and sharing. They can also provide educational, recreational and social opportunities. They can be a place to make new friends. They can be a place to volunteer, providing a safe environment to practice skills and challenge your abilities. They are also a link to the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts, connecting you to activities and opportunities statewide.

Support groups aren’t for everyone but everyone needs support after something as traumatic and life changing as a brain injury. For resources or to find a support group in your area, please contact the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts at www.biama.org or 800-242-0030. It could be one of the best things that ever happened to you too!

Barbara Webster is the long-time facilitator of the “Amazing” Brain Injury Survivor Support Group in Framingham, MA and the Survivor and Family Educator for the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts. She is also the author of Lost and Found, A Survivor’s Guide for Reconstructing Life After a Brain Injury, Lash Publishing.

Version Oct 8, 2020