

Headwaters Acquired Brain Injury Group marks Brain Injury Awareness Month

By Sam Odrowski

In a single moment, life can change forever.

Whether it's a motor vehicle accident, slip and fall, a concussion from sports or health complications, an acquired brain injury can severely alter how a person interacts with the world.

The 165,000 Canadians who endure a serious brain injury each year, according to Brain Injury Canada, can be left disabled or cognitively impaired for the rest of their life.

With June marking Brain Injury Awareness Month, a local not-for-profit support group is celebrating the people it serves with a community barbecue.

Headwaters Acquired Brain Injury Group (HABI) holds the barbeque each year as an opportunity for its members, as well as their family and friends, to enjoy camaraderie, support and a celebration of the group's success.

HABI is a Dufferin County-based support group, founded in 2009, and operated under the umbrella of the Ontario Brain Injury Association.

"HABI is committed to providing support to those impacted by brain injury and is dedicated to raising awareness about the impact that brain injury has on so many," reads a press release from HABI.

"HABI hosts monthly support groups, which provide members with opportunities to support each other, listen to guest speakers, and form social connections."

HABI hosts social activities as well. There is no cost to attend HABI and all community members are welcome.

There is no waitlist to attend HABI gatherings, which take place on the first Thursday of each month, beginning at 6:30 p.m., at The Centre (375 Hansen Blvd., Orangeville).

The group currently has 75 active members and 15-25 people usually attend each gathering at The Centre.

HABI members have shared that they enjoy coming to a group where everyone knows what they are going through and they don't have to explain their symptoms. While many members noted they were nervous when first joining the group, they have found HABI to be a very welcoming and positive outlet for them.

Everyone fits in "whether someone is living with a mild concussion or a more severe brain injury."

HABI members also enjoy the fact that the group is run by and for people with brain injuries.

The Ontario Brain Injury Association (OBIA) is using this month to highlight brain injury caused by oxygen deprivation related to non-fatal overdose.

According to OBIA, "Research suggests that for every one fatality due to overdose, there are approximately 15 non-fatal overdoses, many resulting in hypoxic or anoxic brain injuries. These injuries are often invisible and remain undiagnosed, yet they can significantly affect a person's memory, focus, emotional regulation, and mobility."

The OBIA continued, "Between 2016 and 2021, more than 27,000 opioid poisoning hospitalizations occurred in Canada. The majority were non-fatal, yet the long-term impact on survivors often goes unnoticed. Many are discharged from hospital care without any assessment or follow-up for possible brain injury."

For more information, check out HABI's website at headwatersabi.ca and Facebook page @Headwaters Acquired Brain Injury Group - HABI.

Information about OBIA can be found at obia.ca.