

Local Acquired Brain Injury Services marks five years in area

By Angela Gismondi

June is Brain Injury Awareness Month, and Peel Halton Dufferin Acquired Brain Injury Services (PHD ABIS) celebrated by marking a milestone – the fifth anniversary of opening offices and services in Orangeville to serve Dufferin and Caledon. The celebration was attended by ABI clients, their families and caregivers, PHD ABIS staff and board members, representatives from the Central West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) and dignitaries. Funded by the LHIN and Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, PHD ABIS is a not-for-profit charitable organization committed to making a difference for ABI survivors by collaborating with community partners, supporting ABI advocacy initiatives and offering hundreds of ABI survivors, their families and caregivers community-based rehabilitation and re-integration services. "It's an invisible disease that is far too visible," said Al McMullan, executive director of PHD ABIS. He explained that for many ABI survivors, the impact of their condition may be "invisible" to others, however, survivors may experience profound challenges in complex cognitive impairments, personality changes, lost careers, ruptured relationships, among others. Brain injury is the leading cause of death and disability worldwide. Every day, there are 144 new brain injury cases in Ontario alone. In 2016, more than 18,000 Ontarians will suffer an acquired brain injury. There are over a million Canadians living with the effects of an acquired brain injury.

Since the office opened five years ago on Riddell Road, ABI survivors who have become PHD ABIS clients have access to day services programs, case management, clinical services and psychological support groups, all of which are instrumental in the recovery and rehabilitation process. Some survivors waited more than 20 years for these services to be offered closer to home, McMullan said.

The celebration also served to mark the successes of those touched by an ABI.

Brad Goegan, chair of the board of directors for PHD ABI, was unable to attend the event, but his remarks were read at the celebration. PHD ABI has served the Central West LHIN for the quarter-century they have been an agency.

"The opportunity to reach to Dufferin-Caledon, and the chance to open these offices in service of Orangeville and these regions, has been a challenge, and a privilege," Goegan stated. "As a Board, we would like to thank the LHIN for its funding of these programs. We would like to thank the staff here, for their tireless efforts to make our mission statement of the highest quality of life . . . come alive. And we would like to thank those clients, families, partners and members of the community, that have embraced our services, and worked together . . . on behalf of ABI."

Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones was also on-hand for the celebration.

"Five years may not seem like a lot but when you see what you've achieved and the difference you make in the lives of the individuals you serve, I think it's critical that we celebrate five years," Jones said.

Ken Topping, a member of the LHIN board of directors, recalled attending the opening ribbon-cutting ceremony when the site opening five years ago. He praised the staff for their commitment and dedication.

"You make the clients here feel accepted, recognized, understood and appreciated – four very important words," Topping said. "You provide high quality, family-centered care each and every day."

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