

STROKE/BRAIN INJURY SUPPORT GROUP

of the Bloomington/Normal Area

Discussion ♦ Support ♦ Information ♦ Friendship ♦ Encouragement ♦ Socializing

Are you a stroke or brain injury survivor? Or, are you a caregiver or a family member of a stroke or brain injury survivor looking for a network of support in your local area?

The Stroke/Brain Injury Support Group of Bloomington/Normal Area was established in April, 2007, by two local couples who championed the effort to create a community of survivors and caregivers who could provide support, advice, and camaraderie.

Steve and Jackie Smith, and Chris and Nancy Donnan, learned that stroke and brain injuries strike fast, leaving survivors and caregivers to grapple and cope with life-changing circumstances. As Jackie describes, “in a matter of moments, our lives changed dramatically. We were grateful that Steve survived, but we both had so many questions and concerns about our future.” Chris and Nancy Donnan had a similar experience. “I suffered a stroke as a young woman with a young family – we had many challenges to overcome and adjust to,” Nancy explains.

The Smith’s and the Donnan’s live close by and found great comfort and appreciation in each other’s stories. Sharing their mutual experiences regarding physician visits, rehabilitation, successes and frustrations, made the transition for both families much easier. Both grateful for the other’s support, they recognized how important a strong, well-informed system of encouragement was to their recovery process. In looking for a larger group to communicate with, the Donnan’s and Smith’s discovered there was not a formalized stroke or brain injury support group in the local area. “Given that stroke is the primary cause of adult disability, I was surprised a group was not already established,” Chris said.

The Donnan’s and the Smith’s felt the support they received from each other was so beneficial, they committed to forming a group in the local community. Both couples attended training sessions to learn how to assist survivors and family members in the hospital setting immediately following a stroke or brain injury. As Steve explains, “there is much to consider and plan for before a survivor comes home, so it’s especially helpful to have a resource who can help answer questions in an otherwise scary and uncertain time.” Both couples are now on-call if survivors or family members request their services.

In addition to being available in the early stages of recovery, the Donnan’s and Smith’s worked tirelessly with volunteers from the hospitals and other physicians, nurses and allied healthcare professionals to establish the Stroke/Brain Injury Support Group of Bloomington/Normal Area. Neurosurgeons and neurologists agreed that a local support group was a missing link in the recovery process. With the help and support of local healthcare providers in the neurosciences, the group held its first meeting in April of 2007. Quickly outgrowing their original location, the group moved their meeting site to the Central Illinois Neuroscience Foundation in May, 2007.

The Stroke/Brain Injury Support Group of Bloomington/Normal Area is now guided by a planning Board comprised of the original Founders, active group members and liaisons from both hospitals. In discussing the purpose and goals for the group, the Board agreed on a mission to “establish and nurture a community of stroke/brain injury survivors, caregivers and family members to support each other as they cope with everyday challenges.” Meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of each month from 5:30PM to 7:00PM, at the Central Illinois Neuroscience Foundation, 1015 S. Mercer Avenue, Bloomington, IL 61701.

The monthly meetings, which are well attended by survivors and caregivers, consists of two parts – an

educational presentation which is then followed by group discussions. Local healthcare providers, including neurosurgeons, neurologists, physical therapists, acupuncturists, speech and psychological specialists, have graciously offered their time and expertise to address issues specific to stroke and brain injury survivors. After a brief break and social gathering with refreshments, the survivors and caregivers break into their respective discussion groups. Within each group, individuals are given the opportunity to share their experiences, whether it be successes, frustrations, or general daily obstacles. Although the groups have designated facilitators, the discussion topics are always open.

Read what some of the members have to say about the support group and what it means to them.

Survivors say:

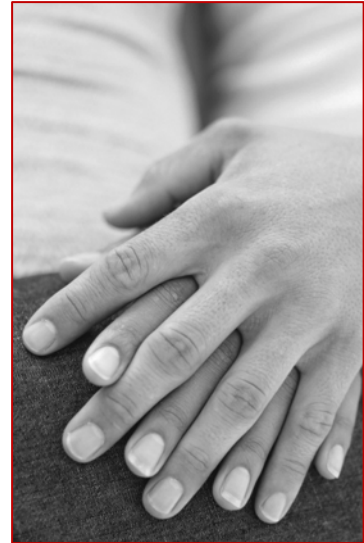
“Survivors give us support, strength, and encouragement. I feel better since the support group.”

“When I am with the group I don’t feel ashamed of my disabilities. If I forget something (go blank) in mid-sentence, I feel the acceptance and understanding. It makes it safe for me to be here (I usually isolate and feel ashamed). The courage of others, and that people have said they’re still glad to be alive, helps me keep going—keep choosing life.”

Caregivers say:

“The group has been a good way to show support to each other. It has been an excellent source for information and a way to meet new friends that you have a common interest with.”

“For me the rewards of being in this support group are two-fold: 1) gaining knowledge is empowering, and 2) forging friendships with others who share common struggles adds a new dimension of strength and joy to my life as a caregiver.”



The onset of a stroke or brain injury is a very frightening time for caregivers and family members. The Donnan’s and Smith’s are not alone in wanting to give back to this special community – survivors, caregivers and healthcare professionals are willing and available to help others in the many phases of the recovery process.

If you are a stroke/brain injury survivor, a caregiver or family member of a survivor, who is looking for support, consider attending a group meeting – registration is not required. As the group promotes, there are “no fees, no pressure, and no obligation. JUST COME!”

For more information, contact Jackie Smith, Chairman at (217) 935-5476 or Chris Donnan, Vice Chairman at (217) 935-8789.

Sponsored by the Central Illinois Neuroscience Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing neuro healthcare through education and research.