



SCI&D SPIRIT

Volume 1, Issue 2

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CATCH the SPIRIT

U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs
VA Boston Healthcare System
Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders

Making a Difference



Mike Guilbault
SCI/D Peer Mentor

In September 1995, Mike Guilbault, an Air Force Veteran, was driving his car when it slid off the highway and he was thrown from the vehicle. Guilbault spent six weeks in a coma. Upon emerging from the coma, he was informed that he had landed on his head and had suffered a neck injury with tetraplegia.

During his initial rehabilitation at a private hospital, Guilbault met two people who influenced him greatly. The first was a Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) service officer who recommended he look into care at the VA. The second was a peer mentor who proved to him that life was different but not over. Guilbault stated "He demonstrated, by his accomplishments, that I could do almost anything I did before my injury."

Guilbault's rehabilitation led to him regaining some use of his limbs. He currently lives independently, drives, and works as the Assistant Sport Director of the New England PVA .



Guilbault Zip-Lining

The influence of the peer mentor he met soon after his accident has had a lasting effect on Guilbault. He lives an active life participating in many recreational activities including skiing, softball, fishing, biking, and kayaking.

He also went on to become a peer mentor to others.

Today, Guilbault is one of VA Boston's SCI/D trained peer mentors. He is a positive role model who offers assistance to others with SCI/D. Guilbault is one of several peer mentors available to answer questions, to serve as a confidant, and to provide useful techniques for adjusting to a new way of life. Guilbault, like his mentor before him, leads by example. He is an active participant in the VA National Wheelchair Games and VA New England Winter & Summer Sports Clinics.

"What I ask my peers when I go to see them is 'What did you like to do before you were hurt?' Because, chances are, with the technology of today, you can still do it now."

"Peer mentoring has been a rewarding experience for me because I make a difference in others' lives."

A mentor is defined as a knowledgeable and experienced guide, a trusted ally and advocate, and a caring role model. An effective mentor is respectful, reliable, patient, trustworthy, and a very good listener and communicator. For more information about connecting with a peer mentor or if you are interested in helping others adjust to their post-injury life, you can contact:

Tracey Presley LICSW, SCI/D Social Worker
Phone: 857-203-6126.
Email: Tracey.Presley@va.gov

A Lifetime Commitment

Supporting Veterans with spinal cord injury and disorders at home and in the community throughout their lives is a big part of the mission of our SCI Center.

In order to do this we continue to improve our services that allow Veterans with SCI/D to live at home and participate in their communities. Some examples of such services include: home care, support groups for caregivers, help in identifying and accessing resources for participation in social and recreational activities, use of new technologies such as secure messaging and tele-home health, and respite care services for times when caregivers are not available or could do with a temporary break. More about some of these programs in future issues...



Sunil Sabharwal, MD
Chief SCI/D Services

VA and PVA Collaborate on Vocational Rehabilitation



Ken Lipton, M.A., C.R.C.
Vocational Rehab. Counselor

In 2010, the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) initiated a collaboration with VA Boston HCS to assist Veterans who have incurred spinal cord injuries or disorders to successfully transition to the workforce, school and/or training.

Ken Lipton, PVA Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, has an office at the West Roxbury campus. He works with Veterans throughout the Northeast.

Ken tells the story of a Veteran he worked with and what Vocational Rehabilitation has to offer other veterans and their families.

“In September 2010, I started working with a Marine Corps Veteran. At that time, he had been out of work for over two years and was on SSDI.

We started with career counseling. This Veteran brought strengths in logistics and people skills and he wanted to use those transferable skills in a customer service related position. I assisted in helping him with his job search, critiquing his resume, and helped him submit an application to the Federal Justice Department in Boston. He was subsequently hired by the Justice Department as an Information Receptionist and is making a salary that has allowed him to leave SSDI.”

Along with job development and placement, Ken can help with career counseling, resume preparation, and applications to both private and government sectors.

Besides Veterans who would like to pursue full time career opportunities, he helps those that are seeking part time, temporary, unpaid volunteer, or educational retraining. Ken assists families and can help caregivers or dependents who would like to pursue career possibilities.

Over the past year, Ken has built relationships with a employers such as TD and Citizens Banks, Raytheon, Walgreen, Verizon, Department of Labor, the Commissaries, Department of Justice, Massachusetts State 911 Department, University of Massachusetts Medical School, Boston Fire Department, Beth Israel Deaconess and Massachusetts General Hospitals, and a number of colleges.

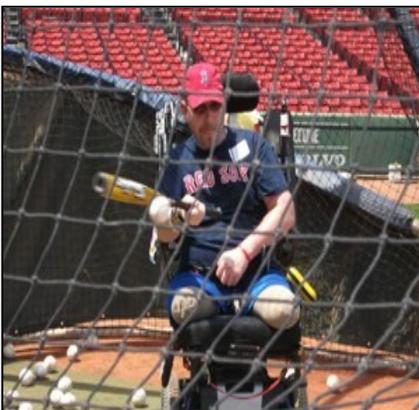
PVA is a Social Security Administration sanctioned Employment Network. This means that a Veteran, who is getting SSDI and has concerns about working and losing social security, now has the opportunity to try the Ticket to Work employment program. This allows a 12 month work period without the worry of losing SSDI during those months. The Ticket to Work program has been a stepping stone for a number of PVA clients who are now gainfully employed and are no longer on social assistance.

If you have not worked or have been out of the workforce for several years, please do not let that deter you from discussing potential career or retraining alternatives in the community or at home. If you cannot come to West Roxbury, Ken can meet at your local VA, home, library, coffee shop or via whatever communication mode that you prefer.

Ken Lipton can be contacted by phone at 857-203-6091 or by email at ken@pva.org



Play Ball...



National Guard Member, Sergeant Ed Matayka, who served in Afghanistan, is about to make contact with a ball pitched by Dave Magadan, Red Sox batting coach.

On July 5th, 2011 a group of Veterans and Active Duty Personnel, who were participating in the acute rehab program at VA Boston SCI Center, attended ‘The Batters Clinic’ at Fenway Park.

The day started at 11 am with pictures in the Red Sox Dugout and in front of the “Green Monster”, followed by lunch, a private tour of Fenway, watching the Red Sox take batting practice on the field and finally seats for the game that night against the Blue Jays.

The Red Sox did their part with a two run homerun by Pedroia, an RBI by Varitek, and 4 pitchers from the bullpen to win 3-2

A long enjoyable day for all!



Gunnery Sergeant Tim Smith, who served in Iraq, with Dave Magadan, Red Sox batting coach.



The Gift of Volunteering

We would like to take this opportunity to recognize Linda Randall for her outstanding volunteer service. She is a Spinal Cord Injury Nurse who works at the Brockton Campus.

Linda volunteered at both the 2011 Summer Sports Clinic at Mount Sunapee in New Hampshire and the 2011 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It was Linda's first time volunteering at the Summer Sports Clinic but her seventh time volunteering at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

She is committed to ensuring that our patients who wish to participate in

these sporting events are able to do so. Without volunteers like Linda, it might not be possible for some Veterans to participate in these games. By contributing her time and energy, Linda is truly making a difference.

When asked to describe her experiences, Linda stated, "To be honest, it can be challenging at times to provide total patient care including medication administration to the Veterans and get them to their scheduled sporting events on time. However, once you see the smiles on their faces as they participate

in the games, it is so worth it. I love to cheer on and encourage the Veterans during the games. It is such an awesome experience!"



Linda Randall, RN

*"The only gift is a portion of thyself."
Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Preventative Health is the Name of the Game

Influenza (Flu) is a serious disease caused by a virus that spreads from infected person to person. Flu is far more dangerous than just a bad cold and may lead to pneumonia or even death. Although good hygiene and frequent hand-washing decreases the spread of the virus, vaccinating against Influenza is a key preventative measure.



The risk of developing a complication from the Flu is much greater than the risk of reaction from the Flu shot.

Viruses change often and the Flu Vaccine is updated each year to make sure it is as effective as possible. This is why it is important to vaccinate each year.

There is no live virus in the Flu shot, so you *cannot* get the Flu from the Flu shot. The risk of the vaccine causing serious harm is extremely small. Almost all people who get the influenza vaccine have no problem from it. Some may experience mild redness or soreness at the injection site, mild fever, or muscle aches for 1-2 days. These symptoms are generally relieved with a few doses of Tylenol.

The Flu vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines, including the Pneumococcal Vaccine. Routine immunizations can prevent illness for you and your loved ones.

The Spinal Cord Clinic offers Flu vaccination from early fall until mid-spring. So be sure to get yours!



CAREGIVER TIP-THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF CARE

Many of our Veterans with SCI have very dedicated, informal caregivers assisting them with their daily needs. These include spouses, partners, children, siblings and friends who often place their loved one's needs ahead of their own.

However, all caregivers need to take care of themselves: Get necessary rest, Eat healthy meals, Find effective ways to manage stress and Make the time to engage in pleasurable activities.

These recommendations will help the caregiver to avoid illness, stress reactions and caregiver burnout. Many caregivers let their own needs go because the demands of the individual they are caring for are so time consuming. It is important for them to remember that taking good care of themselves will make them better able to care for their loved ones.

For caregiver assistance contact: Jeanine Penzo LICSW, Phone: 857-203-6498, email: Jeanine.Penzo@va.gov



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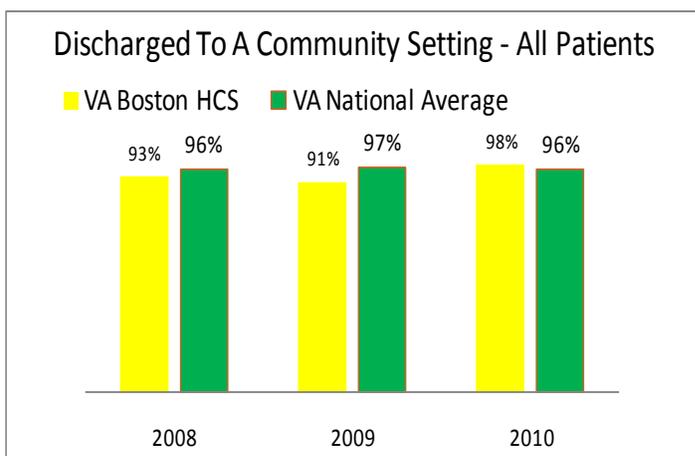
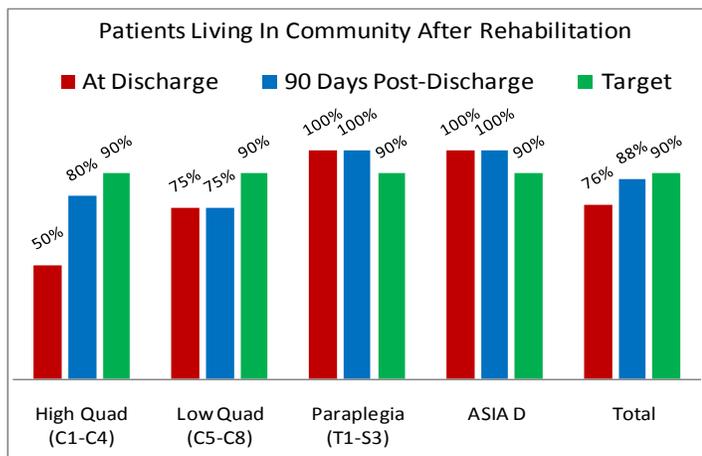
Facebook: VA Boston Healthcare System

Veteran Veteran
 1 Veteran Way
 Boston, MA 02122

Our Outcomes

The SCI/D Program evaluates the quality of the services provided to our patients on an ongoing basis. Two of the measures we use include:

- Percentage of patients living in a community setting after discharge from our Rehabilitation Program in 2010. The target we set for ourselves is 90%. We do realize that numbers don't tell the full story. Sometimes we discharge people from inpatient rehabilitation to another facility temporarily so they can be closer to family while their home is being modified or to make sure that all local services needed are set up before they return home. This explains the increase in community living at 90-days compared to right after discharge.
- Percentage of all patients admitted to our SCI Center who are discharged to a community setting after hospitalization. We continue to be above 90% in this measure and, at 98% last year, are doing even better.



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