



Brain & Spinal Injury
Trust Fund Commission

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Fostering Vision and Possibility





We Have Strong Citizen and Legislative Support

In November 1998, Georgia voters overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment to create a Trust Fund for traumatic brain and spinal injuries, paid for by a surcharge on drunk driving fines. This landmark legislation won by a margin of greater than 2-to-1. In 2014, an additional fine on reckless driving convictions was directed to the Trust Fund to sustain revenue levels. Most recently, a 2020 legislative initiative passed unanimously by the General Assembly to further improve funding priority for the Trust Fund. We thank the citizens of Georgia, members of the legislature and the Governor for their continued confidence in our mission and commitment to improving quality of life for Georgians living with brain and spinal cord injuries.

We Are Guided by Those with Firsthand Knowledge

The idea of the Trust Fund and the advocacy efforts on behalf of the founding legislation was driven by people with traumatic brain injury and spinal cord injury and those who serve them. Because of their first-hand experiences, they knew what was most important for people with these traumatic injuries--and what was missing in the range of services and resources available. They dreamed of an agency that understood the lifelong needs of people with traumatic injuries and was committed to supporting injured individuals at different stages in their life – not just in the critical moments after the injury occurs.

More than half of the people who serve on the Commission must have a brain or spinal cord injury or be a family member of a person with an injury. Other members are specialists in the field or service providers to people with traumatic injuries. Their collective knowledge and experience governs our day-to-day decisions, guides our award distributions, and informs our public policy agenda.

We Connect People to Their Communities

Georgians with traumatic brain and spinal injuries deserve lives of independence and inclusion, lives rich with vision and possibilities. Trust Fund awards assist individuals with injuries in reaching their chosen goals.

We Cast Vision

Our Vision is a Georgia where people with traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries are valued, have equal opportunity, and real choices.



Trust Fund Awards Change Lives.



The Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission is Georgia's only state agency that offers dedicated funding and support for individuals who have sustained a traumatic brain or spinal cord injury. The Commission's mission is to distribute much needed resources to eligible Georgia residents via direct grants for their post-acute care and rehabilitation.

The Commission serves through three major avenues:

The Central Registry identifies newly-injured individuals and their families and enables us to reach out to each one personally to educate them about and connect them to the resources they need to rebuild their lives. The registry allows us to efficiently gauge the needs across the state and the gaps we still need to address.

The Trust Fund provides much needed monetary resources for those who simply cannot afford necessary goods and services they need post-injury or whose insurance benefits have become depleted.

Alleviating even a small portion of financial burden or resource obstacles for those working to define a new way of life and strive for rehabilitation can leave a lasting impact across their entire lives. We assure them that they are not alone. We stand with them and are encouraging them, every step of the way.

As **the Lead Agency**, we are collaborating with stakeholders across the state to make sure Georgia has a system of care that truly meets the needs of people with traumatic brain and spinal injuries. Our State Action Plan partners are a collaboration of agencies, hospitals, schools, and service providers to improve comprehensive care. Our online, direct mail, and personal outreach efforts help potential applicants with the application process and connect them to services in their local community. Our legislative efforts have impacted laws that will reduce injury and make available added resources for Georgians with traumatic injuries. With the ever-changing landscape of the economy and healthcare coverage today, services and resources for individuals with traumatic injuries continue to be more expensive and harder to find. Hence, the role of the Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission has become more valuable than ever before. We are focused each day on making a difference across our state – through public awareness, grant administration and developing new partners.

For so many across our state, the Commission has proven to be a dependable resource they can count on to help them build lives of meaning, independence and inclusion.



Dear Friends,

As we mark our 25th year of service to Georgia I would like to thank all our stakeholders, current and former Commissioners, Trust Fund staff, contractors and volunteers, members of the General Assembly, the Governor's office, sister state agencies and the voters of Georgia who have enabled the continued operation of the Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission. The Commission is proud to have awarded over \$30 million dollars in grants to Georgians who have sustained traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries.



These grant awards enable Georgia residents to remain in their community and fosters their independence through the provision of rehabilitation therapies, durable medical equipment, assistive technology, modified vehicles, personal support services and employment resources. In many cases our grantees report that the grant they received directly helped them stay out of nursing homes, hospitals and other institutional care settings.

The Commission firmly embraces consumer choice by allowing selection of the types of rehabilitation and post-acute care they need most. Recognizing the pressing needs and rising costs of care, especially goods and services, the Commission recently raised the lifetime caps for grants to \$12,000 per eligible Georgian and up to \$18,000 to go towards the cost of a modified vehicle.

Increases in grant awards have been possible due to the reversal of declining revenue and cost cutting measures. The Commission recently relocated to smaller office space downsizing our overhead and a new hybrid work model is allowing our staff to work most efficiently. We continue to look for additional revenue sources to stay aligned with the rising cost of medical/rehabilitative services. We continue to provide our state with Resource Facilitation for Georgians struggling with traumatic brain injury through our agreement with the Brain Injury Association of Georgia and our federal partners at the Administration for Community Living.

As Georgia's lead agency for traumatic brain/spinal injury we work diligently to cast vision for our state as to how we can best provide real opportunities for survivors to live full, impactful lives. We are the hope many need to see possibilities ahead. Our grants are life-changing and often prove to be "the" turning point in their lives that push them forward again.

If you know of survivors needing resources, please encourage them to reach out to us. We are here to help foster new vision for their lives and provide opportunities they may not know are possible.

Regards,

Craig L. Young

The Commission is guided by a strategic State Action Plan designed to help mold the state infrastructure and aid in the development of services to improve the lives of Georgians with traumatic brain injuries and spinal cord injuries. State Action Plan activities focus on seven core areas to ensure an individual's needs are being met by our direct grants:

- Screening and Identification
- Training and Awareness
- Rehabilitation and Wellness
- Service Coordination
- Long Term and Life Long Supports
- Independent and Integrated
- Living Community Participation

Representatives from advocacy organizations and services providers across the state, as well as individuals with traumatic brain injury and spinal cord injuries and their family members actively serve on three strategic committees and multiple work groups. These dedicated members work tirelessly throughout the year to plan and assess the statewide service structure and recommend changes to ensure care needs are being met and supports are available to promote community integration and independence for all individuals.

The Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission is the lead agency for traumatic brain injuries and spinal cord injuries in the state of Georgia. We collaborate with our state and community partners to ensure that the work we do has a sustainable impact on the lives of the individuals we serve.



The Commission Staff

Left to Right: Keisha Zachary, Dionne Braxton, Rosetta Clark, Craig Young, Samantha McCray, Diana Ballard, Kenisha Tait

Learn more about the State Action Plan: <https://bsitf.georgia.gov/media-room> or scan the QR code.



Collaboration Creates Efficiencies & Builds Trust

The Commission is pleased to have many partners within state and federal government agencies, as well as national, state and local nonprofits and other businesses and organizations. Some collaborations are formal with intergovernmental agreements, or grantee and grantor contracts. Others are business relationships that inform our service delivery and best practices.

The Commission has an ongoing collaboration for our home modifications program with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. Commission appointees from other state agencies ensure that the voices of survivors of TBI and SCI are heard and transmitted as appropriate throughout Georgia.

The Commission also does business with 400 vendors in Georgia such as AMS Vans, Mobility Works, Side by Side Clubhouse, Beyond Therapy, YMCA, and scores of medical, therapeutic and clinical providers that offer valuable goods, services and expertise for our grantees needs.

Developing effective, focused programs to address the community needs of injury survivors requires accurate data.

This was the intent of the legislation that created the Central Registry, and that's the intent of the Commission as we work with communities, local and statewide organizations, hospitals, schools, and government entities to improve opportunities for Georgians living with TBI and SCI.

We use the Central Registry data to:

- **Contact each newly-injured Georgian** with information on available resources.
- **Identify Trends** - Information on causes of injury and affected age groups is vital for needs assessment and injury prevention.
- **Educate policy-makers and community stakeholders** about the incidence of traumatic brain and spinal injuries, which ultimately illuminates the needs of injury survivors.

The Commission is committed to gathering accurate and useful information that will tangibly help the thousands of Georgians coping with new injuries each year and the agencies and service providers that support them. Our data is also used by other state agencies, hospitals, and nonprofits to support grant requests and strategic planning for the TBI and SCI populations.

Traumatic brain injuries cost Georgians over \$1.5 billion annually in medical costs and lost wages. Average yearly expenses for those with spinal cord injuries top \$18 million.

TRAUMATIC BRAIN & SPINAL INJURIES
Total Injuries: 27,580 (2022)

		Emergency	Hospital	Hospital	Hospital
		TBI	TBI	SCI	TBI+SCI
By Age in Years	0-4	1051	228	3	7
	5-9	1190	90	4	2
	10-14	2050	122	13	3
	15-19	2623	265	41	9
	20-24	1680	339	39	7
	25-29	1324	314	30	7
	30-34	1228	330	45	11
	35-39	1012	310	39	7
	40-44	937	279	44	5
	45-49	806	277	33	15
	50-54	876	352	48	9
	55-59	825	413	57	10
	60-64	752	501	85	7
	65-69	662	549	62	14
	70-74	639	656	58	12
By Sex	75-79	617	741	51	9
	80-84	489	734	38	10
	85-89	341	530	16	3
	90-94	153	303	14	1
	95-99	50	57	2	0
	100+	8	7	0	0
		19,313	7,397	722	148
		TBI ER	TBI Inpat	SCI	Dual
	Female	9,486	2,999	231	39
	Male	9,821	4,386	491	10
	unknown	6	12	0	0
	Total	19,313	7,397	722	148
By Race	White	9,899	4,444	329	80
	Black	5515	1834	289	48
	American Indian/ AK native	105	11	2	0
	Asian	297	147	16	2
	Native Hawaiian/ Pac Island	27	11	0*	0*
	other	1232	485	54	6
	refused	2227	464	32	12
	No race reported	1	0	0	0
	Invalid race	3	1	0	0
	Blank	7	0	0	0
	Total	19,313	7,397	722	148

Note: some columns may not add up to correct total for privacy reasons.

The primary purpose of the Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission is to fund direct grants for Georgians who have survived neurotrauma i.e. traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries. (OCGA 15-21-140).

By supporting home and community-based services for the care and rehabilitation of those injured we will foster lives of meaning, independence and inclusion. Grant applicants choose the type of assistance they need to move on with their lives. The Commission has a wide range of categories of goods and services available for our applicants to apply for: home modifications, transportation, medical services and therapies, personal support and respite, vocational training and supports, durable medical equipment, health and wellness activities are just some of the areas that the Commission routinely funds.

For many of our grant recipients the Commission is the only funder available. (The Commission reviews all requests to be sure that there are no other funders or programs an applicant can take advantage of.) The Trust Fund can augment existing funding sources; insurance (either private or public), waivers from state and federal programs, and applicants' own resources. The Commission accepts applications from all Georgians who are medically eligible. The Commission's Distribution Committee is composed of individuals who have first-hand knowledge regarding costs of post-acute care and rehabilitation to ensure the most efficient, effective grant distributions.

A traumatic injury is not a one-time event like a broken arm that is treated and returns to more or less pre-injury function. Brain and Spinal Cord injury is disease causative and accelerative. Those with severe injury have recurring issues with the original injury and often, shortened life-spans. Even mild brain injury can, over time, cause cognitive and functional deficits that negatively impact the individual and their family.

2023 Grant Distributions • \$861,429 • 114 Awards

Category	# Awards	Percent	Award Amount	Award Amount	# TBI	TBI Amt	# SCI	SCI Amt	# Both	Both Amt
Assistive Technology	5	4.39%	\$10,793.99	1.25%	2	\$5,379.00	2	\$414.99	1	\$5,000.00
Computers	8	7.02%	\$6,658.99	0.77%	6	\$5,208.99	2	\$1,450.00	0	\$0.00
Dental Services	2	1.75%	\$2,000.00	0.23%	2	\$2,000.00	0	\$0.00	0	\$0.00
Durable Medical Equipment	10	8.77%	\$53,864.13	6.25%	1	\$8,705.00	7	\$31,512.00	2	\$13,647.13
Health & Wellness	9	7.89%	\$26,751.00	3.11%	6	\$11,751.00	3	\$15,000.00	0	\$0.00
Home Modifications	1	0.88%	\$10,000.00	1.16%	0	\$0.00	1	\$10,000.00	0	\$0.00
Housing	1	0.88%	\$1,300.00	0.15%	0	\$0.00	1	\$1,300.00	0	\$0.00
Medical Care	7	6.14%	\$45,495.00	5.28%	6	\$39,495.00	1	\$6,000.00	0	\$0.00
Neurobehavioral Programs	2	1.75%	\$10,250.00	1.19%	2	\$10,250.00	0	\$0.00	0	\$0.00
Personal Support Services	26	22.81%	\$242,450.00	28.15%	18	\$168,150.00	6	\$54,300.00	2	\$20,000.00
Psychology/Counseling	1	0.88%	\$7,000.00	0.81%	1	\$7,000.00	0	\$0.00	0	\$0.00
Recreation/Hobbies	2	1.75%	\$3,000.00	0.35%	2	\$3,000.00	0	\$0.00	0	\$0.00
Transportation	35	30.70%	\$417,616.00	48.48%	7	\$85,000.00	22	\$268,876.00	6	\$63,740.00
Vocational Support	5	4.39%	\$24,250.00	2.82%	2	\$9,250.00	3	\$15,000.00	0	\$0.00
Total	114	100.00%	\$861,429.11	100.00%	55	\$355,188.99	48	\$403,852.99	11	\$102,387.13

ACL SPP Traumatic Brain Injury Grant Update

The Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission (BSITFC), through funding from the Administration for Community Living (ACL) Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) State Partnership Program (SPP), continues to partner with the Brain Injury Association of Georgia (BIAG) to execute our TBI Resource Facilitation program. Thanks to grant funding BIAG currently employs three Resource Facilitation Specialists who collaborate with Georgia hospitals, develop relationships with providers, connect with patients and their caregivers, and ensure qualifying survivors are aware of the wrap-around support the BSITFC grant provides. Resource Facilitation Specialists strategically serve across the state to provide equitable support.

The grant has also enabled BIAG to implement and utilize a new HubSpot database, significantly expanding their data collection capabilities. They successfully linked their website to the system to capture and streamline phone and online inquiries more efficiently and effectively. HubSpot's unique "ticketing system" is improving communication, shortening response times, and offering a better understanding of the real-time needs of those we serve. HubSpot also allows for individual goals and timelines to be established and tracked so each contact is case-specific and person-centered.

This new method of information management has improved data accuracy and is capturing key data points needed to meet ACL grant reporting requirements and enabling us to better gauge progress toward benchmarks and success measures. As well, we've been able to identify more prospective Trust Fund grant applicants and shepherding more through the grant process.

ACL Public Health Grant

The Commission was also awarded a Public Health Grant from the Administration for Community Living. With this grant funding, BIAG hired a bilingual Resource Facilitation Outreach Specialist to organize activities in partnership with local community programs focused on outreach to underserved populations. The outreach activities include establishing new client setup/screenings, consults, assessments, follow-ups, communication through calls, notes, emails providing resources, information, as well as education. New dashboard outcomes were established and will grow as outreach efforts expand.



(L) Kenisha Tait, BSITF ACL Grant Manager and other attendees at TBI Capitol Hill Day in Washington D.C.

were used to create goals and objectives to assist in the piloting and implementation of the RF Outreach Specialist. Working with our federal and state partners has allowed us to further expand outreach statewide and provide more support to survivors, their families, and caretakers. **To connect with a TBI Resource Facilitation Specialist call (470) 834-4426.**

Resource Facilitation Program TBI Participants

Potential Grant Applicants
Identified
375

Grant Applications Accepted
129

Ages Served
Under Age 22: 11
Ages 23-59: 32
Ages 60 and older: 6
Veterans: 5

NCAPPS Technical Assistance Program

The National Center on Advancing Person-Centered Practices and Systems' (NCAPPS) Technical Assistance Program awarded the Trust Fund 80 hours of customized technical assistance with a TBI subject matter expert. These hours

Join Us in Supporting the Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

In 2023, I was honored to be appointed by Governor Kemp as the Chairperson of the Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission, a role that has allowed me to continue my longstanding commitment to aiding individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and/or Spinal Cord Injury (SCI). For the past 14 years, I have dedicated myself to this cause, witnessing firsthand the profound impact our work has on the lives of those affected by serious injury.

This cause holds particular significance for me, as I have been a full-time caregiver and advocate for my daughter for the past 22 years following her TBI. This personal experience has given me deep insight into the challenges faced by individuals and families dealing with these injuries, particularly in rural areas where access to resources can be limited.

Every year, the Commission strives to extend its reach and serve as many Georgians as our funds will allow. But to achieve this goal, we must have the support of our community leaders and advocates like you. I'm personally appealing to each of you to familiarize yourselves with the impact of the Commission and actively seek out opportunities to share information about our mission to those within your communities living with brain and spinal cord injuries. Whether through advocacy, fundraising efforts, or community outreach, your involvement will make a significant difference in the lives of these unique survivors and their caregivers.

I challenge each of you to identify individuals who could benefit from our services and join us in finding solutions to meet their needs. Together, we can ensure the BSITFC continues to provide vital support to those who need it most.

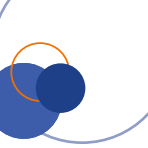
Having lived with and cared for someone with a TBI for over two decades, I am available to share my knowledge and experiences with anyone interested in learning more about the challenges faced by individuals and their families.

Thank you for your attention and the service you help us provide. Your support means the world to us and to those we serve.

Warm Regards,



Jane Warnock
Chairperson, Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission



“The gift of the Trust Fund grant was THE turning point in my life. You've helped me take back some of that which paralysis took from me. I will not surrender to failure. I am going to make this into something wonderful. I have a path forward, full of amazing possibilities.”

Growing Possibilities

On August 10, 2021, Clevance Weekes, a high school English Language Arts teacher in LaGrange, Georgia, was driving to work at 5:00 am preparing his mind for the academic lessons for the day. The next thing he remembers is waking up in the ICU two weeks later. To this day, no one knows what happened. He was found crushed on the side of a rural, two-lane road in his wrecked car, which rolled four times and wrapped around a tree. It was a one-vehicle accident and there were no witnesses. The trauma to Weekes' brain left him with no memory of the accident.

Weekes' back was broken in eight places, both of his shoulders and hips were crushed, and his legs were paralyzed. He tells, "Everything from my neck down hurt. From my waist down felt like cement, but all I could think was thank God, I'm alive!" In the months ahead he faced crisis after crisis. He battled four bacterial infections and had an unstageable wound at the base of his spine. The unstageable wound prevented him from benefitting from state-of-the-art therapies, so recovery was slow.

Weekes says, "I stopped counting the surgeries. It was a rough, dark time. I had to focus on what I was thankful for to chase the gloom away. What kept me going was my need to be accountable for the many prayers friends and family had lifted up on my behalf. My life had been saved, so I had to keep going."

Weekes vividly remembers a night in Shepherd Center when he made the decision to live. He recounts, "It was 11 pm. I was not tired. I asked myself, why am I laying in this bed? At that moment I made the decision to sit up, swing my legs to the side of the bed and embrace life ahead. I told myself I would not be made an invalid. I would not accept this label. I am going to do what I can!" From that point forward, Weekes approached every setback and every challenge with the question, "Am I going to solve this or accommodate it?"

As a result of Clevance's injuries, he could no longer teach, but he was determined to work and provide for his family. He says, "The impact of paralysis goes far beyond the physical. So much of it is psychological. You constantly battle the tendency to focus on what you can't do rather than what you can. I had to cast a new vision for my life."

His vision came when he met someone from "AgrAbility in Georgia," a state project at the University of Georgia's IHDD program with support from USDA. Clevance had always loved to garden. He had wonderful acreage to cultivate. Working

in partnership with his recreational therapists, AgrAbility, and the local extension office, Weekes began making plans to develop a micro farm where he would grow berries.

One of the biggest obstacles to overcome was his mobility. He had to find a way to enable himself to get out and work the land. His standard wheelchair could not handle the terrain. He needed an all-terrain Action Trackchair. Though he had the desire and determination to succeed, he simply could not afford the chair he needed. So, with his 'solve it or accommodate it' motto, Clevance applied for a Trust Fund grant and got one.


He tells of the day his trackchair was delivered, "The truck pulled up and a man with no legs got out to give me my chair. It was a powerful moment! I knew then I was not alone and could do what I set my mind to do." Clevance and the driver, T.C., immediately bonded and a lasting friendship bloomed. He says, "T.C. was manna from heaven. For the first time since my accident I felt seen for my abilities, not my disabilities. I thought that day was to be all about my trackchair, but it proved to deliver so much more!"

Today, his vision for Berry Delicious Farm is in full execution. Clevance works his land for four hours every day in his all-terrain trackchair. He's got his first propagation garden started where he is prudently testing the viability of all types of berries on his farm. He says, "I love to get outside and be productive. The gift of the Trust Fund grant was THE turning point in my life. You've helped me take back some of that which paralysis took from me. I will not surrender to failure. I am going to make this into something wonderful. I have a path forward, full of amazing possibilities. Thank you!"


If you find yourself in Franklin, GA, Clevance Weekes extends a personal invitation for you to stop by and experience first-hand the wonderful things unfolding on Berry Delicious Farm.

Commission Members are a dedicated, group of individuals from around the state. They are committed to improving the effectiveness of the Trust Fund by overseeing its operations and resources to give Georgians new opportunities.


The Governor appoints 10 members for two-year terms, although many of our members serve longer. To ensure a breadth of experience and opinion, the Commission's Governor appointees must consist of: seven individuals or family members with traumatic brain or spinal cord injury and three representatives from medical or other relevant professions. Six Commissioners are appointed by state agencies.




Bob Bauer, PhD – Vice Chairman – Buford – was appointed by the Governor in 2011. Bob is the retired chair of the Dept. of Psychology & Counseling at Valdosta State University and an EX-Peace Corps Volunteer. He has served as a: board member of Georgia Family Connection; chair of the Lowndes/Valdosta Commission for Children and Youth; board member of Elderhostel (now Roads Scholar), Inc. Bob has held several positions on the BSITFC Executive Committee and sub-committees, with particular interest in data evaluation and measurement.




Michael Burns, Captain – Atlanta – serves as the Public Information Director for the Georgia Department of Public Safety, Georgia State Patrol. Captain Burns manages media relations, social media accounts, and the Department website, as well other special projects assigned by the Command Staff. He began his career with the Georgia State Patrol in 2008 assigned to Post 1 Griffin, and has since worked at Post 44 Forsyth, Post 49 Motor Unit, Office of Professional Standards, and Post 48 Atlanta. He has a bachelor's degree in social science from Mercer University and a master's degree in criminal justice from Arizona State University.




Lisa Dawson, MPH – Atlanta – was appointed to the Commission as the representative of the Georgia Department of Public Health. Lisa is the Director of Public Health's Injury Prevention Section and is active as a member of the Governor's Office of Highway Safety – Safety Advisory Board, Emory Center for Injury Control, and SAFE KIDS Georgia.




Andrew Dennison, MD – Atlanta – is a Governor's appointee. Andrew is a physician at Atlanta's Shepherd Center. Dr. Dennison attended medical school at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and completed a residency in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the Baylor College of Medicine/University of Texas–Houston. He also completed a fellowship in Traumatic Brain Injury at Carolinas Rehabilitation in Charlotte, NC. He is board certified in physical medicine and rehabilitation and is an active member in the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine.




Rebecca Dugger, MA – Atlanta – appointed by the Georgia Department of Community Health Rebecca is currently the Director of Programs and Community Support with the DCH, where she has oversight of the Home and Community Based waiver services, Behavioral Health and Long-term care programs. Rebecca earned her BA and MA in Communications from Georgia State University, and another master's in human services (MHS) from Capella University. She also holds several certifications including Six Sigma Black Belt, Medical Coding and Billing, Medicaid Certifications and Project Management. Volunteering at the High Museum of Art Rebecca developed art programs for the families with special needs by working with the Green Family Learning Center.




Ruth Engelberg – Treasurer – Mansfield – is a Governor's appointee from Newton County. Ruth is currently the primary caregiver of her adult daughter, Jordyn, who is fully-dependent following a car wreck in 2016 which resulted in a severe traumatic brain injury. Ruth has previously worked at Atlanta's Shepherd Center as a Peer Support Liaison while studying the benefits of Peer Support to family caregivers in improving their self-efficacy and overall mental wellness. She currently volunteers for the Shepherd Center as a Peer Support Mentor working with family caregivers of patients undergoing brain injury rehabilitation.




Stephanie McDuffie Freeman – Macon – appointed by the Governor to the Commission, is a certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist with Henry County working with Wheelchair Sporting Events. Stephanie sustained a traumatic brain injury as a child in 1993 and has been passionate to help others going through brain trauma. She has been a mental health and disability advocate for Georgia for the past 10 years working with a non-profit brain trauma organization, Share Your Strong helping to bring awareness and hope to individuals across Georgia. She has served as a board member for the Brain Injury Advisory Council with BIAA.




Susannah Kidwell – Atlanta – is a Governor's appointee from Fulton County. Susannah is Director of Rehabilitation Services at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, where she has worked for the past 15 years. Kidwell has worked in the field of brain injury rehabilitation for more than 25 years. Kidwell received a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in Speech Language Pathology from Florida State University.




Gwen McKee – Secretary – Savannah – is a Governor's appointee from Chatham County. Gwen is past board chairman of the Brain Injury Association of Georgia and also serves on numerous non-profit organization boards in the Savannah area. She is a tireless advocate for individuals with physical and mental disabilities. Gwen is a member of the Commission's Distribution committee and the Traumatic Injury Advisory committee.




Randy Owens – Gainesville – is a Governor's appointee from Hall County. Randy is currently employed at Gainesville Internal Medicine. He serves as a board member of Challenged Child and Red Rabbit Transit and is an advisor to Northeast Georgia Medical Center. He is co-founder of Our Neighbor Inc., a nonprofit that serves the needs of those with limitations and enables them to be active in the community. Because of Owens' permanent injury that resulted from a car accident, Challenged Child and Friends was founded. He has been an impactful advocate for young adults with disabilities.



Timothy Wall – Brooklet – was appointed by the Governor in 2010. He is a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist with a BS and MS in Sport Psychology. He is a wheelchair tennis enthusiast, having competed in regional championships since his spinal cord injury in 2001. Tim's brings valuable recreation/respite background to the Commission and first-hand experience working with organizations that provide recreational opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Tim serves as Chairman of the Distribution committee.



Jane Warnock – Chairwoman – Eastman – is a Governor's appointee that has been an advocate for people with disabilities since her daughter, Christy, sustained a traumatic brain injury in a car crash in 2002. Jane is the Commission's Vice Chairman and has served on the Executive committee as Secretary and Treasurer.



Bethany Whetzel – Atlanta – is Executive Deputy Director of Programs for the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. She began her career with the state at the Georgia Department of Corrections as an assistant counsel and went on to serve as Deputy Executive Secretary at the Georgia Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission and General Counsel for the Office of the State Inspector General. She holds a bachelor's degree in Child and Family Development from the University of Georgia, a law degree from Mercer University, and an LL.M. in Taxation from Georgetown University.

Apply online at bsitf.georgia.gov

Supporting lives of meaning, independence and inclusion.

3 Easy Steps

STEP
1



Determine Eligibility.

You must be a U.S. citizen, a Georgia resident, and have a traumatic brain injury or spinal cord injury.

STEP
2



Identify your need.

Select an item or service that will improve your quality of life, independence and participation in the community.

STEP
3



Submit the required documents.

Complete the application and all required materials (see list below) and submit for review.

Required Documents



Injury Documentation

Medical documentation or letter on medical facility letterhead describing **nature, cause, and date** of your injury.

Affidavit of Citizenship

Present a Notary Public with a valid proof of U.S. citizenship; sign and notarize the affidavit and submit with original application.



Cost Quote

Include one cost quote or estimate from a vendor for each request.

Proof of Georgia Residency

Submit a copy of proof of Georgia residency (e.g., valid driver's license, utility bill from past 60 days, paycheck stub, etc.)



For additional support, call us toll free at 1-888-233-5760.

