

Realizing the Possible



FY2009 Annual Report



Brain & Spinal Injury
Trust Fund Commission



Dear Friends:

We all know the continuing economic difficulties have impacted everyone. State revenues are falling and all state agencies are taking furlough days and looking for ways to work smarter. The Trust Fund has been affected as well. **We have lost over a month of work due to furloughs, but the Commission and staff are as dedicated as ever to providing you and our other stakeholders with a program that is responsive to the needs of Georgians with traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries.** As our reserves decline – and with it our annual budget – we must seek ways to control costs operationally. We have already made a great start – **we reduced our operation costs by over 20 percent from 2007 to 2009, and kept our standard of service high.**

We must also continue to prioritize our distribution process so we can keep funding the most necessary grant requests. Though all of our applicants have genuine needs for care and rehabilitation, some are more pressing than others. Our Outcome Measurement Tool is designed to help us determine which applicants have higher levels of need. When deciding which grants to fund, the specialized experience of our staff is another key ingredient to informing those discussions. By advancing our knowledge of the specific needs of traumatic brain and spinal cord injury, we become aware of new treatment and technology options.

In pursuit of new knowledge, we continue to work with new and current partners to leverage our resources, expand the scope of collaboration, identify new resources and build state infrastructure. In the coming months and years we will be expanding screening and identification efforts, building a point of first entry, providing resources for training our state’s professionals and service providers, and educating all Georgians about traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries and how to prevent them. The tragic impact of these catastrophic injuries requires our best efforts to mitigate them on many fronts.

The number of injuries in Georgia is large – nearly 58,000 new traumatic brain injuries in 2008 alone. Many, many more are unreported. Estimates report that up to one-quarter of wounded soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from traumatic brain injury – and though Georgians that return home from war with this invisible injury are not counted in our Central Registry, their need for help will remain.

This is a huge job. We cannot do it alone. Please reach out to your community and local organizations that provide health and human services. Join us as a Commission steward, committee member or advocate. Working in concert, we can make Georgia a better and safer place to call home.

Best regards,

Craig Young, BSITFC Executive Director

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On the cover: (L-R) Vickie, Jonathan, and Ricky Gipson have always had a special bond. Jonathan’s brain injury has required a lot of changes in their lives, but their love for one another keeps them going – along with their commitment to partnering with the Trust Fund and other brain injury organizations to make Georgia a better place for those with traumatic injuries. Read their story on page 12.

Shedding Light on Traumatic Injury in Georgia

A critical step in the successful diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of a person with a traumatic injury is simply knowing where to go and what resources are available. Thirty years ago, this information was nonexistent – and Georgia’s citizens with traumatic injuries were left unidentified and uncared for. Now, the Central Registry for Traumatic Brain and Spinal Injuries, administered by the Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission, is the key to providing such information to Georgians with TBI/SCI. Each year, **the Commission** collects data on the number of traumatic injuries in Georgia and **contacts each person identified, providing them with access to the resources they need** to recover and reintegrate into their communities.

Before the Commission took on the administration of the Central Registry in 2004, the numbers didn’t tell the whole story. But under the Commission’s guidance, more accurate data is providing us with a clearer picture of traumatic injury in Georgia. Now, more than five years later, the Commission is still improving the data collection process and reaching more people with more targeted information. In addition to identifying 58,216 newly injured Georgians in 2008 (426 more than in 2007), the Commission’s Children and Youth Subcommittee, with Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, created a resource guide specifically for children. By splitting the data collected through the Registry into two categories – 18 and under, and 19 and older – the Commission can send information about resources specifically tailored to the age of the injured person.

The Commission also uses the data collected through the Registry to identify patterns in the care of people with traumatic injuries. This enables us to advocate



for needed services and improve existing services by partnering with care providers across the state.

Though the Central Registry is an unfunded mandate, the Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission is committed to making sure that no one is left in the dark about how to receive help after an injury.

Total Injuries – 58,216

By Age in Years	Emergency Department TBI Only	Hospital TBI Only	Hospital TBI + SCI	Hospital SCI Only
0 - 4	9223	253	*	*
5 - 9	4113	96	*	*
10 - 14	3569	155	0	*
15 - 24	9538	1020	38	12
25 - 34	5682	900	36	45
35 - 44	4773	702	33	51
45 - 54	4331	909	29	81
55 - 64	2850	714	19	64
65 - 74	2180	628	11	28
75+	4700	1401	*	22
Total	50959	6778	166	303

By Sex	Emergency Department TBI Only	Hospital TBI Only	Hospital TBI + SCI	Hospital SCI Only
Female	23086	2640	43	54
Male	27860	4132	131	251
Unknown	*	*	*	*

By Race	Emergency Department TBI Only	Hospital TBI Only	Hospital TBI + SCI	Hospital SCI Only
American Indian/Alaska Native	510	111	*	*
Asian	616	89	*	*
Black (Non-Hispanic)	14919	1615	45	127
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	600	153	*	*
Other	2834	466	10	*
Unknown	223	33	*	*
White	31257	4311	107	162

Injury Causation	Hospital + ER TBI	Hospital SCI
Motor Vehicle Traffic	12078	*
Falls	24700	20
Struck by Object/Person	7100	*
Assault/Violence	5654	*

Injury/Type Totals	
TBI – ED	50959
SCI – Hospital	305
TBI – Hospital	6778
TBI + SCI – Hospital	174
Total	58216

*fewer than 10

Little Voices: Mimi Gold is a “quiet, persistent” advocate for children with brain injuries

No matter what she’s doing in her busy day, Mimi Gold always has one question on her mind: “What about the kids?”

This question has defined her career as she has brought much-needed attention to children with brain injuries – and has helped the Trust Fund, through better data collection in the Central Registry and her work on the Children & Youth subcommittee, address those needs too.

With a background in special education and a masters in Human Development, Mimi started her career at the Atlanta Speech School. It was there that she met a neuropsychologist at Georgia State University and first got involved with the brain-injured population. She worked with GSU on a Children’s Transition Program grant to study the brain injury recovery process; and in 1992, she joined the Scottish Rite’s Day Rehab Program where she serves as the Education Coordinator for School Re-entry Transition Planning for brain injury day patients.

“I became a quiet, persistent voice, always there asking, ‘What are we going to do to help the kids?’”

When Mimi started attending the Trust Fund’s Advisory Committee in 2004, she realized that the Trust Fund at the time “was highly focused on adult TBI/SCI needs with very little representation of experts knowledgeable about children’s needs. That is when I got hooked,” she says. “I became a quiet, persistent voice, always there asking, ‘What are we going to do to help the kids?’”

That question was answered when the Commission asked her to chair a new subcommittee focused on children and youth. That was five years ago, and she has been directing the committee ever since.

“It has been rewarding to discover community leaders who have willingly joined the Children & Youth committee,” she says. “The committee has grown and remained dedicated to the monthly meetings where work on projects is developed.”

The committee has produced a Children’s Resource Guide for families with brain injured children or adolescents and a website tool that addresses brain injury related issues for parents, teachers, and providers. They’ve developed a partnership with Parent to Parent of Georgia – who provides support, information services, training, and leadership opportunities for families who have children and youth with disabilities – to train their staff in identifying brain injured students and provide them with resources and information on the services available to them.

Through analyzing the Central Registry Data, the Children & Youth subcommittee was able to identify a large gap in the numbers of children reported with brain injury. Because of her previous experience with the school systems, this came as no surprise to Mimi. “Twenty years ago, I was working for a GSU project,” she says. “We actually knew that if you counted all the kids in the programs I worked for, they added up to more than the Department of Education’s entire estimate of the number of children with brain injuries. When I came to the Trust Fund, I began to see actual data. The stats from the DOE showed probably no more than 400 kids or so identified with brain injuries in the school systems, but I saw thousands – 15,000 kids identified in the Central Registry – that could potentially need help,” she says. “Just being able to have that Registry information helped us begin to talk about it.”



Mimi Gold has dedicated her career to speaking up on behalf of children with traumatic brain injuries.

Mimi and the Children & Youth subcommittee have also been hard at work implementing portions of the Advisory committee’s 10-year State Action Plan. “What we’re trying to do is identify kids who have or are suspected to have brain injury coming into the system,” she says. Every child entering the public school system goes through a kindergarten screening, which Mimi says is “a wonderful, logical step to being able to identify all those kids coming in. Then they can follow them, so we can have more consistent data to compare with the Central Registry.”

This year, the Trust Fund honored Mimi for her dedication and service by awarding her the 2009 Larry Huggins Memorial Award. The award recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions as a member of one of the Trust Fund’s standing committees.

Though Mimi said she was “blown away by the fabulous award,” the Trust Fund’s executive director, Craig Young, raves about Mimi’s work. “Mimi was selected for her dedication to the health and welfare of Georgia’s children,” he says. “As chair of the Children & Youth subcommittee and member of the Traumatic Injury Advisory committee, she has forcefully advocated for high quality services for children with brain and spinal cord injuries. Her professionalism, dedication, and openness have made the Children & Youth subcommittee an engaged and highly productive collaboration of its members.”

Mimi says she is dedicated to helping the Commission achieve its goals and mission, because, “The Trust Fund is absolutely important for all brain injured persons – TBI or SCI – as a source of information and also a source of last-resort funding for families who qualify,” she says. “The Trust Fund is also a critical vehicle for keeping the legislature advised of current information and needs related to the brain injury population in the state.”

Though Mimi is moving to Austin, TX, to be closer to her grandchildren, she does not plan on leaving her work behind. “I want to find a way to keep working with this population of kids,” she says. “What I’m hearing from Texas is that there is not a system in place where schools are notified locally about children that have had brain injuries. I want to find a way to bring the skills I have to Austin – to begin something new in a new city.”

If the Trust Fund Commission is any indication, her passion for children with brain injuries will move mountains wherever she is. When Mimi joined the Commission’s Advisory committee, they did not have a separate focus on children. But, Mimi says, “they do now. They created at least five projects and we’re not done. They created a State Action Plan that included actions for children, actions for schools, and actions for future training and prevention – and it’s all happening. And it’ll continue now, so that’s great.”

A Critical Resource at a Critical Time

Insurance companies, Medicaid/Medicare, and other medical payers leave people with traumatic injuries on the doorstep of hospitals and critical care facilities – medical bills paid for, but left with nothing to help them make the journey back home, back to work, and back to the “new normal” of life with a TBI or SCI. The challenges can seem insurmountable. But with only a little extra help, a teenager can get a wheelchair. An employee can get a ride to work. A mother can get a ramp added to her home. Lives can go on – and thrive – but only if the money to obtain these resources is available.

Ten years ago, it wasn't – until a dedicated group of grassroots activists and individuals with traumatic injuries spoke up and were heard by the state legislature. The Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission was formed to provide the resources Georgians with traumatic injuries needed to re-assimilate back into their communities and workplaces after their injuries.

This year, we awarded more than \$2 million in grants to 258 people with traumatic injuries. But **the number of**

injuries in Georgia is rising each year, while our budget – funded through a surcharge on DUI fines – is decreasing. Like most other agencies and organizations, we have been forced to cut back in the midst of the economic crisis. But we are still dedicated to filling the gaps in traumatic injury services, even if it means dipping into our reserves to make it happen.

That's why we – and your friends, neighbors, and family members with traumatic injuries – need your help. Please contact our office if you would like to be a part of advancing the lives of Georgians with traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries.

“We are dedicated to filling the gaps in traumatic injury services even if it means dipping into our reserves to make it happen.”

The Commission Honors Dedicated Servants

Each year, the Commission presents a number of awards to honor and recognize the service and dedication of those committed to supporting individuals with traumatic injuries and who have volunteered many long hours in service to and support of the Commission. This year's award recipients are:

Larry Huggins Memorial Award: Mimi Gold

Given to honor the service of an outstanding committee member and volunteer for their contributions to the Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission.

- Member, BSITFC Statewide Traumatic Injury Advisory committee
- Chair, BSITFC Children & Youth subcommittee
- Member, Spinal Cord Injury Task Force
- Liason for Children's Healthcare of Atlanta joint committee on the publication, “Resources for Children and Youth and their Families in Georgia”

Mimi Gold has chaired the Commission's Children & Youth subcommittee since 2004 and has guided it with an active and benevolent hand. As Mimi says, “It's all about the kids.” The Committee has produced a Children and Youth Resource Guide – an internet guide of useful links for families, providers and professionals. Mimi has fostered an energetic pace and scope for the Children & Youth subcommittee, which is composed of a diverse membership of professionals, providers, non-profits, government agencies and family members. As a member of the Advisory committee, Mimi ensures that the needs of children and their families are always foremost in its planning and goals.



L-R: Mimi Gold; David Renz and Craig Young with Outstanding Service Award; Larry Huggins Award and Outstanding Service Awards.

Pathfinder Award: Susan Johnson

Given in recognition of the contributions of individuals and organizations dedicated to advancing the lives of Georgians with traumatic brain and/or spinal cord injuries

- Director, Acquired Brain Injury Unit, Shepherd Center
- Chairman, BSITFC State Traumatic Injury Advisory committee
- Member and former vice chair, Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission
- Member, Brain Injury Task Force
- Former executive committee member, BSITFC
- Former board member, Brain Injury Association of Georgia

Susan Johnson has been an advocate and change agent for traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury and all disabilities since the Trust Fund's inception. As a Commission officer and member, Susan has helped direct the Commission to its current status as the lead agency in Georgia for traumatic brain injury. Accessible, committed, and hands-on, Susan has helped define what a proactive Commission member can accomplish. There are few that can match Susan's overall knowledge and expertise in brain injury rehabilitation and state-wide infrastructure. Always available to staff and the Commission's many committees, Susan has advanced the ability of the Commission to provide needed services for the care and rehabilitation of individuals with brain injury throughout Georgia. The Pathfinder Award is given with our sincerest expression of gratitude and thanks.

Outstanding Service Awards

Given in gratitude for the dedicated service of our outgoing Commission members:

Lisa Dawson served on the Commission from 2007-2009, as an appointee from the Department of Human Resources. As Public Health's Director of the Injury Prevention Section, her expertise was brought to bear on spinal cord and brain injury prevention by instituting a free car seat program for public health districts. Lisa's relationship with the Governor's Office of Highway Safety brought the perspectives of the Commission's stakeholders to this important state agency.

Rusty Kidd was appointed by the Governor in 2004 to chair the Commission. He has been a key voice to legislators regarding the needs of Georgians with traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries. Rusty advanced the Commission's annual public policy and legislative agenda with the knowledge of who in the General Assembly can get things done for persons with disabilities. Rusty has used his long experience and personal relationships to advance the causes of seatbelts, motorcycle helmets, new revenue streams, prevention, and building public/private partnerships. Rusty has given generously of his resources, talents and time to the Trust Fund.

David Renz joined the Commission in 2000, as its first chairman. After passing the torch of chairmanship in 2004, he has faithfully served as a Commission member, bringing his vast experience to the table on the Distribution, Executive and Finance Committees. David's insightful voice helped build consensus for the Commission's distribution policies. As Finance chair, David fostered a culture of stewardship and pragmatic use of the Commission's budget and reserves.

A Colorful Life: Pathfinder Artist Stephany Glassing finds passion and healing through art, motherhood, and other dare-devil adventures

As a pilot, water skier, and photographer, nothing can stop Pathfinder Award Artist Stephany Glassing of Marietta, GA, from fulfilling her dreams – including an injury at 19 that resulted in paraplegia.

“My thoughts were on nothing but survival right after my injury. I knew nothing more than that, so it took a few years to get settled into my new life. I did the ‘normal’ thing at that time and went back to school,” she says.

Glassing started college as a computer science major. But while she quickly realized she had no desire to stare at a computer screen for eight hours a day, a new creative side had been illuminated by her studies. She channeled it through photography. She found that children freely opened themselves up to a photographer that moved in a wheelchair.

Her hobby led to a job offer with a photography studio in Powder Springs, GA, which in turn led to studies at the Art Institute of Atlanta – where, through classes in studio art, she discovered a love for oil painting. For the past five years, Glassing has worked to refine her use of the medium to record her experiences as an artist and a mother.

“The last few years of my life, regarding my health, have been on the edge, so I’ve gotten through each day believing I was being healed on many levels,” she says. “‘Deep Blue’ [pictured with artist] came from a place of great desire to go scuba diving. It brought me that feeling on a spiritual level that going diving did for the first time.”

After moving to Georgia in 1992, Glassing involved herself in all kinds of new activities – first, as a peer volunteer through Shepherd Center, then participating on their water skiing team. In 2005, she tried out for the U.S. national disabled ski team. Most recently, she has found her wings through the Able-Flight Program run



by director Charles Sikes. She attended the program through a scholarship, and will gain her pilot’s license after a solo flight in June.

The driving force behind all of Glassing’s passions is simple – her daughter. Being a single, disabled mother has motivated her to keep pushing through all of life’s hardships.



Susan Johnson receives the 2009 Pathfinder Award.

“The one accomplishment that means the most to me is raising my daughter,” she says. “Everything I’ve done in my life was done because she was a gift given to me – to show me my life had worth, for one, but to also show her that anything you want in life can be obtained. It doesn’t matter what your physical self looks like! She doesn’t realize what she’s done for me.”

The feeling is mutual. Glassing’s daughter, Briana, says her life has been defined by her mother. “I would not be who I am today without having experienced the ways of

life with a mother in a wheelchair. We had a special bond that still might have been possible without the chair, but was undeniably made stronger through her disability.”

Being raised by a mother with a physical disability didn’t come without problems. “I was always a bit defensive when people would judge my mom. If I saw someone staring at her, I would ask if they would like to meet her. My mom has a story, and I wanted everyone to know it.”

“My mom has accomplished more in the twenty-five years that she has been in the chair than I think most able-bodied beings do throughout their lifetime,” she says.

As a Trust Fund recipient, Glassing received support to help her realize some of her many ambitions. In turn, the Trust Fund is enriched by her personal odyssey and artistic vision.

The 2009 Pathfinder Award, Glassing’s color landscape “Glowing Moon,” symbolizes the artist’s vision, determination and service. It is a fitting piece to honor these same qualities in Susan Johnson, this year’s Pathfinder Award recipient.

“I’m looking forward to a year that will get me back up flying and painting again,” Glassing says. “My life really has been a journey. I’m looking forward to enjoying the process of becoming who I’m supposed to be...by becoming healthy!”

“I’m looking forward to a year that will get me back up flying and painting again. My life really has been a journey. I’m looking forward to enjoying the process of becoming who I’m supposed to be...by becoming healthy!”

Public Policy

Successes in FY09

- The Senate Study Committee on Neurobehavioral Issues met and issued a report that affirmed the need for Georgia to implement new services for its citizens with neurobehavioral issues resulting from traumatic brain injury. Unfortunately, with the current economic climate – and more budget cuts than ever – the money to do so is not available. Though action is delayed, the Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission continues to bring much-needed legislative attention to the issue.
- The results of our disaster planning survey have provided critical information to Georgia communities for providing appropriate emergency services to people with disabilities in the event of a natural disaster. The information has already been used in evacuation planning by coastal cities and those in tornado alleys, like Savannah.
- The Department of Community Health partnered with the Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission and other stakeholders to implement an Independent Care Waiver Program (ICWP) advisory committee to provide both new perspectives and avenues for change within the program. Providers, state agencies, non-profits and individuals with disabilities and their families now have a forum to exchange ideas that will result in better care and living arrangements for those that desire to live outside an institutional setting and take their place back in the community.

Looking Forward

We continue to support the creation of an effective, sustainable statewide trauma care network, as well as public safety measures such as requiring seat belts in pick-up trucks. New initiatives are not being pursued this year due to the budget crisis.

The Commission prepared to move from the Department of Human Resources (our home for the last 10 years) to the Department of Community Health.

State Action Plan

In its first full year of implementation, the Commission's 10-year State Action Plan has produced partnerships with other state agencies like the Department of Education; Department of Community Health; Children's Medical Services; Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems – Maternal Child Health Branch; Governor's Office of Highway Safety; and Aging and Disability Resource Connection – Department of Aging Services.

These collaborative relationships are just the beginning. The State Action Plan's design is to leverage these pooled resources to build the infrastructure for a comprehensive system of care throughout Georgia. But the work has not been easy. Hiring freezes, furloughs and tight budgets have meant scaling back on plans for shared projects.

Even through tough times, our partners are still willing. This year, we:

- worked to solve our most pressing issues, like TBI screening and identification for children entering our education system.
- focused on educating key Georgia legislators about brain injury-related neurobehavioral issues.
- combined the Trust Fund's knowledge of the needs of individuals with TBI and SCI with the housing expertise of the Department of Community Affairs to effect change for citizens with disabilities as they search for affordable, accessible housing.

We're confident that opportunities will continue to emerge both from within our plan and as initiatives from other stakeholders. Let us know if collaboration with your group will help us advance access to services for Georgians with brain or spinal cord injuries.

Stewardship

A discussion with Ayanna Anderson, Stewardship Coordinator

What are the Stewardship Program's developing goals and how are we meeting them?

The goal of the stewardship program is to have information and stewards all around the state of Georgia in private, state, and federal organizations. This collaboration will ensure that no individual with traumatic brain and/or spinal cord injuries feels alone trying to receive services from the Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission. It's heartbreaking when even one person doesn't get help in time, and we are working to see that all are served. Currently there are stewards from North Georgia to South Georgia; however, I am always researching and trying to make new connections.

What outcomes have there been in the past year?

Collaborations are the largest part of the Stewardship Program. For example: I worked with a wonderful gentleman who, as a result of a TBI, was unable to read. Though he was an accomplished artist, he could not read the street sign directing him to his own residence. Shepherd Pathways had been working with him for approximately a year. Since I had previously met with him at a support group meeting, I contacted Disability Link in Decatur to have the steward there help him with his Trust Fund application. Always willing to help – as all our stewards are – she went through the application with him and called me if there were any concerns or questions that came up. Once the application was in the office, our Director of Applications stayed in communication with the steward at Disability Link,



with Shepherd Pathways, and with the applicant. The gentleman received an award and is now working toward reading, using a computer, and other cognitive therapies. It took four individuals who were willing to work together in order to get the gentleman's application through. Even more than the presentations and the wonderful people that I meet along the way, stories like this are what truly represent the program. The Stewardship Program is made up of wonderful people who are willing to work with others to

help those who need it reach a better quality of life.

What are you hoping to do through the program in the coming year?

I would like to continue these collaborations on a greater scale – to enter into every hospital, clinic, and private or non-private organization that deals with individuals with traumatic brain and/or spinal cord injuries, helping those they see and encounter everyday. In doing so, we will have even more life changing stories to tell. It might not always be easy to receive funding from an organization, but having a person/steward who can help you along the way is priceless.

How can people get involved?

Involvement is as easy as contacting Ayanna Anderson, Stewardship Coordinator, at alanderson@dhr.state.ga.us or 404-825-1466.

Change happens one person at a time.

A House Full of Hope: The Gipson family believes all things are possible, even when they seem improbable

Their marriage started out like a real-life Brady Bunch. Ricky and Vickie Gipson met through a mutual friend, as single parents each raising four children.

“I know the perfect man for you,” the friend told Vickie. But Vickie balked. As a nurse, student, and active church member – not to mention single mother of four – she wasn’t about to get herself involved in a relationship that couldn’t keep up with her life. “I was not interested in dating,” she says.

Nevertheless, after speaking on the phone a few times, Ricky showed up for coffee one Saturday and proposed three days later.

“She was exactly what I was looking for,” he says.

Most of their children were grown by the time they met and married, so their lives tended to revolve around the activities of the younger ones – like Jonathan, their handsome and popular highschooler who as a three-season athlete, starred on the football, wrestling, and baseball teams.

But in September 2005, as Jonathan celebrated in the in-zone after scoring a touchdown against his school’s rival team, an opponent hit him in the head. Nothing has been the same since.

After that game, Jonathan started getting headaches and losing focus in school. He became moody and withdrawn. Doctor after doctor told them that he was “just an adolescent” and that these behaviors were common. “But as a nurse and as a mother, I knew something was wrong,” Vickie says.

Eventually, a doctor put Jonathan on a drug intended to treat depression and anxiety disorders – but unknown to the Gipsons, it was black-labeled for use in teenagers because of increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

In January 2007 – a year and a half after the initial injury – Jonathan was finally diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury. But by that point, it was too late. The drug had taken its toll.

While at church one Sunday, they were milling in the lobby between services, greeting their usual friends and acquaintances when a commotion outside caught their attention.

“Somehow, I just knew where to go,” Vickie says. She rushed outside, where she and Ricky saw Jonathan lying on the ground. He had tried to take his own life.

The bullet entered his head on the right side, and passed through the left. “I barely recognized it was my son,” Ricky says. Jonathan was pale and gray, and his breathing had a rattling sound. “It was the sound of a person dying,” Vickie says. “The nurse in me knew he wasn’t going to make it.”

Soon after arriving at the hospital, Jonathan’s heart stopped beating. The Gipsons agreed to donate his organs – “If my baby can help anybody, you take what you can,” Vickie had said – so the doctors performed a few procedures like keeping Jonathan oxygenated and removing bone fragments to keep his systems viable.

The Gipsons wanted Jonathan’s friends to be able to see him one last time. “We opened up the doors of the ICU, and 200 kids came,” Ricky says. They knew their son was popular, but they were shocked at the turnout.

Then, the unthinkable happened. Jonathan moved. At first, he moved his IV tube. Then, even though he had sustained a massive stroke and was assumed to be paralyzed on the right side of his body, he reached up and hit the doctor when he pinched him on his right side. Because he was still in a coma, the doctors didn’t consider these actions “purposeful movement.” Nonetheless, they put off the organ donation, just in case.



Jonathan Gipson has made a miraculous comeback after sustaining a TBI during a high school football game.

After four and a half days in a coma, Jonathan opened his eyes, though for a few weeks, he would only stare forward vacantly. But then he texted his parents: “What’s happening?” he asked.

From that point forward, Jonathan continued to progress. He came home on June 8 and returned to school that August, taking one regular class to meet his requirements for graduation. He had taken some portions of the written graduation exam before his suicide attempt, but still had the science portion to go. He took the test three times with the help of a Homebound teacher before he finally passed. He went to prom that year and graduated with his class in May.

Though Jonathan’s tenacity and competitive spirit were driving him to achieve unimaginable recoveries, the Gipsons were still in a completely new world. “It turned our family upside-down,” Ricky says. Living in

South Georgia, there were very few resources for families going through similar struggles. They were traveling two and a half hours to Waycross for a brain injury support group when they eventually decided to start their own closer to home. They rented a community center in Boston, GA, and now they host anywhere from 20-30 people each month.

The Gipsons also dream about starting a “Hope House,” equipped with a pool table, video games, and more – a place where survivors of TBI could go any night of the week to hang out with others who understand them.

That acceptance is incredibly important, according to the Gipsons. They have learned the hard way that “people shy away from anything that is different. They don’t understand it, so they tend to ignore it,” Vickie says. Though Jonathan used to be very popular, “Now nobody calls him, nobody comes to visit him. The isolation is really hard,” she says.

That’s why Camp Hardgrove is one of the highlights of Jonathan’s life, according to Vickie. The TBI camp – put on by the Brain Injury Association of Georgia along with support from the Trust Fund – provides a place where, as Jonathan says, he can “come and be normal.”

The Gipsons understand their son’s desire to fit in. They, too, have benefited from forming relationships with others who understand their situation. “Talking to people who are 20 years past their injuries, hearing their stories, gives us hope that things get better,” Vickie says.

“The experts say that at the 2-year mark, what you have is what you’re left with. But we refuse to believe that this is as good as it’s going to get.”

And with their faith in God – which they say is what has gotten them this far – and their love for one another, things are getting better every day.

2009 Annual Meeting



(1)



(2)



(3)



(4)



(5)



(6)



(7)



(8)



(9)



(10)



(11)

(1) Commissioner Mary Alice Bullock of Hulls, Ga. **(2)** Commissioner Gina Gelinas (L) and Sonia Sharan. **(3)** Commissioner Steve Leibel of Dahlonega, Ga. **(4)** The public is invited to sit in on the public policy portion of the Commission meeting and give input on the Commission's policy agenda. Here, Mark Johnson (L) and Commissioner JD Frazier (R) speak with attendees. **(5)** Commissioner Catherine Ivy. **(6)** Commissioners met at the beautiful Georgia Military College/Old State Capitol in Milledgeville, Ga. **(7)** Craig Young discusses upcoming legislative priorities and the accomplishments of the Commission's committees during the annual meeting. **(8)** Annual Meeting attendees gather at Rusty Kidd's lake house after the meeting. **(9)** BSITF staff (L-R): Stephanie Lotti, Dionne Braxton and Dionna Littlejohn. **(10)** Rusty Kidd and Susan Johnson share a laugh during the Commission's annual meeting. **(11)** Leslie McNely (L) in discussion with Lisa Dawson.



Dear Friends:

My letter to you this year comes with a mixture of pride and regret. It is with pride that I tell you that the Trust Fund has awarded more than 12 million dollars to individuals with traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries over the past 10 years. Regretfully, much, much more is needed to fund even basic long-term needs like attendant care and personal support services. Unfortunately, the severe recession makes finding additional funding for these services more difficult. Georgia needs good paying jobs throughout the state to help us turn the corner and get back on the road to economic recovery.

This is one of the reasons why, with regret, I am resigning as Chairman of the Commission. The wide spectrum of hard issues that are assailing our state calls for all of us to roll up our sleeves, take responsibility, and try to make a difference. I have worked diligently to make a difference at the Commission. I am proud to now begin working for you as a member of the Georgia General Assembly. My friends in Milledgeville, Baldwin county, and beyond have seen fit to elect me to the House of Representatives. I will do all in my power to see that Georgia is governed fairly and honorably. I will work even harder to ensure that Georgians with disabilities do not take a back seat to other special interests in the budget process. For too long, individuals with disabilities have been relegated to near exile from the normal activities that many take for granted. My job will be to educate and support new legislation that provides for what the Americans With Disabilities Act promised – equal access, independence in the community, and dignity for all Georgians.

I'm proud that the Commission has traveled so far down the path to implementing its 10-year State Action Plan. We have created a Brain Injury Task Force, a Spinal Cord Injury Task Force, a Children & Youth subcommittee, and worked to form an ICWP Advisory committee. All of these will help to advance the state's infrastructure of services for individuals with TBI and SCI. The Commission and staff have worked hard at revising our Distribution policies to provide higher grant limits for certain therapies and reduce the amount of paperwork required of applicants. As the Commission continues working toward those goals, I will be in front of the public, championing the Commission and its vision – a Georgia where people with traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries are valued, have equal opportunity and real choices.

I am confident and can sleep well knowing that the Trust Fund is in good hands under the leadership of our Executive Director, Craig Young, and our new chairman, Joseph Frazier. I look forward to seeing you under the Gold Dome.

Best regards,

Rusty Kidd

The idea for a Trust Fund that would provide assistance to Georgians who sustained traumatic injuries and were unable to obtain the necessary rehabilitative equipment and services came directly from those who knew those needs best – individuals who were struggling to get back on their feet after their own traumatic injury. That was more than 10 years ago. Today, the Trust Fund is still dedicated to serving Georgians first – and we continue to be guided by those with first-hand experience.

Meeting these needs starts with providing resources. This year, we awarded more than \$2 million to nearly 260 Georgians with TBI/SCI. Some awards pay for things like modifications to a home, making it accessible to an owner who finds themselves in a wheelchair after an accident leaves them with an SCI. Other awards provide adaptive computer equipment so an injured person can continue using the internet or performing their job functions after a TBI leaves them with poor eyesight and reduced motor skills. (See the following tables for a complete breakdown on this year's award distributions.)

The money we distribute comes from a surcharge on DUI fines – a budget that is dwindling every day.

Even in the face of declining funds, we are committed to fulfilling our mandate. We have dipped into our reserves in order to continue to distribute awards at the level of need. But we can only do this for so long before our reserves dry up. With injuries on the rise, more and more Georgians will be left in need unless our funding increases.

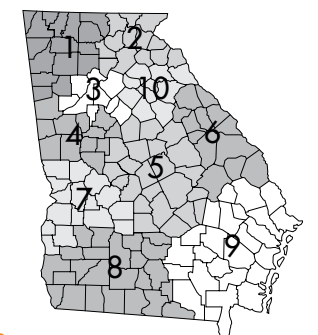
To help our money go further and to provide even better service to our applicants, we have:

- Streamlined the application process.
- Developed an outcome measurement tool.
- Introduced a TBI Awards Sheet that helps individuals with TBI assess their need and request appropriate equipment and services.
- Capped lifetime award amounts at \$15,000.
- Enhanced our distribution policies to allow applicants to spend up to the maximum grant amount for behavioral, cognitive, occupational, physical and speech therapies.
- Raised the cap on personal support services.

And we won't stop there. We continue to monitor our funds and our activities, making sure that we are using our precious resources in the best ways possible to further the lives of Georgians with traumatic injuries.

Awards by Category

Category	Number of Awards	Award Amount
Assistive Technology	8 3.1%	\$30509 1.51%
Computers	16 6.2%	\$17777.36 0.88%
Day Support Services	3 1.16%	\$24900 1.23%
Dental Services	3 1.16%	\$13188 0.65%
Durable Medical Equipment	16 6.2%	\$40693 2.01%
Health & Wellness	8 3.1%	\$22318 1.1%
Home Modifications	21 8.14%	\$236634 11.69%
Housing	7 2.71%	\$9697 0.48%
Medical Care	12 4.65%	\$77817 3.85%
Neurobehavioral Programs	4 1.55%	\$14800 0.73%
Personal Support Services	28 10.85%	\$185546 9.17%
Psychology/Counseling	5 1.94%	\$20335 1.01%
Recreation/Hobbies	2 0.78%	\$2515 0.12%
Speech Services	1 0.39%	\$5000 0.25%
Transportation	119 46.12%	\$1309201.72 64.7%
Vision/Hearing Services	1 0.39%	\$5000 0.25%
Vocational Support	4 1.55%	\$7450 0.37%
Total	258 100%	\$2023381.08 100%



Awards by Region

Region	Applicants	Requests	Awards
1	40	\$419702.75	\$181624
2	27	\$247632.02	\$128102
3	184	\$1537407.06	\$702724.72
4	50	\$344252.31	\$153809.36
5	47	\$390625.87	\$275914
6	30	\$298476	\$117687
7	11	\$86645	\$17316
8	25	\$198693.65	\$164977
9	40	\$304702.91	\$154346
10	34	\$241429.16	\$126881
Total	488	\$4069566.73	\$2,023,381.08*

*non-adjusted

Meet Our Commissioners



Our Commission Members are a dedicated, diverse group of individuals from around the state. Each one is committed to improving the effectiveness of the Trust Fund by overseeing its operations and disbursements.

The Governor appoints 10 of the 15 Commission members for two-year terms. To ensure a breadth of experience and opinion, the Commission consists of: seven individuals or family members of individuals with traumatic brain or spinal cord injury; three representatives from medical professions or providers; and five representatives from relevant state agencies.

Annette Bowling (1) has been serving on the Commission since the Governor appointed her in 2000. She is the Executive Director of the Albany Advocacy Resource Center and is also involved with the Georgia ARC Network and the Commission on Mental Health/Mental Retardation/Substance Abuse. She has served on the Georgia Rehabilitation Advisory Council, the Georgia Department of Medical Assistance Consumer Advisory Committee and many other boards.

Mary Alice Bullock (2), Secretary, was appointed to the Commission by the Governor in 2006. Her son, Ben, was injured in a vehicle accident in 2004 and sustained both TBI and SCI. Mary Alice is a former teacher in the Madison County School System and is involved with several local civic organizations and garden clubs. She is an instructor of Ikebana, the art of Japanese flower arranging, and is involved with Hull Baptist Church's flower ministry.

Lisa Dawson (3) has been involved in violence and unintentional injury prevention for more than 10 years. She currently serves as the Director of the Injury Prevention Program, Emergency Preparedness and Response Division, part of the public health function within the Georgia Department of Community Health. Lisa is also an active participant in the Child Fatality Review Panel; a past Advisory Member for Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project; the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Georgia; the Georgia SAFE KIDS Coalition. Lisa was appointed to the Commission in April 2007.

Joseph D. Frazier (4), Vice Chairman, is the President and CEO of Para/Quad Services, Inc. He was appointed to the Commission by the Governor in 2007. J.D. has been the recipient of numerous honors and awards, and is the Immediate Past President of the Kennesaw State University Alumni Association; Executive Committee member for the Georgia Association of Community Care Providers; and a registered peer supporter for Shepherd Center. He endowed a scholarship in 1996 for students with disabilities at KSU. He speaks publicly about diversity awareness and is an advocate for disability rights.

Griffin Garner (5) was appointed to the Commission by the Governor in 2007. After serving on the staff of U.S. Senator Zell Miller in Washington, Griffin returned to his native Georgia where he has managed Governmental Affairs for the Southwire Company since 2004. He is a graduate of the University of Alabama and he and his wife, Emily, reside in Carrollton.

Gina Gelinas (6), Secretary, joined the Commission in October of 2007, and serves on the Children & Youth Committee. She is the Program Manager of the Georgia Project for Assistive Technology (GPAT), a special project of the Georgia Department of Education, Division for Special Education Supports. Certified in speech-language pathology, she provides learning and technical support services to local school system personnel who work with students who need assistive technology.

Catherine Ivy (7) has worked in the field of aging and disability services for 20 years, specifically in care management, homecare, service planning, and policy development. In October 2008, she joined the Georgia Department of Community Health as Director of the Long Term Care Section, Medical Assistance Plan, where she develops policy and oversees Georgia's long term care programs including the Medicaid waiver programs, nursing homes, community mental health services, home health, hospice services, psychiatric residential treatment facilities, and the Money Follows the Person demonstration grant. Catherine was selected to represent the Department of Community Health as its Commission appointee in October 2008.

Susan Johnson (8), was appointed by the Governor in 2002 and served as past Vice Chair. She currently is the Chair of the State Wide Advisory Committee and was instrumental in the initiation and development of the Neurobehavioral White Paper and State Action Plan. Susan is a speech language pathologist who works at the Shepherd Center as the Director of Brain Injury Services. She has over 30 years of experience working and developing programs for people with brain injuries. She is a member of the American Speech and Hearing Association, and has held leadership positions at the National Brain Injury Association and the Brain Injury Association of Georgia. Susan lives in Alpharetta with her husband Mark, who is a C-5 quadriplegic and nationally-recognized advocate for people with disabilities.

Rusty Kidd (9), Chair, was appointed Chairman of the Commission by Governor Perdue in 2004. A native Georgian, Rusty consults with state and local governments on behalf of associations and businesses, ranging from the Georgia Association of Home Health Agencies to Merck. Rusty has also served on the boards of Shepherd Center and Habitat for Humanity, among others.

Steven K. Leibel (10), an attorney at Steven Leibel P.C. Trial Attorneys and Counselors at Law, is best known for winning the highest jury verdict in Georgia history and has been named a Georgia Super Lawyer for three years in a row by his peers. Steve is active in the community serving as a Municipal Court Judge in Duluth and Snellville, and sits on the boards of the Marcus Institute, Chestatee Regional Hospital, First Citizen's Bank, the NCMA Atlanta Chapter, and the Dahlonega-Lumpkin County Chamber of Commerce.

Carl H. McRae (11) serves as Director of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program at the Georgia Department of Labor. He began his career as a counselor intern at the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency while studying for a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. Carl's longstanding interest in people with TBI has led him to develop unique and unconventional means of assessment. He also served as the first statewide program coordinator for TBI with the Georgia Division of Rehabilitation Services.

Estelle Lee Miller (12), an attorney and consultant, gained a passion for this field after her daughter, Linda Jean, experienced a traumatic brain injury. A Charter Member of the Commission, Lee was appointed by the Governor in 2000. She is active in the President's Council on the 21st Century Workforce, Skills Gap committee; the World Committee on Disability; the National Association of Governors' Councils; the Georgia State Rehabilitation Council and both the Georgia and the National Rehabilitation Associations. Lee has been honored twice for Distinguished Contributions toward the Full Employment of People with Disabilities by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.

David W. Renz (13) was the first Chairman for the Commission, having been appointed by the Governor in 2000. David brings a wealth of personal (he has a T-8 spinal cord injury) and professional experience to the organization. He has held positions as Dalton Whitfield Disability Awareness Chair and Deacon at First Presbyterian Church.

Dan Roach (14) is the Director of Human Resources for the Georgia Department of Public Safety, where he has served since 1999. Dan joined the Commission in 2008 as the DPS representative. Dan holds a Master of Public Administration (M.P.A.) degree from Indiana University, and has more than 19 years of human resource management experience, all of which have been served in the public sector.

William "Bill" E. Smith was appointed to the Commission by Governor Perdue. A graduate of the Citadel Military College, SC, Bill has served as a special agent with the FBI, and as an officer in the United States Marine Corps. He is a member of the Woodbine Lions Club, and served three terms on the Camden County Board of Commissioners and was sheriff of Camden county for many years.

Applying For a Trust Fund Award

The Trust Fund welcomes applications from all Georgians who have sustained a traumatic brain and/or spinal cord injury.

To qualify, we ask that applicants:

- submit medical documentation stating the nature and cause of injury
- show proof of Georgia residency
- supply one quote for all services and goods requested
- complete a daily living survey
- supply an applicant's statement of annual income
- explain how an award will increase your independence, have long-term benefits and promote inclusion in your community
- sign and forward release forms to the Commission

Applications are reviewed every month.

We are committed to improving the quality of life for the more than 58,000 Georgians who sustain a TBI/SCI each year. So, call us (1-888-233-5760) if you are unsure about applying. We are happy to help you find the resources you need.

Four Steps to an Award

Step 1: Apply online at www.bsitf.state.ga.us or call toll-free (1-888-233-5760) for an application. As soon as your application is complete (e.g., has all supporting documents), it is sent to the Distribution Program staff.

Step 2: The Distribution Committee reviews applications and makes a recommendation for funding to the Commission.

Step 3: The Commission votes to adopt the recommendations made by the Distribution Committee, approximately six to eight weeks from the receipt of a completed application.

Step 4: The Commission sends funding recommendations to the Governor's Office for approval as required by our legislation. After receiving approval from the Governor, the Commission will notify you by letter.

The Commission At-A-Glance

We Have Popular Support. In November 1998, Georgia voters overwhelmingly approved (by 73%) a constitutional amendment to create a Trust Fund for 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.

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 (TBI) and spinal cord injury (SCI). 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 that was committed to supporting injured individuals at different stages in their life – not just in the critical moments after the injury occurs.

Additionally, 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 work with organizations that provide services to people with traumatic injuries. Their collective knowledge and experience governs our day-to-day decisions, guides our recommendations for 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 these goals.

Trust Fund awards change lives.

Our Staff



(Left to Right): Wendy Butts, Director of Planning and Review; Stephanie Lotti, Director of Data and Public Policy; Leslie McNely, Director of Finance and Operations; Craig Young, Executive Director; Dionne Braxton, Application Associate; Dionna Littlejohn, Director of Application Management.
Not pictured: Ayanna Anderson, Stewardship Coordinator.

The mission of the Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission is to enhance the lives of Georgians with traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries. Guided by the aspirations of people with traumatic injuries, the Commission supports lives of meaning, independence, and inclusion. As the state's Lead Agency on Traumatic Injuries, we:

- Administer the Central Registry to identify those who are injured,
 - Distribute resources through the Trust Fund, and
 - Advocate for improvements in statewide services.



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