

OUR MISSION: to improve the quality of life for brain injury survivors and their families

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Time for Friends of Brain Injury Recovery to Gather at the Annual SDBIF Friendraiser

You might be asking, "What exactly is a Friendraiser?"

The first SDBIF Friendraiser (in 2000!) was created to bring together professionals, families, friends, and survivors in a warm, welcoming atmosphere where people could socialize, make new connections, and rekindle old friendships—all while raising funds to support our brain injury community.

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Unity & Collaboration Shined Through at the 2nd Annual Brain Injury Symposium

On June 21, 2025, the San Diego brain injury community gathered at the Admiral Baker Clubhouse for the 2nd Annual Brain Injury Symposium. This year's theme, "Cultivating Networks and Resources" set the tone for a day filled with learning, sharing, and camaraderie. Attendees – including survivors, families, and healthcare professionals – enjoyed the beautiful

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COMMUNITY STANDOUT



A huge thank you to Grant Gebler, Black Plague Brewing, and Full Metal Burgers for once again showing their incredible support for SDBIF and brain injury survivors. On March 16, they hosted the 4th Annual Double G Car Show Benefit—and for the second year, SDBIF was honored to be the beneficiary of the proceeds. We are so grateful for this support!

Grant Gebler suffered a stroke on November 11, 2020, and his friends at Full Metal Burgers and Black Plague Brewing launched this annual fundraiser to help with his recovery. We're thrilled to share that Grant has recovered to the point where he is back to work, and now he has chosen to pay it forward by donating the proceeds from this event to SDBIF and is helping others on their journey to recovery.

We look forward to next year's event and would love to have more of you join us for this fun-filled day! **Stay tuned for more information.**

LETTERS TO SDBIF

QUOTE FROM A BRAIN INJURY PROFESSIONAL:

"Collaboration with the SDBIF has been an incredibly rewarding experience. Staff working here treat each survivor and their families with compassion and sensitivity while providing opportunities for growth through daily activities. Celebrating special milestones creates a family like atmosphere which adds a unique quality which feels like home."



Want to share your story? Please do!
CLICK HERE and write a review
of your experience with SDBIF.

A Message from SDBIF's Executive Director,
Dr. Roslyn Knox



Greetings Brain Injury Community Friends!

I want to reflect on the incredible energy, progress, and connection we've experienced during this quarter at SDBIF. We've continued to expand our reach, strengthen our programs, and most importantly, deepen our connection to survivors, families, caregivers, and supporters across San Diego County.

By engaging with new partners to enhance survivor resources and increasing accessibility, serving you with compassion and purpose remains our mission's core. So many new survivors and families have come to our community events, navigation appointments, and reintegration workshops—and we're listening to your feedback about how we can better support your path to healing.

One of the most exciting updates is the growth of our team. I'm proud to introduce two new members of the SDBIF family: **Theo**, our Outreach and Engagement Liaison, and **Luke**, our Program Coordinator. Theo brings a passion for community-building and advocacy, and is already out in the community helping ensure survivors know we are here for them. Luke joins us with strong experience in coordination and client support, helping ensure that every survivor receives the individualized attention and assistance they deserve. Their talents, compassion, and energy are already making a tremendous difference.

Team expansion means our accessibility is growing too—we're now open for in-person support at our Liberty Station office, Monday through Friday from 8:30AM to 4:30PM. Survivors and their loved ones can drop in to:

- Receive resource guidance and referrals
- Pick up literature and educational materials
- Get one-on-one technology assistance
- Meet with a staff member to navigate services and programs
- Simply connect with someone who understands

We remain steadfast in our mission to improve quality of life for survivors of brain injury and their families—to walk alongside you, to listen, to advocate, and to build a community of healing, hope, and forward movement.

- The SISR Program is gearing up for its fall semester beginning this September! Students and survivors are working together to build bridges of advocacy, education, and personalized support.
- The Friendraiser returns this September! Get ready for a wonderful night of networking, music, art, food, and wine. It's a celebration of connection and community, and we can't wait to see you there.
- The Brain Injury Collaboration Network (BICN) is growing! We're building a powerful referral network of practitioners and advocates who directly serve brain injury survivors. Learn how you or your organization can be a part of it.

Thank you for continuing to believe in us, to participate in our programs, and to help spread awareness about the work we do. Your involvement and trust are what fuels our momentum.

With gratitude and anticipation,

Roslyn Knox, Ph.D., MBA,
Executive Director of SDBIF



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It's about community, connection, and coming together to make a difference for survivors and their families.

We're excited to invite you to our annual Friendraiser on **Saturday, September 20, 2025, from 6-8:30 pm at the Admiral Baker Clubhouse**. Come enjoy a beautiful sunset, hors d'oeuvres, fine wines, the chance to bid on unique silent auction items, and shop for one-of-a-kind gifts showcased by our talented featured survivor artists. Each of these



artists has experienced a brain injury and has used expressive art as part of their recovery journey. 100% of art sales go directly to the artist. You'll have the chance to meet them, see their artwork, and hear their inspiring stories.

We're honored to have the **DeRose Foundation** as a Champion Sponsor and proud to announce that Olympic hopeful, **Kiana Davis**, will be our Honorary Chair this year! Learn more about Kiana's inspirational brain injury story on page 14.



All proceeds from this event help us provide life-changing resources and free services for brain injury survivors and their families as they navigate their journey to recovery.

We would love for you to join us! To learn more and purchase tickets, visit: SDBIF.org/Friendraiser

OR you can **scan these QR codes**.

We can't wait to see everyone there!



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to purchase
your tickets

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(L-R) Dr. Galina Nikolskaya, Andrea Conboy, St ephanie Bidegain, Dr. Roslyn Knox, Dr. Barbara Welsh-Osga, Vickie Everich

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venue with scenic views, great food, and an atmosphere of both education and fun. New friendships were formed and old ones rekindled as everyone came together to engage, educate, and communicate.

The day was filled with information and interaction:

- Keynote Speaker: Dr. Galina Nikolskaya
- Panel Discussions: Cultivating Networks & Resources
- Interactive Engagement: Open Q & A
- Breakout Sessions: Strengthening Communication and Understanding
- Exhibitors: Sharing Access to Resources and Information

Dr. Nikolskaya delivered an informative presentation titled “A Collaborative Approach to Brain Injury Recovery”, sharing insightful perspectives on healing and reintegration. Drawing on over 14 years of experience in traumatic brain injury care, her dedication and compassion for individuals with brain injury lit up the room. She also joined the Q&A panel discussion and inspired hope by highlighting effective treatments and underscoring that recovery is possible.

Our expert panel was another highlight of the day, addressing the symposium’s core theme of cultivating networks and resources. We want to extend a huge thank-you to this incredible panel of speakers, who shared their knowledge and personal stories:

• **Andrea Conboy, LCSW – “How & Why to Develop Your Network”**

Andrea gave us practical guidance on how to build and maintain a strong support network, and helped us understand the why behind developing those connections—emphasizing that your network can be a lifeline to emotional, medical, and community support.

• **Barbara Welsh-Osga, Ph.D. – “Family & Change Dynamics”**

Dr. Welsh-Osga helped us explore how families evolve after brain injury, offering compassionate insight into redefining family roles and expectations with honesty and grace. Her perspective helped many attendees feel seen in their journey of change and adaptation.

• **Vickie Everich, OTR/L – “Communicating with Your Network”**

Vickie provided tangible strategies to improve communication within personal and professional



More photos on page 16

networks, offering tools for navigating difficult conversations and creating understanding across different roles in the recovery process.

These discussions offered practical strategies for building support systems and adapting to life after brain injury. The panelists engaged with the audience in an honest Q&A, providing valuable advice and addressing the issues that matter most to survivors, families, and other professionals. Their willingness to speak to participants’ real concerns made the discussion especially impactful.

In the afternoon, attendees broke out into small groups to discuss tackling the real-life challenge of dealing with roadblocks in cultivating networks and resources. This led to eye-opening dialogue among survivors, caregivers, and professionals. Throughout the day, this interactive format encouraged everyone to ask questions and ensured participants’ most important topics were addressed.

We also want to recognize Golden Triangle Self-Storage for their sponsorship and the Wellness Fair Exhibitors who contributed to the event’s success. Attendees browsed exhibitor tables during breaks and lunch, connecting with a

variety of healthcare and wellness organizations. All the exhibitors provided valuable information to increase survivors’ access to resources. Here’s a list of those who were there:

- **Accessible Construction**
- **Coast Care**
- **Health Bridge Children’s Hospital**
- **SDSU Lab for Brain Dynamics of Language**
- **NeuroLab 360**
- **Rehab Without Walls**
- **Vivistim**

Thank you to all the attendees, volunteers, and supporters who made this symposium possible. Your enthusiasm and openness created a welcoming, hopeful environment for learning. We are especially appreciative of the San Diego Brain Injury Foundation team and sponsors for organizing such a memorable day.

As we celebrate this year’s success, we already look forward to next year. **Mark your calendars for the 2026 Symposium on June 20, 2026.** Seats are limited, so be sure to register early. We hope to see you there for another day of inspiration and connection. Until then, let’s continue engaging, educating, and communicating as we navigate brain injury recovery together.



July’s In-Person Day of Art with Lovejoy was such a Success, We’re Adding Another One!

What a special afternoon we had on Friday, July 17th. We were fortunate to have artist, Lovejoy, join us again and lead us in a Day of Art. The room was filled with smiles, conversation and creativity as each artist chose their own painting and proceeded to create their masterpieces. The variety of artwork was inspiring as each survivor brought their own interpretation of what art means to them and it showed beautifully in their finished pieces. We feel very grateful to be able to provide this space for our community to socialize, create and find joy together.



Lovejoy has said that working with the survivors of the SDBIF is one of her favorite groups:

“The painting workshop was a wonderful event, everyone was able to find joy in their painting process. My favorite part was the smiles, and how each person made their painting unique. I am looking forward to the next one.”

In fact, we had such a HUGE request from survivors for another in-person event, that on top of the already-upcoming VIRTUAL Day of Art scheduled for October 17th, we are proud to announce that an additional IN-PERSON Day of Art will be held on November 7!

Keep an eye out for our emails so that you can register and join us for some fun!


OCTOBER 17—VIRTUAL
 20 spaces available—**Register by October 6**
NOVEMBER 7—In-Person (Liberty Station)
 15 spaces available—**Register by October 27**





Oct 17 is a VIRTUAL Day of Art for Brain Injury Survivors

[CLICK HERE](#) to Reserve Your Spot by Oct 6



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If you or a loved one has suffered a traumatic brain injury, you may have legal remedies available to you. These can include money for medical expenses, long-term medical care and rehabilitation, lost wages, pain, suffering and emotional distress. Brain injuries are often difficult to prove, and require the experience and expertise of a qualified brain injury attorney.

Social Security Disability

The Social Security Administration (SSA) is governed by complicated rules and regulations. To understand them, you need to speak SSA language. In California and across the country, the SSA denies more than half (about 65%) of all initial applications for disability benefits. We understand how important it is to present a claim correctly from the outset, and your chances of obtaining benefits improve with the help of an experienced disability attorney.

To receive a FREE case review from an experienced attorney, please call:
(619) 338-9000 or toll-free (877) 700-3994

Summer In Full Swing at Howard House!



Summer is in full swing, and the energy at Howard House has been vibrant, joyful, and full of connection. We’ve had a season filled with outings, new beginnings, and continued gratitude for the team that brings this home to life every day.

New Faces & Transitions

We’re excited to welcome our newest resident, Felicia Mancuso, to the Howard House family! Her arrival has brought a fresh energy to the home, and we’re looking forward to supporting her in every step of her journey. We’re also happy to share that Raul Trejo has officially moved into his new role as Administrative Assistant. His commitment and positive presence are already making a strong impact.

Resident Life & Summer Fun

This summer, our residents have enjoyed a variety of engaging outings and activities that have added so much joy to their days. We’ve explored Seaport Village, Birch Aquarium, Mountain View Park, the Safari Park, and Bates Nut Farm, just to name a few! We’ve also had

lots of music and movement happening around the house—bringing out smiles, laughter, and a strong sense of community.

Celebrating Our Team

We want to take a moment to acknowledge the heart and hard work of our entire staff. Every single team member has shown up with dedication, patience, and love—and it shows. We are so proud of the care being given every day and the culture being built together. Thank you for making Howard House such a warm, safe, and joyful place to be.

Birthdays

Let’s celebrate all the wonderful people with birthdays in the coming months!

- JULY:** Selena, Myra, and our resident Alex
- AUGUST:** Bree, Vanessa, Alyssa, Chandler, Lorenza, and Sarah
- SEPTEMBER:** Residents Gregory and Nicole

Thank you again for your continued support and commitment. Here’s to more sunshine, growth, and memories in the months ahead.

SDBIF Proud to Introduce Our New Team Members: Theo Cunningham & Luke Stengler



THEO CUNNINGHAM
Engagement & Outreach Liaison

Theo brings a strong background in healthcare and community service, with an Associate’s Degree in Medical Specialties and a Bachelor’s Degree in Health Administration. A U.S. Navy veteran, he has dedicated much of his career to supporting underserved populations in both medical and outreach roles.

Theo’s professional experience reflects a consistent commitment to service, advocacy, and empowerment. He has focused on connecting individuals and families with vital resources, breaking down barriers to care, and fostering meaningful community relationships.

At SDBIF, Theo’s passion for service aligns closely with the organization’s mission to provide education, support, and advocacy for brain injury survivors and their loved ones. He is committed to building partnerships and ensuring every survivor has access to the tools and support needed for healing and growth.



LUKE STENGLER
Program Coordinator

Hi! I’m Luke Stengler, the SDBIF’s new Program Coordinator. As a recent graduate from the University of Arizona with a Bachelor’s in Neuroscience and Cognitive Science, I have a passion for assisting those who have sustained TBI’s and other acquired brain injuries.

Throughout high school, I volunteered as a hockey coach for kids with developmental disabilities here in San Diego. This kickstarted my desire to help others in need. In addition, I have been blessed to serve the people of San Diego as an EMT in the 911 system throughout college, and prior to starting my new position at SDBIF.

These experiences fostered a strong sense of pride to help those in need in my home city of San Diego—ultimately leading me here to SDBIF, where I can focus my efforts on assisting the brain injury community. I look forward to making a positive impact in the lives of those impacted by brain injuries.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Upcoming 2025 Saturday Speaker Series Meetings

SATURDAY, OCT 18, 2025	In-Person & Zoom Outpatient Occupational Therapy for Adults	IN-PERSON LOCATION SD Writer's Ink, Liberty Station 2730 Historic Decatur Rd #204, San Diego, CA 92106
SATURDAY, NOV 15, 2025	In-Person ONLY Game Day!!! Join your friends for a day of fun and laughter	IN-PERSON LOCATION SD Writer's Ink, Liberty Station 2730 Historic Decatur Rd #204, San Diego, CA 92106
 SATURDAY, DEC 6, 2025	In-Person ONLY HOLIDAY PARTY!!! Join us for music, food & lots of holiday cheer!	IN-PERSON LOCATION Admiral Baker Club House 2400 Admiral Baker Rd, San Diego, CA 92124

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COMMUNITY NEWS

SDBIF & Community Upcoming Events

SDBIF EVENTS sdbif.org/events

- AUG ZOOM** Survivor Peer Support Group
Friday, Aug 29, 2025 from 2-3:30 pm (PST)
Only 15 spaces are available—[REGISTER ONLINE](#)
- SEPT ZOOM** Family & Friends Support Group
Friday, Sept 12, 2025 from 2-3:30 pm (PST)
Only 15 spaces are available—[REGISTER ONLINE](#)



WHEN: Saturday, Sept 20
6:00-8:30 pm

WHERE: Admiral Baker Club House

[CLICK HERE TO BUY TICKETS & LEARN MORE](#)

- SEPT ZOOM** Survivor Peer Support Group
Friday, Sept 26, 2025 from 2-3:30 pm (PST)
Only 15 spaces are available—[REGISTER ONLINE](#)
- OCT ZOOM** Family & Friends Support Group
Friday, Oct 10, 2025 from 2-3:30 pm (PST)
Only 15 spaces are available—[REGISTER ONLINE](#)
- OCT ZOOM** Survivor Peer Support Group
Friday, Oct 31, 2025 from 2-3:30 pm (PST)
Only 15 spaces are available—[REGISTER ONLINE](#)

Oct 17 is a VIRTUAL Day of Art for Brain Injury Survivors

[CLICK HERE to Reserve Your Spot by July 7](#)

SDBIF is updating our database!

Please click this button to update your preferences and profile information, so that you are only receiving the information you want. No spam from us!

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to Update Your Preferences Now

3RD-PARTY PARTNER EVENTS


- NEUROLAB 360**
MORE INFO: neurolab360.com/free-services
(760) 704-8237

In-Person CogFit Group—Wed, 9/3 @ 10:45 am
In-Person Adaptive Yoga—Wed, 9/3 & 17 @ 12 pm
In-Person Stroke Support Grp—Wed, 9/10 @ 4 pm
HYBRID Aphasia Group—Fri, 9/12 & 26 @ 11 am
- UCSD PALS MEETINGS**
MORE INFO: mmw002@health.ucsd.edu

In-Person Art Class—Wed, 9/3 & 17 @ 2 pm
ONLINE Aphasia Class—Thur, 9/18 @ 9 am
In-Person Support Group—Fri, 9/5 @ 11 am
- SCRIPPS STROKE & BRAIN INJURY**
MORE INFO: Deborah Pimstone, 760-633-6709
pimstone.deborah@scrippshealth.org

In-Person Brain Masters—Wed, 9/3, 10, 17, 24 @ 2:30-3:30 pm
HYBRID Stroke & TBI Support Group—Tue, 9/9 & 23 @ 2:30-3:45 pm
- SHARP EVENTS**
MORE INFO: Grace Latimer or Jim Lizardo, 619-740-4683

Online Gentle Fitness—Tue, 9/2, 9, 16, 23, 30 @ 9 am
- SD PARKS & REC OUTINGS**
MORE INFO: Alicia Bianchi at 619-525-8247

In-Person Karaoke & Table Games—FRI, 9/26 @ 11:30 am @ Park de la Cruz Community Center. Bring a sack lunch and enjoy singing and table games with your friends!
- 

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Running to Recovery—Kiana Davis’ Inspiring Story

After my first professional (indoor) track and field season in 2018, just completing college (Dec 2017), I slipped in ice and my head hit a concrete ramp leaving a basketball game. What started off as embarrassment, I tried to giggle it off, but realized my balance was compromised when I fell again walking to my car. When I got to my car, I realized I didn’t remember how to drive, so I called

a friend, who took me home and told me to go to sleep. After waking up vomiting and confused as to where I was, I ended up in the hospital, soon to find out I had a traumatic brain injury.

I woke up the next morning with slurred/slowed speech and ringing ears, which was getting progressively worse. Unable to function in regular activities, such as showering and cooking on my own, my parents put me on leave at work, and moved me home, for what we thought would be a few days to a few weeks. After months had passed, I had to say goodbye to my coach, sign off on my apartment, quit my job, and fully move home, as we realized this wasn’t going to be a short-term injury.

There were changes in my personality, speech, hearing, and emotional regulation, as well as needing to sleep for the majority of most days. As my day-to-day functioning began to progress, I had to face the fact that I wasn’t able to move around much without motion sickness and overheating in my body temperature, so I started to realize track might not be something I would be able to return to.



With time, I was able to begin working part time, and gradually full time, and slowly began exercising. Though my speech was progressing, my hearing loss also progressed. After a full year, I had gained about 40 pounds, and lost a lot of balance/ coordination. But I decided I was going to do whatever it took to get back to track. I knew in my heart it wasn’t time to hang up my spikes. I slowly transitioned back into training and sport, throughout 2020, and made the Olympic trials finals in 2021. I came back that year and had jumped further than I jumped prior to my injury!

Though it seemed like I was progressing, the following year I started having health complications such as daily nausea, seizures, sleepwalking/disturbances, and random loss of muscle control and coordination (including peeing my pants at practice on multiple



occasions). We had to reanalyze if sport was going to be beneficial to my health in the long run. I was in and out of the hospital throughout 2022-2023, working with neurologists and specialists, but I continued my training. I switched events from jumping to running to give my brain and spinal cord a rest, and have continued training to this point. I never gave up and I am currently training for the 2024 Olympic trials in hopes to compete on the Olympic team!

UPDATE: Kiana is this year’s Honorary Chair for the SDBIF Friendraiser. So, if you would like to meet her in person, please join us on September 20 at the Admiral Baker Club House for an inspirational evening surrounded by friends of brain injury recovery!

Follow Kiana on Instagram @kiana_imani



Enjoy more photos from
this year's Symposium







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"The San Diego
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helped me recover
it all...They saved me
from the isolation
that some people
actually experience."

Christina Hardy,
brain injury survivor

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September 20, 2025
@ Admiral Baker Club House
A Special Night Celebrating Friends
of the Brain Injury Community



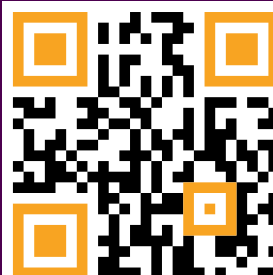
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the silent auction?
Here's the in-kind
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