

Anytime, Anywhere, Anyone

LSC Offers Adults with Traumatic Brain Injuries a Safe Haven

It can happen in the blink of an eye – just as it did for Cole Lippard and Kathleen “Kat” Sullivan. And, in those brief seconds, the lives of individuals and families can be changed forever. For Cole, it was a single car accident 20 years ago, and for Kat, it was being hit by a drunk driver while on her lunch hour. Accidents and injuries that result in a traumatic brain injury, or TBI, affect 1.7 million people each year and are a leading cause of death and disability among young people. As evidenced by the Brain Injury Association’s motto, “Brain injuries do not discriminate. Anyone can suffer a traumatic brain injury, anytime and anywhere.”

A traumatic brain injury is defined as a blow, jolt, or bump to the head from any number of causes, including a car accident, fall, gunshot wound, or IED blast. The Brain Injury Association of North Carolina reports that every hour, six people in NC sustain a TBI and more than 180,000 North Carolinians (equal to the population of the city of Fayetteville) are living with the challenges of a TBI. These numbers will only increase as war veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan return home.

Some of the struggles TBI individuals face can include headaches; seizures; loss of muscle control and balance; short-term memory loss; weakness or paralysis; and changes in vision, hearing, sense of smell and taste, speech, and ability to read and write. No two brain injuries or treatment plans are alike.

A Man with a Mission

Both Cole and Kat have found refuge at Lippard Lodge, a residential group home in Clemmons for TBI adults. The home, which opened in 2004, is operated by Lutheran Services Carolinas (LSC) child and family services (formerly Lutheran Family Services, or LFS). Lippard Lodge is the result of many years of tenacity and dedication from Cole’s family, who as a result of Cole’s accident, searched for residential services that could sufficiently handle the care and challenges faced by those suffering with a TBI.

“Cole experienced a severe brain injury, and we knew that we could not offer him the kind of care he needed at home,” said Jim Lippard, Cole’s father and the driving force behind Lippard Lodge. “For years, Cole spent time in nursing homes and other residential care settings, but I made it a goal of mine to open a home in Forsyth County that could care for Cole and others with TBI.”

A member of Epiphany Lutheran Church in Winston-Salem, Lippard, along with his wife and three other children, turned to LSC child and family services for assistance. “I had a strong connection to the church and my pastor, the late Rev. Steve Gerhard, was on the board of (what was then known as) LFS. It was important to my family to have a church-affiliated program, so we started with LFS to try and make things happen.”

And, happen they did. With tremendous support from the community and donations from grants and local foundations, a home was leased and modified to accommodate four TBI residents. The home, known as Peace Haven, opened in 2001 in Winston-Salem. Staff members and Lippard quickly realized, however, that more space was needed to handle the influx of individuals who needed TBI services.

So Jim Lippard once again set out on mission - this time to build a larger home that could handle the challenges and struggles faced by TBI adults.

"I looked over 302 properties on paper, and personally visited 52 sites to find the perfect location for our new group home," he said. He found the location in a quiet neighborhood in Clemmons and with the assistance of child and family services staff, once again got to work securing donations and in-kind gifts for construction materials and services. Lippard, who has an engineering background, worked with architects on plans and helped develop a six-bedroom facility, with three bedrooms on one side of the house for more severe residents and three bedrooms in another wing for those that are more independent.

The result is Lippard Lodge, named in honor of the family that worked tirelessly to bring the TBI group home to Forsyth County. "We just did what we needed to do for our son and for other families facing a similar situation," Lippard said. With the opening of Lippard Lodge, the former Peace Haven residence moved locations and developed into independent living apartments for TBI adults.

A Safe Haven

Cole, Kat, and the other Lippard Lodge residents are assisted with the daily struggles of TBI thanks to 24-hour residential care led by LSC Program Director Tameka Moses and a staff of seven direct care workers. At Lippard Lodge, six TBI residents, male and female, currently ranging in age from 27 to 50, can be served at any one time. Through the program, LSC is able to meet the basic needs of the residents, in addition to working with them on therapies that focus on reducing TBI symptoms and moving them toward goals like employment and social integration.

"The issues and difficulties faced by these individuals and their families are tremendous, and it is the goal of program staff at Lippard Lodge to provide a safe home environment," said Moses. "Programs like ours are a better alternative for TBI adults and their families than institutional care because those facilities usually lack any peer group or age-appropriate activities."

Moses and her staff work with the residents on short and long-term goals and want them to gain as much independence as possible. The close-knit group of residents often enjoys social activities, like a trip to the YMCA or to the movies. And most of the residents attend classes and volunteer at local non-profits.

For Kat, an outgoing 27-year-old who spent a year in a coma and had to relearn her numbers and the alphabet, it is the social outings that provide her with the most enjoyment. "I enjoy being around others," she said. "My goal is to live independently, get married, and have kids. I just take one step at a time. It's hard work, but with God's help, I know I can do it."

"What stands out the most for me is that the residents here could be anyone - even you or someone from your family - and we are so fortunate to have a home like Lippard Lodge that can improve the quality of life for those in our care," said Moses.

Jim Lippard seconds her thoughts. "I don't want any family to go through what we did with our son," he said. "It really knocks the props out from under you, but I'm so grateful for Lutheran Services Carolinas and the community support that has allowed traumatic brain injured adults to have a place to call home."

Kristen Kitchen