

BRAIN INJURY:

A Family's Journey

Written by Kara Cole
Mother of Karlee Cole

It is 9:05 P.M.—five minutes past our sixteen year old daughter Karlee's curfew. She's never late. A responsible girl who plays sports and makes A's. My husband, Chuck, immediately starts calling. No answer at her phone. He says, "I am going to look for her." Five minutes later, my husband's voice is shrill and hysterical over the phone: "I've found her. She's in the ditch... Life Flight is coming."



We spent a week in the ICU with Karlee in a coma, not knowing if she would live or die. She could be a vegetable; she may never regain consciousness; she may die. Broken bones, collapsed lungs, ventilator, tubes everywhere. We learned things about the human body we didn't want to know. My healthy, athletic daughter lay lifeless, unrecognizable, swollen, and broken.

Though I had worked with children with special needs for years, I had no idea what to do for my own child. Your brain slamming against your skull causes "shearing," cutting the connections like telephone wires. Over many months, Karlee had to learn how to walk, talk, and eat again. When she was awake, she fought—having to have her arms and legs tied to the bed like an animal. She pulled out her IVs, feeding tubes and even worked a cast off her foot. She didn't know her brother's name and called him "Cinnamon."

We were referred to the Rehabilitation Institute of Kansas City by a mother who had traveled from Branson for her daughter to receive similar services. We transitioned to the Rehabilitation Institute after hospital discharge for outpatient therapy, school transition services, and later—driving evaluation and training.

At the Institute, we learned how important it was for Karlee to be in a group with her peers during her recovery. We learned how to explain what Brain Injury was to others and what it meant for a 17-year-old trying to get back to school. When that time came, the Rehabilitation Institute gave us the support and confidence we needed to make the transition from rehab to school all the easier.

Karlee returned to school four months after her accident. She was able to graduate on time and with honors. She is now a junior at Graceland University in Iowa. She is studying nursing and hopes to work with children in the rehab or neurology field. Last semester Karlee had a 4.0 grade point average.

We were told repeatedly during and after Karlee's accident, brain injury recovery is a marathon not a sprint. I can now say this is a race we have won.

Here's How We Make Every Day Count

Often, brain injuries are considered "invisible wounds" because an individual may appear fine, but have difficulty performing everyday tasks. Their speech and swallowing may be affected; they may have lost their ability to understand facial or visual cues; and/or they may be unable to feed or care for themselves.

At the Rehabilitation Institute of Kansas City, 43% of the pediatric/adolescent patients and 33% of the adults patients we serve have experienced a brain injury. These individuals are able to address and overcome obstacles that limit their abilities in the following ways:
(Disclaimer: The following outcome results are from 2010.)

SELF-CARE:

100% of patients were able to better care for themselves and dress themselves 90-days post-discharge.

SOCIALIZATION:

100% of patients were better able to socially engage with others 90-days post-discharge.

SPEECH & SWALLOWING:

97% of patients were better able to swallow and speak 90-days post-discharge.

RETURN TO WORK:

100% of patients who had a goal to return to work were able to return to work or enter a VR program 90-days post-discharge.

RETURN TO SCHOOL:

100% of school-aged patients were able to successfully transition to school at program discharge.

**Want to learn more?
Contact the Rehabilitation
Institute of Kansas City
at 816-751-7700 or**

**Find us online!
www.rehabkc.org**

