



# Jamie Fairles

A Survivor's Story

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Did you know that June is Brain Injury Awareness Month in Canada? This month, we're shining a Spotlight On Brain Injury.

Help us raise awareness about brain injury in Canada by following along with our posts & sharing our posts with your friends! !

**#SPOTLIGHTONBRAININJURY**

My first introduction to Brain injury happened when I was in my senior year of high school playing in a rugby match. After a bone rattling tackle, all of a sudden, my vision was devoid of colour. I figured it was a combination of taking my asthma inhaler too much combined with the repeated blows to my unprotected head. I told my coach and he gave me the typical coach-like answer of "Just walk it off. I once had purple vision when I was playing rugby when I was your age". You'll be fine"

As it turned out that incident was not from my inhaler, nor the many hits to my head. It was my first instance of seizure activity. I didn't know that at the time, so I returned to the field and finished the game. After I continued to experience intermittent and unexplained dizzy spells, for the remainder of that year, my mother took me to see my doctor and after a barrage of CT scans and finally an MRI, I was diagnosed with a rare type of brain tumour, which thankfully was benign.

To keep a very long story short( trust me I could go on and on. I've had both kinds of brain injuries; (traumatic and non-traumatic); both kinds of meningitis (bacterial and viral); both kinds of strokes (hemorrhagic and ischemic). I've had 2 brain tumours (the original mentioned above and its reoccurrence); a total of 8 brain surgeries consisting of 3 craniotomies, 2 ventriculostomies, and 3 shunt revisions. I've had 6 weeks of radiation to prevent a third craniotomy, but although the tumour was shrinking, the cyst associated with it grew, necessitating the third and last craniotomy. In 2005, I was assaulted causing a subarachnoid hemorrhage. (The hemorrhagic stroke as mentioned above) and due to all of the scar tissue on my brain and the fact that I keloid scar, I had an ischemic stroke in 2019. Even though half of my vision in each eye is blind (a result of my first craniotomy – where the neurosurgeons "assaulted" my optic nerve, and my balance and dexterity were largely affected after I was assaulted, this most recent injury has forced me to rely on a walker because it exacerbated the symptoms from my previous injuries. These symptoms include fatigue, trouble problem solving, processing information, and feeling extremely overwhelmed in crowds and noisy environments.

After the assault, I became involved with Brain Injury Association of London & Region (BIALR) where I chaired the editorial committee for the quarterly publication, The Monarch, using the English degree that I acquired in 2004 from UWO. I was one of the first mentors trained in Ontario for the Peer Support Program where "veterans of brain injury" mentor those who are new to the brain injury community by reflecting on their similar, shared experience. I was the survivor co-chair of the London support group with my mother (who was also trained as a mentor the same time I was). After my one and only partnership with a young man who was in a car accident, the Executive Director of the Association at the time, "promoted" me to the role of the Peer Support Coordinator (PSC) who oversees the Program in the London area and liaises with the 16 other Peer Support Coordinators from across the province to find the best match possible for partners (the ones receiving the support and mentors (the ones trained in offering support with their own lived experience with brain injury).

After the former PSC vacated the role. I soon followed in his footsteps by being BIALR's OAC (OBIA Advisory Council) survivor representative where I eventually was elected to sit on OBIA's board. And although my involvement with BIALR has lessened over the years, with me becoming a husband to a fellow brain tumour survivor and a father to a beautiful 9-year-old daughter, I am still BIALR's Peer Support Coordinator (14 years and counting). It gives me purpose in my life to know that sharing my experiences with brain injury can give hope and inspiration to others affected by this cruel affliction.