



Helping Families Navigate Brain Injury: Resources, Support, and Skill Development

by Carol Leish, MA

Services offered by the Brain Injury Center include services to enhance the lives of those who have had brain injuries, along with helping to improve their memory and their daily living socially, educationally, and vocationally. According to Executive Director, Chrissy Stamegna, CBIS, AREF, “It is our hope that people might be able to regain part of their memories after having had a brain injury. We realize that so many different parts of the brain are involved in retaining memories.”

The Brain Injury Center (BIC), which became a 501(c)3 in 1998, offers various services to those who have had brain injuries, in order for these individuals to be able to improve their memory and to improve their lives after being injured. It also offers resources for family caregivers. It is supported by donations and grants, including a State of California Grant from the California Department of Rehabilitation. Other grants that support the BIC are from local foundations. For Banner House, specifically, funding is partly paid through workers compensation, long term care insurance and/or accident settlements.

“Our Care Transitions and Trabajador(a) de Salud Coaches go into hospitals to meet with individuals and/or families to help the individual who has had a brain injury transition back to home,” according to Stamegna. “This also includes supporting the individual in order to get them back to various activities, such as work, and driving. We focus on occupational therapy in order to help the person with issues related to memory. We may refer them to other providers, which would include physical therapists and speech therapists.”

Banner House, which was started by Peggy Harris, is a 24-hour 6-bed, Adult Residential Facility, in Ventura. In 2019, Harris generously donated the program to the Brain Injury Center, which renamed it, BIC Home at Banner Avenue. This client-centered home helps individuals both physically and cognitively, including with improving memory. Stamegna said, “Games to improve memory include: crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, and Sudoku, since they all challenge individuals cognitively. The home focuses on the individual needs of the residents.”

Other services provided by the Brain Injury Center include: 1) Individual Support & Care Coordination; 2) Bi-Monthly Virtual and In-Person Support Groups; 3) Virtual Reality; 4) Social Opportunities; 5) Training and Skill Development; and 6) the Brain Injury Resource Library.

“The use of virtual reality,” according to Stamegna, “is another way of improving individuals’ memory with various scenarios, such as, ‘being on a hiking trail with the goal of passing three items to the hikers.’ We’ve been able to have the virtual reality sessions at the Banner

House and at our office in Camarillo, under the supervision of Kristen Linton, Ph.D., who is a professor at CSU Channel Islands, in the health sciences department, and is also the president of our board of directors.”

Through its services, the Brain Injury Center fulfills its mission, which is to improve the quality of life for those impacted by brain injury living in Ventura County. On-going training and skill-building opportunities are provided for both brain injury survivors and family caregivers. Small group seminars are offered throughout the year on topics such as Auditory Complications after Brain Injury, Navigating the Healthcare System, Problem Solving, and others. To find out more about the various programs offered call 805-482-1312, or visit www.BrainInjuryCenter.org.

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efforts to enhance community resilience and preparedness.

The Firewise initiative is vital for reducing wildfire risks in areas like Ventura and Ventura County. Ventura, which has a Mediterranean climate that makes it susceptible to dry, windy conditions that can increase wildfires. At its core, the program emphasizes community involvement, encouraging residents to assess their vulnerabilities and develop mitigation strategies together. Community-led councils and workshops provide platforms for collaboration on fire prevention tactics, enhancing local resilience.

One of the key principles of Firewise is creating defensible space around the resident’s home, which involves clearing flammable vegetation, maintaining landscapes, and utilizing fire-resistant building materials. Guidelines are established for various defensible space zones to maximize safety.

Collaboration with local fire authorities, including the Ventura County Fire Department, ensures consistent messaging about wildfire preparedness. Regular training sessions and public demonstrations of effective fire prevention methods foster a community-wide commitment to safety.

Landscaping practices are also a focus area. Homeowners learn about the importance of fire-resistant plants, effective irrigation techniques, and regular maintenance to create landscapes that are aesthetically pleasing while minimizing fire risk. Recognizing that some residents may lack the financial means to implement these strategies, Firewise connects individuals with financial assistance and grant opportunities to support critical improvements like vegetation clearance and the installation of fire-resistant materials.

Sustainability remains a long-term



Ventura Voices podcast episode #10: Facing Wildfire

Episode 10 of Ventura Voices explores the critical connection between fire and water in safeguarding Ventura. With recent wildfires highlighting the ongoing risk, Fire Chief David Endaya and Ventura Water General Manager Gina Dorrington discussed lessons learned from the Thomas Fire, advancements in emergency response strategies, the City’s commitment to resilience and the vital role of water infrastructure in fire suppression and wildfire preparedness, from monitoring water supply to maintaining infrastructure and supporting firefighting efforts.

“The Thomas Fire was a defining moment for our city,” said Fire Chief David Endaya. “It changed the way we approach wildfire preparedness, from refining evacuation plans to bolstering emergency communications. The lessons we learned continue to shape how we train our firefighters and engage with the community.”

“Wildfire preparedness isn’t just about firefighting—it’s about ensuring our water infrastructure can withstand the demands of an emergency,” said Ventura Water General Manager Gina Dorrington. “From keeping reservoirs full to maintaining backup power systems, our team works behind the scenes to support fire suppression efforts and protect public health.”

<https://www.cityofventura.ca.gov/2599/Ventura-Voices-Podcast>

goal of the Firewise program. By fostering a culture of fire safety, the initiative ensures communities stay vigilant and proactive outside of peak fire seasons, reinforcing the importance of maintaining fire-wise practices year-round.

Residents can take proactive measures to protect their properties using resources such as pamphlets, handouts, and digital materials that guide homeowners on fire safety best practices. While the Firewise program

cannot prevent wildfires, it equips communities with knowledge, skills, and resources to minimize risks and enhance resilience. The tragic losses in Los Angeles and Altadena underscore the importance of such programs; by adopting Firewise principles and fostering community collaboration, Ventura residents can better prepare for future fire events, ultimately saving lives and homes. www.venturafiresafe.org/ firewiseusa.org/ and www.venturafiresafe.org/wildfire-programs.

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