



# **ANNUAL REPORT**

**2024**

# Land Acknowledgement

We respectfully and humbly acknowledge the Syilx Okanagan Nation and their Peoples, in whose traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory we are located on. Brain injuries can affect anyone, anytime, anywhere. However, colonial systems and attitudes lead to unequal health and social outcomes. By uplifting Indigenous peoples and committing to decolonization and anti-racism through action, we can create communities that are inclusive, just, and accessible for all.

# Table of Contents

Message From the Executive Director	04
Who We Are	05
Community Engagement	06
Life Skills Support	07
Group Programs	08
Innovative Programs	09
Clinical Counselling	10
Crime Prevention & Reduction	11
West Coast Brain Injury Conference	12
Bill C-277	13
Thank You	14

# Message from the Executive Director

As 2024 draws to a close, it is customary to reflect on our accomplishments and the strides we have made together. However, this year, to paint a picture only of our successes would not fully capture the breadth of our experience. It has been a challenging year, not just for us but for the entire charity sector, our community and country.

The after effects of the pandemic have continued to ripple through our society, impacting employment rates and our capacity to sustain the vital programs we developed in response. This year has seen unprecedented staff turnover, adding stress to our organization and those we serve. The soaring cost of living and services made it challenging to host fundraising events and maintain our operations at the level our clients were accustomed to.

The challenges within our healthcare systems have resulted in limited access to medical and mental health care, which has significantly impacted those we serve, especially in securing adequate housing. Our clients frequently faced difficulties being accepted into supportive housing and shelters, due to their brain injury related needs and outcomes. Despite these obstacles, I have actively engaged with various housing providers, offering solutions and training, although finding willing partners has been challenging.

Despite these adversities, there were significant achievements this year. Our collaboration with Brain Injury Canada, the BC Brain Injury Consensus, CGB Centre of traumatic losses and our role in advocating for Bill C-277 stand out as exemplary milestones. This legislation offers hope to the millions of Canadians living with brain injuries and the organizations supporting them.

This year also marked the beginning of a new partnership with the South Okanagan Brain Injury Society (SOBIS) as we work to design a pilot program in conjunction with a provincial authority, setting a precedent for innovative collaborations. I also had the privilege of working with Dr. Colin Wallace and Okanagan College to develop a return-to-learn framework for students with concussions. Additionally, my roles as co-chair on Brain Injury Canada's National Steering Committee and advisor on Interior Health's brain injury services research have been both reminders of the power of collaboration in efforts of systemic change.

As we navigated this turbulent year, one constant remained – our unwavering commitment to our clients and their aspirations. When they needed us, we were there, steadfast in our mission and mandate.

As we reflect on the past year, it's clear that non-profit organizations like ours face unique and isolating challenges. Our reliance on the community to serve those who are often left behind is a heavy responsibility, especially during economic downturns. The costs associated with marketing and engagement continue to rise, adding pressure to our efforts to sustain and serve effectively. Yet, it is precisely in these trying times that the strength and resilience of our clients shine as beacons of inspiration.

Their courage in the face of adversity reminds us why we embarked on this mission. They teach us that no matter the obstacles, we must continue to fight and advocate for those who rely on us. Inspired by their resilience, we too are emboldened to persevere. Just like our clients, we at BrainTrust Canada will never give up.



**Amanda McFarlane**  
Executive Director

# Who We Are

BrainTrust Canada was founded in 1986 by a small group dedicated to addressing the need for greater support and resources for individuals with acquired brain injuries.

Today, we are a values-driven organization committed to empowering those affected by brain injury in the North and Central Okanagan through a range of programs and services.

**Our Mission:** To bring the issue of brain injury to the forefront, reduce preventable brain injuries, and maximize the potential of those who have been affected by brain injury through programs and advocacy.

**Our Mandate:** To provide brain injury prevention, education, and rehabilitation programs and services.

**Our Vision:** To be a key leader and collaborative partner in our community, meeting the unique needs of people affected by acquired brain injury by providing evidence-based practices and innovative approaches to rehabilitation and recovery that lead to meaningful outcomes.



## Common causes of Acquired Brain Injury

- Motor vehicle collision
- Workplace injury
- Sports-related injury
- Physical altercation
- Slip or fall
- Infections (e.g., encephalitis)
- Stroke
- Strangulation
- Non-fatal overdose
- Brain tumours

# Community Engagement

Throughout 2024, BrainTrust Canada proudly partnered with a variety of community organizations to spread awareness about brain injury prevention and support.

In collaboration with the City of Kelowna, we participated in the Bike Valet program, offering our Helmet Safety Program to promote safe cycling practices. As part of this initiative, we provided helmets to individuals who needed them, ensuring that more community members had access to essential safety gear.

We also teamed up with KelownaNow to amplify our message and raise awareness about BrainTrust Canada and our brain injury initiatives. This partnership allowed us to connect with a broader audience, highlight the importance of brain injury prevention, and share the work we do to support individuals and families affected by brain injury.

Our Executive Director was honored as one of the Kelowna Chamber's Top 40 Under 40, a prestigious recognition celebrating exceptional leaders in the community. This award highlights Amanda's inspiring leadership, dedication, and contributions to the diverse and vibrant landscape of Kelowna. Her commitment to making a meaningful impact continues to set an example for others in the community.





# Life Skills Support

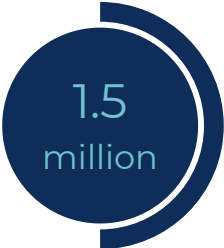
**261** clients living with brain injury

**7300+** hours of 1:1 support

Brain injury can impact many areas of a person’s life, making our Life Skills Support service an essential resource for many of our clients.

Through this program, clients are paired with a dedicated facilitator who provides personalized support tailored to their unique needs. These supports include assistance with independent living, social integration, medical coordination, access to nutrition, employment or volunteer opportunities, brain injury education, and more.

Since every brain injury is unique, we believe that support should be equally individualized to ensure each person’s needs are effectively met.



**1.5 million** Canadians have an acquired brain injury

This year, we:

- Assisted more than 261 clients, delivering over 7,300 hours of personalized one-on-one life skills support.
- Achieved significant progress in client recovery outcomes, with more individuals meeting their short- and long-term goals.
- Strengthened and expanded collaborations with community organizations, enhancing the range of services and supports available to our clients.



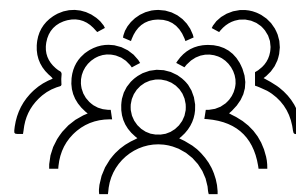
# Group Programs

**11** group programs    **400+** hours    **87** clients

BrainTrust's Group Programs are designed to provide a supportive community and safe environment where individuals affected by brain injury can connect, share experiences, and find encouragement throughout their recovery journey.

In 2024, we offered group programs tailored to clients' needs, interests, and compatibility, grounded in evidence-based approaches. Throughout the year, these programs were continuously refined to ensure they incorporated best practices, that fostered skill development, relationship building, personal growth, emotional regulation, and self-empowerment.

Group programs are offered virtually and in-person in Kelowna and Vernon.



## 2024 GROUP PROGRAMS

- Art Therapy
- Caregiver Support
- Cognitive and Social Enhancement
- Yoga & Meditation
- Peer Support & Accomplishments
- French Communication
- Walking Group
- Horsecworks





# Innovative Programs

Many of us have experienced moments of brain fog or difficulty concentrating, but for post-secondary students recovering from mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBIs), these challenges can be persistent and deeply disruptive. Recognizing this, Dr. Colin Wallace, Professor of Kinesiology at Okanagan College, has partnered with BrainTrust Canada to develop a groundbreaking Return-to-Learn (RTL) program. This initiative aims to provide tailored support and accommodations for students navigating the academic demands of post-secondary education while recovering from concussions or other mTBIs. Our Executive Director, Amanda McFarlane, believes this program can improve the educational experience at Okanagan College and beyond - "We hope that this work will lead to a program that provides post-secondary students with the tools they need to succeed, even when facing significant health challenges."

The RTL program is uniquely informed by the lived experiences of students like Crystal K., a second-year Kinesiology research student contributing to the project. Living with a permanent disability herself, Crystal brings a deeply personal understanding of the need for equitable support in academia. "Every student's concussion symptoms are different," she notes, emphasizing the importance of adaptable, sliding-scale accommodations.

The research team incorporates student feedback at every stage to ensure the program's relevance and practicality. Ultimately, Dr. Wallace envisions expanding this evidence-based initiative beyond Okanagan College, aiming to establish RTL programs across Canada that help break down barriers and foster academic success for students recovering from mTBIs.





# Clinical Counselling

**56** clients living with  
brain injury

**200+** counselling  
sessions

Following a brain injury, individuals often face significant changes and an elevated risk of developing mental health challenges. BrainTrust’s Clinical Counselling Program offers no-cost mental health therapy tailored to the unique needs of individuals living with brain injuries, as well as their caregivers at no-cost.

Our skilled clinical counsellors specialize in brain injury and are skilled at adapting therapeutic approaches to ensure that each client gains the maximum benefit from counselling services.

This year, BrainTrust Canada partnered with ICBC to expand access to clinical counselling services for individuals living with the effects of brain injury across British Columbia. Understanding that accessing counselling can be a significant challenge for those already navigating multiple barriers, we aimed to remove this obstacle by offering virtual counselling services province-wide. This initiative ensures that individuals, regardless of their location, can access the specialized support they need to improve their mental health and well-being.



# Crime Prevention & Reduction

BrainTrust Canada is a pioneer in supporting individuals with brain injury who are in contact with the justice system. As one of the first organizations in Canada to develop a program focused on this critical area, our Crime Prevention and Reduction Program assesses how brain injury impacts daily functioning, identifies areas where support is needed, and offers tailored services to address the needs in context of the justice system.

## Program Highlights for This Year

- Supported over 50 clients, providing direct assistance and advocacy, including representation in Kelowna's Integrated Court.
- Helped clients break the cycle of justice system involvement, redirecting them toward rehabilitation and reducing negative interactions with community partners.

Through this program, BrainTrust continues to create pathways for positive change and reduce the systemic challenges faced by individuals with brain injury in our community.

## Kirby's Story

Seven years ago, BrainTrust was connected to an individual who was often misunderstood within community. A man who had known nothing but abuse, poverty, addiction and incarceration - a story his family and community around him had written off as a "lost cause".

Four years later, after years of a relationship with BrainTrust and his commitment to the brain injury crime prevention programming, he proved everyone wrong. He got out of the system, found a job, met the love of his life, has remained sober and is now a father.

# West Coast Brain Injury Conference



**1** day      **8** speakers      **120+** attendees

In June 2024, we hosted the Pushor Mitchell LLP West Coast Brain Injury Conference at the Delta Grand Okanagan Resort. This full day of learning featured a lineup of speakers presenting groundbreaking research on traumatic brain injury (TBI) in underserved populations across Canada.

While there was no panel discussion this year, we hosted an exclusive invite-only breakfast to rally support for Bill C-277. The conference concluded with a wine and cheese reception, and our vibrant exhibitor hall showcased the incredible work of many community partners.

## Brain Injury Breakthroughs: Current Issues and Emerging Solutions

Highlights included findings on rehabilitation for individuals with brain injury in the contexts of homelessness, the criminal justice system, and gender-based violence. Other topics explored a deeper understanding of brain injury, advocating for its classification as a chronic condition within the healthcare system, and emphasizing the need for comprehensive care frameworks to support individuals and families. Additionally, speakers examined global efforts to secure a chronic designation for TBI, aligning emerging solutions with international collaboration in research and policy development.

# Advocating for a National Strategy on Brain Injury: Bill C-277

This year, significant progress was made towards the creation of a National Strategy for Brain Injuries through Bill C-277. The bill is designed to enhance the health and well-being of individuals living with a brain injury across Canada by:

- Facilitating collaboration: Ensuring all provinces and territories work together under a unified framework.
- Reducing disparities: Addressing differences in health care quality across regions.
- Improving accessibility: Streamlining care pathways and collecting standardized data on the prevalence and lifelong impact of brain injuries.

Once enacted, Bill C-277 will mandate the Minister of Health to consult with key stakeholders to develop this national strategy and report on its progress annually.


This year marked a monumental step forward, as Bill C-277 was read, debated, and unanimously passed in its third and final reading in the House of Commons. The bill now proceeds to the Senate, its final stage before becoming law.

BrainTrust Canada proudly hosted a delegation of political representatives at our Annual West Coast Brain Injury Conference, showcasing unified support for Bill C-277. By bringing these champions for brain injury awareness together, we emphasized the importance of a national strategy and fostered a spirit of solidarity.


We remain steadfast in our commitment to advocating for policies that will drive meaningful change for individuals living with brain injuries and their families.

**BILL C-277 - NATIONAL STRATEGY ON BRAIN INJURY ACT**

"Brain injury is one of the hidden epidemics, too often unrecognized, that exacts a heavy toll on sufferers and their families and caregivers. It has many health implications, which may last a lifetime. Children with brain injuries, for example, are at elevated risk for depression. Other potential consequences of traumatic brain injury include loss of behavior control, aggression, memory loss, dementia and, potentially, substance abuse. Nearly half the homeless population have endured brain injury. A national strategy that entails the proper education of health personnel, teachers, social workers, law enforcement people, service providers and policy makers at all levels is urgently needed. Based on my clinical work and on my extensive reading of the research literature, I fully support this initiative."



Gabor Maté MD, CM



# Thank you

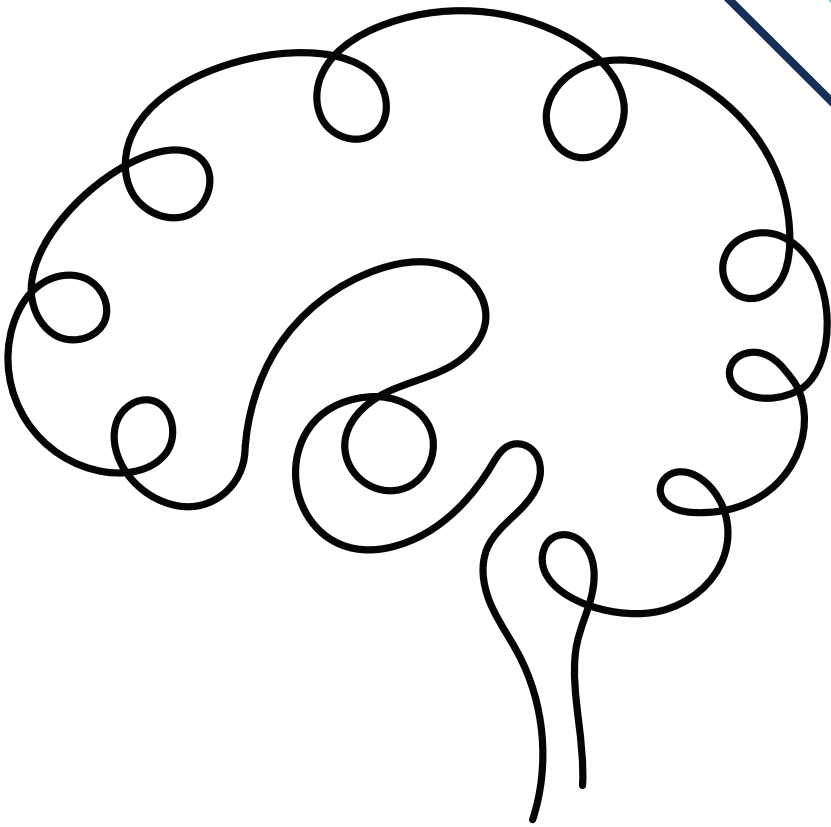
- Acera Insurance
- ACT/UCT Kelowna West
- Bank of Montreal
- BC Brain Injury Alliance
- BC Housing
- BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
- Brain Injury Canada
- Cactus Club Cafe
- Calisto Networks Inc.
- CanadaHelps
- Canadian Red Cross
- Carol Rogers
- Carsen Kendel
- Cathy Cundy
- CEDAR Brain Injury Lab
- Central Okanagan Food Bank
- Central Okanagan Foundation
- CGB Centre for Traumatic Life Losses
- Chances Casino Kelowna
- Christopher Moeller
- City of Kelowna
- Colette and Ron Owens
- Colin Edstrom
- Community Transitional Team
- Crimson Hair Salon
- Deb Porter - Horseworks Equine Learning Cener
- Delta Grand Okanagan Resort
- Domino's Pizza
- Downtown Kelowna Association
- Dr. Angela Colantonio
- Dr. Brittany Dennis
- Dr. Jade Witten
- Eddie and Flo Doucette
- Encore Entertainment
- FH&P Lawyers LLP
- Forensic Psychiatric Services
- Government of British Columbia
- Hands in Service
- ICBC
- Interior Health
- Jackie Cosman
- James Alton Films
- Janelle Breese Biagioni
- John Howard Society
- John Mori
- Jude Brunt
- Jules Delorme
- Kelowna Admin Crown Counsel
- Kelowna Chamber of Commerce
- Kelowna Film Studios
- Kelowna Integrated Court
- Kelowna Law Courts
- Kelowna Probation
- Kelowna RCMP
- KelownaNow/Csek Creative
- Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society
- Lake Country Optometry
- Lakeside Hearing
- Loyly Floating Sauna
- MAKK Spa
- March of Dimes
- Maxine DeHart
- McDonald's
- Metis Community Services
- Michelle McDonald
- Ministry of Social Development
- Mission Creek Golf Club
- MNP
- Monique Ducharme
- Moose Hide Campaign
- MP Alistair MacGregor
- MP Tracy Gray
- Northern Computer
- Okanagan College
- Okanagan Correctional Centre
- Okanagan Regional Library
- Okanagan Vision Therapy
- Paul Rollett
- People Place Vernon
- ProSign
- Purppl
- Pushor Mitchell Lawyers
- Rose McNeill
- Safeway Kelowna
- Salvation Army
- Selina Photography
- Shirley Wilson
- Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
- Splash BC
- The KEG
- Toronto Blue Jays
- Tourism Kelowna
- Tranq Sleep Institute
- Trial Lawyers of BC
- United Way BC
- Valhalla Helicopters
- Vancouver Canucks
- Village Flower Shop
- Wahkohtowin Wellness
- Warren Hooley
- Westcorp Kelowna
- WorkSafe BC



## It takes a community to heal.

Join our community and support brain injury survivors. Whether you make a donation, volunteer your time, or help us spread the word about our programs and events, your support makes a difference for those affected by brain injury.

[DONATE](#)  
[TODAY](#)



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