

## Spinal Surgery Patient becomes Volunteer to help others to recovery



**Figure 1** Past Patient Brandon Ong helps others in Toronto Rehab through Therapeutic Recreation important to share with current patients.

Brandon Ong spent 6 weeks at Lyndhurst in Spinal Cord rehab in 2013 after spinal surgery. During his rehab he remembers receiving visits from Unit Support volunteers and volunteers with the Pet Therapy program but what stands out the most was his introduced to Therapeutic Recreation and the concept of recreation as a form a rehab. During his rehab, Brandon was introduced to table tennis and played on a regular basis and found it very beneficial to his recovery. During this time he discovered that even if you are uncertain of your abilities to achieve something but you learn to adapt while maintain a positive mindset, you are still participating, making progress and improving your own overall wellbeing; a message that he felt was

Upon discharge, Brandon spent the next two years in transition while adjusting to his new lifestyle. He had a lot of challenges to overcome. In addition to physical changes, Brandon struggled to establish a new sense of self and felt he had to re-learn how to navigate social situations which lead to feelings of isolation. Brandon reflected on his positive experience with Therapeutic Recreation and decided to return to the activities he engaged in prior to his surgery. He knew that how he participated might be different but also understood how important it was to keep active and do the things he loved within his ability. He returned to playing billiards and continued playing table tennis, which not only helped him improve physically but encouraged social activity and overall wellbeing. Brandon also wanted to return to his passion for music. He played

guitar and bass had played in several bands and worked in the music/stage production industry prior to his surgery. During rehab he found he wasn't able to hold or lift his guitar due to the weight of the instrument but discovered he could transfer his skill to the mandolin and ukulele, instruments he still plays today (and he has returned to playing guitar and bass). Brandon found playing instruments not only beneficial for improving his fine tune motor skills but an important component for artistic expression, another area he struggle with after his surgery.

In spring of 2014, Brandon returned to the Lyndhurst Centre as a volunteer in the Therapeutic Recreation Department. He wanted to use his personal experience to help motivate others to be active and engage as a part of their recovery. Since then, Brandon has found several other programs across Toronto Rehab to assist with. In addition to his Therapeutic Recreation position, he volunteers weekly with the Patient and Family Education Department with one of their weekly groups for patients and family at our Lyndhurst site and assists the Wellness Department at the Bickle Centre with weekly active games and music video hour programs. Recently, Brandon has started working one on one with patients who have an interest in music. Together they play, sing or listen to music. Brandon really enjoys seeing how others respond to music and observing how it can be used to increase a patient's form of expression. Brandon will admit that as much as he is helping others; he finds his involvement as a volunteer beneficial to his own personal progress as he continues on his journey to health and wellbeing.

Brandon's wish is to develop programs for persons with disabilities that encourages openness for each individual to explore diverse formats of movement, music and artistic expression that focuses on their interests and abilities that will benefit them physically, cognitively and creatively.

Kelly Campbell, Program Coordinator – Toronto Rehab Bickle Centre