

LEGAL EDUCATION AWARENESS PROJECT FINDINGS

LFO grant #: 1490-19

Reporting period: January 1 2020-March 31 2021

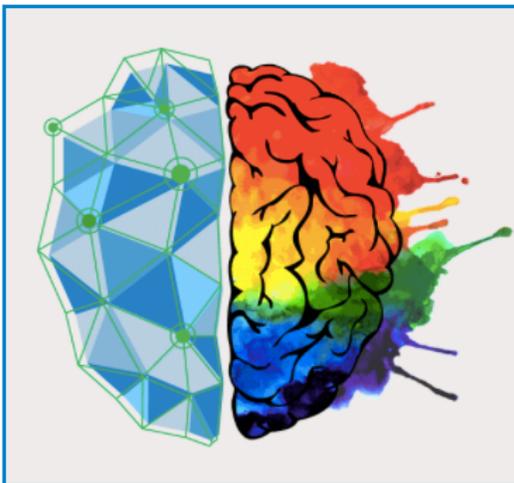


PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The BIST Legal Educational Awareness Project (LEAP) was created to develop, organize and deliver web-based resources and education sessions for people with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) who are involved in the criminal justice system as well as the Legal professionals and Service Workers who support them.

LEAP aimed to:

- Develop an online and mobile toolkit for legal professionals, community workers and the general public
- Provide Educational trainings and awareness events
- Create a social media campaign
- Create and maintain a phone and email based resource referral program



WORK PLAN OBJECTIVES:

- Development of online and mobile toolkit designed for Legal Professionals and community members on the intersection of brain injury and the criminal justice system
- Training on online tool delivered to 500 service professionals across Ontario
- Improve accessibility for Individuals with ABI involved in the legal system, creating a database of resources and referral supports
- Establish the Legal Catalogue, a guide of legal professionals who have been trained in ABI Accessibility. 100 lawyers across Ontario trained in ABI accessibility, who can accommodate ABI clients.
- Develop marketing materials and social media campaign reaching 500,000 people
- Creation and implementation of ongoing project evaluation to monitor performance targets, maintain project flow, data collection, feasibility and success.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES:

Abijustice.org website launched in the November 2020 and has had 108,401 visitors by March 2021.

566

WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

Presented at the ABI Network Provincial Conference and the International Conference of Law Enforcement and Public Health. **1,287** Conference attendees had access to the presentation and materials.

21 VIRTUAL
TRAINING
SESSIONS

Completed 21 virtual workshops across the province for Legal Professionals, Support Workers, Caregivers and Persons with Lived Experience.

AUDITORS
WITH LIVED
EXPERIENCE 5

The website was audited throughout the process of development by 5 persons with lived experience to provide insights and revisions to address accessibility and understanding of information.

22

LANGUAGES

Feedback about content, structure and accessibility provided by community stakeholders through feedback sessions with: Human Services and Justice Consultation Committee, Acquired Brain Injury Local Health Integration Networker (LHIN) Navigators, Legal Professionals and the Ontario Brain Injury Association Board of Directors. This feedback resulted in adapting the website to be accessible in 22 different languages, printable tools in french and a navigational instructional video and voice over being added to the landing page.

2 UPCOMING
CONFERENCE
SUBMISSIONS

Abstracts submissions to present the toolkit at: The Ontario Brain Injury Association Conference in November 2021 and the World Congress on Probation and Parole, recently rescheduled (due to Covid-19) for Fall 2022.

370K
SOCIAL MEDIA REACH

abijustice.org promoted across Facebook, Instagram, Linked In, Tik Tok & Twitter reached a total of 366, 536 people across all platformers.

TRAINING SESSIONS:

Toronto: Sept 30th, 2020

Brain Injury Society of Toronto

Toronto: October 1st, 2020

John Howard Society

Provincial: October 5th, 2020

Provincial LHIN (Local Health Integration Network) Navigators Meeting

Windsor and Ottawa: October 6th, 2020

Brain Injury Association of Windsor/Essex & Brain Injury Association of Ottawa Valley

Provincial: October 7th, 2020

Ontario Trial Lawyers Association

North Bay: October 20th, 2020

Brain Injury Association of North Bay & Area

Toronto: October 20th, 2020

John Howard Society

York Region: October 29th, 2020

Brain Injury Association of York Region

Sudbury: November 6th, 2020

Sudbury Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee (HSJCC)

Toronto: December 4th, 2020

Scarborough Addictions Services

Toronto: December 17th, 2020

Toronto Police Beyond Disabilities Consultative Committee

Toronto: November 11th, 2020

Brain Injury Society of Toronto

Provincial: November 24th, 2020

Provincial Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee

Toronto: November 20th, 2020

Brain Injury Society of Toronto

Peel/Halton: January 18th, 2021

Brain Injury Association of Peel Halton

Ottawa: January 26th, 2021

Ottawa Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee

National: January 12th 2021

Dalhousie, Ryerson and York University Social Work Students

Toronto: February 2nd, 2021

Brain Injury Society of Toronto

Hamilton & Windsor: Feb 23rd, 2021

Brain Injury Association of Hamilton & Brain Injury Association of Windsor/Essex

Provincial: Feb 27th 2021

Ontario Criminal Lawyers Association

Durham Region: March 8th, 2021

Brain Injury Association of Durham Region

WWW.ABIJUSTICE.ORG WAS HIGHLIGHTED ON THE FOLLOWING MEDIA PLATFORMS:

Podcast Exhibit Eh

Podcast - Butter Torts: A Truly Canadian Legal Podcast

The Disability Channel, Unstoppable Tracy Schmidt

March 2021 OBIA Review

A LINK TO THE WWW.ABIJUSTICE.ORG TOOLKIT CAN BE FOUND ON:

Human Service Justice Coordinating Committee (HSJCC) Resource Library

Map Centre for Urban Health Solutions

ABI System Navigation of Southeastern Ontario

Hamilton Brain Injury Association

Brain and Communication

Community Head Injury Resource Services

Brain Injury Association of North Bay and Area

Heads Up Durham

211 Central

Brain Injury Society of Toronto (BIST)

Compassionate Justice Fund

Brain Injury Blog Toronto

IN ADDITION:



www.abijustice.org has been shared with **Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO)** to be added as a resource on their site.

It is in the process of being added to the following webpages:

Brain Injury Canada

Vista Centre Brain Injury Services

National Association of State Head Injury Administrators

All videos from www.abijustice.org can also be found on the **BIST Youtube Channel**

Legal database created of 127 lawyers trained in ABI Justice Toolkit

UNMET PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

- Initially the project was to include live training sessions across the province. However, due to Covid-19 all presentations were switched to virtual events.
- Our social media reach was lower than anticipated. This is in part due to the rising cost of social media advertisements. However, as we will continue to promote this website at upcoming talks and conferences, we anticipate that the social media reach will continue to increase.

INSIGHTS FROM A LEGAL PROFESSIONAL:

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The site has many helpful professional resources and printable tools that are easily accessible. An example of this is the De-escalation Technique Tab which provides helpful information on how to communicate effectively with people who have cognitive challenges, such as using non-threatening communication and body language to de-escalate situations.

The screening tools tab, 'What Your Lawyer Should Know About You' – is another great feature. This non-invasive questionnaire allows clients to relay information to their lawyer about how best to communicate with them, including detailing what areas they experience difficulty with and areas of strength they have. This will enable lawyers to ensure they are using the best tools and means to convey information and receive instructions from their clients.

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IMPACT

WHO BENEFITED AND HOW?

Over the course of the project, 21 training sessions on the ABI Justice toolkit were held virtually across the province of Ontario, and it was presented at 2 conferences. The training sessions included but were not limited to the following: Community Brain Injury Associations, Human Justice and Social Service Committees, Legal Professionals, ABI survivors and caregivers, Brain Injury Rehabilitation Professionals, Addictions and Mental Health Service providers.

There has been international interest in this project, with webinar attendees joining from the United States and the United Kingdom. Project Lead, Melissa Vigar met with the National Association of State Head Injury Administrators in the United States as they are looking to produce a similar toolkit. The project also gained interest in British Columbia with The Prince George Brain Injured Group, and discussions on how to work collaboratively and continue promoting this work nationally are ongoing.

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many participants reaching out to outline how this toolkit will be beneficial in the work that they do. With feedback from individuals with lived experience and community service workers, we have been able to identify changes to the toolkit and make additions/corrections to the content to ensure it is accessible for individuals with lived experience of brain injury, caregivers and Legal professionals.

Many individuals expressed gratitude for the abundance of functional support strategies available through the toolkit. Individuals with lived experience reached out to share their own stories of justice involvement and to provide feedback that this site will be helpful in sharing with their own rehabilitation and support team.

Individuals with lived experience also commented that the functional strategies will provide guidance for self navigation, self-advocacy, and also shed light on the challenges related to the invisible symptoms and struggles of ABI.

Service providers with limited ABI experience stated that this website/toolkit has given them a greater understanding of how to best support people to ensure accessibility within their practice scope.

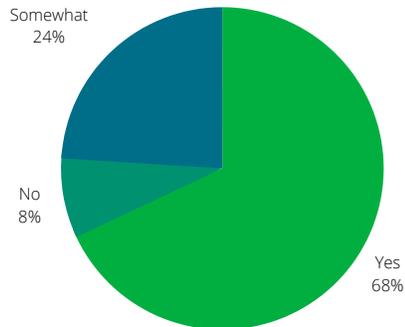
Individual's also provided feedback throughout training sessions to advise us that the breakdown of the legal process was extremely helpful, as this can be confusing and overwhelming system to navigate.



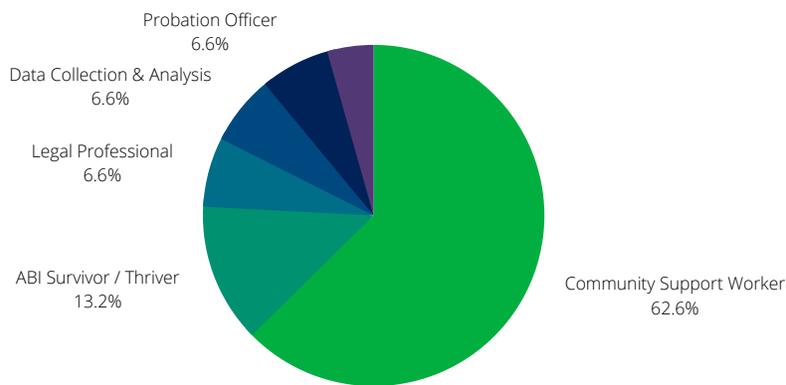
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The toolkit is an amazing resource and it will be utilized for years to come. I was very inspired by the webinar today since I support individuals with a developmental disability or dual diagnosis that have come in contact with the justice system in the York/Simcoe region. Congratulations on obtaining the grant and furthering the advocacy for your population in the justice system. - WORKSHOP ATTENDEE
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SURVEY RESULTS FROM ABI ASSOCIATION WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

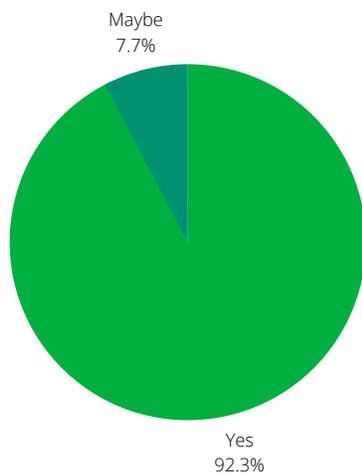
IS THIS TRAINING RELEVANT TO THE WORK YOU DO?



WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO BRAIN INJURY & JUSTICE?



DO YOU THINK YOU WILL REFER BACK TO THIS TOOLKIT FOR INFORMATION AND RESOURCES?



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As a retired police officer, I would have found this useful whilst still serving.
- WORKSHOP ATTENDEE
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FEEDBACK FROM ABI NETWORK CONFERENCE NOV 12-13, 2020:

1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE

3 = NEUTRAL

5 = STRONGLY AGREE

(AVERAGE RATINGS LISTED BELOW)

THE PRESENTATION MET THE LEARNING OBJECTS AS OUTLINED

4.17

THE INFORMATION WAS PRESENTED IN A CLEAR MANNER

4.24

THE INFORMATION WAS RELEVANT TO MY PRACTICE

4.10

COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

"This was an excellent presentation, and the website tool will be extremely helpful. Great work!!"

"I will pass along this info to the other brain injury survivors I know."

"This topic was very well received, and attendees seemed to really enjoy the web resources."

FEEDBACK FROM ONTARIO TRIAL LAWYERS TRAINING SESSION:

1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE

3 = NEUTRAL

5 = STRONGLY AGREE

(AVERAGE RATINGS LISTED BELOW)

TOPIC AND PRESENTATION

4.7

OVERALL WEBINAR EXPERIENCE

4.6

COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

"Very good resources to access in future as needed."

"Excellent presentation. Brief but full of information."

"Very interesting and informative CPD. Would be interested in having this repeated/continued in 2021."

"Great sessions! A lot of the information and resources provided will be beneficial to share with others in the field."

DISSEMINATION & OUTREACH ACTIVITIES:

Initially, the project team reached out to community ABI service providers to partner for training sessions. Each agency also provided advertisement and outreach to their memberships, and local organizations to recruit session participants.

BIST advertised trainings on Eventbrite and also canvassed Legal clinics, Criminal law practises, the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association, Community Human Services and Justice Committees, ABI provincial LHIN navigators and Toronto Police services. During the webinar training sessions, additional talks were requested from the participants to share with their teams, and more trainings were booked through those means. BIST and the project team met as many requests as possible, and created individualized training sessions depending on the nature of the request.

BIST also ran an extensive social media/email campaign to advertise and recruit participants for training sessions.

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I very much hope your efforts to bring awareness into the judicial system is fruitful not only with cases being heard in the here and now but also having the ability to reach back to help others who have been incarcerated without a more complete understanding of their disabilities.
- WORKSHOP ATTENDEE

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SUBSEQUENT PROJECTS

As a result of the ABI justice toolkit project BIST was able to secure a grant through the Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation, in partnership with the Brain Injury Association of North Bay and Area to provide functional legal navigation support. This project trained Bachelor and Masters of Social Work students to support individuals with ABI in utilizing the strategies outlined in the toolkit to provide functional support to individuals who are justice involved. The students reached out to provincial law firms, and community clinics to offer assistance/support, and created a training manual based on the ABI Justice site to train future students in this work. Without the ABI Justice toolkit, this project would not have been possible.

You can read more about the project here:

<https://onf.org/implementation/acquired-brain-injury/2020-21-abi-catalyst-grants/>

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

PROJECT CONTRIBUTOR &
PERSON WITH LIVED
EXPERIENCE - **ALEXANDER
JORDAN MONGKONROB**

I wanted to create soothing tools for persons living with brain injury like myself who experience stressful or anxious situations such as being in an overcrowded over stimulating environment, or in this case; a court setting.

Being in a court setting can be overwhelming with the various sounds and light sensitivity. Also the long hours can be tiring to some, and more break times may be needed. My experience with a tool kit in these situations helps distract me from a negative experience such as sweating, rapid heart beat, anxiousness, headache, dry mouth, fidgeting etc, and to shift my attention with the soothing tools to a more positive focus. I find with the tools I provided, that they can increase awareness around you, help with focus, and provide calmness.

Humans are prone to using at least one or all 5 senses if available to them. The tools that I provide in my toolkit help to benefit all senses from a breath mint for focusing on the taste and coolness to smelling scented lotion on your hands or using unscented lotion and focusing on the texture and smoothness of your hands. All of these tools have some sort of effect on your 5 senses, and will help regulate and control any nervousness or anxieties.

I created the toolkit because I was struggling daily with lots of anxiety, concentration, and behavioral issues. After learning about some mindfulness tactics and learning how to control these fears, and not letting them take over my life, I decided to work with them, and I didn't care how I looked. I started off carrying an elastic coil around my wrist and flicking it if i was anxious in a social situation e.g. around too many people or riding the bus/subway. I used a cane to help my balance, even though I looked normal but with chronic pain and headaches, I needed the cane as an extra tool to help me get around to where I needed to go. For my mood swings, severe anxiety attacks, and headaches and I still do to this day, use ice packs on my head/neck area. It instantly cools me down, regulates my blood flow and releases the pressure from my head pain and tension. For breathing since I don't smoke, I find bubbles help to slow down my thought process, confusion, as well as I feel more grounded with each slower breath I take; Plus who doesn't like bubbles?

As a grown man on the bus and subway, I was embarrassed to hold a plushy or squeeze toy for kids. However, using it in a healthy and positive way to help me focus my breath and help my blood flow better through my veins to my brain, I learned not to care what others think. If you're in court, possibly chewing a mint, tic tac, or mint/fruity gum if allowed will help to focus your brain on the flavor of the candy and your thoughts may become clearer as well as your focus.

I feel my toolkit can benefit persons with ABI going through the legal system because they are small items that can easily be taken into a court or lawyers office. They are safe enough and small enough to help a person with ABI who is experiencing a lot of stress and anxiety in the moment to use, without being too noticeable.

I feel the experience of creating this toolkit has helped me a lot. I'm always adding more items to the kit, or removing items I feel are not beneficial anymore.

Not only do I observe myself with the items in my toolkit, but also I make changes to how others use the items in my toolkit, and what works and what doesn't. I feel hopeful that these tools will help anyone of any age. I feel grateful knowing that my toolkit ideas are being used in a positive and inspiring way in the ABI Justice System.

REFLECTION ON PROGRAM'S CHALLENGES & SUCCESS:

At the onset of this project, BIST and the project team had to pivot and adapt to working strictly remotely due to the pandemic restrictions. Although this initially posed challenges related to the training delivery and content creation, the project team feels that the website content/training were delivered successfully and exceeded our expectations in terms of provincial outreach. The website/tool kit was a new undertaking for the BIST project team, and at the onset, the team did not fully appreciate the scope of resources that needed to be created, gathered and organized.

BIST was able to secure consultation from Legal experts, ABI professionals and individuals with lived experience to ensure the information provided in the toolkit is functional, accurate and accessible for both individuals with an ABI and Legal professionals. These consultants were instrumental in the success of the project.

The BIST project team is very proud of the ABJustice toolkit and feels that this is an inclusive, functional and educational tool that addresses a gap for the community at large. The toolkit provides knowledge and functional tools that can be utilized or adapted throughout the province of Ontario.

The team learned throughout the project creation and training delivery that there is a strong need to continue providing education and advocacy for individuals with ABI who are justice involved. The team feels that this toolkit is a successful step towards providing equity for individuals within the justice system, but that there is still much work to be done.

Individuals with ABI continue to be overrepresented in justice populations, but they lack access to the medical interventions/assessments to accurately diagnose their conditions.

Even if diagnosed, there are limited ABI specific support staff and programs available to assist these individuals. .

This will continue to pose challenges within the justice system, as legal professionals may not be able to identify ABI and the implications this can pose for individuals from their initial contact with police, system navigation, participation in their own legal process, and recidivism.

Individuals will continue to require functional support to advocate for their accommodation needs, accessibility needs and guidance to understand the complexities of the processes.

BIST and the project team learned that there are continued gaps in knowledge related to ABI. As Acquired Brain Injury is a life long, invisible, and complex condition, which can be easily misunderstood or undiagnosed. For individuals with ABI and Legal professionals, there is a need for ongoing/increased education to address the inequities that will continue to arise with the justice system.

The BIST project team feels confident that this website/toolkit has been successful in reaching service providers and legal professionals to provide education and functional resources to support their clients with ABI, but that this is just a starting point in the work that will be required to continue.

UNANTICIPATED BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Completing this project in the midst of a global pandemic allowed our team to reflect on some of the benefits and challenges a virtual world has to offer. Unfortunately, what we know is that the pandemic affected everyone differently, and those who were marginalized before Covid-19 hit, became even further isolated. Those without access to affordable technology, or whose cognitive abilities impacted their ability to navigate technology, were unfortunately unable to benefit from our webinar trainings.

However, the virtual world did offer some benefits. By providing training online we were able to extend our reach beyond Ontario, as we reached communities in the United Kingdom, the United States and British Columbia.

We also had an unexpected challenge of trying to navigate the amount of information we wanted to convey, without it being overwhelming. We wanted the information to be clear, accessible and easy to digest, however, we wanted to provide as many resources and tools as possible. We are hopeful that we struck a balance between these two important needs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

BIST would like to thank the Law Foundation of Ontario for this incredible opportunity to advance knowledge of ABI and the Legal system. We are grateful for all we have been able to learn from and share with our community.

BIST also thanks all Project Consultants involved in the creation of this toolkit:

Project Leads: Melissa Vigar, Katie Manikas & Meri Perra

Content Contributors: Dr. Carolyn Lemsky, Catherine Wiseman-Hakes, Mathew Eaton-Kent, Robert Ben, Alexander Monkrob, Adam & M.P., Laura Bellon, Ontario Brain Injury Association (OBIA), Jordan Assaraf, Erik Joffe, John Groe, Jeff Chartier, Gemma Creek, Lyn Turkstra, Barbara Collier, Zamaneh Mohammadi, Jaspreet Matharu, FASD & Justice, Aneeka Sihra, Arthur Stern

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I'm looking forward to looking at everything in more detail and sharing with the teams I work with - I really like the court visuals and the checklists, and am also looking for a screening tool to start using in a new court project I plan to start after lockdown (which was inspired by my visit to Canada when I first learnt about BIST!)
- WORKSHOP ATTENDEE

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