Rich Sharp is now the director of North Eastern Services.

By Skylor Pond and Erica Mills

The Center for Persons with Disabilities (CPD) is a sub-contractor working with the Division of Health and Family services to help educate the citizens of Utah about brain injury. The effort began when the state of Utah commissioned a wide-ranging study for the needs of the adults with brain injuries. It found that most cases of TBI occur in rural areas where access to information is hard to obtain. Since then, the CPD has worked to educate individuals, families and professionals about TBI. It provides pamphlets explaining brain injuries and giving various information in both English and Spanish. These pamphlets are compiled and translated by the Brain Injury Associations of America and Utah, the CPD, Vocational Rehabilitation, Utah State Office of Education, and Primary Children’s Medical Center. The CPD also lists conferences on its website that deal with traumatic brain injury. In addition, the CPD, through a Zions Bank donation, is developing electronic PowerPoint presentations and DVDs meant for training purposes and targets them at professionals who work with people who have sustained brain injuries. Previous projects have resulted in the creation of house bill 174-S, which directed the state of Utah to help bring the education of TBI to the Utah public.

Who benefits? People affected with a TBI or a supporter of a TBI recipient will know who they can turn to for medical help, and find help with coping nationwide.

Thirteen years ago, at age 17, Rich Sharp sustained a TBI in a construction accident. While putting in some sub-flooring, Sharp’s foot got caught and he fell through the hole in the floor and landed on the concrete of the lower level. He made the first contact with the concrete on his head. Although he cannot remember it, Sharp suffered a seizure and loss of consciousness, resulting in his being life-flighted to Logan Regional Hospital, then to the University of Utah Medical Center. Sharp spent one week in the ICU, one week in recovery and two months doing in-house occupational and speech rehabilitation. Then he returned to Logan Regional Hospital for a few more months of speech therapy.

While Sharp’s speech slowly progressed, communication and his personality changes were still difficult and frustrating for his family and friends. Sharp explained that TBI is so unexpected that people just don’t know what to do or where to go to deal with it. Through this grant, more work can be done to educate the public about TBIs and how to best deal with changes they cause.

Sharp is now the director of North Eastern Services, a community service agency contracted with the Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD), providing service to individuals with developmental and physical disabilities. Through the TBI Partnership Grant 2007-2010, NES and other agencies and individuals activate more resources, such as one-on-one time for TBI affected individuals, group structures, and individually trained staff. When asked if learning about TBI is important Sharp said, “Absolutely! No one really expects a TBI to happen and that’s why it can be so traumatic to families.”

Sharp is actively involved in helping educate the public because he wants to “help out as much as I can, because other people have helped me so much.” That help came in the form of family, friends, support groups, and medical doctors. Now, on only a mild dosage of a prescription for concentration, Sharp is very successful in his work as the NES director.

“Just because someone sustains an injury does not mean you don’t have to feel like you can’t follow your dreams; you can, and you can be successful, with the supports and community resources that are available which we are trying to get in line,” said Sue Dubois. She is involved
with the Utah State Traumatic Brain Injury Partnership Grant and works as the Cache County Community TBI Pilot Coordinator. “It takes a team of pros for sure, but you should never limit yourself. Keep your dreams, and you can obtain them.”