

## Peer Support Groups

### *Survivors Supporting Survivors- Lived Experience is Key*

There are approximately **460,000 Canadians** who have survived a stroke. A stroke can be devastating – not only for the survivor, but also to their family members, loved ones, and caregivers. With the right support, the journey to stroke recovery can be made easier.

#### ***Why join a peer support group?***

- Connect and talk with others living with the after effects of stroke
- Find emotional support in a respectful, inclusive and safe space
- Participate in local meetings, activities and seminars
- Find tips on how to cope day-to-day
- Share personal experiences and exchange valuable information
- Develop new skills
- Make new friends
- Gain an understanding of stroke and recovery and what to expect
- Find a new way to give back to your community

### ***Peer support groups help stroke survivors...***

After Stroke investigated in a research report why stroke survivors believe that peer support groups are so important.<sup>1</sup> Below are some of the findings:

#### ■ ***Gain a better understand of the impact of their stroke***

Many survivors find that during their hospital stay, they did not feel they understood what having a stroke meant to their life, or what they would do to recover.

*'I didn't understand stroke until I went home and met other survivors.'*

*– Tom, 7 years post stroke*

#### ■ ***Feel less isolated***

Feelings of isolation can be alleviated once people are connected with others in a similar situation.

*'You find you're not alone. [The group] is an extended family who knows what you're going through.'*

– Angela, 11 years post stroke

### ■ **Overcome (post-stroke) depression**

Many stroke survivors and caregivers deal with depression after a stroke. Support groups play a significant role in helping overcome depression.

*'Being together with such a happy group who had disabilities too helped me keep my spirits up so I don't let myself get down.'*

– Lena, 2.5 years post-stroke



### ■ **Relate to their peers**

Most survivors find that the experience of speaking with other survivors is vastly different from speaking with their family or friends. Groups provide an open and safe forum for survivors to voice concerns.

*'The [other survivors] speak to me and then they'll really listen. Other people would say 'oh, I can't be bothered'. They are friends because they are always willing to help you.'*

– Lillian, 1.5 years post-stroke

### ■ **Improve and recover over a long period of time**

It is often thought that the majority of recovery takes place within the first 6 months after a stroke. However, many support group members share that they are still making strides towards new recovery goals and seeing results long after their stroke first occurred.

*'I'm still finding improvements. I still can't do some things, but I got so much back I feel I have a lot to live for.'*

– Lena, 2.5 years post-stroke

### ■ **Help others**

Often survivors express gratitude for the contributions their support group has brought to their lives and recovery. They are motivated to stay with the group to give back to others.

*'[The group] gave me strength and I want to give it back. We've all been there, we all understand. We can talk, cry and laugh together --- that's what's important about the group.'*

– Angela, 11 years post-stroke