



**Brain Injury
Alliance**
ARIZONA

Police Chief's Cross-Disability Advisory Board and Local Community Advocate Honored at Rays of Hope

May is a special month for Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona members and supporters. Each May, the state-wide nonprofit brings together over three-hundred survivors of brain injury and caregivers for a statewide conference, Rays of Hope. The motto of the 2017 conference was "It's Your Day," and survivors and caregivers were encouraged to attend educational sessions on behavior after brain injury, learn about neuroplasticity, or unwind by socializing or participating in a harp therapy session or drum circle. "The journey after brain injury is a lifelong one," said Tom Nielsen, Chair of the Board for the Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona (BIAAZ). "Our hope each year is to meet people where they are at on that journey so that they can take what they need from the conference at that particular moment of their adaption to a new normal."

This year featured the Alliance's first-ever recognition of two outstanding community partners.



Marchelle Franklin, Director of Police Community Affairs; Sabrina Taylor, Crisis Intervention Team; Nikki Hicks, Police Community Affairs Specialist; Sgt. Herminia Hernandez, Community Response Squad; Det. Tony Davis, Cross Disability Advisory Board Chair Detective Liaison; Det. Julie Smith, Cross Disability Advisory Board Chair Detective Liaison; Jennifer Longdon, Cross Disability Advisory Board Chair; Victoria Washington, Cross Disability Advisory Board Vice Chair; Ashley Bridwell, LMSW, Cross Disability Advisory Board Member; Julie Rake, PAC, Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona Board Member; Sean Badding, Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona Board Member; Kay Wing, Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona Board Member; Carrie Collins-Fadell, Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona Executive Director

In appreciation of their efforts to create an educated and empowered community that is more welcoming for brain injury survivors, the Phoenix Police Chief's Cross-Disability Advisory Board was honored, as was longtime community advocate Jennifer Longdon.

"Wake Up Arizona's" CBS 5 Anchorman Preston Phillips was the Master of Ceremonies for the awards luncheon at Rays of Hope. The Phillips family is no stranger to the roller coaster of emotions that occur after a brain injury. Preston's younger brother himself is a long-time brain injury survivor.

Phillips' made his remarks to the packed ballroom on why the BIAAZ Board chose to honor the Police Chief's Advisory Board. "Life with brain injury is not always simple; it isn't always black and white, and the behaviors that our loved ones with brain injury might want to express from their hearts don't always go according to plan," Phillips commented. "Some of those living with brain injury become frequent users of services of local police departments all over the country."

To improve the interaction between those in the community with brain injury and the police, the Advisory Board was formed in 2014. "It was a truly trailblazing move to include brain injury resource advocates on this board right from the inception," said Carrie Collins-Fadell, Executive Director of the Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona. "Historically, across the country, those living with the invisible disability of brain injury have not always been invited to the table when the topic is disability and that is a huge disservice. But that is not the case in Phoenix."

BIAAZ Board members chose to honor the Police Department at Rays of Hope for the outstanding work on the Advisory Board and including those with brain injury when looking for positive community solutions. Marchelle Franklin, Director of Police Community Affairs was on hand to accept the recognition. Jennifer Longdon, the current Chair of the Advisory Board introduced Ms. Franklin and thanked the department. "The Phoenix Police Department is humbled to accept this award and recognition," said Franklin. "We are committed to serving a community filled with various abilities and learning and responding to their needs."

The BIAAZ Board of Directors was especially pleased to honor Jennifer Longdon, a resident of Phoenix who is also the current Chair of the Police Chief's Cross-Disability Advisory Board, for her outstanding advocacy in the community on behalf of those living with or caring for someone with brain injury.

"We know Jennifer didn't plan to be an advocate for the disability community, but she is the ultimate example of a fierce warrior who is moving the conversation forward in a thoughtful and strategic manner," said BIAAZ Board Member Julie Rake, PAC who was on hand to present Longdon with the award.

Before accepting the award, Longdon shared that she and her partner are the survivors of a violent shooting. London struck the ground after she was shot, leaving her with a spinal cord injury and a mild traumatic brain injury. She discussed how she found her new voice and mission as an advocate during her recovery. "I'm surprised and humbled by such an honor," said. "I believe that it's not my award, it belongs to the entire Advisory Board."

Longdon will continue her advocacy and involvement on the Chief's Board. "The long-standing commitment by the Phoenix Police Department to serve everyone in our community is evidenced by the creation of the Phoenix Police Chief's Cross-Disability Advisory Board (CAB)," Longdon said. "The CAB is comprised of individuals representing a broad range of disabilities who work to help PPD better understand our experiences so they may become more responsive to our needs."



Jennifer Longdon accepts the BIAAZ's first-ever All-Star Advocate Award. PHOTO BY LOREN WORTHINGTON

