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Article Title: A HOPE TO WALK AGAIN

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³Superman² movie star Christopher Reeve put a famous face on the devastating problems associated with spinal cord injuries.

The Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation (www.ChristopherReeve.org) recently awarded a \$10,000 Quality of Life grant to Redmond-based NextStepsNW, a non-profit organization that provides intensive and specialized exercise rehabilitation and support for people with paralysis.

Roughly 11,000 spinal cord injuries<one every 41 minutes< occur in the U.S.

each year. And others are paralyzed due to strokes or neurological diseases such as Multiple Sclerosis.

Bruce Hanson, board director of NextStepsNW, knows first-hand what it's like to hear the words, ³You'll never walk again.² He became an advocate for people with paralysis after a near-fatal ski accident. His wife, Kate Willette, wrote a book, ³Some Things Are Unbreakable,² about his ordeal and his will to prove the doctors wrong; see www.lulu.com/unbreakable.

³Every person in the medical profession should read this book,² said Michaelann Harvey, president of NextStepsNW.

Many of their clients have significantly improved their mobility, some even walking again. ³To cope, to be able to get in and out of bed, just do day-to-day activities,² is a milestone for many.

Few able-bodied people comprehend the full picture of being wheelchair-bound. The sedentary life can easily lead to weight gain, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and loss of bone density.

At NextStepsNW, clients are told that regardless of when their paralysis occurred, it's never too late to start exercise that can deter or reverse ³learned non-use² in affected muscle groups.

Three fundamental components of the exercise program are locomotor treadmill training, electrical stimulation cycling and visualization-activation muscle training.

³This can give cardiovascular benefit even if it doesn't restore motor functions,² Hanson emphasized.

The emotional trauma of immobility also decreases with exercise.

³When they first start out, they're quiet, depressed. Later, they're talking, laughing; we've got the music going and they're having a good time,² said massage therapist and personal trainer Tricia Lazzar.

Grants like the one from the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, and the Michael-Ryan Pattison Foundation<named for a Woodinville High

School graduate who became paralyzed after diving into Lake Chelan are critical to the success of NextStepsNW, Harvey stated. Pattison (www.michaelryanpattison.com) had in auction in October 2006 and donated \$50,000 to NextStepsNW, allowing the organization to subsidize six low-income individuals needing therapy. The grant from the Reeve Foundation will allow them to subsidize one more.

By the time clients become outpatients (often referred from University of Washington, Harborview or Children's Medical Centers) they've exhausted their medical insurance benefits, and insurance companies don't recognize (the importance of this therapy) because recovery is such a slow process, she explained.

Facilities similar to NextStepsNW, in other parts of the country, charge \$100-\$200 an hour for their services; NextStepsNW clients who aren't subsidized pay \$75 an hour.

Allan Northrup, (our) main founder, was in a program down in San Diego for 18 months that was for-profit and saw people sell their houses to receive therapy. We don't want that happening. This is why we became non-profit, said Harvey.

The organization's fundraising goal is to purchase a robotic locomotor treadmill trainer (a \$230,000 machine). As well, Harvey and her colleagues have rallied in Washington, D.C. alongside Senators Hillary Clinton and John Kerry and actress Susan Sarandon, for passage of the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Act.

When people say, "You'll never walk again," it becomes a mindset; it closes a door, said Lazzar.

I think it's irresponsible for doctors to say that when you never really know, Hanson added. I've always had it in my mind that it's possible. And if I can't walk again, I'm going to push to make it happen for someone else.

To learn more about NextStepsNW and how you can help, visit www.nextstepsnw.org.

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