



Walkin' and Workin'

Now they tell us! After nearly five decades of sittin' and wheelin', I could now be walking. Not really for me and my gray-bearded cronies, but this news is encouraging for newbies with spinal-cord injuries.

The national media headlines blared, "NextStepsNW—Exercise, Hope & Health for Paralysis," and "2 ABC Shows Feature Successful Spinal Cord Injury Walking Programs." ABC's *Good Morning America* and *Extreme Makeover Home Edition* aired stories about SCI-recovery programs. People with paralysis are regaining function, and some are walking again. In the Puget Sound area, NextStepsNW clients are regaining mobility and taking steps.

Good Morning America aired a segment on locomotor treadmill training for people with SCI. It featured a 3-year-old paralyzed Kentucky boy who learned to walk again after trying the therapy, financed by the Christopher Reeve Foundation's Neuro-Recovery Network.

A few days later *Extreme Makeover* renovated the home of a woman who sustained an SCI in her job as a Los Angeles policewoman. She is making progress on recovery with the help of Project Walk, a rehab center in San Diego with a philosophy very similar to NextStepsNW.

NextStepsNW (www.nextstepsnw.org) is the only center in Washington that offers intensive exercise recovery programs for SCI and other neurological disorders. One client with quadriplegia who was told he would never walk again is taking steps on his own after only three months of specialized training.

Michaelann Harvey, NextStepsNW president, says, "We are pleased ABC has let the nation know that intensive SCI-recovery programs really work! We hope these specialized programs will soon become the standard of care for individuals with paralysis. SCI is often financially devastating, and many who could benefit from these programs cannot afford them. Insurance coverage and medical referrals could help these people experience more recovery. They would then need

less overall care during their lifetimes, having money in the long term and providing them with a better quality of life."

NextStepsNW is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Redmond, Wash., that specializes in intensive exercise rehabilitation therapy for people with paralysis. The facility uses the latest exercise techniques and specialized equipment such as locomotor treadmill training, electrical stimulation cycling, and visualization-activation muscle training. Some of these therapies were developed by Christopher Reeve's doctors. The goal is to reawaken the nervous system in order to return mobility to paralyzed limbs.

The news is good for some folks with SCI disabilities who can walk. According to a survey, 76% of employees with more severe disabilities working under the federally funded Javits-Wagner-O'Day program are happy with their jobs, and 79% are proud of their work. Possibly the fortunate few who can walk to work enjoy their labors even more.

The program provides employment opportunities to nearly 47,000 people and is reportedly the largest single source of employment in the United States for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.

This first-ever survey was administered via telephone to more than 500 randomly selected employees with cognitive, physical, or other disabling conditions. Its goal was to find ways to improve the program, and it was designed to assess employee satisfaction regarding workplace issues—including earnings, safety, training, and co-workers' relationships.

"Results of the survey have been overwhelmingly positive," says Bob Chamberlin. "It's good to know that the employees are finding satisfaction with what they do."

This is great news and bodes well for people with disabilities in the employment survey as well as the SCI recovery program. Although NextSteps-type programs involve strictly SCI patients and the survey encompasses *all* types of disabilities, it is encouraging to see that employees with disabilities are enthusiastic, satisfied, and content. ■

"All things are possible until they are proved impossible—and even the impossible may only be so, as of now."

Pearl S. Buck