Dear Name,

A vibrant young woman, Ali Rheame was living out her dream as a Physical Education teacher, field hockey and track coach, Kids Ministry Director and Zumba instructor! In February 2016, metaphorically, Ali’s survivor story began with,

“when one door closes…”,

but for Ali, the heavy commercial door literally struck her in the face, and things changed forever.

**Above and below her right eye took the brunt of the force and Ali sustained a severe concussion.**

The following 24 hours came in a blur with memory loss, mental fog, trouble with word finding, vision changes, delayed speech, vestibular challenges, sensitivity to light and sound, auditory processing difficulty, and changes in her baseline secondary to the concussion she had sustained. Ali tells you her story with humor, grace, and the positive attitude of someone who views this turning point positively –

“…another door opens.”

“I was told it was [just] a concussion and that I could go back to [normal] activity after a week or so. I woke up the next day with significant changes - lacking functioning and emotional response. My family urged me to see my primary doctor, who referred me to a Neurologist, where I was again told to go home and rest. I have little to no memory of that first week at home, or of the month following. During this time, I also experienced Occipital and Trigeminal neuralgia, as well as terrible headaches and pressure. I was referred to Spaulding Outpatient Rehab for Physical and Occupational Therapy, as well as Speech-Language Pathology. It was there that it was suggested I get a second Neurologist’s opinion.”

Weeks turned to months, but Ali worked hard, and things were starting to look up for her with proper treatment. “My progress was very, very slow, but I was okay with that. I had a great team consisting of a Neurologist, Neuropsychologist, PT, SLP, Chiropractor, Craniosacral therapist, Acupuncturist, Primary Care, and Neuro-Optometrist. I was finally on a path to follow and things were moving in the right direction.”

As her treatment progressed, an unexpected change in insurance required that Ali switch doctors and uproot all the care she had taken time and energy to establish. This brought a new plan of care and while sorting out the changes, Ali sustained a second concussion due to poor proprioception, a result of her first concussion. She was once again sent home to recover.

Then in December 2016, through a “perfect storm” of medical changes, Ali had lost most of her cognitive function and was experiencing numerous nonepileptic seizures a day. Almost overnight she’d lost the ability to speak, walk, and eat. Three more weeks of inpatient rehabilitation, she regained enough function to head home and continue outpatient treatment.

But her journey didn’t stop there. After only one month at home, Ali’s body struggled to keep up with hypoglycemia, hypotension, bradycardia, and postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS), and she found herself in Neuro-ICU. Doctors
there struggled to figure out the impact of the brain injuries and the severity of autonomic dysfunction that Ali was experiencing. For the next year and a half, Ali was constantly in and out of the hospital and inpatient rehab.

She then began working with a Functional Medicine Practitioner to put the pieces together, and two and a half years post injury, Ali was able to experience a support group. “By the fall of 2018, I finally got to the point where I was ready to venture out, to join others who could relate to what I was going through. The second I walked into Creative Corner at BIA-MA, I was heard, loved, and supported. It felt like home and quickly became family. No one should go through brain injury alone, and you don’t feel alone in a group like this.”

“For a long time, I was unable to properly communicate what my body was doing or what it felt like, which made recovery hard. I have really needed to advocate for myself and I got the confidence to do so once I (literally) got my voice back! My faith and general outlook on life is how I got through the toughest times – being hopeful that things happen for a reason. I’m feeling the best that I have since 2016 and I want to share that with others.”

Taryn Barlow, Speech-Language Pathologist, says “Along this journey, Ali has maintained her hope through it all and strives to be a light while encouraging others. Ali will joke that the door didn’t REALLY have to hit her so hard, but since it did, she chooses to use it to tap into her passion for teaching, advocacy, and supporting others in their journey with brain injury.”

BIA-MA is the voice of brain injury BECAUSE of survivors like Ali. Through the generosity of our friends and donors, we can continue to provide important support opportunities to thousands like Ali as well as to continue to advocate for better services and educational opportunities for professionals in the field of brain injury. All of the things that have helped to provide a better path for Ali.

“At BIA-MA everyone sees you for you, regardless of what changes a brain injury may have brought! This community truly supports each other, radiates an abundance of joy, and has helped me get as far as I’ve come.”

I hope you will consider her journey and the journey of so many others at this time of year when considering your annual and holiday giving and make a donation today.

Sincerely,

Nicole Godaire
Chief Executive Officer

P.S. - To learn more about Ali’s journey please visit www.biama/annualappeal
or follow her on Instagram at @alison.rheaume

To make a donation online, please visit https://give.classy.org/BIAMA_give2019