

THE WAR AMPUTATIONS OF CANADA ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF CANADIAN AMPUTEES

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I lost a leg to cancer at the age of 13. I became a member of The War Amps Child Amputee Program, or CHAMP as it is better known, shortly thereafter. For the last 10 years I have worked with The War Amps and am presently its Director of the National Amputee Centre and Director of Prosthetics and Counselling. In that time, I have attended over a dozen prosthetic conferences to keep up-to-date on artificial limbs and to pass that information on to Canadian amputees.

The War Amputations of Canada is a charitable organization that has been in existence for over 80 years and I will share with you an overview of our history and what we do.

HISTORY OF THE WAR AMPS

The Association was founded by national charter in 1920 as The Amputations Association of The Great War, a fraternal society to provide direction for its members while also seeing to their needs. Counselling, self-help and practical assistance were emphasized.

The organization's first President was Lieutenant Colonel Sidney Lambert, an army padre who had lost his leg in action during World War I. He helped galvanize his comrades in the early years and later spearheaded a drive to set up a sheltered workshop where war amputees could work for competitive wages, while providing a service that would generate funds for the organization. The name of the association was changed to The War Amputations of Canada, and as disabled veterans returned from World War II, the organization provided information, fellowship and employment opportunities to all of its members.

In 1946 the Key Tag Service was launched as a means of providing employment for war amputees. Since then the service has grown into a computerized program that has returned nearly a million sets of lost keys to their owners, but always is dedicated to providing employment for Canadian amputees and people with other disabilities. The War Amps has been able to initiate many programs over the years due to public donations to the Key Tag Service.

The War Amps has always had as its hallmark the philosophy of "amputees helping amputees." Because the Canadian public was so supportive, in 1953 The War Amps expanded its scope of assistance to "civilian" amputees in order that war amputees could share their knowledge with others who are missing limbs from causes other than war. Later, the program was divided into two, one for adults and a separate program for children.

PROGRAMS FOR ADULT AMPUTEES

The War Amps has two programs to assist adult amputees in Canada.

CHAMP Adult Program

When child amputees enroll in The War Amps CHAMP Program, which I will discuss later, a "lifetime commitment" is made to assist them. When Champs turn 18 or have finished their post-secondary education they become members of the CHAMP Adult Program. Through the CHAMP Adult Program, financial assistance is provided for artificial limbs (including repairs) - the remaining cost after funding from provincial plans or private insurance has been accessed - and limited funding for recreational fittings. Financial assistance is also available to cover travel costs to/from prosthetic centres.

Adult Prosthetics Program

The War Amps also provides assistance to thousands of other Canadian amputees who register in the Adult Prosthetics Program as adults. The Adult Prosthetics Program covers 20% of the total cost of a new limb, to a maximum of \$2,000, every three years. We recognize, however, that a new amputee requires both a temporary fitting followed by a definitive fitting months later and we provide funding for both. These guidelines allow us to provide some assistance to as many adults as we can. As a charitable organization, available funding under personal insurance, social assistance or some other program, must be accessed before requesting assistance from The War Amps. We also provide information on prosthetics and amputation.

CHAMP PROGRAM

Cliff Chadderton, who lost his right leg during World War II, became the Chief Executive Officer of the organization in 1965. For more than 30 years he has tirelessly served the needs of Canadian amputees, both young and old. Under Cliff Chadderton, the organization grew dramatically and has become known around the world for its innovative programs and ideas. Although veterans' issues are still today a large part of the work of the CEO, Cliff Chadderton realized many years ago that war amputees were being well served by existing programs and that in the future their needs would decrease. So in 1975 he turned the organization's attention to child amputees and in 1975 started the Child Amputee (CHAMP) Program. Children missing a limb at birth, for medical reasons, or because of an accident receive the help they need to live full and active lives. Based on principles of fostering positive, winning attitudes, CHAMP offers child amputees specialized assistance - financial as well as emotional. The organization tries to reach all amputee children and their families as soon after an amputation as possible, providing artificial limbs, information and counselling to help the children and their families cope with their amputations.

The services and programs provided through CHAMP are extensive.

On a practical level, CHAMP provides financial assistance for artificial limbs and related expenses not covered by government or private health plans. Child amputees outgrow their artificial limbs faster than their clothing! They also need specialty limbs and devices which allow them to participate in recreational activities at school, in the community, and within the family.

On a personal level, CHAMP provides emotional support for youngsters and family members alike through a strong network of supportive counselling programs and regional seminars.

CHAMP Seminars

Regional CHAMP Seminars, held annually across Canada, bring together child amputees and their parents to meet their peers and learn about artificial limbs and new developments. They also derive great benefit from interacting with one another. In a country as expansive as Canada, many children live in communities where they know no other amputees, so can often feel alone - a CHAMP Seminar is often the first opportunity many of them have to meet other child amputees.

Each Seminar offers sessions in numerous areas:

- * Parents gain support from others who have "been there" and CEO Cliff Chadderton shares his over 50 years of experience in handling situations they face in raising their amputee children.
- * Junior Counsellors are older Champs who offer support to younger Champs and parents, providing practical advice and personal insight into growing up with amputation. They are natural role models.
- * Teens helping teens - Champs in their teenage years have very different concerns. Sessions for older Champs provide a setting to discuss topics such as dating, driving and career opportunities.
- * What's new in artificial limbs? Families at seminars learn about the latest developments in artificial limbs. Champs participate by proudly demonstrating their own artificial limbs, including special artificial limbs for activities such as swimming, skiing or playing the violin!

- * Super Champ have unique needs - special seminars address the unique needs of Champs with multiple amputations

Offshoot Programs of CHAMP

The War Amps also has developed offshoot programs within CHAMP.

In the 80s, The War Amps initiated a program called MATCHING MOTHERS whose theme is "parents helping parents." The Program matches parents of an amputee child with another "more experienced" family within CHAMP. The name of the Program exists for two reasons - MATCHING MOTHERS was the idea of a group of CHAMP *mothers* themselves who expressed how their own anxieties about their child's amputation would have been alleviated by early contact with a parent who had "been there." Plus, although more and more fathers are requesting matches, most requests through the Program are still for mothers. The program is, however, there to assist the whole family. Similarly, we have a JUNIOR COUNSELLING Program where older members of CHAMP, now in their teens and young adulthood, provide the peer support to new amputees or those going through a difficult time. CHAMP parents and the amputees who volunteer in our support programs are **not** professional counsellors. Their role is to share their own experiences and insights and to simply offer support. Requests for matches may come from families themselves or a doctor, nurse or social worker.

Numerous safety programs were initiated after it was noticed that many children enrolling in CHAMP had lost limbs in accidents. PLAYSAFE is aimed at cautioning Canadian youngsters of the dangers while at play and is a *kids-to-kids* approach to child safety awareness. DRIVESAFE was developed to promote safe driving and to prevent serious injuries due to accidents, and SAFETY WALK encourages parents to take their children on a walk to inspect potentially dangerous sites in their neighbourhood.

The JUMPSTART Program provides computers and computer training to Champs with multiple amputations. CEO Cliff Chadderton describes JUMPSTART as "the great equalizer." JUMPSTART allows children with multiple amputations to keep up with their peers at school and opens doors to future career opportunities. JUMPSTART focuses on the benefits of computers and early computer training, with the ultimate goal being future employment and independence for children missing multiple limbs.

The CHAMP JUMPSTART Training Facility is a specialized computer training workshop that provides excellent employment opportunities for amputees. Courses are individually tailored for each student in the different facets of computer work, classroom and practical experience.

WHY SUCH A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM?

The value of such a comprehensive program that addresses all the needs of an amputee is reflected in my personal story. As mentioned previously, I lost my leg to cancer as a young teenager. In the first moments after my doctor told me what was happening - once the few moments of utter disbelief wore off and I realized it was not a terribly bad joke - my greatest fears surfaced in the questions I immediately asked the doctor: *Am I going to die? Will I ever walk again? Will anyone still like me?*

Several issues are at the forefront here. It is a *physical, social and emotional* roller coaster on which amputees find themselves. When working with amputees at any stage of rehabilitation, you cannot treat one aspect of their rehabilitation and ignore the others and expect great results. In some cases the amputee's life has been threatened and dealing with that is of primary importance. Once an amputee's physical survival is assured (as much as it possibly can be), then his/her social and emotional needs must be met. Amputees want to become functional again and to take part in society as they used to (or as much as possible), and must be given realistic expectations in regards to prosthetic fittings, recognizing, of course, that the individual's motivation and perseverance plays an integral role in the results. While dealing with the fitting process, those working with an amputee must recognize that

strong emotions are at play as the individual tries to come to terms with an altered body image and fears of rejection by loved ones.

Oftentimes, amputees themselves are the ones who project their own fears onto others, sometimes without realizing it, and thus close themselves off to close relationships. Later when relationships fail or do not begin at all, the failure may be blamed on the amputation when in fact signals were being given out that the amputee was not approachable - creating a vicious circle. It is obvious that if amputees are struggling with emotional issues, these will be reflected in how they cope with other aspects of the rehabilitation process like prosthetic fittings. In short, as you have likely heard many times, do not forget the "whole" person you are working with, and ensure all those who can help an amputee are brought together in a "team" approach. Be careful though not to overwhelm the amputee - I have heard from many new amputees that they are often intimidated and fearful when they enter a clinic situation and are placed in a room with half a dozen professionals who use terminology they cannot understand.

In order to address the needs of Canadian amputees, The War Amps is continuously creating new programs and resources.

Most recently, to address the needs of teenage amputees we produced a series of *TEEN TALK* videos covering the topics of: the school years, relationships and body image, driving and employment. We have placed the series on one two-hour video tape that is used in part at our seminars, but is also available to members on loan.

Another resource that we created to address the needs of very young child amputees who are entering their school years is a Starting School Kit - this kit contains guidelines and suggestions for parents to actually go into the school or daycare to introduce the child to his playmates or classmates in a very positive way, and to provide an opportunity for the other children to ask questions about the child's amputation or artificial limb. Our families have high praise for the kit. The kit also includes two short counselling videos - a four minute cartoon called *Kinetic Prosthetics* featuring an amputee character named Fleetwood and a 15-minute puppet video, *Just The Way I Am*, featuring amputees, Luke and Michele, showing how they handle situations at school.

Plans are always ongoing for additional resources to be introduced.

THE FUTURE

The organization has put the groundwork in place for the time when war amputees will no longer be able to run the affairs of the Association. The Association plans to carry on under the name The War Amps. Through Operation Legacy, former members of CHAMP who are now grown will continue The War Amps' tradition of "amputees helping amputees." The War Amps will continue on into the future to provide many valuable services to its amputee members and the Canadian public.