

National and regional support groups reach out to new amputees

*Translated into plain language by Helen Osborne of [Health Literacy Consulting](#)
Original article by Kim Norton*



When people lose limbs, their lives change in many ways. Most people want a lot of information at this time as well as support and answers to their questions. National and regional (local) groups can help.

One very helpful national group is the Amputee Coalition of America (ACA). Its mission is to reach out to people with limb loss and to empower them through education, support and advocacy. It does this by working with regional (local) support groups who, in turn, reach out to community members who need support.

One regional support group is “UnLimbited Connection” based in Denver, Colorado. This group started more than 10 years ago as support for families with children who have limb differences. Now, this group also helps adults.

The start of UnLimbited Connection

Karen Mohr and Stormy McDonald helped start UnLimbited Connection. Mohr tells her story: “I was training to become a physical therapist when I lost my leg in 1990. Because of my education, I knew who to contact for more information. It was my thought that I have so much information, but what about those who don’t?” Mohr is now the board treasurer for UnLimbited and an ACA member.

In 2003, McDonald was in California when she lost her left leg below the knee from an accident. She called the ACA for guidance and spoke with Susan Tipton who referred her to a local support group. McDonald later joined UnLimbited Connection when she moved to Colorado. “My experience in the California support group prompted me to seek out another group when I moved.” McDonald has been a vital part of this group since then, saying “Like most groups, there aren’t always a lot of volunteers and you always need new blood to keep things going.” McDonald has been an active member ever since.

Mohr and McDonald both find that their roles in UnLimbited have changed over the years. Instead of needing support, they now give it. “At this point in my life, I am capable of helping others, and that’s why I was eager to seek out a support group,” says McDonald. Mohr likewise wants to help those who need information and support. In fact, she was very active in getting the adult support group started after it had stopped for a while.

UnLimbited Connection now

Today, UnLimbited has about 50 active members and 200 people on its mailing list. There are monthly meetings where members talk about topics they want to discuss. Members not only share information but also support each other by talking about limb loss.

Beyond these meetings, UnLimbited has a newsletter about upcoming social events and meetings, topics of interest, and news about other support groups. This year, UnLimbited held its second “peer visitor” training seminar that was hosted by ACA. “I attended the training seminar held by the ACA in 1999, and the training

has evolved wonderfully. We're hoping to get more people involved and certified as peer visitors," Mohr says.

UnLimbited Connection and the ACA

Mohr and McDonald both say that the ACA helped them get to this level. "The ACA is a great initial support. Their work has been effective in reaching out to the community on a more personal basis though regional groups," says McDonald.

UnLimbited is now reaching out to local hospitals and letting them know about its services. "It is our goal that every case manager, social worker, physical therapist, and prosthetist know that we exist and to get out the information about our group and the ACA," says Mohr.

A story about how this support helps

In January this year, two Berthoud High School students were on their way home from a school dance when they stopped to change a flat tire. Tyler Carron and

Nikko Landeros, both 17 years old, were pinned when their car got hit by another. Carron and Landeros became bilateral amputees as a result of this accident. McDonald saw the story on the news and quickly told Mohr and Tipton at the ACA. They put together a packet of information about the ACA and local support groups. Then they called the boys' high school counselor and wrestling coach and also a social worker at Denver Health Medical Center. McDonald, Mohr and Tipton wanted to be sure that appropriate materials were there when people were ready to read them. Mohr faxed a copy of UnLimbited's newsletter to the boys' wrestling coach (a close family friend) and wrote, "For your awareness, when the time is right."

These efforts paid off. Just a few weeks later, Mohr got a call from Ralph Fowler who is an active ACA member from El Paso, Texas. He had just received some e-mails from another social worker at Denver Health Medical Center who was working with the boys and their families. "Since we knew each other, Ralph called with the new contact, and the next day I met two social workers who were assisting the family," says Mohr. A few minutes later, a social worker asked the mothers if they would like to join this conversation. "They did, and I was finally able to

directly answer some questions and provide some resources from the ACA (brochures, *inMotion* and *First Step*), the Challenged Athletes Foundation, and Adaptive Adventures, along with our local information,” says Mohr.

The families said that they had seen these items somewhere before. “We don’t know where they may have seen them, or if they even came from us, but it illustrates that, while the resources had reached them, the time had not yet been right,” says Mohr.

This story is a shining example of how local and national groups work together to help new amputees. Mohr recently sent an e-mail to Tipton, saying, “I know [the ACA] can’t keep track of every amputation occurring across the country, but the ACA’s effort to reach out to those you hear about and traumatic situations like this one is wonderful. Thank you!”

This article was based on information from Stormy McDonald and Karen Mohr of Colorado’s UnLimbited Connection.

Here are ways to learn more:

- Web at www.colo-UnLimbited.org
- Phone at 202/380-3898
- E-mail at UnLimbited@aol.com

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