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Helping the helpers

May 17, 2007

By Sandy Illian Bosch | STAFF WRITER

Education was important to Anne Deutsch. The Darien native had completed her master's degree in sustainable architecture and was well on her way to a promising career as an urban designer. But a morning walk changed everything.

Deutsch was walking her dogs near her home in California nearly three years ago when she was hit by a bus. The driver didn't stop, but the accident brought an end to the quality of life Deutsch had worked so hard to achieve.

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Anne Deutsch, who once aspired to a career as an urban designer, is one of 1,400 Illinois residents served by a Darien agency helping people with brain injuries. Her parents say she has already done many things her doctors said she would never do. (Photo for The Doings by Herb Shenkin)

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"She was left with a traumatic brain injury," said Deutsch's mother, Phyllis. "She's made great strides," her mother said, but the 37-year-old still cannot walk or talk, and life can be difficult for her parents, who instead of enjoying their long-awaited retirement are caring for the day-to-day needs of their injured daughter.

"Caring for Anne was a monumental job for the two of us," John Deutsch said.

But a little over a year ago, the family found help through Aabcor, a Darien service agency that acts as a warehouse of resources for those with brain injuries and their families.

Suddenly, the family felt far less



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Phyllis and John Deutsch have cared for their 37-year-old daughter, Anne, since an accident three years ago left her with traumatic brain injury. The family has found help through Aabcor, an agency that provides resources for such caregivers. (Photo for The Doings by Herb Shenkin)

alone.

"They showed us the way, they showed us where to go," Phyllis Deutsch said. "You're not an island all by yourself."

With help from Aabcor, the family secured a certified nurse assistant to help their daughter five days a week. When it came time for a dental checkup, Aabcor helped them find a doctor who could meet Anne's special needs. And when Phyllis complained that the cost of simple medical supplies was becoming daunting, Aabcor helped her find a service that provides them free of charge. Most recently, Aabcor put them in touch with a psychologist who is helping

them to cope with their daughter's stresses, and to control their own.

Anne is one of 1,400 Illinoisans with brain injuries who are served by Aabcor and its 30 case workers, all of whom have degrees in social work. A program of the Illinois Department of Human Services Office of Rehabilitation Services, Aabcor helps people from infants to the elderly who have suffered an injury through an accident, an illness or stroke. Co-founder Judi Davey said Aabcor is dedicated to helping people with brain injuries learn to make the most of their new reality, which often means a new set of skills. It's with that in mind that the agency has launched its latest endeavor, an annual scholarship program that will help people with brain injuries further their education.

This summer Aabcor will award two \$1,500 scholarships to brain injured people in the Chicago area. They need not be served by Aabcor, but must have a diagnosed brain injury, co-founder Ahmed Basith said. Applicants must submit a short personal statement explaining why they have chosen their intended course of study and how the program will improve their quality of life. The money, to be awarded July 1, will be applied toward a technical or trade school, a two-year or four-year college program, or even graduate studies.

"With our 10th anniversary this year, we want to give something back to the people in the community who need help," Basith said.

He hopes interest in the scholarship will make even more people aware of the services available to people w Aabcor can help them find those services. More information about Aabcor and its scholarship program is av

Anne Deutsch isn't ready to return to school, but her parents aren't ruling it out. She's already done so many would never do.

"She'll do what she wants to do when she wants to do it," John Deutsch said.

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