

When the earthquake hit on January 12, 2010, Kenny Theosomy was already suffering from a spinal cord injury (SCI) that left him paralyzed from the waist down. Kenny, a 24-year-old electrician from Port-au-Prince, was repairing wires when he was electrocuted and fell. He struggled to survive without a wheelchair, a job or any access to medication and basic services. In the confusion of the earthquake, Kenny was brought aboard the U.S.N.S. Comfort for care as part of the humanitarian aid effort. But when it came time for the ship to return to the U.S., Kenny, and a group of SCI patients were left with no place to go.

That's when SBHF received a call, asking if we could take over caring for Kenny and some of the other patients on board. With no facilities or formal program in place, but armed with the conviction that we had to help if no one else could, SBHF accepted its first group of SCI patients in February 2010. Several months later, Christian Blind Mission, USAID and World Learning stepped in as funding partners and SBHF opened a national spinal cord injury rehabilitation and reintegration program in Fond-des-Blancs.

To date we've enrolled 48 people in the program and the majority

of those have been successfully reintegrated into their communities. Our dedicated SCI team spends many hours on the road each week, checking in with those in our community-based program and delivering supplies and medicine to their homes. When a person with an SCI is admitted to our >

Kenny Theosomy, injured in the earthquake, now lives in Fond-des-Blancs and works as a peer-educator, educating community members and patients about living with disability.

Providing a home and a future for SCI patients in Haiti.

program they are fitted for wheelchairs and taught how to maximize their own mobility; they receive physical and occupational therapy; family members are trained in caregiving; they attend psycho-social support sessions to deal with the emotional trauma that comes with an SCI injury and they have access to vocational training -- like jewelry-making or computer skills. And when they're ready to leave SBHF, a professionally trained team assists with the transition and conducts monthly follow-up visits. To date, 15 locally-hired staff members have been trained in SCI rehabilitation and reintegration.

"We work with people to ensure that they have the support to realize their goals of returning to work, school or parenting," says Betsy Sherwood, the SCI Program Coordinator. "But I think above all this program is important because it's saving lives. Before, most people with SCI's without access to services like these would be discharged back into their communities and could ultimately die from secondary complications," Sherwood says.

And what about Kenny? He now works for SBHF as a peer-educator and wheelchair repair technician. When new SCI people are admitted into the program, Kenny is there to make them feel welcome and help them realize that in Haiti, life doesn't have to end with a disability.

Spinal Cord Injury.

Jean Ricot Buissereth, a Community Rehabilitation Assistant, helps Dominique Jean Louis, an SCI patient injured in the earthquake, with physical therapy at St. Boniface Hospital.