

# ROLAND PARK news

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**Blink of an Eye  
Nonprofit**

*Hillside  
Park  
Update*

**Building Community  
with Thread**





# The Story of Louise Phipps Senft and Blink of an Eye® Nonprofit

By Alhaji Mansaray

## The Origin Story of Blink of an Eye®

When I sat down with Louise Phipps Senft, founder of the nonprofit Blink of an Eye®, her passion for her mission was palpable. The journey that led to the creation of this extraordinary organization is both heart-wrenching and inspiring.

Phipps Senft and her family have been residents of Roland Park for almost 40 years. In 2015, her son Archer, one of the family's five children, experienced a life-altering spinal cord injury (SCI) that turned their world upside down. "In a blink of an eye," she recounts, "our lives were changed forever." The feeling of being overwhelmed and helpless that accompanied this traumatic event was something she never wanted another family to endure.

Phipps Senft founded Blink of an Eye to provide the kind of support and hope she and her family received, as well as access to the best medical and expert information and resources that were sorely lacking or difficult to find during her family's time of need. The nonprofit aims to assist families with everything from creating a care team to paying medical expenses to being connected to best SCI rehabilitation centers. "I felt lost and alone with the medical silos and the complications at every turn of the SCI injury," she says, "and I vowed that no other family should have to do this by themselves." She adds, "Because of our amazing friends, faith community and neighbors in Roland Park, as well as all my children's coaches and school communities and my dear mediation clients from many walks of life, our family survived. But I know many families do not have the big family or community we have."

## The Under-Researched Reality of Spinal Cord Injuries

Spinal cord injuries are an often-overlooked aspect of medical research and support. Acute high spine neck injuries are considered one of the most complicated medical injuries. According to the National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center, there are approximately 17,810 new SCI cases each year in the U.S. alone. Despite these numbers, only a small percentage of hospitals have specialized SCI units. A 2018 study found that fewer than 15 percent of hospitals in the U.S. are equipped to provide specialized care for SCI patients, and less than half of 1 percent have SCI expertise.



*Phipps Senft is part of a rapid response HEAL Team for bedside support for newly injured SCI families in ICUs across the country. This is the McDermott family in Boston. Photos courtesy of Blink of an Eye*

The lack of expertise and resources makes navigating the aftermath of an SCI incredibly challenging for families. Blink of an Eye is working to bridge this gap by providing critical support and advocacy for those affected.

## Key Programs and Services Offered

Blink of an Eye is not just a nonprofit; it is a lifeline for families dealing with SCIs. One of the cornerstone services is the rapid-response HEAL Team, which travels nationwide to offer bedside support to patients and their families in intensive care units within the first days after an SCI. The team provides information and emotional comfort, helping families navigate the complex journey following an SCI. They provide vital bed wound prevention education, as well as information about what to anticipate in the hospital, and how to navigate with medical staff, raise funds, respond to their loved one and family at home, and gather their support team.

Also vital are the organization's SCI Navigators, to whom the HEAL Team hands off each family, placing them in caring hands for 24/7 support. These are people who live with SCI, either themselves or through a family member, so they earn immediate trust. They are trained as family mediators and in trauma-informed support. They offer holistic—mental, emotional and physical—support. "Our navigators understand the journey," Phipps Senft explains, "and they provide a beacon of hope and practical guidance." Blink of an Eye is also a way for SCI Navigators to share their life

experience and give back. Families report their SCI Navigators kept them from slipping into depression and isolation, while helping them find resources they needed.

SCI Navigators are supported by a wrap-around team of prominent SCI medical experts, including local physicians Dr. Bizhan Aarabi at the R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center at the University of Maryland Medical Center, Dr. Cristina Sadowsky at the Kennedy Krieger Institute, Dr. Jamie Wright



*There are approximately 17,810 new SCI cases each year in the U.S.*

## BLINK OF AN EYE®

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at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and Dr. Delia Chiaramonte, an expert in complementary medicine, as well as SCI resource experts knowledgeable in everything from insurance appeals, to fundraising to pay medical bills, to ADA home renovations. “Our SCI Navigators and wrap-around team are well connected from their own life experiences to regional resources, and Blink of an Eye also has national partnerships with United Spinal Association [[unitedspinal.org](http://unitedspinal.org)], New Mobility [[newmobility.com](http://newmobility.com)] and Help Hope Live [[helphopelive.org](http://helphopelive.org)].”

### The Vision for the Future

When asked about the future of Blink of an Eye, Phipps Senft's eyes sparkled with determination. “We aim to bridge the gap for SCI injuries,” she responds. “We want to create a comprehensive trauma-informed Relational resource that addresses and provides support for the psychosocial, spiritual and practical needs for families and their friends for successful navigation of the first 30 days and year, and that addresses and provides best-in-class SCI medical and trauma-informed information for medical teams. I want to partner with a world-class medical institution to make this approach standard operating procedure for all SCI patients. I would love to see Baltimore as the beacon of this new Relational healthcare way for SCI.”

Through its new partnership with Shock Trauma, Blink of an Eye hopes to do just that.



*Fewer than 15 percent of U.S. hospitals have equipment to provide specialized SCI care.*

Phipps Senft envisions a future where Blink of an Eye has catalyzed and created a protocol of bedside HEAL Team support within days of injury, as well as a network of services with a personal SCI Navigator for families during the first 30 days of the crisis. To reach every family, she envisions a digital platform with best-in-class SCI information that is easy to access and understand, with short videos of real people giving expert practical tips and protocols. She and her team are working to design the *SCI PLAYBOOK* by and for SCI families, their friends and medical teams. It will include what to know, what to say and not say, what to ask for, how to treat the patient, how to raise funds, definitions of SCI medical terms, names of vendors and providers, and locations of the best SCI facilities. She is looking for funding and digital design experts now.

She smiles when I asked her about the Blink of an Eye Podcast ([blinkofaneyeye.org/blinkofaneyepodcast](http://blinkofaneyeye.org/blinkofaneyepodcast)), which is ranked the No. 2 SCI podcast by #Feedspot. “The podcast has been an amazing messaging arm for the nonprofit. But the real truth is, I love intimate conversations. As a mediator of over 30 years, I have witnessed the educational power and therapeutic benefit of personal storytelling. That is what the podcast is all about. It’s an intimate forum for others’ voices and life experiences, and I get the joy of also bringing on thoughtful expert guests. We cover trauma, chronic pain management, SCI surgical considerations, medical trials, integrative health and brain science, and spiritual health too...a bunch of cool things.” Phipps Senft pauses and smiles again, saying, “Even though it’s for SCI, the podcast is really for anyone experiencing a medical crisis or catastrophic life event and various ways to cope and thrive. If you haven’t yet listened in, you may want to.” You may also become a podcast sponsor.

I asked her about the next five years. “We have a long way to go, but we hope to have illuminated a deeper understanding of SCI with a nationwide message of the need for Relational trauma support for SCI families. The podcast and *SCI PLAYBOOK* will be how we deliver the message. I see that we will have created here in Baltimore a Relational healthcare ICU model for SCI families that is scalable and replicable. We want to light the way for others. We welcome readers to join in helping us be the go-to practical trauma resource for families facing acute SCI, and also for their friends who are trying to help, and their medical teams grappling with treating a very complicated medical injury, offering everything you need from medical information to emotional support, all with a compassionate understanding of the implications of shock and our human reaction to trauma on health and decision making in the first days and months of crisis.”

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Phipps Senft's message is clear: a life-changing event like an SCI does not signify the end of a fulfilling life. "Yes, there are challenges for sure," she acknowledges, "and there is hope and joy in creating and giving back. I just want to light the way for others. We are so grateful Archer is alive. People living with SCI can live happy, rewarding lives....when they have their village."

She emphasized the importance of preventing isolation and feelings of separation. "Everyone needs to know that they are not alone. There are resources, there is support, and there is a community ready to embrace you."

Blink of an Eye is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the power of community. Through their unwavering dedication, Phipps Senft and the Blink of an Eye team are transforming lives, one family at a time.

Phipps Senft is lighting the way for other SCI families. Her journey from a mother facing a life-altering crisis to the founder of a nonprofit dedicated to supporting families dealing with the trauma of acute high spine SCI is a story of courage, vision and activism. Blink of an Eye is more than just a nonprofit; it is a



*The team is developing the SCI PLAYBOOK, which will include best-in-class information for families, friends and medical teams in the first hours, days and months of an SCI.*

navigation flashlight for families facing the challenging journey of SCI survival and care, and navigating the medical maze and a life of spinal cord injury.

In the words of Phipps Senft herself, "A life-changing event isn't the end of the world. My grandmother always used to say, 'When one door closes, another one opens'. I laugh each time one of our SCI Navigators says that we are now members of a very elite club we never wanted to be members of. But it's true about life, you just never know what might happen to you. We are all on this journey together, spinal cord injured and able-bodied. We can help each other. With the right support, we all benefit."

Through Blink of an Eye, Phipps Senft and the team are on a mission to create an extraordinary experience for any recently injured SCI family,

ensuring that no family ever has to face the journey alone. Their work is a shining example of how one person's vision and determination can make a profound difference in the lives of many. ❖

For more information, visit [BlinkofanEye.org](http://BlinkofanEye.org).

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