



Redefining Possibilities for the  
Spinal Cord Injury and Paralysis Community

# MEDIA KIT



To Whom It May Concern:

In July 2004, my son Darren sustained a spinal cord injury when he dove into shallow water off of our family boat. He broke his neck and was paralyzed from the chest down. He was 18 years old at the time. This catastrophic event led us to form a non-profit organization called Push to Walk to help Darren and others living with spinal cord injuries and paralysis.

The National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center estimated in 2014 that approximately 276,000 people were living with a spinal cord injury (SCI) in the United States. Every year, an additional 12,500 people are diagnosed with SCI and go through rigorous physical rehabilitation to recover their bodies' sensory and motor abilities. But what happens when these people or others with paralysis are discharged from rehabilitation centers and sent home to adjust to a "new normal?" Is there anything to give SCI survivors and others hope for improvement?

In Oakland, New Jersey, Push to Walk exists for the purpose of providing hope to these survivors. Exercise trainers specializing in SCI provide one-on-one individualized exercise sessions. Clients spend each session out of their wheelchairs while using adapted gym equipment to focus on working their whole body – even the areas affected by paralysis. Unlike a regular gym, the equipment and floor plan has been designed with wheelchair users in mind, and the trainers have received certification in methods known to help regain strength and function in people with SCI and other neurological conditions such as brain injury, multiple sclerosis, transverse myelitis and stroke.

Spinal cord injury has been a frequent topic in both the local and national news cycle since Rutgers defensive tackle Eric LeGrand suffered a severe SCI in an October 2010 football game. The public's subsequent interest in SCI has created an opportunity to increase awareness of the long road to recovery that so many survivors of SCI face today and the tools available to them along the way. Push to Walk is the only center of its kind in the northeast, with the next closest facilities located in Boston and North Carolina, making it a valuable resource to people with SCI and other forms of paralysis in this area.

As the Founder and President of Push to Walk, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about our program. Three of our clients are also available for interviews to discuss the benefits of Push to Walk. Each client has seen physical improvements resulting in an increased quality of life. I look forward to speaking with you about how Push to Walk can benefit people with spinal cord injuries and other forms of paralysis.

Sincerely,

*Cynthia Templeton*

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### **Who We Are**

Founded in 2007, Push to Walk is a non-profit organization that provides individualized workouts and resources to people with spinal cord injuries and other forms of paralysis to optimize current quality of life and to prepare for future medical advancements. Our approach is a cutting edge technique encompassing what the medical community terms “Activity Based Training.” A 501(C)3 non-profit, Push to Walk is located in Oakland, New Jersey and is the only non-profit specialized exercise gym in the New York-New Jersey area.

### **Why We Exist**

In July 2004, Darren Templeton, a talented skier and athlete, sustained a C5 spinal cord injury (SCI), resulting in quadriplegia at the age of 18. After completing traditional in-patient and outpatient rehabilitation therapy, Darren was looking for a way to further increase his abilities. To support Darren’s goals, his parents -- John and Cynthia Templeton -- hired a personal trainer and traveled with Darren multiple times to an intensive exercise based program in Carlsbad, California. The Templeton’s cross-country sojourns to and successes there inspired their idea to start a similar program to serve individuals in the New York-New Jersey area. The client population of Push to Walk now includes people with brain injuries, Multiple Sclerosis, transverse myelitis cerebral palsy, and stroke.

### **Scope of the Problem**

In the United States, spinal cord injuries disproportionately affect individuals -- especially men -- in the prime of their personal and professional lives, many of whom lack private health insurance to help them manage their condition.

Some key facts regarding SCI, Traumatic Brain Injury and Multiple Sclerosis:

- Over 276,000 Americans are spinal cord injured.<sup>1</sup>
- The average age of a spinal cord injured person is 42.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.7 million people sustain a Traumatic Brain Injury each year in the U.S.<sup>2</sup>
- The leading causes of TBI are falls (35.2%) and motor vehicle-traffic crashes(17.3%).<sup>2</sup>
- 400,000 Americans have Multiple Sclerosis.<sup>3</sup>
- Women are developing MS twice the rate of men.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Spinal Cord Injury Facts and Figures at a Glance, 2014, <https://www.nscisc.uab.edu/>

<sup>2</sup> [www.brainline.org](http://www.brainline.org)

<sup>3</sup> [www.multiplesclerosis.com](http://www.multiplesclerosis.com)

## **What We Do**

Push to Walk provides activity based exercise programs that help individuals living with spinal cord injuries and paralysis lead higher quality, more productive lives. We aim to provide these services at the lowest possible cost, while still covering our operating expenses.

Using movement and a whole body approach to health, wellness, and fitness, Push to Walk helps clients redefine what's possible by:

- ***Maximizing their physical health and well-being*** -- Clients regain physical strength through workouts that strengthen the entire body and improve the core and balance.
- ***Working toward and achieving optimal function and independence*** -- Based on a professional assessment of their individual abilities and strengths, each client receives a personalized program that is regularly updated to progressively challenge them and constantly take them to new horizons.
- ***Living life as fully and productively as possible*** -- Push to Walk trainers promote confidence and inner fortitude in each client, encouraging everyone to embrace a good work ethic so they see improvement in their daily lives.

## **Achievements**

To date, Push to Walk has served 300 clients and counseled 500 individuals and families in the New York-New Jersey area and from around the United States.

Our clients have made notable progress across all areas of life, such as:

- ***Personal empowerment*** -- Several clients have struggled in their roles as spouses and parents after sustaining a spinal cord injury/diagnosis. By gaining strength, wellness and self-confidence, their positive attitudes are returning, helping them to reintegrate into their family roles, social activities and hobbies they enjoy.
- ***Professional careers*** -- Several of our clients have increased their ability to independently navigate in their office environments, maintaining full time jobs and balancing time for family and exercise.
- ***Adaptive sports*** -- Some of our clients now enjoy participating in wheelchair rugby, hand cycling, adaptive skiing and surfing, boosting their self-confidence and providing a way to connect with friends and family.
- ***Academic achievement*** -- Many of our college age clients have returned to school -- driving independently, living on campus, and decreasing their dependence on personal aides. These young people are participating in many college activities and living life as fully as possible.

## **For More Information**

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### **When does a person with paralysis begin a program with Push to Walk?**

Determining when to join our program depends on individual circumstances. We recommend that anyone who is interested, but unsure if this is the program for them contacts us directly. For those with spinal cord injuries (SCI), we recommend beginning our program in combination with or directly after the conclusion of outpatient services so that the progress that was achieved in therapy is not lost. As for those with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) or cerebral palsy (CP), starting a program at Push to Walk should begin when their doctor recommends it to be appropriate. Lastly, any person with traumatic brain injury (TBI) who would like to start one of our programs may begin when their body is capable of physical activity, though we still recommend consulting your doctor first.

### **How is what Push to Walk offers different from Physical Therapy (PT) and Occupational Therapy (OT)?**

Our program is like an intensive gym workout, done completely out of the wheelchair, with one-on-one attention from a trainer for the entire session. It is in no way a substitute for *rehabilitative* therapies like Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy, which are absolutely necessary after paralysis. Our program is key to maintaining gains made during previous rehab sessions, improving activities of daily living, and establishing new goals.

### **How is a Push to Walk program different from having a personal trainer at a regular gym?**

Our trainers are educated in methods shown to work with people who have spinal cord injuries, Multiple Sclerosis, traumatic brain injuries, and other forms of paralysis. They have nationally recognized certifications from the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) and the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM), and participate in continuing education and specialized courses. Our gym is entirely accessible to people with paralysis; many workout gyms are difficult to navigate in a wheelchair, don't always have wheelchair accessible machines and don't usually have staff knowledgeable in helping a person with paralysis.

### **How does a person with paralysis begin exercising at Push to Walk?**

Potential clients must complete an application packet. Once received and reviewed, a free **two-hour** initial evaluation is scheduled.

### **What progress can a client expect to make working with Push to Walk?**

Every client is different. In general, clients can expect to see a difference in strength, particularly in their core, which will make activities of daily life easier. Goals are created for clients based on their capabilities. For example, if a client is not able to sit in his chair with proper posture, we will focus on improving the way he sits by performing exercises specific to sitting upright. We also practice gait training using walkers or the weight-assisted treadmill system. The level of

injuries/diagnoses and stages of our clients vary, but when possible, we add a locomotor training component to each workout which we modify according to their capabilities.

### **What equipment is used?**

Our gym has state-of-the art equipment including the an adductor machine, weight-assisted treadmill, Keiser Infinity performance trainer, SCI-Fit arm cycle, Total Gym 26000, EZ Stand Glider, spin bike, hip/glute machine, parallel bars, RT 300 FES Bike, RT 200 FES Elliptical, RT600 Step & Stand, Xcite FES Clinical Station, GHS II Walker, Rifton Tram Walker, LiteGait, and an Galileo Delta A Tilt Table. A complete list of equipment is described in [Our Gym](#) page (link).

In addition to our equipment, hands-on and manual training is implemented to individualize the proper stimulation to each one of our clients. This allows the trainer to receive direct feedback from and respond accordingly to the client's body.

### **How does Push to Walk make their services affordable to clients?**

Workouts at Push to Walk are generally not covered by insurance. Clients must pay out of pocket for each exercise workout. However, we make every effort to assist clients in submitting invoices for insurance reimbursement, and providing documentation if needed. We will also assist with Worker's Comp payment if an injury was sustained on the job. We strive to keep the cost down as much as possible. Client fees cover approximately 70% of operating expenses (rent, utilities, salaries, etc), and Push to Walk has chosen to make up the balance through fund raising and grant writing. Since our opening in 2007, our Annual Golf Outing, Casino Night, and Beefsteak have helped offset costs for our program. Team Push to Walk's participation in The NJ Marathon has also raised funds, most of which has been for the Client Scholarship Fund helping those in financial need. Individual donations and other fund raising efforts are a necessary and important component of Push to Walk's program each and every year.

### **Do other organizations provide services that are similar to Push to Walk?**

While there are excellent medical facilities in the metropolitan area, there are no other specialized gyms for people with SCI, MS, TBI and other forms of paralysis in this region. People travel long distances to come to our program because there is nothing else like this in a very large geographical area.

### **How many clients does Push to Walk serve?**

On average, we have 65 clients participating in our exercise program in our gym once or twice a week. Since opening our doors in 2007, we have served more than 300 clients and counseled at least 500 individuals and families on how to address a variety of issues related to living with paralysis.

## **Cynthia Templeton, Founder & Community Partnerships Coordinator**



Cynthia Templeton was inspired to start Push to Walk after her son, Darren, sustained a spinal cord injury and was able to successfully improve his condition through a specialized exercise program in Carlsbad, California. From the opening until the end of 2016, Cynthia managed the daily operation of Push to Walk, including financial operations, marketing and publicity. In January 2017, she plans to stay involved and maintain regular contact with clients and family members, assist with building collaborative partnerships and work on special projects to build the Push to Walk brand in the community. Prior to founding Push to Walk, she owned and managed her own hockey company for five years that imported and printed hockey pucks. She holds an Undergraduate Degree in Social Work from Kean University in Union, New Jersey.

## **Darren Templeton, Co-Founder**



Darren Templeton sustained a spinal cord injury in July 2004, at the age of 18, which left him paralyzed from the chest down. Through his own experience in a similar exercise program, Darren saw firsthand the potential that specialized exercise holds for helping people who are paralyzed regain strength and mobility.

In 2007, Darren joined his parents, Cynthia and John, in founding Push to Walk to bring similar services to clients in the New York – New Jersey area. Darren is involved in strategic planning, special projects and client contact and advises on marketing and educational outreach. His input is invaluable as both a Push to Walk founder and client. Darren graduated from Ramapo College in 2009 with his degree in finance and completed his MBA in Supply Chain Management at Rutgers – Newark in May 2011. After working at ISP/Ashland Inc. as a Supply Chain Analyst for three years, he joined Millennium Technologies as their Director of Operations in January 2015.

## **John Templeton, Co-Founder**



John Templeton co-founded Push to Walk with his wife, Cynthia, and their son, Darren and currently serves as a strategic advisor to the organization. John is a successful salesman and entrepreneur who has owned his own business, Millennium Technologies, since 1995. He assists Push to Walk with overall operations, long term planning, and strategy development.





## Life on My Own

Christan Zaccagnino is a successful and driven 27-year-old woman who suffered a C6/C7 spinal cord injury (SCI) at the age of ten while diving into her backyard swimming pool. Initially unable to control anything below her neck, Christan underwent years of traditional rehabilitation and therapeutic interventions and regained function well below her level of injury -- including control of her upper body and feeling and movement in her legs. She now continues her quest for improved function at Push to Walk. With 17 years of experience as a spinal cord injury survivor, she is well-informed on the current avenues of SCI research and knows what her body needs in order to thrive.

"It's so important to maintain your strength when you have a spinal cord injury!" she says. Christan addresses this need by making the 40 minute drive to Push to Walk in Riverdale, New Jersey from her home in Port Chester, New York. There are regular exercise gyms that are closer to her, but she says what she truly benefits from is the intensive program at Push to Walk. According to Christan, Push to Walk's trainers provide me with everything I need as a person with a spinal cord injury to keep my body healthy and strong. I never have to worry that they're going to give me less than 100% of their effort."

*"Because of what I've achieved at Push to Walk, I'm able to live 90% of my life on my own."*

Christan has been a regular client of Push to Walk since 2007, and her dedication has paid off in ways that affect her quality of life. The strength she has gained in her abs and hips has improved her ability to transfer out of and into her wheelchair and helped her live independently. "Because of what I've achieved at Push to Walk, I'm able to live 90% of my life on my own, without assistance," she says.

Her commitment to the program is not to be understated. When she broke her leg in the summer of 2010, she was back at Push to Walk a week after the surgery. "I wasn't able to put weight on that leg, but I wasn't going to let my other muscles suffer because of it," she says. "If you don't use it, you lose it."

Like all the clients at Push to Walk, Christan receives one-on-one sessions from a trainer specialized in spinal cord injury methods. "My trainer gets me out of my chair and makes me feel like I'm working out as if I never had an injury," she says. "The equipment is adapted to my needs so that I can use it to the best of my ability."

When not exercising at Push to Walk, Christan leads a full and busy life. She currently works as a real estate agent and recently graduated with her Master's Degree in Public Relations. There is a balance to her life that she strives every day to maintain. She says that some people with an SCI live their lives focused only on therapy and rehabilitation and forget to try and enjoy what they have. Others give up hope and adapt to life as it is without trying to see what it could be. Christan avoids these extremes and strives for the middle road -- a road that takes her regularly to Push to Walk.





## Improvements with Meaningful Impact

On July 4, 2009, Gianfranco Gervasio was hosting his friends at his Saddle Brook home. They were enjoying a typical Fourth of July celebration complete with a swimming pool and barbeque, but everything changed the instant Gianfranco dove too deeply into the pool and hit his head against the bottom.

The dive changed his life, as he sustained what is known as a C5 spinal cord injury. A C5 injury is a high spinal cord injury that often results in difficulty controlling the upper and lower body. Gianfranco was told he would never walk again nor would he have full control of his body.

The first year of rehab and recovery was a frustrating period for Gianfranco, but he celebrated every small victory that gave him more independence in daily activities. Even something as simple as brushing his teeth without becoming exhausted was noteworthy. "It might seem trivial to a lot of people, but for me it was a huge accomplishment," he explains.

Gianfranco's desire and motivation for increased independence led him to Push to Walk for an individualized, intense exercise routine. He's been a client for a year, and he feels that the gains he has made have positively impacted his quality of life. It's easier for him to get out of bed on his own, and he can transfer himself from the couch to his wheelchair with minimal help. What may seem like small improvements to others are very meaningful steps forward on the path to independence for Gianfranco.

*"Push to Walk has been one of the best things to happen to me since the accident."*

"Push to Walk has been one of the best things to happen to me since the accident. I know I'm going to become stronger and more independent," Gianfranco says. That's important, as he has plans to go to college and pursue a four-year degree. He also points out that there is more than just a physical benefit to working out at Push to Walk. "I'm happy that when I go there I get to meet new people who are in my situation. It's good to be able to relate to people."

Ultimately, Gianfranco feels that it's the individualized attention that he receives at Push to Walk that has helped him the most. Having a trainer work one-on-one means he spends his time at the gym out of his wheelchair, which he appreciates after sitting in the same position all day. "I credit my success to the one-on-one training," he says. "The trainers give me hope for improvement, and they're teaching me about my body. I'm learning more here than I did anywhere else."

Even though the pool changed his life, Gianfranco says he cannot wait to get back into one. He looks forward to using his sister's new in-ground pool next summer to help him stay fit – along with his regular sessions at Push to Walk



## Strength of Body and of Mind

Lori Douma has never let her spinal cord injury keep her from living her life. Transverse myelitis, a neurological condition that affects Lori's spinal cord at the 12th thoracic vertebra, paralyzed her from the waist down in February 2001 when she was 23. Six months later, she traded busy days at the rehab facility for busier days of graduate school and outpatient therapy. It took two years for Lori to finish her master's degree in speech-language pathology and begin working with special needs children. "I didn't ever want time off," she explains, "and my family was so supportive. They said, 'You're going to school and to therapy. We're going to figure this out.'"

Part of that process involved Lori moving to California on her own for three months to attend Project Walk's Spinal Cord Injury Recovery Program in 2003. She followed an at-home program for years using the techniques she learned there, but in 2008 she discovered that a facility had opened in New Jersey using the same methods she'd seen at Project Walk. "I couldn't believe what I was reading," she says of the moment she first learned of Push to Walk. "It was hard having the at-home program because we didn't have all the equipment, but we did our best. And then to find out that there was a facility about a mile and a half from my house! I was a client within a week."

*"When I first started at Push to Walk, I needed two people to help me stand. Now I only need one person."*

Lori has regular one-on-one sessions with an exercise trainer who specializes in spinal cord injury methods. Twice a week, she works out for 90 to 120 minutes in a challenging routine. "I've lost weight, and my flexibility has increased. Sitting in a wheelchair for full days of work gave me very tight hamstrings and hip flexors. When I first started at Push to Walk, I needed two people to help me stand. Now I only need one person. My core, back muscles, and butt muscles have more strength, and I have more energy and stamina."

These are benefits Lori doesn't believe she could have obtained by attending a regular gym. The floor plan and equipment placement at her local gym contained too many tight turns to make it easy to navigate in a wheelchair, and some equipment was not accessible. The equipment at Push to Walk is adapted for use by people in wheelchairs, and Lori is comfortable knowing that her trainer is educated in how to keep a person with a spinal cord injury healthy. "A regular trainer may think that they're pushing me through a challenging set," she says, "but the trainers at Push to Walk know that the spinal cord regulates the body's temperature system and it's easy and dangerous for a person with an SCI to become overheated."

It's not just the trainers at Push to Walk who understand what Lori's body is going through. A sense of community has flourished among gym members. "I've become really good friends with a few other clients, and many of us are friends on Facebook. It's like being in a gym and hanging out with your friends – we get in trouble for talking too much!" she jokes with a laugh. "And even if we don't talk, it just helps to know you're not alone."

While the physical benefits that Push to Walk can provide are what its clients come looking for initially, these mental benefits are just as important, for no one should feel alone in their fight. For Lori and others, Push to Walk helps bring strength both to the body and to the mind.