

Meet MSKTC Ambassador Juan Garibay

Overview



When Juan was 20 years old, he was part of a gang. During that time, he was shot, and he sustained a spinal cord injury (SCI). After his SCI, Juan's life changed for good. While he was in prison, Juan thought about his life; he decided to change and become a good citizen. When he got out of prison, Juan volunteered at the Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center. In this role, he helped others with SCI. In 1999, he got a scholarship from Rancho Research Institute (RRI). It was part of a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. Later, he was the program manager at the Rancho Violence Recovery and Prevention Program. In this role, he helped patients who were newly injured by violence or an assault. His experience as an SCI survivor inspires his family and others to overcome the obstacles in their lives.

Fun Facts About Juan

Juan has a great sense of humor and loves a good joke. He played wheelchair basketball with the Rancho Renegades for 15 years. He is also an avid skier. As a father and grandfather, Juan wants to stay youthful so that he can keep playing with his grandchildren. Juan expects to graduate from Los Angeles Harbor College in the spring of 2023 with four associates in arts degrees. The degrees are in Arts and Humanities, Health and Fitness, Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Psychology. He plans to transfer to California State University in the fall of 2023. He will pursue a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in sociology. He wants to continue his work at RRI to create and develop programs that will help people overcome the obstacles that come with living with a disability. He plans to become a teacher at the community college he attends.

The MSKTC resources are really useful for people with SCI, especially those newly injured. They help people with SCI know how their bodies may change so that they can be prepared to address their challenges properly. They help answer the questions that patients and families may have and give people hope that SCI can be managed.

I want to thank the MSKTC for the opportunity to be an ambassador. This is definitely something needed for people with disabilities to let them know that life continues regardless what you face.

Why did Juan want to be an MSKTC ambassador?

Juan believes it is important to share the MSKTC's research-based information, especially with people with a new SCI. For people with an SCI, Juan has shown them that there is hope and that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Juan is grateful for the support he received when he was first injured. Such support was like a bridge for Juan to a full and productive life. He wants to be that bridge for others. He also wants to let people know that their lives are not over because of their SCI.

What did Juan do as an ambassador?

Juan has used MSKTC's resources on SCI to educate patients with SCI and their families. He prints out MSKTC's resources and gives them to patients when he visits them. Juan also talks about MSKTC's resources when he goes to support groups for people with SCI. He includes his MSKTC ambassador title as part of his email signature. He also includes a link to the MSKTC's website so that people can find those resources. In the future, he plans to offer MSKTC's resources at resource fairs and in RRI newsletters.

