

# Reclaiming Life

## Young Stroke Survivors Bond, Build Community

BY ANNALISE DE ZOETE

**K**aren Dionne and Libby Schnabel are an ambitious pair.

They have already met their 2010 goals of starting a support group for young stroke survivors and families, creating a website and hosting a stroke awareness and fundraising event. Given this list of recently completed activities and continuing pursuits, it may be surprising to learn that these two young women are only three years into their post-stroke recovery.

On March 2, 2007, 37-year-old Dionne suffered a hemorrhagic stroke. She spent 10 days in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and three weeks in an inpatient therapy setting where she diligently worked to regain balance, mobility and use of her left side.

A little more than a year later, Schnabel, 27, had an ischemic stroke. She spent 21 days in the ICU hooked up to feeding tubes and ventilators. As she continued



improving throughout the next three months, she was moved to different settings. One of her hospital stays was in the same bed Dionne had stayed months before.

The two women were introduced by a psychologist who had seen them both. The psychologist hoped that Dionne's determination and goals would inspire and assist Schnabel in her rehabilitation.

Their meeting did more than that.

"Although our strokes occurred one year apart," Dionne says, "we became friends armed with the ideals of getting better and stronger with the mindset that our strokes will not beat us."


The duo actively works to "reclaim

themselves"—a phrase that has become their motto.

Independently, they're committed to their rehabilitation, with Schnabel walking 5 miles a day on her treadmill and Dionne having recently completed her first 5K race. Together they're accomplishing their goals for 2010.

In February, their support group for young stroke survivors and their families, Reclaiming Ourselves, met for the first time. The women forged ahead, hosting their first fundraiser on May 8, 2010. The event received numerous corporate sponsors, featured a live band and guest speaker Dr. Brian Knott, a renowned Seattle-area doctor.

In addition, Dionne and Schnabel have created a website, [reclaimingourselves.com](http://reclaimingourselves.com), that provides information about their support group, events and lists various resources for stroke survivors and caregivers. Their website reaches numerous young stroke survivors around the country who feel isolated and need hope and encouragement.

Though neither of them ever imagined they'd be recovering from stroke at such a young age, Dionne and Schnabel are using their experiences to spread hope. Their dedication to making a difference in the world of stroke, especially for young survivors, is a testament to their personal reclamation. 

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### UNIQUE STROKE SYMPTOMS IN WOMEN

In addition to common stroke symptoms, women report unique stroke symptoms such as:

- Sudden face and limb pain.
- Sudden hiccups.
- Sudden nausea.
- Sudden general weakness.
- Sudden chest pain.
- Sudden shortness of breath.
- Sudden palpitations.

Know how stroke can uniquely impact women. For more information on women and stroke visit [stroke.org/women](http://stroke.org/women).