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Shelburne and Orangeville hold first flag-raising ceremonies in Canada, marking June as Brain Injury Awareness Month

Written By JOSHUA DRAKES

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

When the Town of Shelburne hosted a flag-raising for Brain Injury Awareness Month on June 1, it was significant in several ways.

Shelburne was the first municipality in Dufferin County and all of Canada to fly the flag. Orangeville followed on June 2.

Marked each year in June, Brain Injury Awareness Month is meant to raise awareness for those living with or supporting people with brain injuries. The campaign started as grassroots movements hoping to band together and offer mutual support when no systems existed.

This year, however, is special.

Wendy Cook, who oversaw both the Shelburne and Orangeville flag raisings, said that for the first time ever, the Ontario Brain Injury Association (OBIA), and by extension Headwaters Acquired Brain Injury (HABI) group, is raising its own dedicated flag. The goal is to send a clear message that help is available and offered locally. This flag was officially dedicated to Katie Lang, who has an acquired brain injury, and Cook's son, Keaton Cook, who also had a brain injury and passed away in 2024.

?We want families and caregivers to know, and siblings and community friends to know that there's brain injury support in this community,? she said. ?June is Brain Injury Awareness Month, so when you see this flag go up, you know that the community flying it supports you.?

Cook also highlighted the significance of a flag-raising for this campaign.

?This is the first time a flag has gone up for Brain Injury Awareness month,? she said. ?We've come a very long way from our beginnings. When Keaton came home from the hospital years ago, there was nothing, almost no support.?

?Then there was one couple who had had a brain injury from a car accident who showed up at my door and said, ?Hey, we're here for you. Is there anything we can provide for you?' Eighteen years later, HABI, the Headwaters Acquired Brain Injury group, came from that knock on the door.?

Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills said that the town remains committed to supporting residents with brain injuries.

?We're very happy to be out here today to fly this new flag and proclaim June as Brain Injury Awareness Month,? he said following the flag raising on June 1.

?June is a busy month of awareness events, so we're happy to kick things off with this one here today, and hopefully help the community become more aware of brain injuries and the impact they can have on folks.?

The sentiment was shared in Orangeville, which held its own flag-raising the following day, June 2.

Mayor Lisa Post attended the flag raising and acknowledged the importance of public awareness and mutual support.

?Like how Wendy Cook said in her remarks, it's really important that everybody in our community knows that there are resources, and this is a great campaign to help raise awareness about the services that we do have here in Dufferin,? she said. ?We are unique

that way, thanks to the advocacy of lots of great people in this community, we have services and support to offer folks who are struggling.?

The flags represent an ongoing campaign that is seeing results. Support groups continue to form, advocacy gets stronger, and stigmas are reduced.