

# California Student Who “Surpassed The Odds” Wins Traumatic Brain Injury Scholarship Award

*California art student announced as the latest recipient of New York brain injury attorneys De Caro & Kaplen, LLP's Traumatic Brain Injury Scholarship award.*

PLEASANTVILLE, NEW YORK, USA, October 3, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In 2016, 26 year old art student, and aspiring teacher, Luis Fierro Rios' life changed forever.

Fierro Rios was in his first semester of the M.F.A- Master of Fine Art program at California State University of Fullerton when he was struck by a van

during a class outing. Fierro Rios recalls, “As part of an outdoor painting class, we were visiting a hiking mountain to learn and paint the scenery. When I returned to the car, I crossed the road and I was struck by a van going at speeds of about 40 mph.”

“

It is important for our life to have a purpose and [in teaching] I have found mine. I encourage everyone I meet to unlock their full potential of the brain and to never give up on their dreams.”

*Luis Fierro Rios*



Shana De Caro & Michael V. Kaplen with 2019 Traumatic Brain Injury Scholarship winner Luis Fierro Rios

Fierro Rios was rushed to Los Angeles County USC Medical Center by helicopter, where a left hemicraniectomy was performed — a surgical procedure where a large flap of the skull is removed to reduce intracranial pressure on a swollen brain.

Fierro Rios' physical and psychological health have been permanently affected, “I sustained severe trauma to my

head and my skull fractured in the impact. This surgery had to be done to treat the swelling of

my brain, but it also left my brain unprotected with my scalp as the only shield. I was in a coma for about two and a half weeks, and when I woke up, I was a different man. Over time there was no recovery but instead a decline in both physical and psychological health.”

Indeed, Fierro Rios’ injuries were so serious that doctors feared he would never walk again, “My right side of my body was paralyzing. I was also in a wheelchair and my family was told I was never going to walk again.”

But Fierro Rios was determined to prove the doctors wrong. Nine months after the accident, another operation was performed, followed by two months of therapy as an in-patient. “A team of physical, speech and the occupational therapist did everything possible for me to improve as much as possible along with my determination to be normal again. I felt like an infant which had to relearn mostly everything.”

During his time at the hospital Fierro Rios rediscovered his passion for art and determined to resume his education, “Occupational therapy began to introduce art and it sparked memories, thoughts, and ambitions to be an artist and use my skills to teach others once again.”

Enrollment in a community college helped prepare Fierro Rios for University, but he also realized he would have to overcome the difficulties in social interactions to achieve his goals, “This experience taught me what I needed to improve including higher levels of thinking and even social interaction. Before the accident, I wanted to be a college professor but now after exploring more options, I decided to teach students at a high school level.”

To help with his social skills, he began a part-time teaching job in an afterschool children’s art program, before enrolling in the single subject ‘Teaching Credential in Art’ at California State University of Long Beach, “ I went above my



Michael V. Kaplen



Shana De Caro

disability and obtained a part-time job teaching in an afterschool children's art program. Then I began University. The feeling of starting the single subject teaching credential in art was exhilarating."

In September 2019, Fierro Rios' dedication to overcoming his disability was recognized by New York brain injury lawyers, [De Caro & Kaplen](#), LLP, when he was selected as the recipient of their annual [Traumatic Brain Injury Scholarship](#) award.

In presenting the award — a check for \$1,000 to assist with education and living costs — De Caro & Kaplen, partners Shana De Caro and Michael V. Kaplen said, "It is always difficult to select the winner of our award. Each applicant has a unique, and deeply moving story of his or her experience with brain injury. But something every applicant has in common is the determination to continue to pursue his or her dreams. We were impressed by Mr. Fierro Rios' drive to resume his education, but also his bravery in continuing to pursue a career in teaching. Social interactions can be difficult after brain injury, so it would have been easy for Mr Fierro Rios to choose a less interactive career. But Mr Fierro Rios has refused to let his injury control his future, and we hope that our scholarship will help him achieve his goals."

Now 29, Luis Fierro Rios believes he has 'surpassed the odds' and encourages other individuals with a disability not to give up on their dreams, "It is important for our life to have a purpose and [in teaching] I have found mine. Without them, we have no future to look forward to. I encourage everyone I meet including kids and individuals with a disability to unlock their full potential of the brain and to never give up on their dreams. The brain is capable of so much including healing. Many individuals didn't believe I would get better but I surpassed the odds by transcending from my disability."

The Traumatic Brain Injury Scholarship award is presented by New York brain injury lawyers De Caro & Kaplen, LLP and is open to students in the USA who have sustained a traumatic brain injury. Applications for next years award will open in March 2020.

Michael V. Kaplen  
De Caro & Kaplen, LLP  
(914) 747 4410  
[email us here](#)

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