

University rallies to help stabbing victim

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Kofi Ampong doesn't get upset when he thinks about being confined to a wheelchair indefinitely.

He doesn't cry when he thinks about the brutal attack that led to his partial paralysis. He thinks only of his future and how important his past relationships have become to his wellbeing.

"If I hadn't attended St. Thomas University, if I hadn't become involved in the students' union and if I hadn't made the lifelong friendships that I did, I believe I would've been left for dead," Ampong said. "I will be forever indebted to the university community."

Ampong moved to Moncton after completing an economics major at the liberal arts university in Fredericton in 2005.

He wanted to find a place of his own and a job that suited his passion for business. But instead he found pain.

On Sept. 1, 2007, Ampong was surrounded and beaten by four men outside of a popular nightclub in Moncton. He was stabbed in the neck and in the chest.

The injuries damaged his spinal cord and took away the use of his legs.

"I came to the Maritimes as an international student from Ghana, but while I was in the hospital trying to recover, my Visa and papers expired," he said. "I lost my medical coverage and my status in Canada."

Fresh out of school with little savings, Ampong had to hire a lawyer to look after the paperwork and try to get him permanent Canadian residency.

He had to purchase a wheelchair and needed physio and occupational therapy.

"Thankfully, the ministry of health in Moncton stepped in and as a compassionate gesture, helped with some of the medical costs," Ampong said. "But I am in a financial mess. I have legal fees and medical and equipment expenses that I'm not sure how to pay for."

That's where Ampong's relationship with the St. Thomas community became important for the first time since completing his education there.

One of his former professors learned of his struggles and started the Friends of Kofi group.

The project, in partnership with the current students' union, aims to raise money to help Ampong with his expenses.

"I didn't know Kofi (Ampong) personally, but he made quite an impression on other people at the university," said Duncan Gallant, vice-president of the St. Thomas Students' Union. "This university is like Kofi's family and as a former student, he's one of us. We just want to do all we can to help him."

The Friends of Kofi group is asking for donations from the university and general community. It has joined forces with a local restaurant in an effort to generate for funds for Ampong.

"Caribbean Flavas on York Street is offering a Kofi smoothie and a Kofi club sandwich and a portion of the money from each of those will go into the Friends of Kofi fund," Gallant said. "The restaurant is also offering to donate a portion of the proceeds from appetizers sold on Tuesday nights."

In addition to working with Caribbean Flavas, the Friends of Kofi group will be selling Kofi buttons and raising money in a variety of other ways at the university campus.

"It's overwhelming to know that the university community is doing this for me," Ampong said. "I know that I can still have a good future ahead of me when I have friends like those at St. Thomas looking out for me. I cannot thank them enough."

Ampong said just knowing someone cares about him is enough to help him gather the strength to get through the painful physiotherapy and adjust to his new way of life.