

Friends help stabbing victim get his life back on track

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Ghana native was paralyzed after stabbing outside Moncton nightclub in 2007

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Kofi Ampong just wants some peace of mind.

The 26-year-old native of Ghana, in western Africa, moved to New Brunswick in 2001 to study economics at St. Thomas University, where he played varsity soccer, wrote for the student newspaper, was a member of the debating team and served as vice-president of the student union.

After graduation, Ampong moved to Dieppe, where he lives with his fiance. He was beaten by four men and stabbed in the neck and chest outside a Moncton nightclub in 2007.

The injuries damaged his spinal cord and have left him confined to a wheelchair, but he is determined to resume the activities he once enjoyed even though medical and legal bills have left him \$23,000 in debt.

While in hospital, his visa and immigration papers expired, so he lost all of his medical coverage and status in Canada. New Brunswick's Department of Health eventually intervened as a compassionate gesture and assisted with some medical expenses, and lawyers eventually were able to get him permanent Canadian residency papers.

If police can look after their investigation into the beating incident and his medical and legal bills can be taken care of, Ampong can finally get the peace of mind he so desperately desires.

"I've been lucky," he said during an interview yesterday. "So many people have helped me.

"God bless the people who have helped me."

One of Ampong's former professors at St. Thomas has started a Friends of Kofi group, which has been raising money on campus and in Fredericton to help the economics major, who is not working yet, but expects to once he feels better.

A downtown Fredericton restaurant, Caribbean Flavas on York Street, is selling Kofi smoothies and Kofi sandwiches to raise money for Ampong.

The restaurant's owner, who identifies himself as simply Naz from Trinidad, is a former University of New Brunswick student and remembers Ampong from his days in Fredericton.

"When I put my business plan together for an international restaurant in Fredericton, my professors gave me my bad grade and said it would fail," Naz said.

"Now, we are busy and we were voted the best restaurant in New Brunswick in an online poll. I've had lots of celebrities, like Akon and Leonard Cohen compliment the restaurant. Akon wanted me to send my food to him when he was in Winnipeg.

"I also had banks and government agencies turn me down. Everyone likes to say they welcome immigrants, but it is difficult."

Naz is encouraging restaurants in Metro Moncton to get involved in fundraising projects similar to his in Fredericton.

"I am also a DJ, so I've offered to come to some clubs in Moncton for a special Kofi night so we can turn the proceeds over to him. I hope it works out. He deserves it."