

*Achieve*

**RAMP LESS TRAVELED  
BRAND STRATEGY**

## THE NEED

A spinal cord injury changes every aspect of a person's life. Tasks that once seemed simple suddenly become daunting, and future plans and goals have to be altered. One of the biggest challenges following a spinal cord injury can be transitioning or returning to college. Students with a spinal cord injury encounter numerous obstacles when going to college post-injury. Often, students and their caregivers need help seeing the benefits of returning or attending college as well as assistance in navigating the process.

## THE STATS

In the United States, there are 12,000 spinal cord injuries per year (NSCISC, 2013 p.1). Approximately 273,000 Americans are currently living with spinal cord injuries and it costs roughly \$3 billion to manage care for this group of people (NSCISC, 2013 p.1). Although there are several causes of spinal cord injuries, injury primarily results from car accidents, falls, sporting accidents, violence and other non-foreseeable crises (NSCISC, 2013 p.1).

The primary demographic for spinal cord injuries is men (80%) and the average age of people with injury is 35 years; however, the most common age of injury is 19 years old (NSCISC, 2013 p.13). Nearly a quarter of all injuries occur between the ages of 17 and 22 years old (NSCISC, 2013 p.13). More than 60% of those with injury were at least high school graduates at time of injury (NSCISC, 2013 p.14).

For those with a spinal cord injury, timing is a critical part of recovery. Timing is not only important in the rehabilitation process, but also for returning to normal life routines. Research shows that the further out a person is from the date of injury, the less likely that individual will obtain their college degree. This makes it imperative that students have the resources they need shortly after injury to apply for and attend college. Around 48% of those with spinal cord injury receive their bachelor's degrees within the first five years of injury (Appendix B).

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**There is a sizable group of 17-22 year-olds with spinal cord injuries who have a five-year window to attend college before the likelihood of receiving higher education dramatically drops.**

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

To better understand the day-to-day challenges that these students face, we spoke with a variety of people who have close involvement with students with spinal cord injuries.

The interviews conducted included the following individuals:

- Current college student
- Former college student on a successful career path
- Parent of a current college student
- Psychologist at a rehabilitation center
- Executive at a rehabilitation center
- University staff member from the disability department

There were several common themes that emerged during the interviews. First, students with spinal cord injuries need a certain level of confidence to pursue their dreams, although those dreams may have altered from those prior to injury. Second, students with spinal cord injuries need access to the tools necessary to achieve independence and success throughout college. Third, students with spinal cord injuries need support from their communities to help normalize their experience and integrate into everyday life.

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**Students with spinal cord injury want confidence, independence and support to integrate into everyday life.**

## SWOT ANALYSIS

### Strengths

No other organization provides the services that Ramp does, pairing a student with a mentor who helps them navigate the higher education world. In addition, Ramp has a powerful success story to build its brand and mission. The Ramp team has a close connection to the target market, because they have direct experience with students with spinal cord injury. Also, the market is clearly defined, which makes for a very focused vision moving forward.

### Weaknesses

There is a lack of general awareness on spinal cord injury. The market is also relatively small, which is a benefit, but could also prove challenging at times. In addition, Ramp currently relies heavily on Jay's personal story, so it will be important to expand to additional success stories in the future.

### Opportunities

The issue that Ramp is targeting is unique and is not being addressed by other organizations. Being a new organization, Ramp has the opportunity to build energy and excitement around the issue as well as provide clear stories as illustrations of why the issue is important.

### Threats

The primary threats in the market are other organizations that will be competing for attention and funding, including spinal cord rehabilitation centers, disability technology companies, other scholarship organizations and various spinal cord organizations. In addition, there is a strong inclination for those with spinal cord injuries to not attend college at all because of the numerous obstacles they will face.

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**Ramp is serving a niche market in higher education where there is a clear need for student support.**

## TARGET MARKET

Ramp's primary market is high school graduates between the years of 2011-2016, which will change every year to align with current high school and college students. From the age of 17 to 22 years old there are nearly 3,000 new cases each year of those with a spinal cord injury. Since the target market is an age span of 6 years, the target market consists of roughly 18,000 people in any given year.

- Target: HS graduates from 2011-2016
- 12,000 spinal cord cases each year
- 24.7% of all cases are between the ages of 17-22
- This equals 2,964 cases a year in the target market
- 2,964 multiplied by the six year target market is 17,784

Common traits for individuals in the target market include having been injured within the past 1-5 years, coming from a background of being independent and ambitious, having had plans for the future or attending college and are promising individuals with a successful academic track record.

The secondary market that Ramp will target is the caregivers of those with spinal cord injury. Many parents and caregivers will be the ones who research colleges and help the student apply and attend college successfully. The traits of this market include being supportive and involved in the student's life and future, valuing higher education, being dedicated to the student's success and being able to afford higher education.

The third market that Ramp should consider will be donors. These are people who care about Jay and his story, know someone with spinal cord injury or are passionate about higher education for those with disabilities. Donors will be motivated to give through an emotional connection to the cause because of a relationship with the beneficiary, which can be created through personal stories of success.

Lastly, since Ramp will be marketing its services to currently rehab patients, a final market is the hospitals and rehabilitation centers. It will be important to get their buy-in to Ramp's services so that they can effectively reach the patients.

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**Ramp is targeting ambitious high school graduates from 2011-2016, which equates to roughly 18,000 potential applicants a year.**

# RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

Ramp is unique in providing social, emotional, and financial support to college students with spinal cord injury. However, there are several organizations that also grant scholarship money to those with spinal cord injury and support students in ways other than mentorship. Below is a list of primary competitors in the United States:

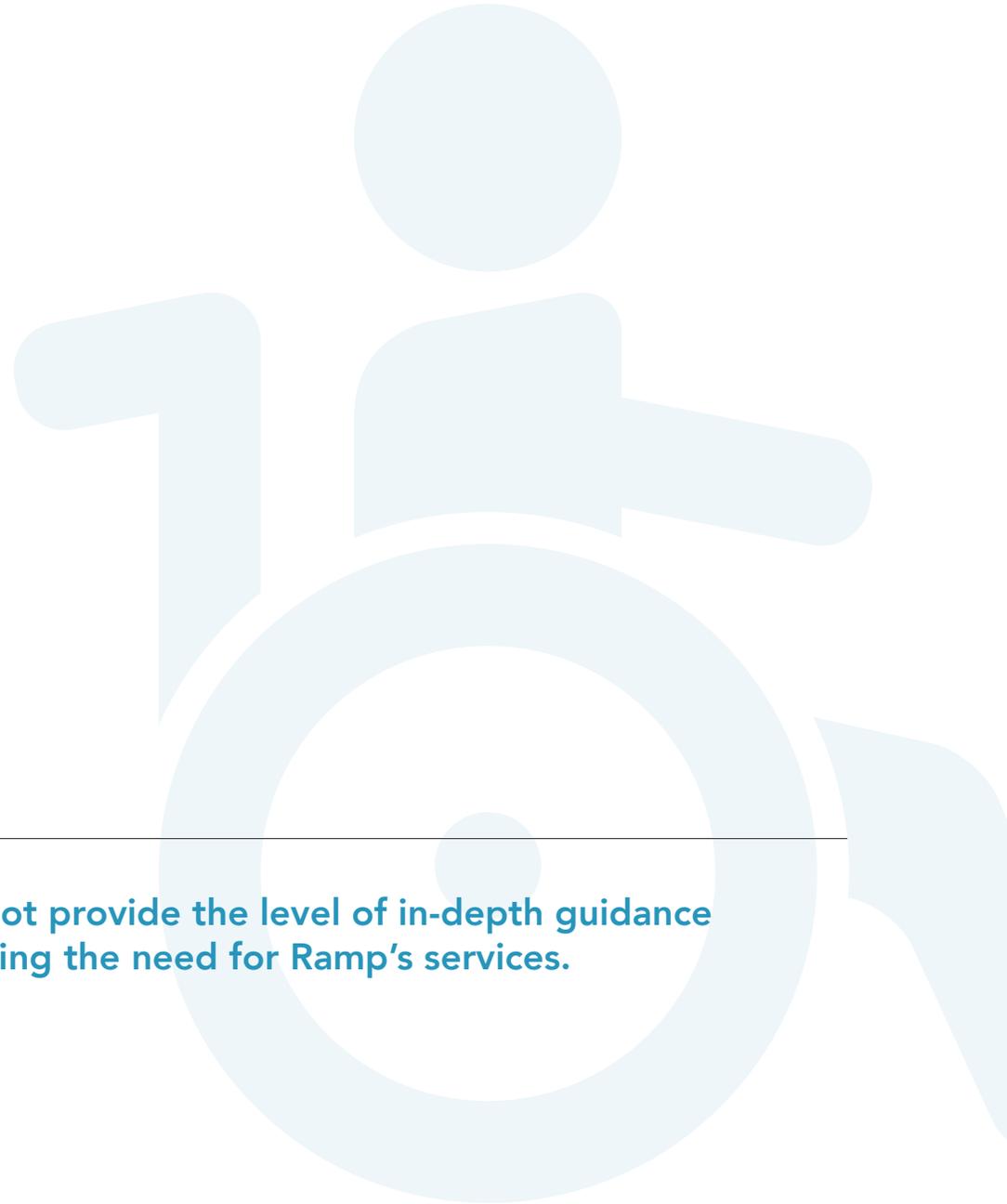
ORGANIZATION	SCHOLARSHIP	MENTORSHIP	RESEARCH
The National Spinal Cord Injury Association	X		X
Spinal Cord Injury Foundation	X		X
The Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation	X		X
Determined2heal Foundation		X	
SPINALpedia		X	
Friends for Michael, Inc.	X	X	
Kent Waldrep National Paralysis Foundation		X	X
Dream2Walk Foundation	X		
Bryon Riesch Paralysis Foundation	X		X

## SUBSTITUTES

In addition to competitors, there are several options that students with spinal cord injuries could pursue instead of higher education. One of the most common alternatives is to stay in therapy and continue the rehabilitation process. This can create a sense of false hope, but it also encourages students to live at a standstill where they are not able to embrace their current life as they wait to recover. The second alternative is for students to live at home or in assisted living. This option does not provide the level of independence those with spinal cord injury desire. The third alternative is to get a job without higher education. There are already numerous challenges to getting a job without higher education and adding the complexity of a disability creates another barrier. Lastly, students could attend online programs, community college or educational training programs. However, this does not allow for independence, freedom and fun experiences that same way attending a university can.

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**The competition and alternative options do not provide the level of in-depth guidance that the Ramp mentors provide, thus reinforcing the need for Ramp's services.**



## GOALS

Based on the research performed, the market and the competition, there are three things that have emerged as organizational goals:

### **Build Confidence**

Provide the necessary tools to re-enter the community and make attending college a reality.

### **Provide Support**

Ensure that emotional and physical support is available from the entire college community.

### **Encourage Independence**

Advance students' independence through higher education, leading to career obtainment.

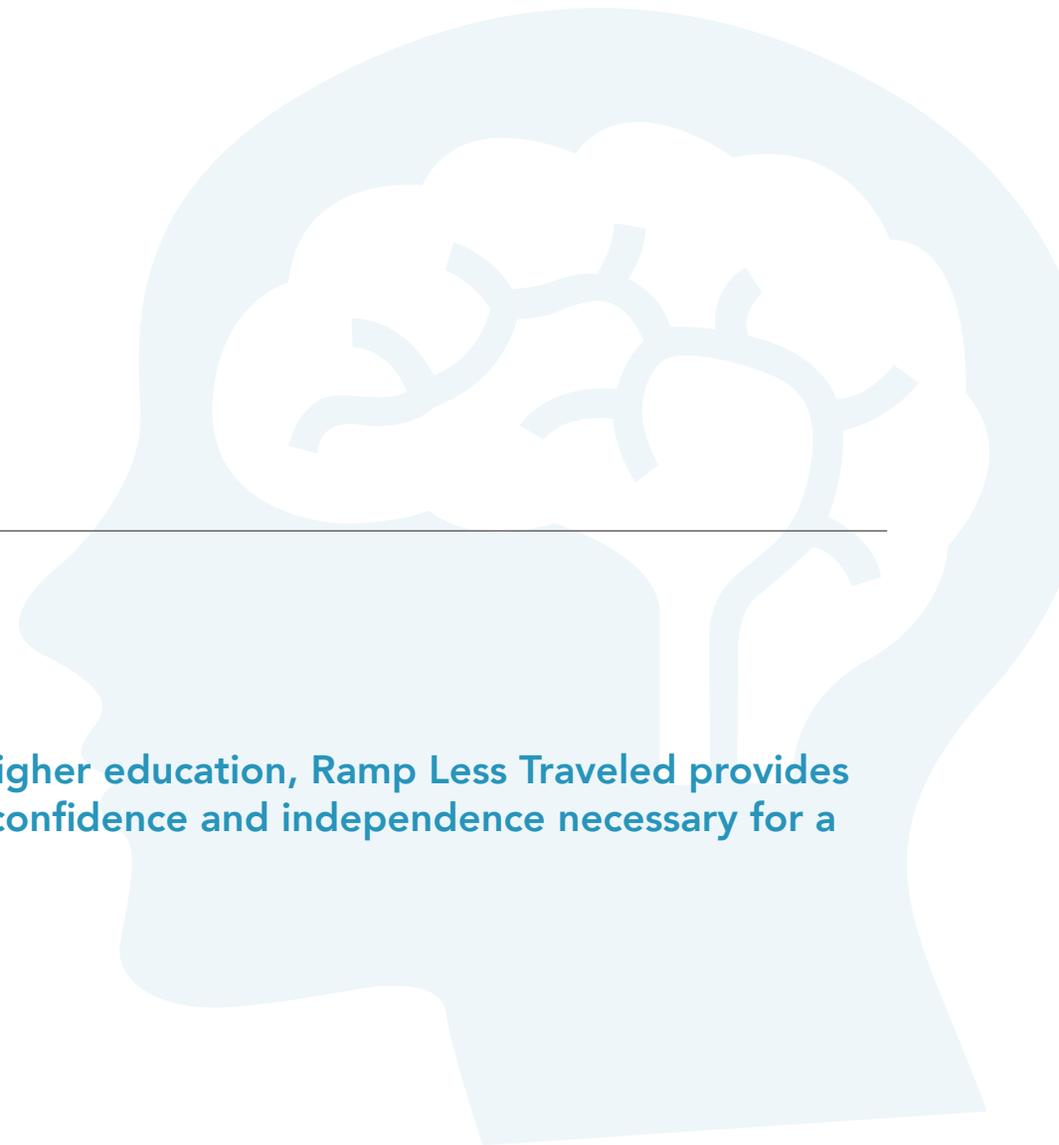
## POSITIONING

As we position Ramp in the market based on the research and goals of the organization, it is important to clarify who Ramp is and who it is not. Ramp provides mentorship and scholarships for students with spinal cord injuries to ensure that they get into and complete college. Ramp does not: research spinal cord injuries, provide support for rehabilitation, act as the primary educator in the space, function as the primary financial supporter for college education or support technology or medical equipment for college students.

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### POSITIONING STATEMENT

**For people with spinal cord injuries pursuing higher education, Ramp Less Traveled provides mentorship and financial support to build the confidence and independence necessary for a successful life post-injury.**



## VOICE

The voice of Ramp exemplifies the style and tone of the organization and is imperative to connecting with Ramp's audience in clear and effective way. When someone first interacts with Ramp, the primary feeling that they should sense is a message of hope. The writing style should be both calming and supportive, but ultimately leave the individual feeling optimistic about the future. In order to achieve this goal, Ramp should message in a friendly and casual tone, reflecting a theme of "life goes on after injury." Primary tones that should influence voice are:

- Hopeful
- Optimistic
- Calm
- Friendly
- Future-focused
- Practical
- Non-dramatic

There are also several words and messages that Ramp should not use in its messaging in order to ensure that the voice of hope and positivity comes across to its audience. In particular, do not use language that is too serious or gives a feeling of a lack of control over the individual's situation. In addition, stay away from "insider" speak or words that the every day person may not know. These words include the following:

- SCI
- Survivor
- Victim
- Suffered
- Dependent
- Needy

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## TAGLINE

**Investing in students with spinal cord injury to succeed in college.**

## ABOUT COPY

Ramp Less Traveled knows the potential of students with spinal cord injuries; they are cable of pursuing and achieving ambitious goals. We come along side students with spinal cord injury to help them successfully transition to college and pursue their dreams. We connect students and their families with mentors who guide them through the college process as well as provide them with scholarships to ease the financial burden of higher education.

Founded in 2013 by Jay Ruckelshaus, we aim to see students follow their dreams by guiding them the challenges that come with attending college with a spinal cord injury. We believe every person with spinal cord injury has the potential to continue their life plans and we invest into those driven students to help them overcome their unique obstacles.

Our mentors are trained and experienced in navigating the college admission process as well as transitioning to life on campus. They work with students to identify problems and solutions that make it possible for them to receive the full college experience and bring their dreams to life.



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**Use a tone that is hopeful and matter-of-fact, demonstrating that students can have ambitious goals after injury and showing both optimism and offering practical solutions.**

## WORKS CITED // APPENDIX

Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation (2014). "One Degree of Separation: Paralysis and Spinal Cord Injury in the United States." Retrieved from [http://www.christopherreeve.org/site/c.mtKZKgMWKwG/b.5184241/k.ACBD/Average\\_age\\_average\\_length\\_of\\_time\\_since\\_paralysis\\_and\\_SCI.htm](http://www.christopherreeve.org/site/c.mtKZKgMWKwG/b.5184241/k.ACBD/Average_age_average_length_of_time_since_paralysis_and_SCI.htm)

National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center (2012). "Spinal Cord Injury Model Systems: 2012 Annual Report Complete Public Version." Retrieved from <https://www.nscisc.uab.edu/PublicDocuments/reports/pdf/2012%20NSCISC%20Annual%20Statistical%20Report%20Complete%20Public%20Version.pdf>

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### APPENDIX A: Age of People with Spinal Cord Injuries

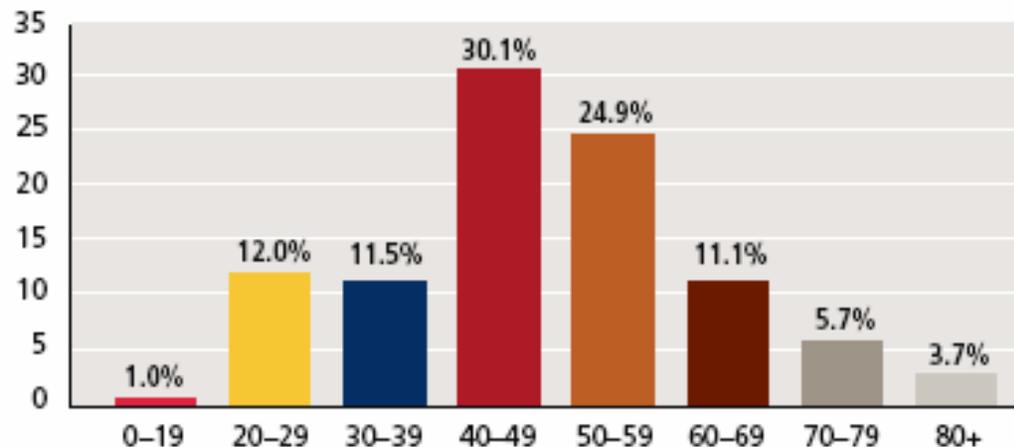


Chart from Christopher & Dana Reeves Foundation Website

APPENDIX B: Highest Level of Education Completed by Post-Injury Year

Education Level	Post-Injury Year								
	1	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	Total
8th Grade or Less	1,634 (7.6)	680 (5.9)	317 (5.0)	137 (3.4)	75 (2.5)	53 (2.3)	41 (2.9)	11 (2.5)	2,948
9th through 11th Grade	4,754 (22.0)	1,686 (14.6)	815 (12.9)	416 (10.2)	256 (8.5)	152 (6.6)	80 (5.6)	16 (3.7)	8,175
High School/GED	11,404 (52.8)	6,602 (57.0)	3,214 (50.8)	2,061 (50.5)	1,381 (45.9)	1,056 (45.5)	617 (43.4)	168 (38.4)	26,503
Associate Degree	677 (3.1)	575 (5.0)	465 (7.3)	339 (8.3)	315 (10.5)	225 (9.7)	144 (10.1)	44 (10.1)	2,784
Bachelors Degree	1,699 (7.9)	1,264 (10.9)	941 (14.9)	688 (16.9)	591 (19.7)	500 (21.6)	327 (23.0)	117 (26.8)	6,127
Masters Degree	444 (2.1)	292 (2.5)	265 (4.2)	227 (5.6)	206 (6.9)	205 (8.8)	135 (9.5)	56 (12.8)	1,830
Doctorate Degree	226 (1.0)	133 (1.1)	106 (1.7)	83 (2.0)	86 (2.9)	75 (3.2)	53 (3.7)	17 (3.9)	779

Chart from National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center Website



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