

THE Advocate

A VOICE FOR ACCESSIBLE, EQUITABLE AND EMPOWERED LIVES | 2022 SPRING ISSUE

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

Return to the driver's seat
Awe-inspiring caravan adventures
Visit beautiful Western Australia

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF

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On the open road

When dreaming of your next travel adventure, it's easy to conjure up pictures of the Eiffel Tower in Paris or a remote beach somewhere in Fiji.

But often, exploring what's in your own backyard can be just as memorable, by taking a short drive to visit somewhere new, from wherever you live.

This issue, we've drawn on this idea, with members sharing their caravanning adventures to different parts of the country; along with a review of must-see destinations from as far afield as Mandurah in Western Australia.

Keeping in mind that day trips often require a car, we're also looking at driving assessments and what it takes to get back behind the wheel after spinal cord damage.

Protecting your health and wellbeing is always so important, which is why our nursing team has shared their tips to stay safe while you're out on the road.

You can find even more suggestions and advice by joining our private Peer Support Facebook group, which is a great way to stay connected.

From the Board's perspective, we have been reviewing plans for this financial year, to ensure we are continuing to stay true to our mission and long-term goals.

It's essential that we take the time to reflect on the past 12 months as we look to the future. You can find a summary of these achievements in our Annual Report, which will be released soon ahead of our Annual General Meeting on Monday 14 November.

In this Advocate, you can also read more about an important proposal that we are presenting at this year's Annual General Meeting, on Page 28.

I encourage all members to read more about the proposed changes so you can cast an informed vote, to further strengthen our organisation and ensure we can grow and succeed.

As you may have read in our last Advocate, we're also seeking your feedback on ways to improve our organisation's sustainability, so we can play our part in reducing our environmental footprint and contribute to a positive future for our community.

Share your feedback or become more involved in our future activities at sustainability@spinal.com.au – we'd love to hear your thoughts.

GYL STACEY

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?



Email us at theadvocate@spinal.com.au – we'd love to hear from you!

4 QUESTIONS WITH THE CEO

Mark Townend

What are you most excited about right now?

We're about to commence a new program to boost employment for people with a disability in the Moreton Bay region, thanks to support from the Queensland Government's Growing Workforce Participation Fund.

Our EnABLED Business Program will provide disability awareness training and one-on-one mentoring to businesses, to help them to become more confident about how to welcome employees with a disability.

I'd also like to thank Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development Di Farmer MP, who visited our Healthy Living Centre in Brisbane to congratulate the team on the grant.

How are you working to create more accessible travel opportunities?

Our Advocacy Officers are continuing to complete accessible tourism reviews in regions across Queensland and Western Australia, to provide direct feedback to operators and accommodation providers on what they're doing right and how they could be more inclusive.

You can see these reviews on accessibleaustralia.com.au, and share your own experiences and first-hand knowledge, to help others plan a day out or a trip away.

What is the biggest challenge for Spinal Life at the moment?

Like the rest of the disability sector, Spinal Life is currently experiencing unprecedented staff shortages, for several reasons including COVID-19 challenges, seasonal illnesses and a lack of staff in the Australian economy.

This particularly affects our Personal Support Worker (PSW) workforce, who provide essential support to people with disabilities both in their homes and at their workplaces.

We have been working hard to improve employment conditions to support our current PSWs and encourage new team members to join us, including collaborating on a new enterprise agreement, as well as offering permanent part-time positions and free accredited qualifications.

To further address this important issue, we are advocating to the Australian Government to ask for new incentives and

policies to make it easier for people who wish to work in our sector, including allowing pensioners to re-enter the workforce without losing their benefits.

What's happening with the Disability Doesn't Discriminate campaign?

The Disability Doesn't Discriminate campaign commenced just over a year ago, to address the severe inequity of funding for people with a disability aged over 65, who are unable to access the NDIS.

The campaign was coordinated by Spinal Life with 28 partner organisations, gaining more than 25,000 signatures on our petition ahead of the federal election earlier this year. While we had discussions with many candidates at the time, we did not receive a clear commitment from either major political party that this issue would be resolved.

We are continuing to battle this discrimination and will be moving forward on two fronts. Firstly, we are collaborating with another advocacy group to lobby for this change directly to the offices of federal politicians.

Secondly, we are liaising with a law firm that believes there is a chance a class action lawsuit may force the Government to introduce much-needed funding support for people with a disability aged over 65, so they can live more independently in the community.

We are collecting the names of people who have been affected by this discrimination, so please get in touch via members@spinal.com.au if you would like to participate. [A](#)






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Driven to succeed

Suze Connors is getting back behind the wheel

For Suze Connors, being able to drive gives her a sense of independence and freedom – and she can't wait for her next chance to be behind the wheel.

On Australia Day in 2019, the Daisy Hill resident began to lose sensation from her toes up to her hips and went straight to hospital.

She was diagnosed with Transverse Myelitis, a rare neurological disorder caused by inflammation of the spinal cord.

“I will hopefully be able to pick up my son and get him to his after-school activities ”

“They found a demyelinating lesion at the C2 level, so that affects everything from that point down,” Suze said.

“My symptoms vary from day to day but generally my lower body is more affected than my upper body, and my right side is more affected than my left. My right leg is now affectionately known as Woody, and my left is Willow. Two good lumberjack names for legs that behave more like logs as the day progresses!

“Basically I needed to learn to walk again without sensation, just trusting that my legs knew what to do.

“They were really numb originally but now it's more like how your face feels when you have a needle in your mouth at the dentist – they just feel foreign to me.”

Suze's connection with Spinal Life first began when her specialist told her about the organisation's Transverse Myelitis support group.

"It was nice to find other people with the same experiences – and that got me started with the physiotherapist, and help to prepare my NDIS application," she said.

While she wants to return to work one day, currently much of her time is spent at hydrotherapy and at her nearby gym, using a program developed with the help of a physiotherapist and exercise physiologist.

"I have been doing weights and Pilates and things like that, to help with my core stability and balance," she said.

Suze currently uses a walking stick, wheelie walker or a mobility scooter depending on where she is going and is hoping to receive NDIS approval for a manual wheelchair with a power assist device to make getting around much easier.

In the meantime, Suze was also keen to undertake her driving assessment to get back behind the wheel, beginning the process in June last year.

"The Spinal Life Occupational Therapist (OT) did the off-road component of the assessment to see what was achievable, determined that driving with hand controls would be the safest option for me, and helped prepare the report," she said.

"I then started lessons with a driving instructor who has dual controls and the different types of hand controls. It made sense to control the vehicle with my hands, with my legs lacking sensory feedback and motor control."

The first moment back behind the wheel was one to remember.

"When we set off, I was so nervous and a bit teary, but the instructor actually controlled the car and I did the steering for the first few blocks and then we got out of the traffic area and he got me to take over," she said.

OT Maxine Timmins supported Suze with her initial driving assessment, as one of the Spinal Life team who has received specialised training to help people with a physical disability return to the driver's seat.

Maxine said the process first involves a visit to the GP to obtain a medical certificate specifically for driving, before completing the relevant forms to update an existing licence or apply for a learner's permit.

"Once this has been successfully completed, a driver-trained OT will conduct an off-road assessment with you, which covers a range of areas," Maxine said.

Maxine said this off-road assessment involved:

- Initial Interview – Obtaining information about a person's medical and driving history, including any medications they are taking
- Physical Screen – Assessing range of movement, strength, tone, sensation, and coordination
- Vision Screen – Assessing visual acuity, peripheral vision and eye movements
- Cognitive Screen – Assessing concentration, attention, memory, problem solving, planning skills and level of insight >

Suze picks up her brand new Suzuki Vitara



Suze back behind the wheel for her first lesson



- Road law knowledge screen

“If everything checks out and we are ready to proceed, the next step involves an on-road assessment and driving lessons to look at the best vehicle modifications and driving controls to suit the individual’s needs and their goals,” Maxine said.

“The number of driving lessons and hours required depends on the type of modifications or driving controls recommended.”

Suze has had eight lessons so far and has settled on Fadiel wireless satellite hand controls for her left hand; which is worn like a glove, and uses a trigger lever to accelerate. This enables Suze to drive with both hands on the steering wheel which was preferred, as she was used to driving with both hands on the wheel prior.

She will have a separate lever in the car for braking, that she will use with her right hand.

While she purchased a new Suzuki Vitara in December last year, Suze is waiting on the outcome of her recent NDIS plan review in May this year to approve the hand controls, so she can finally have them installed.

Her long-term goal is to explore a new career option and eventually go back to work.

In the short-term, though, it’s all about spending time with her husband Shane, their 11-year-old son Spencer, family, and friends.

“Having a positive attitude and a good sense of humour has helped me accept the changes to my life and have the patience to keep working on the things that matter most to me,” she said.

“I will hopefully be able to pick up my son and get him to his after-school activities.

“I want to go to the beach and visit friends.

“I love being able to go and help other people and that’s the hardest thing for me at the moment, I can’t just get in the car and go and do something.

“I want to pick people up from the airport!” **A**

Visit spinal.com.au/driving to find out more about assessments. Spinal Life also runs regular driving clinics at the Healthy Living Centre Brisbane, with services also available at the Healthy Living Centre Cairns.

Returning to driving: the process simplified

1. Ensure driving is a specific goal in your NDIS plan.
2. Book an appointment with your GP and advise them you wish to obtain a medical certificate for motor vehicle drivers (form F3712 in Queensland).
3. Provide this medical certificate and complete the relevant documentation (form F4355 in Queensland) to notify the Department of Transport and Main Roads of your condition, to update your existing licence or apply for a learner’s permit.
4. Obtain a quote from a driver-trained Occupational Therapist (OT) and book your off-road assessment.
5. If your off-road assessment is successful, your OT will request a quote from a driving school for an on-road driving assessment; as well as a quote for use of a specialised vehicle if required.
6. Book your on-road assessment with the driving school and your OT.
7. Your OT will assist you to complete a report for the NDIS, for funding for modifications and driving controls.
8. Complete the required number of lessons and hours in your driving program, which is determined by the type of modifications or driving controls recommended.

Funding for vehicle modifications

The NDIS has lots of information online to help when looking at vehicle modification and supports.

Visit ndis.gov.au/participants/assistivetechexplained/vehicle-modification to find out more.

If you use your vehicle as part of your job, you might be eligible for some assistance for modifications through the Australian Government’s Employment Assistance Fund.

Visit jobaccess.gov.au/employment-assistance-fund-eaf to find out more.

The National Injury Insurance Scheme Queensland (NIISQ) may also assist with vehicle modifications for participants in this funding scheme.

WHAT I DRIVE

Spinal Life members have shared more about their vehicles, via our Peer Support Facebook group. You can read more tips on planning your next road trip or overnight adventure on Page 16.

Natalie Toth



INJURY LEVEL: T2/T3 paraplegia.

VEHICLE MAKE AND MODEL: 2018 Subaru Outback.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT IT: It gives me independence and it's easy to get in and out of – I use my slide board for transfers.

MODIFICATIONS: Push/Pull hand controls with a spinner knob on the steering wheel. I also have a Braun Chair Topper hoist on the roof of my car, which stores my manual wheelchair inside.



Nate Greenfield



INJURY LEVEL: C6/C7 quadriplegia.

VEHICLE MAKE AND MODEL: 2019 Kia Seltos.

MODIFICATIONS: Push/Pull hand controls and a Tri-Spin for steering, plus I have a Wymo hoist on the roof.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT IT: The freedom to travel anywhere I like – I love going on long drives. It's a great car because it's a mid-size SUV that is easy to transfer into, and it has all the safety standards.



Don Tennant



INJURY LEVEL: C5/6 quadriplegia.

VEHICLE MAKE AND MODEL: 2008 Mercedes Sprinter MWB.

MODIFICATIONS: Tri-Spin steering wheel control, plus Push/Pat hand controls for brake/accelerator. I also put an additional micro switch on the Push/Pat handle for the horn and have a hand splint to operate the key.

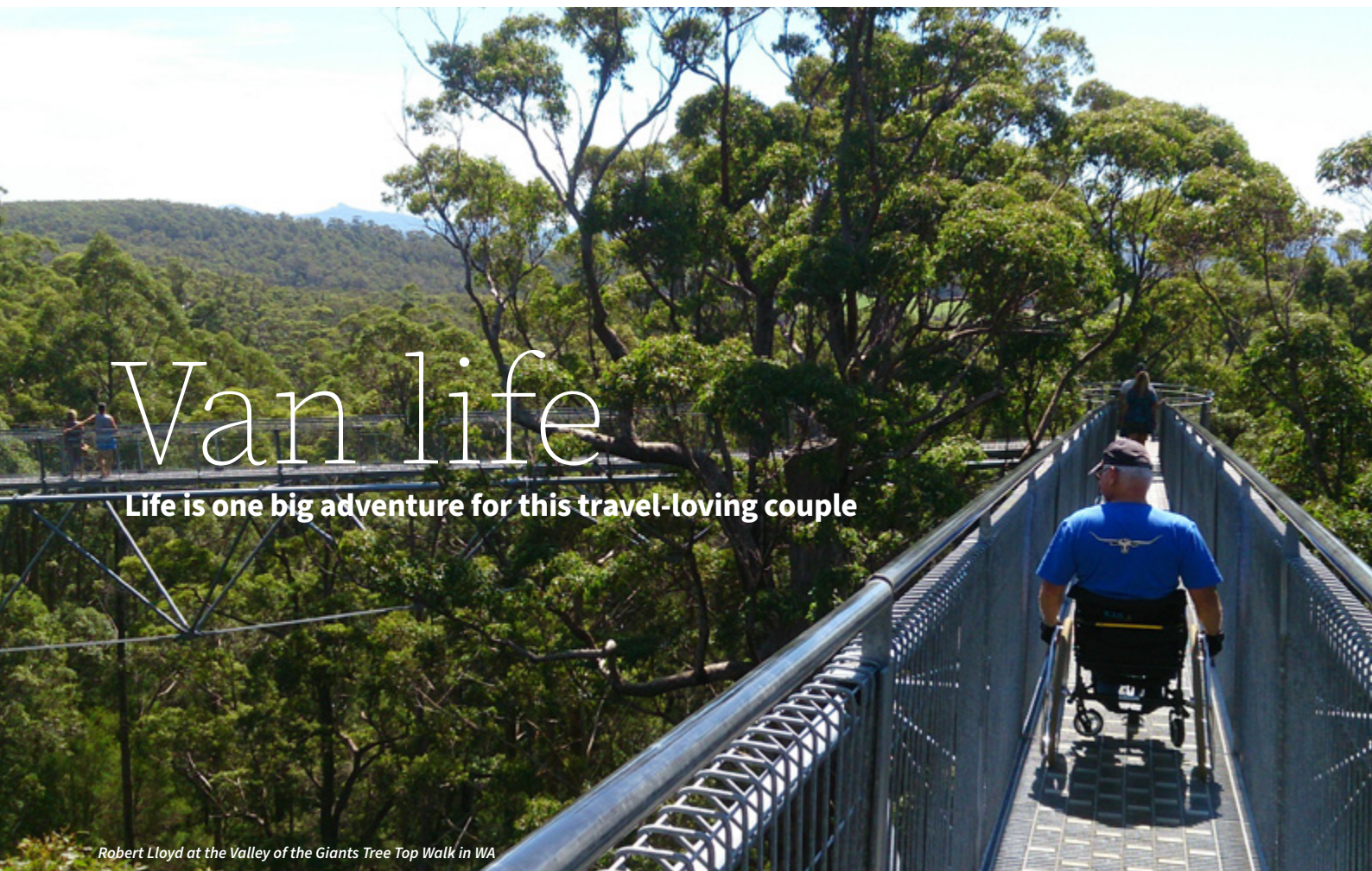
Vehicle modifications include remote control for both the rear doors and the Braun hoist set up, automatic wipers and three vision-assist cameras due to my limited neck movement. It was purchased as a panel van and we put in windows all around, plus a flat timber floor with vinyl.

There are also QLK150 lockdowns on both the driver and passenger front-seat positions, as well as double fold-up seats and two fixed bucket seats for additional passengers. The vehicle can accommodate and lock down three chairs plus five other passengers.

I also have a folding ramp for emergency exit in case the hoist should fail.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT IT: I love the ease of access into and out of the van. I can normally park so I don't get too wet in our tropical climate as well.





Van life

Life is one big adventure for this travel-loving couple

Robert Lloyd at the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk in WA

Robert Lloyd, 70, and his wife Kim, 64, from Ipswich, bought their first caravan in 2007.

“We had been doing a lot of travelling, but it was always a struggle to find disability accommodation that actually catered for disability,” says Robert, who has had T12 L1 paraplegia since he was 22. “We would book into places that were supposed to be wheelchair-friendly, but they weren’t. It was so frustrating. Eventually we just had enough of it and decided to buy a caravan so we could be totally independent.”

Their first van, a 17-foot Pop Top, was great for shorter trips, but they didn’t feel quite ready for longer journeys. That was until one fateful trip when they met another caravanner using a wheelchair. “He told us he went up to Darwin every year,” says Robert. “I asked him: what about toilets? Because that was my biggest problem – I need access to disability amenities. When he said there are accessible, eco-friendly public toilets all along the highway it convinced us that we should go touring.”

They soon realised they’d need a van with a shower and toilet for when they wanted to free camp – i.e pull up at a place not officially designated as a camping spot. So, after three years with their Pop Top, they upgraded to a purpose-built van with ensuite.

“It’s a 24-foot Olympic caravan built to our specifications,” says Robert.

Two non-negotiables were an east/west queen-size bed (which Kim can walk around) and a large ensuite. The caravan’s door is also a lot wider than normal, in order to fit Robert’s wheelchair, and they made other smart choices like removing one of the chairs at the dining table (Robert brings his own, after all), and cutting the other chair back by 300mm, to allow for clear wheelchair access down the hallway. The couple also installed solar panels and a satellite dish which lets them access TV Australia-wide.

A number of the modifications were made by Robert himself, who used to be an engine fitter in the Royal Australian Air Force, working on F-111s.

“I still like building things – when we’re not on the road I’m in my workshop from daylight to dark,” he says. “I jack the caravan up on stands, lie down on one of those little boards on wheels and scoot underneath to do all sorts of work on it. I’ve replaced all the wheel bearings and the brakes, ripped out and replaced the plumbing, and installed an 85-litre grey-water tank.”

He also added hydraulic stabiliser legs to the caravan, so instead of having to manually wind each leg down

Getting ready to fly over Kings Canyon, NT



Kim and Robert looking out over the Great Australian Bight



individually, they engage all at once, at the press of a button. His greatest achievement, however, might be the ramps and balcony which let him access the caravan in his wheelchair.

“They basically hook on to the van, can be set up in a matter of minutes, and are stored quickly and easily underneath.” It’s a job that either Robert or Kim can manage on their own – especially as Robert has managed to refine things over the years and get the ramps down from 60 kilograms to just 16! The ramps inspire conversation and photos wherever the couple goes: it seems there’s definitely a gap in the marketplace for Robert’s clever design.

Thanks to their thoughtful modifications, the caravan is perfect for Robert and Kim’s needs, and has taken them on many incredible adventures.

They’ve camped on the cliffs on the Nullarbor and for a month off Ningaloo Reef, watched crocodiles in the wild at Kakadu, and travelled the Great Ocean Road.

They’ve been at the finish line of the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race, taken helicopter rides over Nitmiluk (Katherine) Gorge in the Top End, Kings Canyon in the Red Centre and the Bungle Bungles in the Kimberley, and attended the bi-annual Dunny Derby at Winton in Central West Queensland.

Robert’s homemade ramps make the caravan super-accessible



Robert’s even been given the opportunity to fly a plane. “We met some pilots at an airshow in Temora who told us about Merrit Aviation at Moruya in New South Wales, which has planes with hand controls, so we stopped in on our way home from the Melbourne Grand Prix,” he says. “I did five hours of training in 50 minutes – I have a flight simulator at home so I knew my way around the cockpit – and then we went up!”

When it comes to the perfect places to camp, the couple looks for large flat sites in close vicinity to amenities. “We find accessible campsites and caravan parks using camp books, WikiCamps, Facebook groups and word of mouth,” says Kim. “Showgrounds are also great – there’s always heaps of room and good amenities. And you’re helping out the locals: in small towns the fees charged go towards their local country shows. Without caravanners, some small towns simply wouldn’t have the funds to hold their annual shows.”

When the caravan is hooked up to Robert and Kim’s car, the entire rig is an epic 15 metres long and quite a feat to manoeuvre. “We met some people while camping back in 2015 and bumped into them again recently,” says Kim. “The wife said, ‘You know, I talk about you guys all the time. I remember when we first met, we watched Robert back in to the hardest site in the camp – he nearly had to jackknife the van into it – and *then* he got out and we saw he was in a wheelchair, and *then* he went and set everything up.’ That was 2015 and she still hasn’t gotten over it!”

The adventurers are planning future trips to outback towns all over Queensland, and hope to go back to Darwin one day soon. “But we’re older and wiser now, so we don’t travel from October to the end of March,” says Kim. “It’s so hot, and it’s storm season – you don’t want to be out in a mini cyclone in a caravan!”

They have everything they need in the caravan to be independent, and after years of travelling they’ve got things down pat: “We set our own schedule and pull up where we want, when we want,” says Robert. “We always have a plan, but we don’t set strict timeframes and there’s no pressure to be anywhere at a particular time. The freedom and independence that caravanning gives us is just as important as being able to see so much of our beautiful sunburnt country.” ➤

5 things Robert & Kim never travel without

1. Diesel heater
2. 12-volt fan/air cooler (for free camping)
3. Mozzie/midge repellent
4. Fly swatter
5. Weber Baby Q (especially if you're away at Christmas and need to cook the turkey!)

Robert & Kim's best insider travel tips

- You'll meet people who will tell you they've been to a place and it's not worth the trip. Luckily we ignored that sort of advice on a number of occasions and experienced some spectacular destinations. For example, somebody told us not to bother with Wyndham, but we went anyway and discovered the Five Rivers Lookout, where the five rivers of the Kimberley meet and flow into the ocean. It is *amazing*. No photo can do it justice... you've got to see it to believe it. And if we'd listened to the advice of that person, we would have missed it.
- Call into small country towns. Talk to the locals and learn the history of the area. Bakeries are the 'go-to' place.
- Don't say you'll do something "next time". You may never return. Make the most of everything while you're there. We did the Tahune Airwalk in Tasmania and were travelling with friends who said they'd do it "another time". But just a couple of weeks later there was a massive fire. The Airwalk has been rebuilt, but trees that were hundreds of years old are gone forever.
- Be smart and be safe. Don't travel at night. If you're free camping, introduce yourself to other travellers. If it looks dodgy it probably is, so move on. We have done a lot of free camping, however, and never had any problems.
- If you don't like red dirt and expensive fuel, don't go caravanning!
- Keep up to date with the weather.
- Have a checklist when packing your van or you'll definitely forget something important.
- If you can afford to go caravanning, do it! Don't wait for "one day". [A](#)

Spinal Life helped Robert to get funding for FreeWheel and FireFly attachments which allow him to independently go to places that otherwise would be impossible with his wheelchair. Visit spinal.com.au to find out more about our Occupational Therapy services.

Greg Hayden with his Teardrop Camper

Going solo

The joys of caravanning on your own

Greg Hayden, 63, lives in Regents Park in Queensland. At the age of 24 he sustained T8 paraplegia – and in his late 40s a passion for caravanning.

It was about 15 years ago when Greg bought a Cub Camper, which he used to tow behind his trike (a Can Am Spyder; like a motorbike on three wheels) and take to motorcycle rallies.

But about three years ago he sold the Cub Camper and bought a small Teardrop Camper, which features a double bed and a kitchenette, but only weighs about 500 kilograms and is easily towed by his Honda CRV.

Greg found a guy in Plainlands, between Brisbane and Toowoomba, to build him the Teardrop from scratch, including all the necessary modifications.

“He recommended we make the door 800mm wide, instead of the usual 500mm, in order to fit my chair,” explains Greg. “It’s easy to transfer from my wheelchair into the Teardrop – as someone who lives independently, this was really important. In general it’s just less work than my previous caravan – it’s faster and easier to get everything set up.”

Greg’s taken his Teardrop to various places around the Sunshine State, including Ipswich, Boonah and his favourite so far, Bribie Island.

“I love it there because they have really wide concrete paths that go all over the island. They’re massive – probably nearly

1.5 or 2 metres wide. So you just park your car, get out your power assist, hook it on to your wheelchair and head out. It’s fantastic. I stayed at Bongaree Caravan Park, which was great, with good showers, toilets and kitchens.”

As well as top-notch facilities, Greg looks for camping spots that are close to a town: “I like to park the car and then just use my wheelchair to travel around. You don’t use any fuel, and I’ve got a solar panel on the roof to charge up the battery of my power assist.”

The other thing on his perfect-spot wish-list? Water. “Whether it’s a creek or river or the ocean, I like being by the water if I possibly can,” he says.

His longest trip in the Teardrop so far has been to Mackay, where his daughter lives. “I can drive up and free camp overnight, around Gladstone, and then be in Mackay the following day,” he says.

Apart from making sure you have a decent bed, a good collapsible table and a two-burner BBQ that collapses and stores easily, Greg says one of the best things you can pack is a drone to take lots of images of the places you’ve been. And one of the best things you can have is RACQ Ultimate Roadside Assistance. “You might think it’s expensive,” he says, “but when you break down it’s worth every cent.”

Greg’s final word of advice? “If you want to go caravanning, make sure you like driving!” **A**



SuperMan(durah)

Just how accessible is WA's largest regional city, Mandurah?

Less than an hour from Perth (road trip, woo hoo!) lies Western Australia's largest regional city, Mandurah – or Mandjoogoordap, an Aboriginal Nyoongar word meaning 'meeting place of the heart'. It's known for its magnificent beaches, beautiful canals and the Peel-Harvey Estuary – a wetland and ecosystem of international significance that's twice the size of Sydney Harbour.

Mandurah is also the focus of Spinal Life's latest accessible tourism review.

Headed up by Community Advocacy Officer, Karen Harvey, the review was developed and delivered thanks to partnerships with Mandurah Council, Visit Mandurah and a number of Western Australians living with disability. Its goal? To identify, review and promote accessible tourism offerings that already exist within the region, and help educate tourism operators and small businesses about steps they can take to make improvements.

"They've put a lot of work and effort into making things accessible in Mandurah," says Karen. "They're really proactive when it comes to making experiences, beaches and parks accessible for all abilities – they're definitely at the forefront of making accessibility changes here in WA."

Karen's three Mandurah musts

1. House Boat

We were so lucky to experience the beautiful *Emily Louise*, a specially made accessible house boat from Mandurah House Boats (houseboatsmandurah.com.au). It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I will never forget. It was like being in an accessible luxury apartment – but one that you could also float down the river and go fishing from the back door! We picked up the *Emily Louise* at 10am and initially needed two people along for the ride to teach us how to use the boat and all the safety procedures, and advise us on some places to visit. The keys were then handed over to us and we were off on our house boating adventure, heading to Pelican Point. It took us two hours to arrive, by which time we were ready for a bite to eat, so we continued a little further down to Sandy Cove and picked up dinner from a local restaurant. Afterwards, we headed back to Pelican Point where we hooked up the boat to the electricity point and settled in for the night (me relaxing inside the boat; my companion fishing off the back). There was plenty of space to manoeuvre around on the boat, which was completely accessible, from the ramp to the sliding door providing easy access to get inside, and a roll-under table, kitchen bench and bathroom sink. Everything was at the perfect height,

from the cupboards in the kitchen, to the light switches, bathroom mirror and even the couch, which allowed for easy transferring. My highlight of this awesome experience? To be able to get behind the steering wheel myself and actually take command of the boat for a little while. We were über-excited to try house boating, and I highly recommend everyone put this activity on their list of things to do in Mandurah.

2. Dolphin Cruise

Spotting wild bottle-nosed dolphins is a famous pastime in this part of the world, so we headed out on a one-hour Dolphin Cruise & Views tour with Mandurah Cruises (mandurahcruises.com.au). From an accessibility point of view there were pros and cons: on the plus side, Companion Cards are accepted, there's accessible parking close by to the departure point, and there are seating areas throughout the bottom level of the boat where wheelchairs fit under the tables easily. To access the boat itself there are a few ramps; some were a little hard to navigate independently, but with assistance were fine. On the negative side of things, there are no accessible toilets onboard, just a regular loo, and access to the top deck was via stairs. But there were plenty of other viewing options, including the aforementioned tables, the area in front of the café and a platform at the back of the boat. The cruise took us around Mandurah's stunning canals – happily, we managed to spot some of the beloved dolphins – and protected wetlands that are home to some fantastic water birds. The captain of the boat was accommodating and even allowed one of our volunteers to take the wheel for a moment.

3. Nature Tour

Operated by local zoologist Sarah Way, Ways To Nature (waystonature.com.au) leads guided nature walks around the beautiful reserves of Mandurah's internationally significant Peel-Yalgorup Wetlands and beyond. A range of tours to suit all abilities is available, providing unique experiences with nature. On the day of our tour Sarah chose the Joseph and Dulcie Nannup Trail. While the trail is accessible, parking at Riverside Park where the tour commenced was not the greatest, with no accessible parking bays and no access ramp to the path. But we got there in the end, and were able to move freely once we reached the path. There were two of us on the tour with mobility impairments: me in a wheelchair and a person using balance sticks. Sarah set us up with binoculars and then throughout the tour helped us to spot and view different birds. We made our way to a new accessible boardwalk, which runs out over shallow water and made us feel immersed in the environment. It's a lovely, relaxing experience that makes you feel closer to nature, and Sarah hopes to introduce more accessible tours in the future for those with a disability. [A](#)

The Mandurah Accessible Tourism Review was made possible thanks to financial support from Visit Mandurah. You can read the full report at spinal.com.au or visit accessibleaustralia.com.au to check out reviews of the Mandurah region and share your own experiences.



GLENN MOORE UNITS HOBART TASMANIA

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Plan your road trip

Whether it's a shorter drive or an overnight camping stay, we asked members of our private Peer Support Facebook group to share their advice on making your next road trip a great experience.

You can find more tips by joining the group at [facebook.com/groups/peersupportspinallifeaustralia](https://www.facebook.com/groups/peersupportspinallifeaustralia), which provides the opportunity to share information and experiences with others. Below is some of the advice our members have shared:



"When making bookings insist that the hotel/motel provides you with photos of the room's accessibility and more importantly photos of the bathroom layout." – **Bill Simpson**

"#1 – Never assume!

Car trip – Bring extra water, have an empty container in case you need to 'relieve' along the way. A towel or stable table for your lap in case of having munchies.

Camping – bring a soft/hard brush to clean any crap from tyres.

Overnight accommodation – bring 6 x of the plastic furniture raisers for the bed if you are a hoist transfer." – **Dennis Kretzschmar**

"Planning is a must. People with a disability and their carers make great project managers as we are forever having to think ahead and plan everything we do.

As Bill has also said, the need for meticulous information and details are a must." – **Steve Hatherell**

"When I travelled to Europe, my portable shower chair was awesome. I made a few modifications by drilling all the rivets out so it would fit in the suitcase.

Always carry more than you need when it comes to your medication and other medical requirements.

Do your research and scope the places out. Email hotels for photos, state your needs etc." – **James Powell**

"I've got high-level quadriplegia and have travelled all over Australia and been on an international cruise. My tips are:

- Create an inventory of everything you think you need to take
- Contact the accommodation and ask them to take photos of space around and under the bed (if it isn't height adjustable), plus ask them to check the height of the toilet to ensure your shower/commode chair will fit over the top
- If needing equipment such as a mobile floor hoist, height adjustable bed, alternating air mattress etc try to find an equipment company and have the items delivered to the accommodation at least 1 or 2 days prior to arriving
- Always ask the equipment hire company to check that the equipment is working prior to being dispatched/delivered. Yes, I've had an electric height adjustable bed and a mobile floor hoist delivered that were not working
- Always check that your sling is compatible with the mobile floor hoist and do not forget to take your own sling
- Always take a power extension lead and power board for charging your power wheelchair, electric bed, hoist, mobile phone and any other products
- Take double the amount of bowel care products, laxatives and equipment that would usually be needed for the length of time, just in case you get caught somewhere, and the same for any medications." – **Greg Killeen**



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Tips & Tricks



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In da hub


Spinal Life's Healthy Living Centre Brisbane is a hub of good health and good vibes



Bryn Bradford [right] with Exercise Physiologist, Ernest Starowicz

Bryn Bradford, from Teneriffe, has been a regular at the Healthy Living Centre (HLC) Brisbane since February this year, just a month after it opened. Exercise plays a central role in the life of the 30-year-old Communications Manager, who was injured in a fall at the age of 21, and diagnosed with incomplete fractures at the C5 and T6 levels.

“Since leaving the SIU in 2014 I’ve had consistent goals, recommended by my doctors, around improving my strength and ability,” he says. “These goals demand fitness and strength work, and are aligned with my goals for independence when it comes to pushing, transfer and weight management. Over the years I’ve gone to gyms or worked on my fitness myself, but the HLC has provided a great opportunity to use resistance training and specialist equipment, and to get one-on-one help.”



Bryn initially met with Spinal Life Exercise Physiologist, Ernest Starowicz, to design an exercise programme.

Because Bryn's injury comes with a high amount of extension tone, part of that programme involves regular use of an FES (Functional Electrical Stimulation) bike. "The cycle uses electrical stimulation to move Bryn's legs," explains Ernest. "It helps to manage the tone of his legs, and to 'fatigue' them so that he doesn't get too much spasticity at night. It's quite an advanced piece of equipment and because it's all digital, if you've got access to this sort of cycle anywhere in the world all you need is your ID and password, and you're good to go."

Other equipment used in the HLC is also digital, and so easy to use that even the biggest technophobes are fans.

"Once we've written a programme for you, it's saved on a card which you just tap against your chosen HUR machine and it will do things like automatically change weights, and count your reps and sets," explains Ernest. "We can track and adjust everything remotely, or you can control things yourself."

A lot of the equipment is multimodal, allowing you to do two different types of exercises on a single machine. "We have treadmills, a height-adjustable arm crank, an endless rope machine, a custom-made rower and more, all of which can be used whether you're in a manual chair or a power chair as the seats are

removed," says Ernest. "Not everyone can use every bit of equipment, but everyone can get a good workout in here."


Bryn, who goes to the HLC three or four times a week and has seen continued improvements regarding his fitness goals, offers this advice: "The staff are all there to help, but trial and error will help shape parts of your workouts to get the best outcomes. Some machines will work you harder than others, based on your functions, so be open to giving all exercises a go, and from there get stuck into the ones that work for you."

While the Exercise Physiologists are there to help as needed, their ultimate goal for everyone is self-management. "The focus is on empowerment and independence," explains Ernest. "It's about making

sure people are familiar and confident with the equipment, so that they don't have to rely on anyone else."

It's also about more than "just" working out: it's a place where people can get the whole allied health experience.

"As well as Exercise Physiologists and Physiotherapists we've also got Occupational Therapists, Registered Nurses, the Back2Work team and the Assistive Technology room," says Ernest. "Having such a multidisciplinary clinic was a big drawcard for me to join Spinal Life. It means that we can help people with whatever they need, from start to finish. And we can do it so easily and efficiently: if we need the help of a particular health professional, I can literally just walk across the room and talk to them." >



“Once we’ve written a programme for you, it’s saved on a card which you just tap against your chosen HUR machine and it will do things like automatically change weights, and count your reps and sets”

The final words must go to Bryn: “Fitting training in can be a challenge around my full-time work hours, so the unstaffed hours at the HLC is the biggest benefit to me,” he says. “Whereas other specialist services are always at the mercy of staffed hours, at the HLC accessibility is at the forefront of everything. It’s definitely a service that goes above and beyond regular gyms.” **A**

The Healthy Living Centre Brisbane is located at 109 Logan Road in Woolloongabba. The Fitness Hub can be accessed between 6am – 8pm, 7 days a week for visitors with a pass. To find out more, visit spinalhealthyliving.com.au/brisbane



Placing stimulation pads for the FES bike

What is Exercise Physiology?

“It’s basically exercise interventions that target people’s specific goals,” says Ernest. “Because we have the knowledge, experience and training to understand all the nuances of a person’s condition or disease, we’re able to safely implement exercise interventions to target their goals accordingly, while taking into consideration how they present, i.e. their pathologies. It makes us able to treat people more effectively and get better outcomes for them.”

An unexpected benefit of exercising at the HLC

“The benefits of exercise for people with spinal cord damage and physical disabilities include improved strength, mobility, tolerance, pain relief and so much more,” says Ernest. “But another benefit that some people might not have anticipated is the sense of community at the HLC. We’ve seen a lot of friendships develop purely through incidental contact – especially at the little café area where people can take a break, have a coffee and just enjoy a chat sharing their thoughts and experiences with a fellow HLC member.”

Spinal Life
Healthy Living Centre

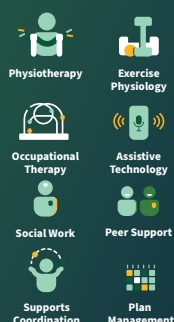
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AVAILABLE SERVICES



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Or speak to one of our team on 1800 335 276

1. In vitro data on file – WHR 16933 TA 1369 FeelClean Phase 1 Report. *In vitro data on file.



Stay well behind the wheel

Our nursing team share their travel tips to ensure you are prepped and ready to go

Whether driving locally or travelling far from home, heading out on a new adventure can take some research and preparation, especially when you have a disability. However, it's well worth the effort, to help you gain independence and see more of the world.

Whether you're travelling by road or air (or even sea), it's important to remember the following:

Ensure you have enough continence consumables

- if you have an indwelling or suprapubic catheter, pack all the consumables required for a catheter change into separate plastic bags, so that if you need a catheter change everything is on hand and readily accessible.
- if you use intermittent catheters, ensure you have adequate supplies – it may be an idea to have your catheters pre-posted to your accommodation, which can be arranged via your consumable supplier.
- if you normally use an intermittent catheter, consider using an indwelling catheter while travelling long distances or on long-haul flights.

Maintain your usual bowel routine

- When you are away, always stick to your normal bowel routine and don't forget to pack your PPE, gloves and other supplies.

Manage autonomic dysreflexia (AD) symptoms

- If you are susceptible to AD, ensure that you have the necessary medication to alleviate any symptoms.

Pack medications, prescriptions and supporting documents

- Have your medications with you – if you are travelling by

air, ensure these are in your carry-on luggage, not in your checked luggage.

- Prior to leaving, ask your GP for prescriptions of all your medications and take these with you just in case your medications are misplaced.
- Ensure you have a letter from your GP, including their contact details, and other documents relating to your medical conditions/medication list etc in case it's required at any time when you are travelling.

Plan for wheelchair and equipment needs

- Carry spare items for your manual wheelchair or power wheelchair – you can ask your Occupational Therapist for a list of things you may need.
- Consider hiring items at your destination, to reduce the amount of luggage you need to take (especially when driving). When flying, medical items are not included as general luggage.
- Alternatively, items you may wish to take include a travel commode, hoist, bed raisers, a SmartDrive and other assistive technology devices. It is also recommended if you require a hoist, consider taking your own sling, even if you are hiring this equipment.

Look after your skin

- To reduce the chances of pressure sores or wounds, it is recommended to take your personal seat cushion with you. When flying, you should take it on the plane for your seat, for added comfort during your flight.
- Relieve pressure points as often as possible by moving regularly.
- Keep up your usual routine of skin checks and immediately follow up on anything that doesn't look right.

Be mindful of thermoregulation

- Be conscious of being exposed to extreme heat or cold conditions and look at ways to manage this effectively.
- Wear light layers that can be added to or removed depending on the temperature.

See if you can access extra support

You may be able to arrange Personal Support Workers to help you pack and unpack, to make this process easier. At your destination, you could also arrange for help settling into your accommodation and unpacking what you need, so you can enjoy your holiday time.

Keep your stress levels under control

Stress can sometimes be an easy trap to fall into while travelling, especially if things aren't going right. Sometimes imagining the worst-case scenario, and questioning what the next step would be if your worst nightmare came true, is oddly helpful. It can put some perspective on a situation that causes stress, and help you realise that if it did happen, though it's not ideal, it's also not the end of the world.

By utilising the above as a guide and adding or adapting to your specific journey and requirements, you'll find you are better prepared and can reduce stress once you arrive at your destination.

Travelling should be enjoyable for everyone, and it can be with the right preparation and research. Just by quickly Googling the 'most accessible destinations', you will be filled with knowledge, curiosity, and an eagerness to see what the world has to offer you. [A](#)

Visit spinal.com.au/nursing to find out more about our Community Nursing service.

Meet our nurses

Our Community Nursing team helps with bladder and bowel management, continence assessments, wound assessments and dressings, NDIS assistance and more. While our nurses are based in Brisbane, telehealth consultations are available.

DEB DENT

COMMUNITY NURSE SPECIALIST



After working for six years as a nurse in the Spinal Injuries Unit (SIU) at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, Deb knows the medical complexities that come with sustaining a spinal cord injury. In 2020, she brought her skills and experience to Spinal Life as a Community Nurse Specialist in the greater Brisbane region.

PENNY SCOTT

COMMUNITY NURSE



Penny started working as an enrolled nurse at the Princess Alexandra Hospital in 2010. In 2012 she moved to the SIU and started studying to become a registered nurse while working full time. Penny decided to join the Spinal Life team so she could keep working with patients she met during her time in the SIU and see how they continue to progress.

ELLE SAINT

COMMUNITY NURSE



After completing her nursing degree at Griffith University, Elle worked as a registered nurse in the SIU, before bringing her experience and knowledge to Spinal Life. She provides specialist in-home nursing services to improve the wellbeing and quality of life for clients with spinal cord damage, including bladder and bowel management, pressure sore and wound care, diabetes education, medication reviews, general health assessments and more.

SHARON EGAN

COMMUNITY NURSE SPECIALIST



Sharon is the newest addition to our team and has more than 48 years' experience as a nurse, with four of these working in the SIU at the Princess Alexandra Hospital. Sharon is excited to be part of the experienced nursing team at Spinal Life, assisting clients in the greater Brisbane region with wound care, tracheostomy care, training Spinal Life Personal Support Workers and more.

MAKING WAVES FOR BETTER BEACH ACCESS



Spinal Life Senior Advisor, Access, Advocacy & Grants Dane Cross has been reviewing beach accessibility

Going to the beach is a quintessential Australian pastime that should be able to be enjoyed by everyone.

With many public beaches still inaccessible for people with a disability, our Advocacy team has been hard at work to find solutions.

When reviewing this issue, the team found approximately 26 beaches in Queensland have introduced accessibility measures such as beach wheelchairs and matting, provided by the local surf lifesaving clubs or Council lifeguard services.

Spinal Life members also provided feedback about their experiences, sharing that they have found the process of accessing equipment varies significantly depending on the location, which can lead to confusion and additional challenges when trying to safely visit the beach.

During their research, the Advocacy team found there is no central 'resource kit' for surf lifesaving clubs and Councils to refer to, which would outline best practice for facilitating disability access to beaches.

Spinal Life Board Director Gerard O'Brien, who has a long history with Surf Life Saving Queensland, is helping to progress this important issue.

"When I speak with people involved in the surf lifesaving movement, there is so much goodwill towards making our beaches more accessible, yet there remains confusion about what can and cannot be done," he said.

"That is why Spinal Life is ready to develop a resource kit, which will provide a standardised approach for surf lifesaving clubs and Councils to follow, in order to evaluate and introduce beach accessibility measures.

"This resource would also contain a step-by-step process for managing and maintaining required equipment, including a list of suppliers, as well as advice on how to appropriately assist beachgoers with a disability.

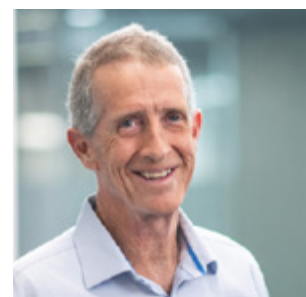
"By having a consistent process and making this information readily available in our Accessible Australia app, people with a disability and their families can be more confident that their day out to the beach will be seamless and stress-free."

Spinal Life is seeking funding to undertake this important work and if successful will be collaborating with Surf Life Saving Queensland to develop the resource kit, with more information to be shared soon. [A](#)

Visit spinal.com.au/advocacy to find out more about our advocacy work.

MEET GERARD

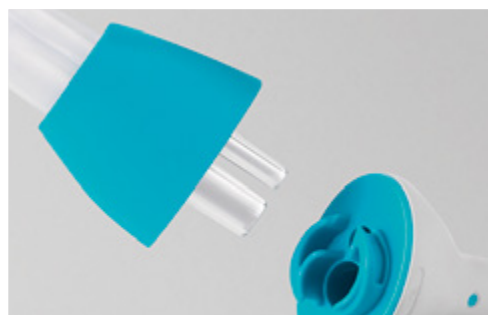
With an extensive history in finance, corporate governance and management, Gerard O'Brien joined the Spinal Life Board in 2019, to share his expertise and make a positive contribution to the organisation's growth.



In addition to his work with Spinal Life, Gerard has been actively involved with the surf lifesaving movement for many years, including 'on the sand' activities with his family and in management positions. He has been President of Surf Life Saving Sunshine Coast since 2019, which covers 15 clubs.

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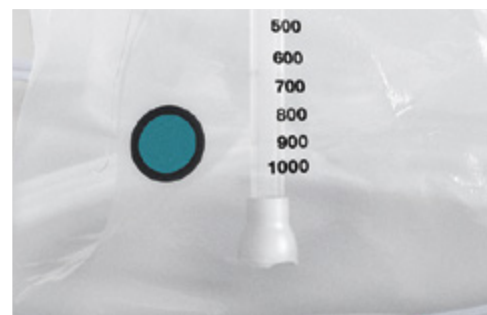
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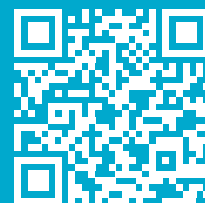
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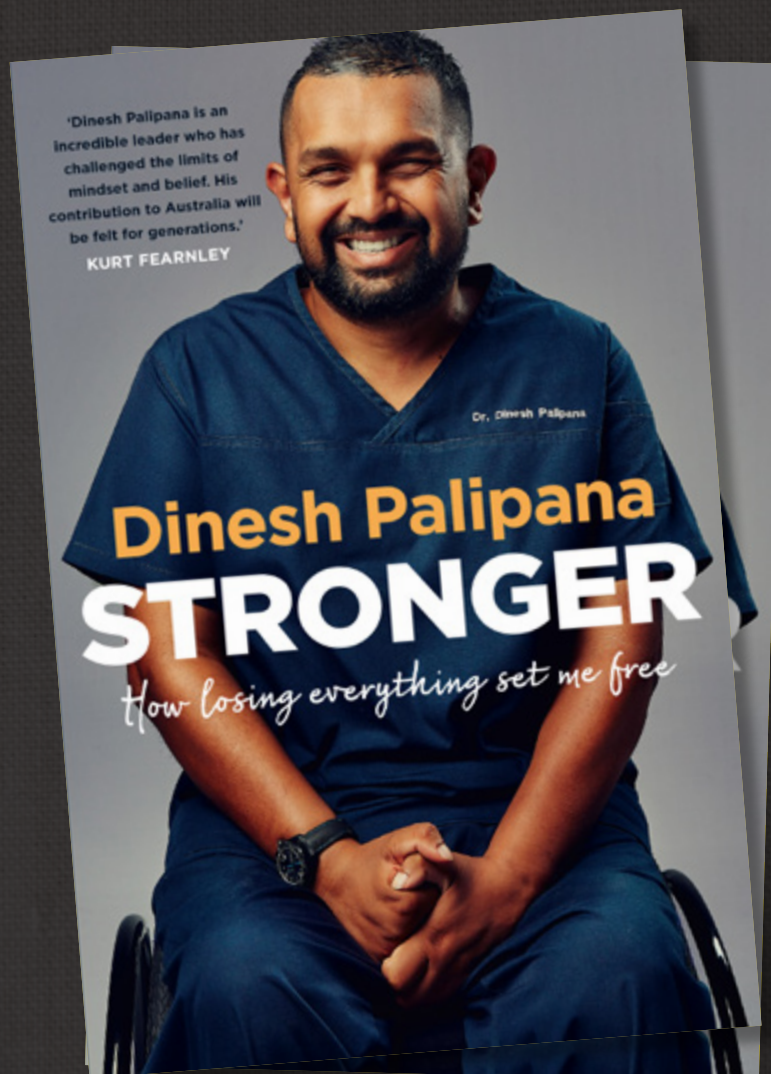
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The Write Stuff

We've got your next must-read title all lined up – and the author is a Spinal Life Board Member

Regular readers of *The Advocate* will be familiar with the story of Dr Dinesh Palipana OAM, and how in 2010 he was involved in a life-changing car accident while halfway through medical school.

Despite his spinal cord injury he returned to complete medical school – and ultimately became the first person with quadriplegia to graduate medical school in Queensland... and just the second in all of Australia.

In 2021, Dinesh was named Queensland Australian of the Year, and in 2019 he was awarded an Order of Australia Medal; and became the third Australian ever to receive a Henry Viscardi Achievement Award in New York, which recognises exemplary leaders with disabilities.

These days Dinesh works in one of the busiest emergency rooms in Australia at the Gold Coast University Hospital. He's also a researcher, a lawyer, a disability advocate, a founding member of Doctors with Disabilities

Australia... and even finds time to be on the Board of Spinal Life Australia!

And now, thanks to the July release of his inspirational memoir, Dinesh can also add author to this incredible list of achievements.

In *Stronger: How Losing Everything Set Me Free*, he recounts the story of his extraordinary life so far, and how he believes his accident helped him to clarify what's important, and has actually made him a better and more sensitive, compassionate doctor – and human.

It's a truly compelling story and should be on everyone's must-read list. In the meantime, we asked Dinesh just what it's like to commit your life story to the pages of a book.

What inspired you to write your memoir?

"Friends and family, really. I still feel like an impostor. I've been really lucky to have people in my life who have

continuously prodded me to write the story. Eventually, they helped me bring it to life. I was so nervous about it coming out, but the reception has been heartwarming. I didn't sleep much the night before the release date!"

Can you describe your writing process?

"I did it in between my day job as a doctor, my parallel job as a researcher, and the other things that I am lucky to be doing. Through the thick of it, I went to my desk after work, then often wrote till the sun came up. Since I was writing my own story it was a reasonably straightforward process, but I wanted to get the right reflections in as well. I wanted the tone to be conversational – I didn't want it to be too serious, but get a few points across for people to think about."

How long did it take to complete, from start to finish?

"The entire process took many months, but writing the first draft was done within about three weeks. Again, this is because I was juggling it in between working through a pandemic, of all things."

Did you ever get writer's block and how did you overcome this?

"I'm surprised to say that I didn't. I was writing from my own memories, which was easy enough. I think the part that took the most effort was to condense them into sensible and readable segments."

How did you feel about the book being published?

"I'm still nervous! A couple of people told me that when you're writing a book, it's yours, but then it's the world's. So far, I am so happy with the feedback but still, it's scary."


What do you hope readers will take away from the book?

"I wish that I could tell the readers that life will be smooth sailing, but we often come across difficult things. I just want them to know that they will be okay, to stay the course and to believe – especially when the chips are down. Outside of that, I hope that it encourages the world to be more inclusive of people with disability."

What has the response been like?

"The response has been great so far. I feel very lucky!"

What are you most excited about, looking to the future?

"Everything! The world is an amazing place. For example, I recently started flying again. There is exciting medical research into spinal cord injury. We are moving into a time where society is becoming more inclusive. I love life." 

Stronger by Dinesh Palipana, published by Pan Macmillan Australia, is available in paper, ebook and audiobook formats.

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Have your say at the AGM

As a member-based organisation, Spinal Life Australia hosts an Annual General Meeting each year for members to participate in and share their feedback.

The meeting is also an opportunity for the Spinal Life Board and Executive team to share more about the organisation's achievements over the past financial year.

At this year's meeting, to be held on Monday 14 November, the Board is also proposing an important change to our Constitution to be voted on by members, which is vital to our future success.

The key points of the proposal are summarised below, with more detailed information available on our website.

Five things you need to know:



1. The majority of Board Directors, including our Chair, will *always* be people who have lived experience of spinal cord damage, combining first-hand knowledge of disability with their professional skills.



2. We look for new Directors based on what skills are most needed on the Board at any time, to ensure we have the strongest possible team – the right mix of skills and expertise to achieve Spinal Life's goals.



3. Under the proposal, members will continue to choose the Directors who have lived experience, who you feel will best represent you – these will be called Elected Directors.



4. The remaining group of Directors will be chosen by the Board and subject to regular performance reviews, just like any other role – these will be called Appointed Directors.



5. This change will bring Spinal Life in line with other similar organisations; and ensure we can attract the highest quality Board candidates who have the skills we really need to be successful in the competitive environment.

Visit spinal.com.au/agm2022 to find out how to participate in the Annual General Meeting, and for frequently asked questions about this proposal.



CATCH UP WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

Our Peer Support catch-ups are held across Queensland and Western Australia. Keep an eye on Facebook and our website for updates on upcoming events.

If you'd like to connect with our Peer Support, Post Polio or Transverse Myelitis Groups in your region, please use the contact details below.

Spinal Life Peer Support Groups

BRIE ISLAND: Bill Peacock on 0403 686 998.
Combined with Post Polio group.

BRISBANE: Fred Nitz on 0412 190 585.

BUNDABERG: Steve Richter on 0413 457 284.

MACKAY: Debra Reaves on 0487 021 735.

MORETON BAY: Ross Duncan on 0475 077 080.

ROCKHAMPTON: Robynne Clifton on 0473 576 107
or Anne Guthrie on 0407 116 035.

Post Polio Groups

CAIRNS: Joy Hay on 4055 5795.

GOLD COAST: Lyn Glover on 0448 206 856
or Joan Radanovic on 0413 178 073.

SUNSHINE COAST: Cathy Newman on 5447 6608.

Transverse Myelitis Group

Contact Jodi Gallon on 0451 235 860.

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Hand controls make driving possible for any ability

Endlessly customisable hand controls for people who love to drive



Professional athlete Paul Crake was competing at the World Road Cycling Championships in New Zealand in 2006 when he had a serious accident that resulted in T4 paraplegia.

After leaving hospital, Paul and his wife Daniela relocated to her home of Italy, where they discovered Fadiel Italiana.

When they returned to Australia, Paul found the local equipment severely lacking. He loved to drive – and knew people with disability in Australia did too – but felt restricted by a lack of high-quality assistive driving technology.

This led Paul and Daniela to establish Total Ability in 2011, becoming the exclusive distributors of Fadiel Italiana products in Australia and New Zealand.

Why Fadiel Italiana?

With over 30 years of experience, Fadiel Italiana's range represents the best assistive driving technology the industry has to offer. As a company, they have helped countless people living with disability not just be able to drive, but love to drive.

All Fadiel Italiana's offerings combine sleek Italian aesthetics with durable construction. Their products are renowned for comprehensive customisation options, with hand controls being no exception.

Total Ability recently introduced two new Fadiel Italiana hand controls, the Ergonomic Radial and Easy Drive, to complement their flagship Satellite Accelerator.

Ergonomic Radial

Designed for people with limited dexterity, the Ergonomic Radial and Brake Lever can be configured with a palm or lever grip handle. Both handles can be customised in terms of weight and rotation.

The hand rests in a naturally comfortable position atop the control during operation. A modest push activates the brake, while acceleration requires only a gentle turn of the hand. Operation of the Ergonomic Radial places almost no stress on the shoulder.

Easy Drive

Available in three models – Push/Pull, Pull/Radial, and Floor Brake – Easy Drive can be configured to suit all needs and preferences. Designed for comfort and ease of use, the force required for braking and acceleration are independently adjustable.

Easy Drive's convenient brake lock feature allows the user to rest at traffic lights, plus comfortably operate the gears lever during manoeuvres like three-point turns.

Satellite Accelerator

The Satellite Accelerator is for the driver who wants to maintain both hands on the wheel. Available in wired and wireless versions, the unit enables acceleration with an innovative thumb operated lever.

Two-handed driving provides more precise control of the vehicle and a safer feel for the driver. Most users also report a substantial decrease in fatigue compared to other control options.

Love to drive? So do we!

The only thing we love as much as driving is helping people get on the road again.

Whether you are looking at options to return to driving, have never driven at all, or want to increase driving freedom and capacity, the team at Total Ability can help.

To access our free step-by-step Complete Guide to Driving with Disability as well as instructional videos, visit totalability.com.au or reach out to our team on 1300 858 410.

Getting to know...

Service Establishment Key Worker, Kristian Reynolds-Smith



For more than five years, Kristian Reynolds-Smith has been an important part of Spinal Life's Personal Support and Home Care Services.

Kristian first started as a Personal Support Worker before becoming a Service Establishment Key Worker, helping to ensure new clients receive the support services they need to live the life they choose.

With her positive outlook and an empathetic approach to everything she does, Kristian is also inspiring her colleagues too, saying: "In this role we are learning every single day how to be and do better."

Can you tell us a little about yourself?

My name is Kristian (pronounced like Christian) and I'm 29 years old. I live just north of the Gold Coast and I'm formerly from Newcastle, NSW. I have an amazing partner and two beautiful dogs and I am a follower of AUS and USA basketball.

What three words describe you best?

Punctual, empathetic, and professional.

Can you describe an average day in your role?

The main responsibilities of a Service Establishment Key Worker are to assist new clients to transition to Spinal Life services.

An average day could look like – learning and creating a routine for new clients in their home, creating documents such as Individual Support Plans and Residential Hazard Inspections for the client to best support them and the PSWs, and training both new and existing PSWs with their new clients.

What's the best thing about your job?

The training we receive to best perform in our position, the support from the team to be able to do the job to the best of my ability and, most importantly, being able to see the progress the clients make as time goes on.

What's the funniest moment you've ever had while on a job?

Haha, so one time on shift I was removing a client's pressure stockings (keep in mind, I poke my tongue out when I concentrate) and as I got the pressure stocking off, the client had a leg spasm. Being that my face was too close to the foot – the client accidentally put his big toe in my mouth. We both looked at each other with horror for 30 seconds or so, before he laughed the hardest I have ever heard him laugh. Needless to say, I borrowed some of his mouthwash to wash my mouth out!

What's the one thing you wish more people would understand about spinal cord injuries?

I wish people would understand that just because someone uses a wheelchair does not mean that they are unable to make their own decisions or speak for themselves, countless times I've been with clients and people look to me to communicate about the client instead of talking to the client directly. I've removed myself from way too many situations like this.

What is the most important lesson your work has taught you?

Not one single person is exactly the same as the next! 

To nominate a team member to feature in a future issue, email theadvocate@spinal.com.au

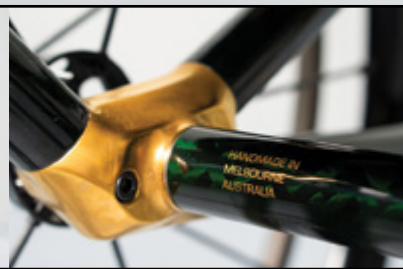
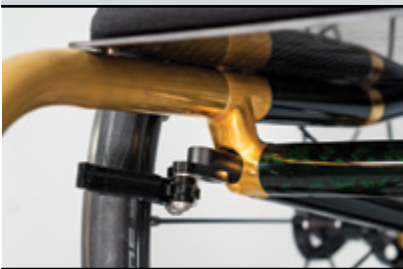


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The latest

Information, inspiration and inclusivity



Bionics Queensland CEO
Dr Robyn Stokes



Spinal Life member James Powell



James Powell and Dr Robyn Stokes
with Spinal Life Executive Manager –
Business Development Frances Porter

CHALLENGE ACCELERATES LIFE-CHANGING INNOVATIONS

A competition has been launched to fast-track innovations and technology that have the potential to change the lives of millions of people.

The Bionics Challenge 2022, led by Bionics Queensland, provides mentoring support and funds to inventors of bionic devices, treatments and implants; that will help people affected by road accident trauma, related disabilities and health conditions return to a full and active life.

Bionics Queensland CEO Dr Robyn Stokes said she was excited to see this year's ideas and discoveries, with the competition open to "everyone from accident survivors themselves to grassroots innovators and start-ups, clinicians, engineers, AI and robotics experts and allied health practitioners".

"The field of bionics has expanded, with new mobility devices and e-suits, VR and AR enabled e-stimulation for spinal cord injuries, improved brain-computer-interface devices to treat brain injuries, plus new bionic implants and

allied wearables that, in time, will redefine and overturn disability itself," Dr Stokes said.

Spinal Life member and aviation engineer James Powell helped to launch this year's Bionics Challenge, sharing more about the 'landing gear' system he designed to stabilise his motorbike when braking.

The competition is delivered in partnership with the Motor Accident Insurance Commission (MAIC), with prize winners receiving valuable funds to bring their innovations to life, as well as the opportunity to talk to Australia's best advisors about things like start-up costs, finalising their designs and manufacturing.

This year's theme is *Innovating in Medical Bionics to Transform the Lives of those impacted by Trauma/Injury, Disability and Disease.* [A](#)

Visit bionicsqueensland.com.au to find out more.

SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK ON SUSTAINABILITY

The Spinal Life team has commenced the journey towards better sustainability across our entire organisation, to make sure we are doing everything we can to protect our future.

Led by Board Director Michelle Wilson, we are seeking feedback from you about improvements that we could make to be more sustainable.

This includes things like the way we manage electricity and water at our sites, paper and other waste generated, fuel when our team travel to clients each day, air travel and more; looking at ways we can reduce our impact and make the best use of resources available to us. [A](#)

To share your feedback or become more involved, email sustainability@spinal.com.au

LATE EFFECTS OF POLIO AWARENESS

We're proud to support Polio Australia's efforts to raise awareness of the late effects of polio in hospitals across Australia.

As part of the organisation's clinical education program, more than 200 kits are being sent to hospitals, which include key documents covering three areas: allied health, medical/surgical and nursing.

These kits provide valuable information for hospital staff, when patients advise that they have the late effects of polio.

At Spinal Life, we're continuing to provide a resource endorsed by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners to educate GPs about the condition, aiming to increase their knowledge and support them to better diagnose and treat polio survivors as they age.

We also have copies of a Medical Alert card for polio survivors to keep on hand, to assist in providing key information to health professionals when needed. [A](#)

Visit spinal.com.au/polio to find out more.



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ROCKING THE 'TOK

Meet the 21-year-old student who broke his back in a freak skiing accident and is now a TikTok superstar



If you're on TikTok, you probably already know of Jimmy Jan. And if you haven't succumbed to the popular app just yet, Jimmy's brilliant posts might just be what inspires you to download it.

During lockdown, the 21-year-old medical student from Newcastle in New South Wales was living in a van in the Snowy Mountains. His studies had gone online, so he was making the most of his season pass and doing his uni work from the slopes.

But then on one fateful day in August last year he hit the slopes, hit the jumps, performed an unintentional backflip and landed badly: directly on his head, as it turned out. He lost consciousness, was airlifted to Sydney for emergency spinal surgery, and spent a month in hospital and then a few more in rehab. Doctors told Jimmy that he was paralysed from the waist down and would never walk again.

Jimmy's response to the news was unexpected, to say the least. With astonishing maturity, determination

and positivity – and after just five days in the ICU – he decided to continue with his studies, and later sat his end-of-semester exams in hospital.

He also started documenting his new life on TikTok, where his upbeat attitude comes across loud and clear. In one post explaining his situation he says: “The accident I had that day was pretty severe and the course of my life changed in an instant, and it will literally never be the same. But there's nothing I can do to change what happened that day. All I can do is look back and say, ‘oopsie.’ My point is that sometimes bad things happen in life, and there's nothing you can do to change them.”

More than 615,000 people now follow Jimmy's account, drawn to his resilience and positive approach to life in a wheelchair, his fun and upbeat vibes, and genius sense of humour.

The TikTok that really propelled Jimmy to internet fame was his “boyfriend application video,” in which he lists the benefits of dating him. In his typically

self-deprecating style he says things like, “I'm Jimmy, I'll never walk away from you” and jokes about perks such as his access to parking (“Premium parking, always”). The cheeky clip quickly went viral, and to date has had more than 16 million views.

In other clips you'll find him doing everything from cooking tutorials (his recipe for “ground oats” literally involves pouring oats on the ground), putting together Ikea furniture (it's way more fun if you're using a wheelchair, apparently) and even going skiing again (“Would you believe me if I said I didn't fall over the whole day? Because you definitely shouldn't. Because I definitely did. A lot.”) It's feel-good vibes all the way – not to mention epic stacks, which Jimmy manages in his chair with alarming regularity.

If you're on TikTok and you're not following Jimmy Jan already, this is your sign to find his account now and click that plus sign for a charming dose of positivity. **A**

Follow [@jimmyjan](https://www.tiktok.com/@jimmyjan) on TikTok

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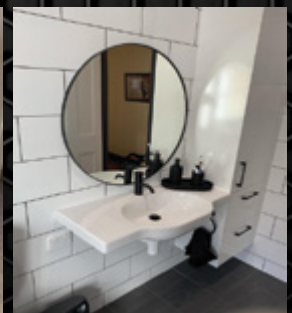
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