

THE Advocate

A VOICE FOR ACCESSIBLE, EQUITABLE AND EMPOWERED LIVES | AUTUMN 2024 ISSUE

**The healing power
of hydrotherapy**

**Finding your
career path**

**Making beach access
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It's Game Time

SPORTING WHEELIES JOINS SPINAL LIFE

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF

Spinal Life
AUSTRALIA



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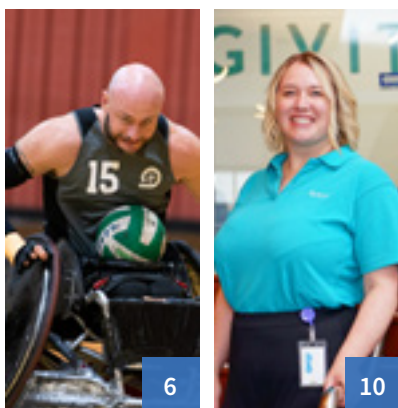
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Kicking goals for our community

We are “off the blocks and racing” in 2024, with an exciting start to the year.

In early January, members of Sporting Wheelies voted unanimously to transition their organisation to become part of Spinal Life Australia.

The decision followed months of careful negotiations and due diligence by both the Spinal Life and Sporting Wheelies Boards, looking at the financial sustainability for both organisations, and how we could best support people with disability to stay healthy and active.

Bringing Sporting Wheelies into the Spinal Life fold just made sense, given our shared mission and vision, and the opportunity to bring together our expertise and resources to grow much-needed community sporting and recreation programs.

Our aim is to continue building Sporting Wheelies’ grassroots programs to encourage people of all ages to participate in sport for the many health and wellbeing benefits, not to mention the social aspects of getting involved.

There will also be a very important focus on pathways to professional sport on a national and international level, as we look towards the 2032 Brisbane Olympics and Paralympics.

Sporting Wheelies will continue to operate from existing locations, including the Para Sports Clubhouse in Milton, and will deliver the same services on a ‘business as usual’ basis.

Lastly, I wanted to thank everyone who participated in Spinal Life’s Annual

General Meeting (AGM), which was held on Thursday 23 November virtually and in person at our Woolloongabba office.

At the meeting, members elected Board Director Rebecca Tweedy to continue in her role, having already made a valuable contribution since she first joined in 2021.

Rebecca brings wide-ranging experience not only as a Musculoskeletal Physiotherapist and a respected leader in the Allied Health space, but she also has the unique perspective of being a parent of a son who has a spinal cord injury.

In other changes to the Board, in January we farewelled long-term Board Director Michelle Wilson, who chose to step down from her role and pursue other opportunities.

Michelle first joined the Board in 2019 and was also the Chair of our Audit, Finance and Risk Committee, due to her extensive professional skills as a Chartered Accountant.

On behalf of the Board, we extend our thanks to Michelle for volunteering her time so generously, and for the expertise and guidance she provided during her tenure.

I look forward to updating you on the Board in our next Advocate issue, and as always please reach out to chair@spinal.com.au if you have any questions or feedback. [A](#)

GYL STACEY

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?



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



3 QUESTIONS WITH THE CEO

Mark Townend

What are you most excited about?

As you may have read in Gyl's column, it's been exciting to welcome Sporting Wheelies into the Spinal Life family.

We're looking forward to supporting the growth of grassroots programs for sport and recreation, along with providing more pathways to elite sport.

Spinal Life is also a proud part-owner of Move Mobility, an equipment supply business that is focused on providing exceptional customer service, quicker access to products, as well as high-quality after-sales support.

As we go to print, Move Mobility has opened a brand new showroom in Bundaberg, joining their locations in Shailer Park and Robina. Our Bundaberg Spinal Life team has also moved from our previous office into a dedicated space within the new showroom, and we're looking forward to collaborating further with the Move Mobility team in future.

Move Mobility has also launched their website for you to view their range of products, at movemobility.com.au.

Is there any news on the Brisbane Precinct?

Our proposed Brisbane Precinct has been inspired by our Healthy Living Centres in Cairns and Woolloongabba, to provide health, wellness and rehabilitation services, plus fully accessible accommodation, a fitness hub and hydrotherapy pool, all in the one place.

We are working to finalise a proposed site, which will be close to the Princess Alexandra Hospital so we can best support people transitioning home from the Spinal Injuries Unit, as well as everyone else who would like to access these important services.

The Precinct will also house a range of other services and programs to ensure our members, clients and community can find everything they need in the one convenient location.

We will continue to update you on the progress of these plans and seek feedback on proposed services in the near future.

Are there any key advocacy projects underway?

As part of our ongoing efforts to make tourism more inclusive for everyone, we were thrilled to announce a partnership with the Australian Tourism Industry Council (ATIC), which is the national representative body of Australia's tourism industry councils.

The Accessible Tourism program will see businesses undertake a comprehensive accessibility assessment, to identify improvements they could make, as well as ensure the information they provide to visitors is accurate and relevant to their needs.

We will also be working with ATIC to provide ongoing advice and advocacy to small tourism businesses, local and regional tourism organisations and the Australian Government.

Accessible tourism is one of the many advocacy areas our team is working on at the moment, considering feedback from our members on the challenges they are facing in their daily lives.

As always, please don't hesitate to contact me at ceo@spinal.com.au if you ever have any feedback or suggestions on our advocacy campaigns or anything else.



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A Sporting Partnership

The Spinal Life family has expanded to increase sporting opportunities for people with disability



Competitors in action at the 2021 Queensland Wheelchair Rugby Championships, known as 'The Bash'.
Image courtesy of Joep Buijs Photography



Toowoomba athlete Charlotte Barber loves going to regional wheelchair basketball competitions.

We've got big news to share in this first issue of *The Advocate* for 2024: Sporting Wheelies is now part of Spinal Life!

It's a marvellous combination, bringing together two Queensland organisations renowned for their commitment to building a more inclusive and accessible Australia.

Spinal Life is a leading provider of advocacy, therapy and support services for people with spinal cord damage and other physical disabilities, while Sporting Wheelies is a leading provider of inclusive sports, recreation and rehabilitation services.

Together, the team will ensure people with disability continue to be supported to stay active and healthy through sport, recreation and leisure. And by combining forces, they're going to help more Queenslanders get involved at the grassroots level, while also strengthening the pathways to elite competitions like the Paralympics and world championships.

With the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games only eight years away, it's an exciting time for aspiring athletes and Paralympians across the state, with opportunities and resources set to increase dramatically.

Toowoomba-based Charlotte Barber, 21, is one such athlete keen to ride the Brisbane Paralympics wave (if you can use a surfing analogy for wheelchair basketball).

"I'm really hoping to make it into the Paralympics in 2032 for wheelchair basketball," says Charlotte, who got into the sport through her brother Dylan and has been playing for about six years. >

Thomas Robins attends boccia every week at Sporting Wheelies. Image courtesy of Joep Buijs Photography



Together with Dylan, 25, and her other brother Curtis, 23, Charlotte plays for the Toowoomba Bushrangers.

“Thanks to Sporting Wheelies I’ve made quite a few friends; not just the people on my local team, but people behind the scenes as well,” says Charlotte.

She especially loves going to regional competitions, where she can sign up to play for other teams. “It’s great when we can branch out, meet new people and experience different coaches and different ways to play. Everyone’s supportive of each other and it’s so much fun, I just love it.”

The role of Sporting Wheelies in making this all possible, is enormous.

“Sporting Wheelies has really come to the party when it comes to wheelchair basketball in Toowoomba,” says Charlotte. “They’re pretty much in charge of the whole thing, like handling all the admin and registration fees and so on. They’re a big part of Toowoomba basketball and I can say, hand on heart, that if it wasn’t for Sporting Wheelies there would not be a Toowoomba team.”

But the Sporting Wheelies/Spinal Life collab is not just about helping budding Paralympians: it’s also about participation for everyone, encouraging more people to sign up for social sport and recreation, and creating a space where everyone can feel like they belong.

People like Thomas Robins, 19, who lives in Beerwah on the Sunshine Coast and is an enthusiastic participant in the game of boccia.

Ways to get involved

WHERE TO FIND SPORTING WHEELIES

The Sporting Wheelies Para Sports Clubhouse (2 Kilroe Street, Milton) opened last year, providing an inclusive sports hub with sports programs as well as rehabilitation services.

You can also find sport and Exercise Physiology services in Townsville, as well as dedicated sports programs in other parts of Queensland. All the details are on the website.

If you’re part of a sports or recreation activity that is accessible and inclusive and would like to be part of Sporting Wheelies’ line-up of programs, we’d love to hear from you!

Thomas, who has a genetic disorder called hereditary spastic paraplegia (HSP), originally got involved with Sporting Wheelies in around 2017, playing wheelchair basketball competitively for two or three years and even competing at the nationals in Townsville.

“But I stopped playing wheelchair basketball because I realised that I don’t really fit well with team sports – mostly because when I’m participating in sport I don’t really talk much, which is hard when you’re in a team setting,” he says. And so he moved on to boccia.

“I came to know about boccia through a ‘come and try’ event where you try different para sports,” Thomas says. He started to play at Sporting Wheelies and hasn’t looked back.

“At Sporting Wheelies they have a coach and a weekly social session for every sport they offer,” he says. “I come down from the Sunshine Coast to attend the boccia session for two hours every Wednesday. I also have a session with the Exercise Physiology services while I’m down there, which really helps with my strength and mobility.”

While boccia is a competitive Paralympic sport, Thomas prefers to just enjoy the ‘now’ and not plan too far ahead. But you never know what the future could bring, so watch this space!

Sporting Wheelies will continue to operate from their existing locations, including the Para Sports Clubhouse in Milton, and deliver the same services on a ‘business as usual’ basis.

Therapy and rehabilitation services will continue to be offered as well as sports, and the whole exciting transition will be overseen by new Chief Operating Officer, Dane Cross.

Spinal Life members will already know Dane for his passion for providing accessible, inclusive, high-quality advocacy for people with disability, through advocacy as well as access and inclusion consulting. He’ll head up a team that will consist of many existing Sporting Wheelies staff members.

There’s a lovely sense of coming full circle with the recent changes, as Sporting Wheelies first began in the 1960s as a small sports club within what was then known as the Paraplegic Welfare Association in Queensland, and which later became... Spinal Life Australia!

Sporting Wheelies became a separate not-for-profit in 1977, solely focused on providing sporting and recreational activities for people with disability.

With such a strong, shared mission – to support people with disability to live accessible, equitable and empowered lives – joining forces is an incredibly positive step forward for aspiring athletes and sports-loving people across Queensland and the rest of Australia. We look forward to updating you in the next issue of *The Advocate*. [A](#)

For more information about Sporting Wheelies, go to: sportingwheelies.org.au

JOIN A SPORTS PROGRAM

Sporting Wheelies is the state body for five Paralympic sports for Queenslanders with disability, including wheelchair rugby, wheelchair basketball, boccia, goalball and para-powerlifting.

Play for fun and meet new friends, develop new skills and get fit, all within a supportive environment – and train for elite competitions if you choose.

There are also volunteering opportunities to help out during sports competitions, as well as events that raise vital funds to continue Sporting Wheelies services and programs.

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT AND WIN

Each month Sporting Wheelies holds an Art Union to raise funds to support Queenslanders with disability to participate in sport and recreation.

Purchase a ticket in the monthly competition and you could win a share of \$30,000 in cash prizes, with a \$20,000 first prize for the winner of the draw.

There is also a monthly \$5,000 bonus prize for VIP supporters who sign up to buy tickets on a regular basis, with \$1,000 cash for five VIP runners-up.

Want to find out more? Visit sportingwheelies.org.au or call the team on **07 3253 3333**.



The art of giving

When companies treat employees with a spinal injury right

GIVIT is a national not-for-profit donation platform for people who need a helping hand. It's kind of like a matchmaking service, connecting more than 4,500 community organisations across Australia with the general public (a.k.a the generous public). Organisations can request exactly what's needed by the people they support, and then kind individuals can donate exactly those goods and services. Basically, it's all about supporting people in need, in a smart and thoughtful way.

And, as it turns out, GIVIT's pretty good at supporting its own people, too.

One such person is Hannah Tate, now 27, who was in a motor vehicle accident in February 2020, when she was 24 years old.

"I was riding my motorbike on the way to work and stopped behind a bus while it let passengers off," she explains. "And then an elderly driver just smashed right into me, with no brakes or anything."

The impact propelled Hannah forwards, and then back onto the hood of the man's car. She was rushed to the Royal Brisbane Hospital where they gave her a spinal fusion to stabilise a T12 burst fracture. Three or four weeks later, they

Hannah Tate (accompanied by Barbie), giving it all she's got at GIVIT, the not-for-profit organisation that really looked after her following a life-changing accident.

“ GIVIT has been extremely supportive at every stage – my boss at the time even came to visit me in hospital. ”

don't work properly and I've got a lot of weakness in my glute muscles. I've also got bladder and bowel disability that have to be worked manually, which I think was the biggest change for me.”

Hannah spent about two months in the SIU, where she was taught techniques to handle loss of function, and had to learn to walk again.

“I started off in a wheelchair, when my legs were completely incapacitated, and moved on to double forearm crutches which I used for a long time,” she explains. “Now I use an ankle-foot orthosis (AFO); a special type of leg brace called a PDE (Posterior Dynamic Element). They help keep me stable, and also manufacture the spring that you should get through your calf, but that I'm missing. They're awesome.”

Hannah, who has continued to do rehab since she left hospital, has nothing but praise for the SIU: “They basically prepared me so that I could return home safely,” she says.

At that stage, home was an investment property owned by Hannah's parents. >

moved her to the Spinal Injuries Unit (SIU) at the Princess Alexandra Hospital. “It was a scary time,” says Hannah.

The ultimate diagnosis was an L3 Asia B SCI. “I've got permanent spinal damage beneath L1/L2; technically it's incomplete paraplegia because my spinal cord is not severed, but it's still damaged. And it's not curable,” she explains.

“I didn't know much about what the long-term chronic impacts would be,” she continues. “These days I do have sensation in my legs, but it's reduced. My calf muscles



"I was renting the property and looking after my parents' dog, as they had just left to work in the UK for a few years," she says. "And then I had my accident."

Luckily, it was a low-set home with no stairs. A few changes were needed to make it more accessible, such as renovating the ensuite, but Hannah was able to move straight back in after she left hospital.

Her parents – suddenly homeless thanks to their unexpected return from the UK after Hannah's accident and the outbreak of an unexpected pandemic – moved in with her.

"I'm quite an independent person, but I definitely needed help when I first got out of the SIU, so it all worked out well," says Hannah.

Four months later her sister, Lauren, joined them. Already close, the sisters became even closer during this time and have lived together ever since. "We're now living together in Nundah, where I bought an apartment about six months ago," says Hannah. "She's even taken on a few caring roles for me, and we just got a little Labrador puppy called Wilson."

Hannah's parents, meanwhile, had moved into their own place after about six months. A question mark looms over the notion of them heading back to the UK, as a stressful court case involving the accident is still ongoing.

"The effects of all of this were being reflected in my body," says Hannah, who has struggled with chronic pain. "I guess it was a reminder that I'm still in recovery. Even though it's been three years since my accident, there are so many things in life that can hurt your body in ways that you've never experienced previously."

So, at the end of 2023, Hannah undertook a five-week pain-management course at the Wesley Pain and Spine Centre. "As a result, I had to reduce my hours and sort of go into survival mode at work," she says.

Which brings us nicely back to GIVIT and their unwavering support of Hannah.

"From the get-go, it was a very warm, welcoming and generous workplace," she says. "GIVIT has been extremely supportive at every stage – my boss at the time even came to visit me in hospital."

GIVIT made it possible for Hannah to return to work in a part-time capacity about five months after her injury. Which is all the more incredible when you learn that at

the time of her accident, Hannah had only been working at the company for four weeks!

"I was really motivated to get back to work, I was itching to get going," says Hannah, who also had help from NIISSQ and Spinal Life's Back2Work team.

"I was referred to Back2Work during my stay at the SIU, and my caseworker played a huge and important role in guiding me through the process," recalls Hannah. "It was great to get advice and insights into the challenges I would face when returning to work with a spinal cord injury."

She also worked with a physiotherapist who helped set up an ergonomic work station so that Hannah could work from home.


"In my first year back at GIVIT I worked from home 100% of the time, and I will always need access to a work-from-home option," she says. "But these days I work a four-day week, for five hours each day."

Wednesdays are Hannah's day off, and she divides the other days between her home office and GIVIT's HQ in Milton. It's a strategic schedule that Hannah planned with her Back2Work team: "They got me really thinking about my work hours – not just the total number, but how to structure them in a week and organise them cleverly to avoid fatigue and burnout."

Prior to the accident, Hannah had been working at GIVIT as a social media officer, but these days she's in a digital marketing role.

"My new role is really exciting," she says. "GIVIT basically created it for me and tailored the team to make it all possible. What they've done is brilliant and should be standard practice in getting people with a disability back to work, but sadly it's definitely the exception."

A new home, a new puppy and a new and exciting role at GIVIT: it's been a *big* couple of years for Hannah. So what's next?

"After dealing with the accident, rehab, court cases and chronic ongoing pain, a big motivator is to just focus on enjoying life, and not worry so much about where I'm going to be in the future and what limitations I'm going to have because of my injury. I just want to take things slow and enjoy life." 

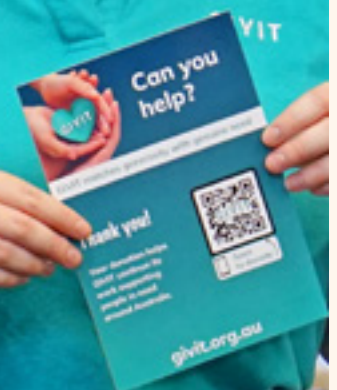
For more information about Givit or to donate goods and services, go to: givit.org.au/whats-needed

GIVIT has structured things so that Hannah can work a four-day week, five hours a day. She spends three days in the office, and works one day at home.

What gives?

“At GIVIT we support anything from natural disasters to economic hardship, domestic violence to homelessness,” says Hannah. “There’s a huge crisis and it’s a really hard time for many families. It’s devastating to see so many vulnerable people not being able to afford essentials anymore.”

Thanks to donations from the public, GIVIT is able to help some of these people with everything from washing machines and mattresses to fuel and food vouchers. But their current list of what’s needed also includes some smaller items that might just break your heart: school shoes, nappy bag, dog food, hairbrush, lunch box... and a pack of three HB pencils.



A loving legacy

The Gold Coast company making accessibility affordable and fun





“That’s actually quite a complex question,” says Dave Ingerson, when asked how long his Gold Coast-based company, Tangible Workshop, has been in operation.

“We’ve been going since 2019, but for 18 months of that we were hardly operating,” he explains. “Our daughter became very sick and as things got worse, my wife Caroline and I made the decision to shut things down so we could spend precious time with her.”

Since the age of five, their beloved Tara had suffered 600 or 700 seizures *a day*. “She had something that was almost like very early onset motor neurone disease,” explains Dave.

Her condition meant that things could change in a moment.

“Her leg, for example, could be moving perfectly one minute, and then 10 or 15 minutes later would only have a 10% range of movement,” explains Dave. “We tried various physiotherapy devices, but nothing worked. We needed something that was extremely flexible to accommodate all her needs, and able to adapt extremely quickly. But we couldn’t find anything, anywhere in the world.”

So Dave took things into his own very capable hands.

“Because my background is in engineering design and manufacturing, I decided that if the thing we needed didn’t exist, then I’d make it myself. And so my wife and I sat down and designed a rehabilitation trike for our daughter.”

The purpose of the trike was to stop Tara’s muscles atrophying, and the ultimate design was so good that it not only won an award from Buckingham Palace, but the US military also wanted it, recognising its value in relation to rehab for their troops.

“But just a few weeks before we were about to start trials, COVID hit and everything got called off,” says Dave. “We’d spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on this design that we couldn’t sell without medical sign-off... and we couldn’t get medical sign-off because everything was in lockdown.”

Like so many businesses during this time, the keyword to staying afloat was “pivot”.

“I said to Caroline, ‘We need something to keep us going, and we need it fast’. So we sat down again and came up with another idea,” says Dave.

The result was the Getabout Buggy. >



These three photos showcase the Getabout Buggy's ingenious, inflatable lifting mechanism.



“Because my background is in engineering design and manufacturing, I decided that if the thing we needed didn't exist, then I'd make it myself...”

“We'd wanted a beach wheelchair for Tara for some time; existing ones just didn't work for her,” says Dave. “At that stage we were spending as much time in hospitals as out of them, and all the OTs and specialists kept telling us that a beach wheelchair just wouldn't work for Tara, because you can't use one if you don't have the strength in your body to support yourself. But we said, ‘Hang on, Tara has a wheelchair that has postural supports – why can't she have a beach wheelchair with postural supports as well?’”

The other thing they wanted to ensure was that the buggy was fun. “I got really annoyed that so much medical equipment looks like, well, medical equipment,” says Dave. “It was important to us that the buggy looked fun, so that other kids wouldn't look at it in a negative way.”

They got cracking with creating their innovative, fun buggy and things were going well until the ultimate tragedy struck in early 2021, when Tara's health deteriorated and she died at just 18. Her parents shut down the business as they manoeuvred their way through their grief.

“I eventually went and got a job with the government,” says Dave. “I lasted for about 10 months but I just got so disheartened. My wife said, ‘You can't carry on doing this job, it's sending you nuts. You've got to get back to what you really enjoy doing.’”

And so they made the decision to fully immerse themselves in the beach wheelchair they'd designed for Tara. “This was going to be her legacy,” says Dave.

They've only really started to ramp things up again in the last six months, but during that time have made massive inroads. So much so that they actually launched the Generation 3 Getabout Buggy at the 2023 Care Expo Brisbane in September last year.

One of Dave's goals was to make the Getabout Buggy affordable and keep the price tag under \$1,500, in keeping with NDIS funding limits. With most traditional beach wheelchairs costing around the \$5,000+ mark, it was a revolutionary move.

As was the design.

“We knew that what was suitable for our daughter was not necessarily what the next person needed,” says Dave. “We also saw that people's medical needs change over time,

and they'd often have to discard their existing equipment and start all over again. So it was frustrating and expensive."

The solution to all of this was to make a modular buggy: you simply start with a base unit and then add what you need.

"It means it's suited specifically for you, and you only pay for what you actually require," explains Dave.

Additions include a footrest that fits in seconds, inflatable outrigger floats that fit onto the side of the buggy and turn it into a floating wheelchair, and two new Spinal Life-inspired inventions.

"I often speak to groups, just to check that my design ideas are sensible and actually what people want and need. And so I approached Spinal Life about the Getabout Buggy," says Dave.

"We were meant to have a meeting with just a couple of people in Spinal Life's Healthy Living Centre in Brisbane, but people crowded around the buggy and before we knew it, we had 10 or so people with lived experience giving us feedback and coming up with ideas. We said okay, what are the things we need to do to make this *really* what you need? It all seemed impossible initially, but then we started throwing ideas around and their suggestions went from impossible to very do-able in about half an hour."

There were two major things on the Spinal Life wish list: the first was for the buggy to be able to be self-propelled.

"Beach wheels are so wide that you'd need an extendable arm to make them work yourself," says Dave. "But I thought, well, there's a rim on each wheel: why don't we just turn the wheels around so that the rims are on the inside? Then I spoke with a friend who manufactures glass fibre and he said he could make the part that would make self-propelling beach wheels possible."

This was another of Dave's boss moves: bringing together a world-class team of local manufacturers to create high quality products here in Australia.

"Because we do the design and manufacturing work here, it means that instead of things having to go overseas for six months to be developed, we tend to just have a go ourselves straight away. In this case it meant that instead of spending \$20,000 or \$30,000 on the addition and having to produce them in batches of thousands overseas, we can create them right here for a tiny fraction of the cost, and make them in lots of just 10 units," says Dave.

The other thing the Spinal Life team requested also related to independence: they wanted to be able to do easy and safe transfers into the beach wheelchair without any assistance.

"We'd been asked about doing this before, by putting in a bath lift, but those lifts cost \$3,000 to \$5,000 each and, worse still, weigh about 20 to 30 kilos – once you add a person it would just make the buggy too heavy to move on soft sand," says Dave. "But I started to think about air balloons. We use them to lift cars off people in emergency situations and to right trucks that have turned over – why couldn't we use an air balloon in the buggy? It seemed a very simple solution to something that no one's been able to solve before."

Dave spent three or four months speaking to different companies and finally was given the name of a company that manufactures inflatable equipment and was up to the task.

"The air cushion sits under the seat and you basically adjust the height by inflating or deflating it," he explains. "Best of all, it comes in at under one kilogram."

The Getabout Buggy and its brilliant additions – including the two requested by Spinal Life – are all available now.

"We're just trying to give people the option to do things they wouldn't usually get to do," says Dave, who is hoping to get the rehabilitation trike on the market soon, too.

Thanks to Dave and Caroline's passion and ingenuity, some brilliant Aussie manufacturing talent and an incredible price tag, so many people are going to be able to use a Getabout Buggy and enjoy beach fun that they previously thought impossible.

A fitting legacy for Tara, indeed. [A](#)

The Getabout Buggy is available at Tangible Workshop: tangibleworkshop.com



Even dogs can get in on the fun with this incredible buggy that even floats!



Takin' care of business

Tips for returning to work after a spinal cord injury

After sustaining a spinal cord injury or damage, the idea of re-entering the workforce can be daunting. But it's also one of the most positive things you can do to improve your physical recovery, as well as reduce the likelihood of developing mental health issues like depression or anxiety. And then of course there are the financial benefits.

As part of a new series aimed at informing and encouraging people who are considering going back to work, we spoke to Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counsellor, Tania Goossen. She's been with Spinal Life for more than 25 years, and has a wealth of information to share about this topic.

"In many cases, people are very confident and happy to re-establish themselves in work on their own; they don't necessarily need a support service involved," says Tania. "You can absolutely do things on your own, just know that there are supports there to help you at any stage: right from the start, or later on if needed."

So what are some of the things to think about if you're considering a return to work?

Go back to the same role

"If there's any possibility you could go back to the company you worked for prior to your injury, keep in touch with them," says Tania. "Let them know how you're progressing and ask

to attend staff meetings or social events. You could consider reduced hours or a different role, and you might need some modifications to your work area. Let your employer know that support is available for them, as well as for you."

Start a new career path

"If you're unable or unwilling to return to your previous employer, the next step is considering what work you want to do," Tania advises. "Can you use any of your previous work skills in a different role, or would you like to try something completely different? If you have the right mix of skills, knowledge and experience to apply for work immediately, make sure your resume is up to date, research employers you'd like to work for, make the most of your work contacts and start asking around!"

Hit the books

Keen to work in a completely new industry, but think you might be missing some essential qualifications, knowledge or skills? Get advice from an employer, Vocational Rehabilitation Counsellor or a TAFE Queensland advisor. Another trick is to look at ads for the type of job you're after, as they often contain all the information you need. To get any missing qualifications and skills, you might need to consider studying – anything from a one-day refresher to a degree at university. "The Queensland Government has released more than 100 courses through TAFE that are now free of charge

for anyone who meets the eligibility criteria,” says Tania. Places like the University of Queensland, QUT and Griffith University also offer scholarships, so be sure to check the website of your chosen educational institution.

Consider self-employment

If you were self-employed before your injury and your business can continue with only minor changes, great! If there are bigger challenges, you might consider changing the focus of your business. “This could mean providing advice rather than physically doing the work,” explains Tania, “or employing a worker or apprentice to do the parts of the job you can’t do yourself. Perhaps you could reduce the services you provide in your business.” Self-employed people are eligible for assistance with the costs of modifying their workplace through the Australian Government’s JobAccess initiative, although there are a few more eligibility criteria.

Start a new business

“Some people simply can’t see themselves being an employee,” says Tania, “especially if they used to run their own business before their injury, but it’s no longer sustainable. But if they’ve got a new idea that they want to pursue or an existing side business that they want to grow, there are opportunities out there to make it happen. For example, you may be eligible for Self-Employment Assistance, a free Australian Government program.” This can help you to start and develop your small business by providing things like accredited small business training, help to develop a business plan, personalised mentoring from a provider, and funding allowances.

Try volunteering

“If somebody wants to dip a toe in the water around work, but they’re not ready to commit to actual paid work, volunteering is a kind of beautiful exploratory space where they can road test their ideas about what they might like to do,” says Tania. “It’s especially useful if someone can’t go back to the sort of work they used to do.”

Be good to yourself

“More generally, keep yourself as healthy and fit as possible, do things that make you feel good about yourself, and surround yourself with positive people who support you in your goal of returning to work,” Tania recommends. **A**

Available Support

NDIS

“The first step is making sure that you’ve got work or study as a goal in your NDIS plan,” says Tania. “If you’ve got NDIS funding, talking to your Support Coordinator is a great place to start.”

Disability Employment Services (DES)

If you’re registered with a DES, they can help you identify jobs that would suit your skills, experience and abilities. “They often have good contacts with local employers, and can explain the full range of supports available to them, such as workplace modifications,” says Tania. “DES may provide financial assistance too: anything from paying the upfront cost of any modifications, to offering a wage subsidy (a small financial incentive) to the employer.”

JobAccess

The JobAccess initiative manages a number of things in addition to assistance for workplace modifications. This includes information about finding DES in your local area, if you haven’t found one already. “It’s a good resource: they’ve also got some great things about self marketing and what you can do to promote your skills, or how to talk to employers about your disability,” says Tania. “They’ve got quite a large website now (jobaccess.gov.au), full of hints and tips and we’re always recommending people use this resource.”

Spinal Life

There’s a range of Spinal Life services that you can access, including:

- Occupational Therapists and an Assistive Technology Mentor who can help with aids, equipment, technology and workplace modifications advice
- Access Consultants who can provide workplace audits and recommendations on physical access upgrades, as well as disability awareness training workshops for staff
- Personal Support Workers who can assist people at work as well as at home
- Peer Support for mentoring and guidance

Spinal Life’s Back2Work project is offered to newly injured patients while they’re in the Spinal Injuries Unit at the Princess Alexandra Hospital and other select hospitals, proudly supported by the Motor Accident Insurance Commission (MAIC).

For more information, go to: spinal.com.au or call **1300 774 625**. And look out for articles on volunteering, studying, and paid work and self employment in future issues.



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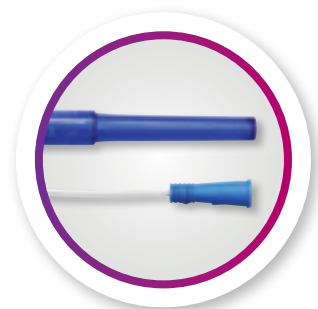
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AP-64861-AUS-ENG-v1(V1.2) CC05-GCG August 2023

Physiotherapist Julie Ince guides client Janet Blaik through a hydrotherapy session, with the help of volunteer Mandy Sapper.



The healing pool

Exploring the benefits of hydrotherapy for rehabilitation

For many people, there's nothing like the sensation of being immersed in water and the feeling of freedom that it brings.

And it doesn't just feel good to be in water: it actually *is* good for you. Thanks to things like water pressure and buoyancy, just the act of being immersed in water can provide a raft of therapeutic benefits.

If simply getting into the water is good for you, imagine what's possible when you actually start hydrotherapy.

Also known as aquatic therapy, water therapy and aquatic physiotherapy, hydrotherapy involves specific exercises and activities performed in a warm-water pool.

It utilises the unique properties of water to support a person's weight, which helps to relieve pain and increase the range of movement in their joints. Warm water also makes the rehabilitation more effective. Together with support from a trained therapist, hydrotherapy can help with a number of challenges faced by people with a spinal cord injury. As well as reducing pain and improving movement, this includes reducing tone and spasticity, promoting muscle relaxation and increasing strength, stamina, comfort and circulation.

Thanks to the water's buoyancy, resistance and temperature, a unique therapeutic environment is created. Traditional, land-based therapy may not be

appropriate for clients who are unable to move against the effects of gravity, but hydrotherapy is ideal for people with restricted mobility as they have more freedom of movement in the buoyant environment.

Spinal Life has a dedicated hydrotherapy pool at the Healthy Living Centre in Cairns, and offers services from a local aquatic centre in Brisbane. Hydrotherapy can be used as a primary method of treatment, or to enhance and complement other treatments.

All hydrotherapy sessions are customised to meet each client's individual needs and to work towards their functional goals. One to two sessions per week may be prescribed, or more if clinically indicated. Sessions are conducted on a one-on-one basis with an experienced Physiotherapist or Exercise Physiologist. The programs are personalised, reviewed regularly and progressed as indicated.

Most hydrotherapy sessions are one hour in length, including 10 minutes to get into the water, and 10 minutes to exit the pool. On average most clients spend 40 minutes in the water, though timings may be adjusted to their individual needs.

"Our therapists are trained in pool rescue techniques, CPR and defibrillation," says Healthy Living Centre Cairns Physiotherapist, Julie Ince. "They're also familiar with and able to monitor for problems common to people with spinal cord injuries, such as autonomic dysreflexia, orthostatic

hypotension and temperature dysregulation. Therapists will conduct a comprehensive medical screening prior to commencing hydrotherapy to ensure that the client has no contraindications to hydrotherapy: things like uncontrolled blood pressure, open wounds (including pressure areas), and temperature dysregulation that will be aggravated by the warm water.”

The team also uses a variety of flotation devices and exercise equipment which assist in the delivery of high-quality care.

“People can access and exit the pool via an overhead hoist, a waterproof wheelchair on an elevator, or stairs with rails,” says Julie. “This means we can accommodate people in the pool regardless of their movement and transfer abilities.”

An improved sense of well-being. A reduction in pain. Improved independence in activities that you might otherwise struggle with on land. The simple enjoyment of being in the water and the feeling of freedom it brings. Getting in the pool is definitely positive when it comes to hydrotherapy. **A**

Spinal Life Australia offers hydrotherapy services in both Brisbane and Cairns. For more information, visit spinalhealthyliving.com.au or call 1300 774 625.



Four potential benefits of hydrotherapy for people with a spinal cord injury

1. Buoyancy and reduced weight bearing

The buoyancy of water counteracts the effects of gravity, reducing the impact on joints and allowing people with a spinal cord injury to perform exercises with less weight bearing.

2. Pain management/increased range of motion

The warm water in hydrotherapy can help to relax muscles and joints, potentially contributing to a decrease in pain and discomfort, and an increase in flexibility and range of motion, and helping with things like muscle stiffness and spasms.

3. Improved circulation and cardiovascular health

Hydrotherapy can promote better blood circulation, which can enhance oxygen delivery to tissues, reduce swelling and contribute to overall cardiovascular health, which is important for individuals with limited mobility.

4. Enhanced strength and endurance

As water provides a natural form of resistance for muscles, hydrotherapy exercises can target specific muscle groups, helping to build strength and stamina.

Ship happens

Sailability is a brilliant, nation-wide and totally free sailing program. How about it?



Sailability is a gem in the Cairns crown. Located at the Cairns Cruising Yacht Squadron (CCYS) in Portsmith, a few minutes from the city centre, Sailability Cairns offers sailing opportunities for everybody, especially people with disability.

Founded in 2014, Sailability Cairns has grown from a handful of people with a dream and a single dinghy, to a thriving association with a dozen craft.

Access to the water is via ramps and pontoons, with slings and hoists provided for people with a significant disability. Volunteers are on hand to assist with transfers and sailing, and a safety boat is always on the water when Sailability is active.


"Everyone is welcome and everyone has fun," says President, Jeff Crofts. "We especially welcome visitors from southern Queensland, interstate and overseas. We sail on Tuesday and Saturday afternoons, and we charge no fee. Lifejackets are supplied, and we provide crew for experienced sailors and skippers for novices."

Founder of Sailability Australia Phil Vardy OAM, a Spinal Life member who has lived with paraplegia for 50 years, agrees: "In mid-winter last year, I enjoyed a week of respite at the Spinal Life Healthy Living Centre in Cairns. I was pleasantly surprised to find cards advertising Sailability Cairns on the front desk at the Centre. On a Tuesday, I met founding member Don Tennant who kindly drove my partner and I to Sailability Cairns. We returned on Saturday to sail with founding president Andy Murray, a finalist for the 2023 Queensland Volunteer of the Year Award of Sailing Australia.

I hadn't sailed since retiring from sport administration after the Beijing Paralympic Games in 2008. It was terrific to be on the water again."

Sailability Cairns has five Hansa 303 dinghies, so-called because they're 3.03m in length. These Australian-designed craft have become the standard at sailing associations for people with disability around the world. In these small, two-person boats, the helmsperson and crew sit side by side, and steering is via a joystick. Due to their deep drop-keel, Hansas are extremely stable. According to Phil, no one has ever capsized a Hansa dinghy.

Sailability Cairns also has four SV14s, which are touted as 'performance dinghies'. "I was very impressed with these boats," says Phil. "Balance is difficult for many disabled people. In the SV14, the helmsperson and for'ard hand sit one behind the other in high-backed, high-set, motorised seats. As the boat heels, one can press a button and tilt the seats to the upright position. Ingenious. A wide beam and deep drop-keel ensure amazing stability."

Asked about sailing for people with disability, Phil says: "I've given the same answer for more than 30 years. Sailing provides an unparalleled sense of freedom and movement for people with disabilities. On the water, no one knows that a sailor is disabled. And the sailors themselves don't feel disabled; the change in self-concept is liberating. If you're in Cairns, visit Sailability. You'll have a ball." 

For an incredible – and free – day on the water, contact Sailability Cairns on **07 4035 5115** or visit sailabilitycairns.com.au

Tropical treasures

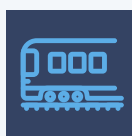
Phil shares his favourite things to do while staying at the Healthy Living Centre in Cairns

My partner and I flew to Cairns in early July last year, when even Brisbane's winter tests our thermal regulation! Spinal Life should be congratulated on the Cairns Healthy Living Centre, where we stayed for a week. It's fantastic.

We planned to prepare our own meals in the fully equipped kitchen that graces each unit. At the press of a button, cupboards can be lowered so that a wheelchair user can easily reach the contents. That was the plan, but what we *actually* did was enjoy breakfast every day at the café attached to the Centre. And then we ate out every night.

We also planned to simply relax in the sun, enjoy the hydrotherapy pool at the Centre, and take advantage of the gym and physiotherapy. But Cairns is a tourist town and we couldn't resist some of the brilliant attractions, most of which (but not all) accept the Companion Card.

Phil's faves:



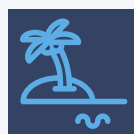
KURANDA SCENIC RAILWAY

This historic railway is fascinating and the train is beautifully accessible. It winds its way through World Heritage protected tropical rainforest, past beautiful and spectacular waterfalls and into the awesome Barron Gorge. Two warnings: 1. Kuranda itself is set atop a hill, and I needed assistance to push to the village centre from the station. 2. In hindsight we should have taken the trip back from Kuranda via the Skyrail Rainforest Cableway. We reasoned that the cab fare from the bottom of the cableway back to the railway station where our car was parked would be excessive. In reality, it's a short taxi trip to the Freshwater railway station where we began our journey. ksr.com.au



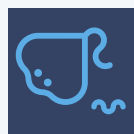
THE AUSTRALIAN ARMOUR & ARTILLERY MUSEUM

This is a paradise for aficionados of armoured warfare. However appalled you might be at the concept of war, you'll be fascinated at the biggest collection of fighting vehicles outside Europe. ausarmour.com



GREEN ISLAND

This beautiful 6,000-year-old coral cay, covered by rainforest and located within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, is a delight. It's just 45 minutes from Cairns by fast catamaran, and both boat and venue are accessible. The island is also home to the fascinating Cassius, the largest crocodile in captivity (110 years old). His front end is scarred from the time he ripped an outboard motor from the back of a boat... *while it was still running.* green-island.com.au



CAIRNS AQUARIUM

If you're into ecology, you'll want to spend the entire day here, where you'll be delighted by the 15,000 animals displayed in the 10 ecosystems. In a short visit to the aquarium, you'll experience more of the Great Barrier Reef than if you spent a week scuba diving on Australia's greatest natural wonder. It's astonishing. cairnsaquarium.com.au



SAILABILITY CAIRNS

If you visit Cairns, enjoying a free afternoon sailing on Smiths Creek/Trinity Inlet is an absolute must. sailabilitycairns.com.au



GLENN MOORE UNITS - HOBART TASMANIA

Experience the beauty of Tasmania in Autumn with our accessible accomodation

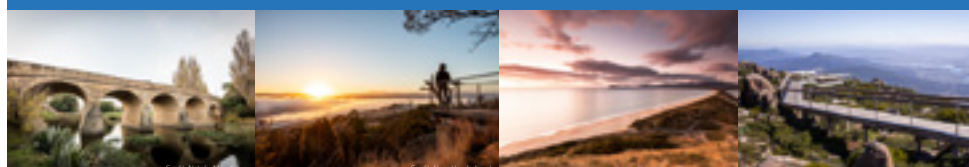
Glenn Moore Units consist of two spacious, accessible and fully self-contained units featuring all the comforts of home. Each unit sleeps up to five people and are close to transport, shopping centres, sports grounds and medical facilities and only minutes from the heart of Hobart.

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For more information call: (03) 6272 8816 or email admin@paraquadtas.org.au or www.paraquadtas.org.au



Your home in Hobart...

Discovering the Land of the Long White Cloud

Spinal Life member, Charmaine Idris, shares her (accessible) travel adventure in New Zealand



Visiting the incredible Weta Workshop.

"You're off to great places, today is your day!

Your mountain is waiting, so... get on your way!" ~ Dr. Seuss

Last year, I decided to take a trip 'across The Ditch' to Aotearoa, to attend the World of WearableArt (WOW) show: a gift to myself for being in remission from cancer.

WOW is an annual event held in Wellington over three weeks in September and October. It's a competition that invites professional and amateur designers from across the globe to create unique wearable art, and it culminates in a dynamic stage production that showcases the short-listed entries.

Was I excited to see this incredible extravaganza? Yeah! Was I anxious to travel? Hell, yeah! This was going to be my first overseas trip since COVID.

I started my research about eight months before the event. There was a lot to organise: new passport, flights, special assistance (I would be travelling solo), accessible accommodation, a suitable location, sightseeing options, a flexible itinerary, dietary requirements and the hire of a power wheelchair.

Due to the precarious nature of travelling with/in a wheelchair, I enlisted the help of Flight Centre to help arrange special assistance and my flights, and ultimately booked with Air New Zealand.

Accessible accommodation in a suitable location was a priority, given my overzealous sightseeing list. I never trust the search features on generic booking sites that offer below-normal rates, and prefer to deal directly with hotels to get a clearer understanding of what 'accessible' actually means to them. The Tryp Hotel ticked all the boxes: location, accessible room/bathroom, elevator, wide doorways, close proximity to sightseeing spots and the airport, and free breakfasts!

I hired a power wheelchair to help conserve my energy and give me more time to sightsee. Bonus: hotel management agreed to store it in one of their meeting rooms. I also researched Uber options, just in case. I'm glad I did, as no maxi taxis were available for my return trip to the airport. I'm able to transfer out of my wheelchair, so the Uber Assist option was ideal. The driver even helped me get to the special services counter at the airport!

The big day finally dawned and I headed to the airport. The pandemic laid the way for new check-in procedures, but from start to finish they were seamless. Self check-in doesn't just include suitcases, so remember to print an extra baggage tag if you're taking a mobility device. And let special assistance know if you're taking your own wheelchair to the door of the aircraft (Air New Zealand provides an onboard wheelchair if needed). I always remove my wheelchair's sideguards and cushion, for storage in the overhead locker.

Left: the incredible view from Mount Victoria;
Right: Solace in the Wind statue by Max Patte at Wellington Harbour.





The rule for wheelchair passengers is first on, last off, so boarding was a breeze. I had an aisle seat close to the bathrooms at the rear, and a lovely couple sitting beside me. We exchanged pleasantries and settled in to enjoy the flight.

Thirty minutes before landing, it all kicked off. Wellington is known as the windiest city on Earth, and we were advised to brace ourselves for a rough ride. Rough is an understatement. The wind buffeted us relentlessly, and people groaned out loud with every dip and rise. I clutched my neighbour's hand during this harrowing experience, which seemed to last forever but was only 30 minutes or so. Just five minutes before our planned touchdown the pilot announced that landing in Wellington was a no-go and we were headed for Auckland instead. Mother Nature was in charge of this one, alright!

Air New Zealand arranged transport, taxi, food vouchers and a hotel for my overnight stay in Auckland. I compromised with my bathroom etiquette as there was no accessible room available, but I was just grateful to have survived the wild ride. An old friend in Auckland had asked if I would be visiting, and now here was the opportunity for us to connect after almost 10 years. Before my flight the next day she took me on a whirlwind tour of Auckland, savouring the main sights in just under five hours. What a delightful day it turned out to be. The gift of friendship is priceless – so too is going with the flow!

After an emotional farewell, I boarded the plane to Wellington. This time, the flight was perfect, but I was definitely not prepared for the drastic drop in temperature when we disembarked. A bitterly cold wind ripped through the city, but I consoled myself with the thought of a hot shower and a good night's sleep. The Tryp Hotel delivered, and then some. I was greeted with a warm welcome, trendy fittings, chocolates, dimmed lights, a massive TV screen and a cosy looking bed complete with an enormous, accessible bathroom. The next day, a delightful breakfast was devoured with great gusto.

As my stay in Wellington had been cut short, I rearranged my sightseeing schedule accordingly. With the help of my power wheelchair and the random arrival of two family members, I visited the Te Papa museum, attended the (incredible) WOW show, toured the Wētā Workshop, drove along Marine Drive and took in the views from Mount Victoria, strolled along the central waterfront, and dined at some delightful cafés in the Cuba Precinct. I made the most of the time I had, but three days was not nearly enough and a repeat visit (minus the weather dramas) is definitely on the cards. [A](#)

Read more about Charmaine's experience at WOW by visiting artshub.com.au/news/features/world-of-wearableart-goes-beyond-imagination-2671667/

Charmaine at WOW: the World of WearableArt show.



Charmaine's travel tips

- Do your research before you travel
- Be prepared to be challenged
- Plan ahead and be flexible with your sightseeing options
- Don't be afraid to ask for help
- Call ahead if you're uncertain about accessibility
- If possible, hire a power wheelchair/mobility device
- Explore options to use public transport, maxi taxis and Uber when booking tours
- Make sure your dietary requirements are catered for
- Speak directly to staff when deciding on accommodation options

Tickets, please!

How two event-loving Spinal Life members helped change the way people can book accessible tickets



Lindsay Nott with the best seat in the house at a Brisbane Broncos vs Melbourne Storm game at Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane.

It was after yet another frustrating attempt to attend an event that former Spinal Life Advocacy Officer, Lachy Chapman, decided he'd had enough.

For people with accessibility needs the system was a nightmare. Instead of being able to book tickets online in mere moments like everyone else, the only option was to call and wait on the phone forever, or send an email and wait for a reply.

"But the accessible seating team only worked from Monday to Friday, and this day was a Saturday – the same day as the event," says Lachy. "I'd made a last-minute decision to book tickets for my partner, our child and me. And you can't wait for a reply the next business day when you want to attend something in just a few hours' time!"

With no one able to confirm if accessible seats were available, Lachy was advised to just turn up to the venue in the hopes that someone would be able to sort everything out.

"But there was no guarantee we'd get seats," he says. "Plus we'd have to arrive much earlier in order to have time to – fingers crossed – sort things out. Getting a young child out of the house can be difficult enough at the best of times. The thought of driving all the way to the venue, only to have to turn around and go home again because there were no accessible seats was just too much. So we didn't go."

The constant research and double-checking of plans is yet another aspect that people with a disability have to contend with.

"As a person in a wheelchair I feel like I'm constantly fighting battles to do things that *everybody* should be able to do," says Lachy. "It's incredibly frustrating. There are already so many question marks when it comes to going out, and the issue with booking tickets just adds a layer of negativity. It wastes so much of your time, and you often end up feeling stupid and like you're an inconvenience. Every step is a headache. Every single step. It's soul-sapping. So when the potential dramas and disappointments outweigh the potential pleasures, you often just choose not to go. You basically stop doing things."

Fellow Spinal Life member, Lindsay Nott, has experienced similar difficulties on numerous occasions: "With accessible seating there's no such thing as last-minute, late-night or weekend bookings. You always have to wait for someone to get back to you. And for some events if you wait, you miss out altogether. It's outrageous. Why do I have to wait when everyone else can buy a ticket whenever they want?"

And so Lindsay and Lachy decided to approach Ticketek about its accessible seating booking system and the difficulties they were constantly facing when trying to get out and enjoy concerts, festivals and sporting events.

"I knew that if I was having issues, everyone else in a similar position was going to be having the same issues," says Lindsay. "If you go on any forum or Facebook group for people with a disability, it's a common and constant topic of conversation... and frustration."

Luckily, Ticketek recognised that they had an issue, and wanted to make things more accessible. They welcomed

feedback from Lindsay, Lachy and other Spinal Life members, as well as government bodies, industry partners and other advocacy groups.

It took a number of years, but finally, in late 2023, Ticketek rolled out an online accessible ticket booking platform. The new system means people with disability can buy tickets online and in real-time, just like everybody else. They can also choose specific seats within certain venues, and buy both accessible and non-accessible tickets within the same transaction.


“That’s a big positive, because previously you could only buy one wheelchair ticket and one seat for your carer,” says Lindsay. “If you wanted to attend an event with more people, they’d have to sit somewhere else. It’s nice that people can now sit together.”

Suncorp Stadium and Nissan Arena are some of the first venues in Queensland to incorporate these new accessible booking capabilities, along with the RAC Arena, Astor Theatre and Regal Theatre in Western Australia, among others.

The system will gradually be rolled out to other venues and like all technology, it will also continue to evolve over time.

“It’s so important that poor accessibility does not become a barrier for people living their life to the fullest,” says Mark Townend, CEO of Spinal Life Australia. “The same customer experience, whether people have a disability or not, is a benchmark in accessibility for all Australian companies to aspire to. We call on all event organisers and venue and facility managers to follow this great example of improved access and inclusion.”

Lachy and Lindsay are also pleased with the results, and are looking forward to using the new booking system.

“I’m happy with the outcome, and that I can now jump online and buy tickets to events through this national ticketing provider, and that I can attend those events with who I want, just like the rest of the community,” says Lindsay. “My money is the same as everyone else’s money, so it’s great to be fully included. Companies just need to realise that if you build it, we will come!” 

To learn more about accessible bookings call Ticketek’s Accessible Seating Hotline on **1300 665 915** or scan the QR.



Lachy Chapman with his mother, Rowena, watching Moulin Rouge at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre

Australia’s foremost
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ATSA INDEPENDENT LIVING EXPOS ARE COMING TO A CITY NEAR YOU!

Registrations to attend the highly anticipated ATSA Independent Living Expo are now open, and the events are free to attend.



The ATSA Independent Living Expo is renowned for its success in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, and Canberra, and was held for the first time in Adelaide in March 2024. Join us to explore, test, and learn about the latest and most innovative assistive technologies that will empower you and your loved ones to lead a more independent life.

An enriching two-day seminar program held alongside the Expo awaits you: with new panel sessions and exciting topics covered, these presentations consistently attract high attendance and uphold the ATSA Independent Living Expo as a well-respected educational event.

For the fashion-forward, we have a treat! The increasingly popular fashion show, initially launched in Brisbane in 2022, is back for Sydney, and Brisbane events in 2024. Check out the latest styles and trends in adaptive fashion, celebrating inclusivity.

WHY YOU SHOULD ATTEND

Attending an ATSA Independent Living Expo comes with a host of benefits:

- **Discover New Technologies:** Stay ahead of the curve and learn about the latest assistive technologies available today.
- **Hands-on Experience:** Get hands-on and try out different technologies, allowing you to identify the best fit for your needs.
- **Expand Your Network:** Connect with others already utilising assistive technologies and gain valuable insights from their experiences.

- **Learn from the Best:** Benefit from presentations by leading experts in the field of assistive technologies, enriching your understanding.
- **Get Personalised Assistance:** Our exhibitors' knowledgeable staff will be on hand to answer your queries and offer valuable guidance throughout the event.

SAVE THE DATES AND REGISTER EARLY

Now that you know what awaits you at the ATSA Independent Living Expos, it's time to secure your spot! Remember, attendance is free, but for your free coffee, registration is essential.

MARK THESE DATES IN YOUR CALENDAR

- ATSA Independent Living Expo **Sydney** – **22-23 May 2024**
- ATSA Independent Living Expo **Brisbane** – **29-30 May 2024**
- Follow us on Facebook to stay informed of the dates for 2025 – Melbourne, Perth and Canberra

Visit atsaindependentlivingexpo.com.au to register and find more details about each Expo.



GETTING TO KNOW... Key Worker, Katie Holmes

Katie Holmes and her partner, Thomas, have been together for 13 years. They have three children together: Savannah (11), Aleeyah (10), and Noah (2), not forgetting their beloved dog, Bear (3). The family live in Bundaberg, and love the beach and any outdoor activities such as camping, kayaking and hiking. "Date nights involve the five of us, always," says Katie.

What three words describe you best?

"Outgoing, cheerful and trustworthy."

How long have you been working at Spinal Life?

"For more than three years."

Have you always been a Key Worker, or did you start off in another role?

"I began as a Personal Support Worker (PSW) and then after three months was offered the opportunity to apply for a position as Key Worker."

What sort of experience or qualifications did you have in order to secure the role of Key Worker?

"Certificate IV in Ageing Support."

What do you think are the main qualities somebody needs to be a good Key Worker?

"You must be open-minded and positive, and be able to advocate for

your client when needed. You also need to understand that every individual is unique and every home is different, and you need to be a good role model and leader for your colleagues. Being able to work within a team is important, and knowing you can always go to your Client Service Officer and your Team Leader is also key."

What are the main responsibilities of a Key Worker?

"Some days, it means picking up shifts at short notice. You could be arriving at a shift at 6.30am or doing an overnight shift and have to roll a client every two hours due to a pressure sore. I will do passive exercises, personal care routines, transfers using a variety of different hoists in different homes, with up to four clients in a day. I attend hydrotherapy, physiotherapy and pilates with my clients, help out with maintenance checks on equipment like wheelchairs and hoist slings, and lots more. My clients sometimes experience autonomic dysreflexia, so I am always making sure I'm aware of each individual's symptoms."

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

"One of my clients has lots of animals on her property. She also has lots of birds. And the only thing I'm terrified of in life is... birds! I'm slowly overcoming this fear thanks to these birds, especially a guinea fowl called Jack. Jack has lived there for 10 years now and likes to come over to us when we're outside, especially when we're listening to music. Jack loves to sing and bob his head to the beat."

And the most life-affirming moment?

"I have a client who moves me every single time I see her. No matter what life throws at her she is always smiling – even if she's crying. She never gives up, and if you say she can't do something she will show you that she can."

What's the one thing you wish people understood better about people with a spinal cord injury?

"I don't think people really know how inaccessible a lot of simple things are for people with a spinal cord injury. For example, clients have had to take their own hoists to appointments, and the lack of wheelchair-accessible taxis in our region is terrible."

What one thing could make your job easier?

"More staff, if anyone reading this knows someone who might be interested in joining the team!"

How do you relax when you're not at work?

"If I'm not working my happy place is my family. I love cooking and enjoy reading books."

What's the most important advice you would give anyone thinking of becoming a Key Worker?

"Be yourself, be kind and be a good role model for others. Treat others how you would want to be treated."


What's the best thing about your job?

"Knowing I'm doing good in the community, and spreading positive energy. I am very lucky to have the best support system at Spinal Life and am forever grateful for my mentors and all the people who are now a part of my life."

What's the hardest thing about your job?

"Not being able to do more."

What's the most important lesson being a Key Worker has taught you?

"Being a Key Worker has taught me so much; one thing that stands out is the knowledge that I have gained over the years." 

To find out more about Spinal Life's Personal Support and Home Care, visit spinal.com.au or call 1300 774 625.



FIND AN EVENT IN YOUR REGION

Our Peer Support Catch-Ups are held regularly across Queensland, and are a great opportunity to connect with others, share information and advice, and hear about Spinal Life's latest advocacy initiatives.

You can visit spinal.com.au/events for upcoming event dates, or use the contact details below to get in touch with our Peer Support, Post Polio or Transverse Myelitis groups.

SPINAL LIFE PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

BRIBIE ISLAND: Wayne Slattery 0449 923 887

BRISBANE: Fred Nitz 0412 190 585

BUNDABERG: Steve Richter 0413 457 284

MORETON BAY: Ross Duncan 0475 077 080

ROCKHAMPTON: Robynne Clifton 0473

576 107 or Anne Guthrie 0407 116 035

POST POLIO GROUPS

CAIRNS: Joy Hay 4055 5795

GOLD COAST: Lyn Glover 0448 206 856

or Joan Radanovic 0413 178 073

SUNSHINE COAST:

Noel Allen 0427 148 724

TRANSVERSE MYELITIS GROUP

Ross Duncan 0475 077 080

We email regional event invitations to Spinal Life members, along with news and advocacy updates. Join our community at spinal.com.au/membership or call **1300 774 625** to find out more.

A menu of Takeaways

Each month we share a bite-sized segment on our website and Facebook, called Takeaways, aimed at giving you a taste of topics that are important to you.

From romance and relationships, to going on a cruise, to returning to driving, you can hear from our experts and hosts, who share their experiences and valuable information.

Catch up on our website at spinal.com.au/takeaways



Leave a gift in your will

Spinal Life has partnered with Gathered Here, a free will-writing service that makes charitable giving as easy as possible.

All gifts will help support our goal to make real and tangible differences in the lives of people living with a physical disability.

If you would like to find out more about Gathered Here, and ways to support Spinal Life, visit spinal.com.au/donate or call **1300 7745 625**.

Free access mentoring

Our EnABLED Business program has launched in Ipswich, the Sunshine Coast and Wide Bay, partnering with disability employment specialists Epic Assist.

We offer businesses tailored advice on how to improve their access and inclusion, hold awareness workshops for staff and provide connections to potential employees with disability.

The project is proudly funded by the Queensland Government. For more, visit spinal.com.au/enabled-program

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Wayne with his great friends Sonya Booth (left) and Peta-Maree Willett, celebrating Wayne's 50th birthday at a restaurant at the Treasury Casino and Hotel Brisbane.



I did it my way

The life and times of Spinal Life member, Wayne Amisano

"It's not what's in front of you that blocks your way, it's what's inside you that holds you back."

These are the words that Wayne Amisano lives by. And they've certainly held the Townsville resident in good stead throughout his long and eventful life.

Born and raised in Ingham, the sports-mad Wayne was 19 and in his second year of an engineering degree at James Cook University in Townsville, when his life changed forever.

He was travelling with four mates in a ute (two in the front and three in the back) that hit a power pole and then crashed into a parked car, killing one of his friends instantly. Wayne was thrown clear, knocked unconscious, broke his back and was in a coma for nearly two months.

With paraplegia from a T6 injury, and a head injury that resulted in a paralysed vocal cord and a paralysed left arm, Wayne's prognosis was bleak.

"I was told that I would never walk again, I would never be able to push my own wheelchair, I would never go back to uni, I would never drive a car and I would never live by myself," he recalls.

Wayne, however, has never put much stock in what other people say he can or can't do: "I just humour them... or ignore them!"

Apart from walking, Wayne has managed to do every single thing on that list.

In 1986, he enrolled in uni again, graduating in May 1990 with a double major in computing science and higher maths. He later obtained a Master of Business Administration.

He's been driving for years, designed his own home (where he lives by himself), and has played representative wheelchair basketball, wheelchair rugby, was a member of Sporting

Wheelies, and pushed himself around New Zealand and the United States on solo holiday adventures. Not bad for someone who was told he'd never push his own wheelchair.

His trip to the US was nothing short of epic: he spent nine weeks travelling on an open air pass, flying more than 28,000 kilometres and passing through 35 airports. He visited cities including Los Angeles, Dallas, Seattle, New Orleans, Chicago and Boston, and everywhere he went he had people to visit and stay with; friends he'd made online. "It was an awesome holiday, I loved it," he says.

At one hotel, he couldn't fit through the bathroom door. It was only a few centimetres, but that made all the difference. When the front desk advised that no other rooms were available, Wayne told them: "That's okay, just send someone up with a screwdriver." He asked them to take the door off the hinges and voilà... Wayne was able to access his bathroom.

"A lot of people do things by the book, but I've never followed the book," he says, "I just look at a problem and say okay, how can I overcome that, what do I need to do? I also tend to use humour a lot as a tool."

His well-developed sense of humour has served him well throughout his life, and when he broke his leg while negotiating a steep wheelchair access ramp back in the mid-1990s, the irony did not escape him. It all happened just moments before Wayne was to attend a city council meeting about... improving disability access in the Townsville CBD!

In recent years he's also advocated for better accessible transport in Townsville, featuring in a couple of stories on the ABC news where he talked about the lack of accessible taxis.

Wayne carved himself a great career in IT, starting at the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority in Townsville.

"I worked there for about seven or eight years, and then moved down to Brisbane to work for Queensland Health," he says. "I was there for 20+ years, building databases and doing UNIX administration. Have you ever seen that show, *The IT Crowd*? Do you remember Richmond, the guy who used to sit in the basement? That was me. Somebody else would get all the glory while I provided them with the tools to achieve their moment in the sun! It was my job to make my boss look good."

He retired at the start of 2023, and is loving his new life. "I'm really enjoying retirement, I can do what I want now," he says. "I'm 58 now, but remember: when you're over the hill you pick up speed!"

For more information about Spinal Life's Townsville services, visit spinal.com.au or call 1300 774 625.



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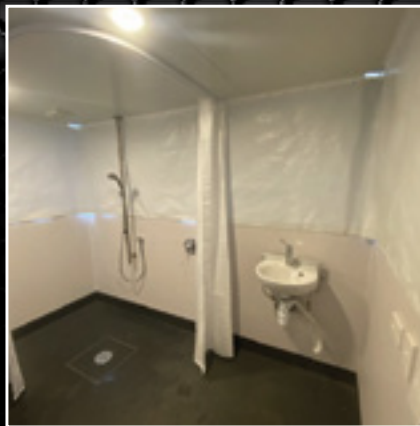
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