

Spinal Outreach Team Newsletter

Issue 20, January 2017



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Welcome to 2017! Everyone here at SPOT wishes you, your family and friends a Happy New Year. This year's newsletter is:

All about friends

Did you know that research is showing that one of the benefits of having friends is that they are good for your health? SPOT asked some of the people we have worked with over the years to share their stories about friendship. We hear from people with spinal cord injury and also from a researcher who has a keen interest in the topic.

SPOT clients share their friendship stories

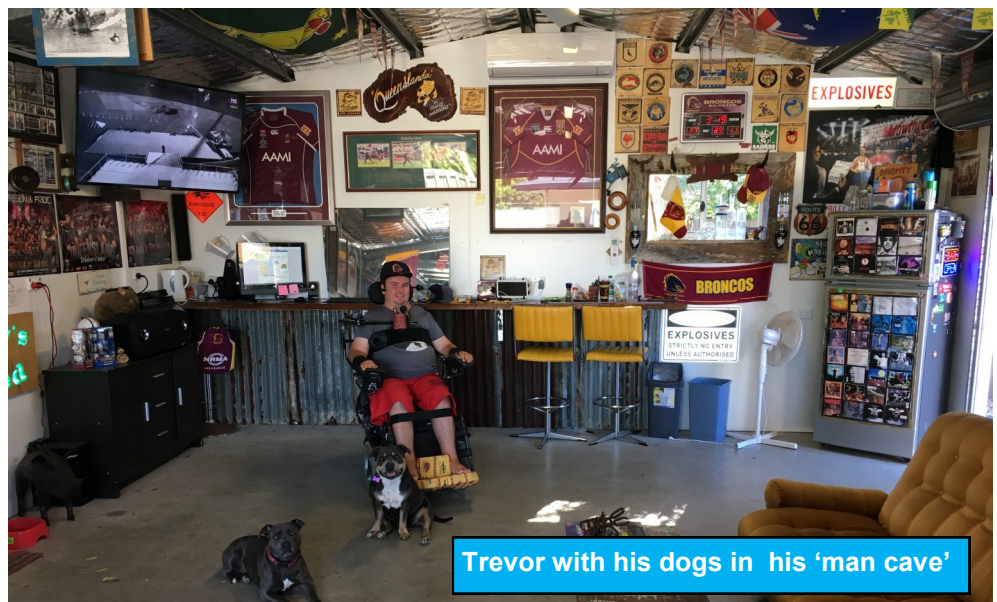
Catching up with his friends has always been important to Trevor. "My mates have always been important to me. I have friends I have known from 10 to 26 years – some of them are from primary school days." His friends were supportive after his injury, visiting him regularly in hospital despite some having long distances to travel and young families to care for. He always felt confident these friendships would continue. Trevor found it took him a while to "get his personality back" after his accident, and connecting with friends helped. Talking to his friends about his injury helped them to understand the changes and feel more comfortable.

Tips to make and maintain friendships

Friends are there through the good times and can also support you when times get tough. They can boost your happiness and confidence and encourage you to enjoy life.

Sometimes it is hard to make new friends and keep old friends. Some tips are exemplified in the stories from Vicki, Trevor, Dean and Mick.

- ▶ Consider activities you like to do and ways you can meet with people who share your interests.
- ▶ It is not always about the number of friends but the quality. Importantly, you have to make yourself available to build and maintain friendships.
- ▶ Keeping in touch by phone, text, or online through sites like Facebook, helps to stay connected.



Trevor with his dogs in his 'man cave'

Since his spinal cord injury, Trevor has built a 'man cave' at home. It is set up with a TV and bar and decorated with signed sporting jerseys, posters and things collected over the years. Trevor has always enjoyed entertaining friends and had always planned to build a shed like this. It wasn't built to keep his mates but it helps. "It's like going to a bar but it's all accessible for me, and friends and their children like coming to my place. People drop in all the time."

Trevor and his friends still go out, or go away together and they understand how he does some things differently. "I'm not worried if they're not worried."

SPOT clients share their friendship stories



Vicki

"I realised very early on after my injury that my friends were going through a whole new experience, just like me. I decided to be really proactive. If I received an invitation from friends I would just say "yes". So my default position on social activity was YES. I knew if I didn't push myself to participate the friends were likely to drift away. It definitely paid off. Friendships were a really important part of my life then and they still are today. I think health professionals have a role to play in creating a hospital environment where friends are encouraged and welcomed. I also think having social opportunities as a part of rehab is really important."

Travelling has given Dean a wider circle of friends. Since 2000 he has been doing trips in his caravan, and later motor home, to Townsville, North Queensland, the Kimberley, along the Murray and many other places. "It's a great way to meet people. Everyone mixes and you connect because everyone is doing a similar thing. You might encounter the same people in different places."

Dean has developed friendships, and stayed in touch by phone, with many of the people he has met on his travels and they sometimes visit each other to park the caravan a while or arrange to meet up on another trip. He recently had friends he met 12 years ago on the Great Ocean Road come to visit. Having an able bodied companion makes travelling easier and Dean's mother has enjoyed joining him on most of his trips.

Dean thinks it's good to have a variety of friends – different ages and different backgrounds. On the road he has met all ages, from young backpackers to grey nomads. He likes to hear their varied stories and has met people from all walks of life, including teachers, farmers, engineers and someone who worked on the Snowy River Scheme.

Activities can be a good base for developing friendships around a common interest. Dean also has friends from his farming days, agricultural college, cricket club, and from trips with his father to horse racing events.



Dean

"Friendship, family, mates, associates, home helpers - I've been so fortunate to have the very best of all these. I am a 60 year old C5/C6 quad who broke his silly neck playing a game of rugby league after leaving school at 15. It was just an accident but life was turned upside down. I had the absolute best family in this universe, and a lot of great friends & mates. These incredible people rallied around me and still do, and I am grateful for them."



Mick

"Having travelled to many different countries, including 3rd world countries, I realise how fortunate I am living in Australia with the fabulous support networks that are available here."

"As my health and physical fitness have deteriorated over the last 5 - 7 years, the help, humour and friendship of the great people who have assisted me over these years you just couldn't buy. They are so, so much more than "just home helpers" and I thank them too."

Mick says that while being as independent as he can is great, it is also positive to find what resources are available and connect with them. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Peers with a spinal cord injury can be a good source of information and support and friendships can develop. Sporting clubs such as Sporting Wheelies and Sailability are a good way to connect with others with similar interests.

SPOT receives a commendation from Carers Australia QLD



The Spinal Outreach Team was nominated for a Carer Friendly Business Award and was awarded a Commendation for the category of Great Service Provider. The awards are held each year to celebrate National Carers Week. SPOT was presented with their certificate at a ceremony hosted by Carers Australia QLD.

SPOT was thrilled to have been nominated by a family member of a person with SCI that we have visited on our regional visits to North Queensland. Kiley Pershouse, SPOT Manager, pictured left with some of the team, said "It is great to know that the family have felt supported by SPOT, with regular visits as well as telephone and email, and have also appreciated the education on SCI we have provided to the local services that support them."

To see when SPOT is next visiting your area, check out the back page or [our website](#).

Friendship research

Friendship following traumatic injury is of special interest to Dr Melissa Kendall who is the Senior Research Officer for the Transitional Rehabilitation Program (TRP) and Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service (ABIOS). Her interest led her to complete a PhD in this area.

In 2015, Melissa wrote a journal editorial titled "Friendship: the forgotten relationship in the rehabilitation environment." In this article, she outlines the scenario of a young person who sustains a spinal cord injury and brain injury and spends an extended period far from home in a rehabilitation unit. She raises questions about the impact on friendships when friends are unable to be a part of rehabilitation, may not understand the injury and may need support themselves.

Both positive and negative changes in friendship have been reported after spinal cord injury and some people report changes, for a variety of reasons, in the frequency of socialising and who they spend time with. Melissa states that there is little research in this area and concludes that "a greater understanding is needed of the challenges facing friendships and the ways in which we can, as rehabilitation professionals, enhance the maintenance and growth of friendships through and beyond rehabilitation after injury". ([Kendall, MB. Friendship: the forgotten relationship in the rehabilitation environment. Edorium Journal of Disability and Rehabilitation 2015; volume1: pages 12 – 15.](#))

[Read the full article here](#), or contact SPOT for an emailed or printed version.



National Disability Insurance Scheme

One of the aims set out in the service charter for the NDIS is "...to enhance the independence, social and economic participation of people with disabilities and their carers."

If you are eligible to access the NDIS and have the opportunity to develop an individualised plan, you will be asked to think about your goals and aspirations. Goals could include finding and maintaining friendships.

The NDIS website has lots of information on eligibility, the types of support you can access and information on its roll out in Queensland.

To find out more visit www.ndis.gov.au



National Injury Insurance Scheme Queensland

From the 1st July 2016, anyone who sustains serious personal injuries in a motor vehicle accident in Queensland may be eligible to receive necessary and reasonable lifetime treatment, care and support under the National Injury Insurance Scheme Queensland.

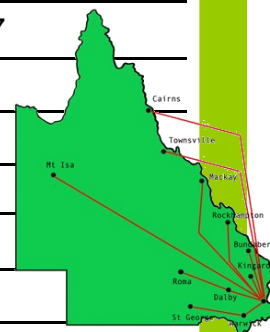
The Scheme is administered by the National Injury Insurance Agency Queensland and helps participants achieve their individual goals, maximise their independence and participate in the community.

To find out more visit www.niis.qld.gov.au

Regional visits 2017

Check out this year's schedule so you know when we will be in your area.

Area	Week Of
Toowoomba, Pittsworth and surrounding areas	30 th January 2017
Roma, Dalby and west	20 th February 2017
Mackay, south to Sarina and north to Bowen	13 th March 2017
Rockhampton and west, Emerald & Dysart	27 th March 2017
Cairns and Hinterland, north to Cooktown and the Cape	8 th May 2017
Bundaberg and Monto	29 th May 2017
Nambour and north of Nambour to Gympie	19 th June 2017
Longreach, Winton and surrounding region	17 th July 2017
Stanthorpe, Warwick and west	31 st July 2017
Kingaroy, Murgon, Gayndah and Mundubbera	21 st August 2017
Townsville and Mt Isa (including Palm Island)	11 th September 2017
Cairns and Hinterland, south to Tully	9 th October 2017
Gladstone, Biloela, Theodore and Bundaberg	30 th October 2017
Hervey Bay and Maryborough	27 th November 2017



Education Update - Contact SPOT if you want to know more

The QSCIS website has been updated, including some new information for consumers and health professionals. Keep an eye out for the section "Participation in life after SCI", which includes videos of four people sharing their lived experience of SCI. Also note the new information for GPs in the "Health and Wellness" section. This factsheet has been prepared to help GPs find information and support when managing health concerns of people with SCI.

SPOT will be providing one hour **videoconferences for health professionals** on the following topics:

- ▶ **Cauda equina & lower motor neurone injuries**
Tuesday 21st March 10.30 -11.30 am and Thursday 30th March 1.30 - 2.30 pm
- ▶ **Common splints for the tetraplegic hand**
Tuesday 16th May 10.30 -11.30 am Thursday 25th May 1.30 - 2.30 pm
- ▶ **Spinal cord injury - the essentials for health and wellbeing**
Tuesday 11th July 10.30 -11.30 am and Thursday 27th July 1.30 -2.30 pm
- ▶ **Posture and seating - the basics**
Tuesday 17th October 10.30 -11.30 am and Thursday 26th October 1.30 - 2.30 pm

Contact SPOT by phone or email to book in to a videoconference session.

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