

Your Voice

TAC clients sharing their stories and information

Keeping active

Keeping active is important, particularly as we grow older. Even just a small amount of daily physical activity can result in tremendous physical and spiritual benefits. Living an active life gives us more energy, helps us sleep better, reduces the risk of depression and can help prevent a range of chronic diseases.

If you've been injured in an accident then exercise can be



Returning to exercise after an injury is an important step in your recovery.

crucial to your recovery. Bear in mind that healthcare professionals are there to help. A healthcare professional will assess the nature of your injuries and help you build an exercise program aimed at accelerating the recovery process. They can also help you get back to doing some of the things you loved doing before the accident. Speak to your healthcare professional about a fitness program that is right for you.

Work with your health care professional to set some short term goals and then use these goals as a motivating force. For example, you may wish to start a

fitness program so that you can take the kids to the park again. Or you may want to get back out in the garden. Whatever the driving force, achieving your goals will help you stay positive and encourage you to stick to your exercise program.

And remember; don't set your expectations too high. The recovery process is often slow going and can truly test your patience and resilience. You will have good days and bad. This is normal. Try to pace yourself, make sure you warm up properly, start your activities slowly and gradually build up to a rewarding and sustainable fitness program.

TAC Support Services

To find out more about the TAC support services, contact the TAC Customer Service Centre on 1300 654 329 and ask for a copy of the brochure *About the TAC*. You can also visit www.tac.vic.gov.au

If you'd like to share your story in a future edition of *Your Voice* please contact Erin on (03) 5225 6504 or email yourvoice@tac.vic.gov.au

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The accident changed my life in so many different ways!

By Sharon

I knew I was in trouble as soon as the bike landed on top of me. My right arm was in terrible pain. If only I'd met my friend for coffee like we'd originally planned. If only I'd remembered my training at that critical moment. But what can you do? That's life. There's nothing I can do now to change what happened. It was just a freak accident. It happened in an instant and it's changed me forever.

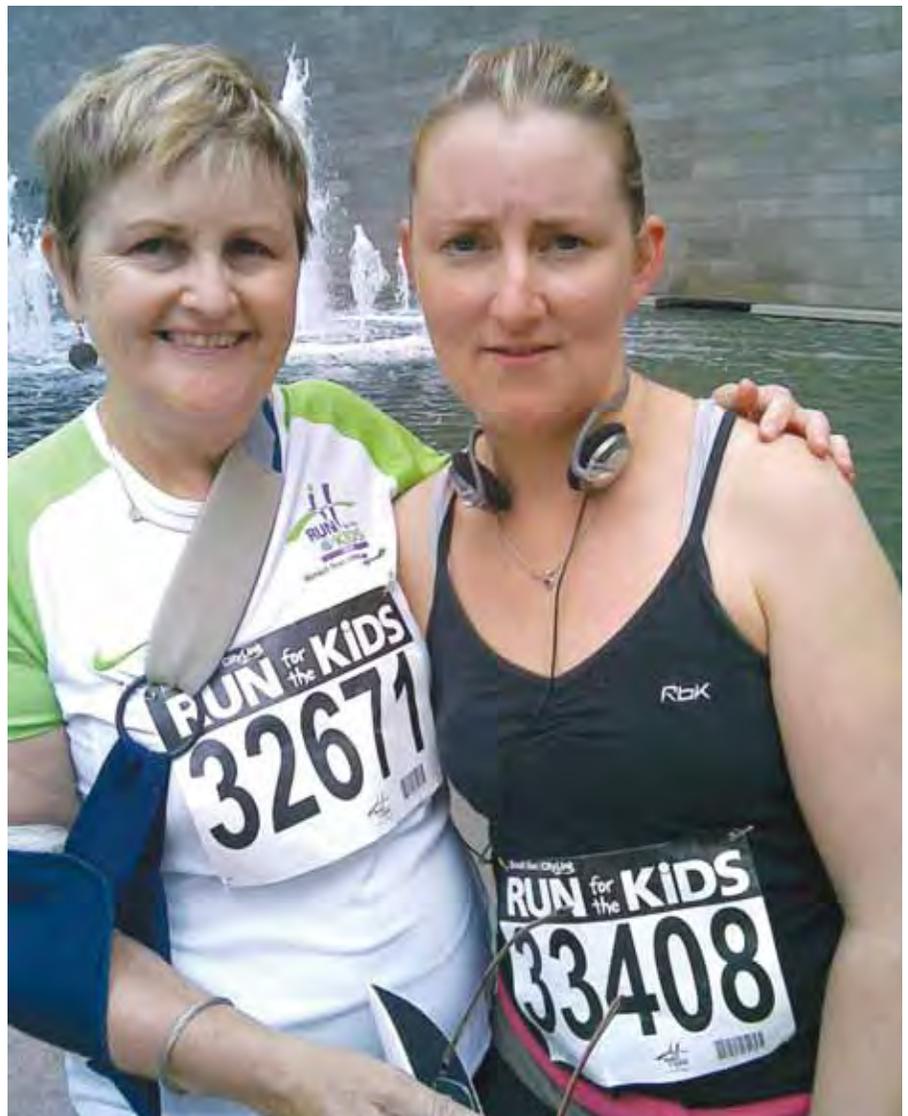
Before the accident I was an extremely busy person. When I wasn't working as an executive assistant in aged care, I was going on long walks, cycling,

When the bike hit a pot hole it landed on top of me and I started feeling pain like never before.

swimming and spending time with my husband Grant whom I married in 1974. Sometimes I wonder whether I might have been a bit too busy. Did that make me prone to having an accident?

I decided to get my motorbike licence so that I could go riding with Grant on weekends. My instructor had been pleased with my progress and I was just about ready to add motorcycling to my growing list of hobbies. But all that changed on August 14 2005.

Grant and I were in Traralgon chatting with my friend Karen



Before the accident I was an extremely busy person. When I wasn't working as an executive assistant in aged care, I was going on long walks, cycling and swimming.

when I hoisted myself onto her postie bike. Funnily enough I never actually intended to actually ride the bike; I just wanted to sit on it. Then, just as we were about to call it a day, I somehow managed to kick the bike into gear while pushing out the throttle at the same time. All of a sudden I was on the move! In the heat of the moment I panicked. Everything I'd learned in training went out the window. When the bike hit a pot hole it landed on top of me and I started feeling pain like never before.

At first I thought I'd broken my arm and my leg but as it turned out my leg was just badly bruised and would eventually make a full recovery. Unfortunately I wasn't so lucky with my arm. My elbow had been badly crushed. A surgeon later described it as the worst case he'd seen.

Thankfully Grant was able to rush me to the local hospital in quick time. I just wish the hospital staff responded with the same degree of urgency. I spent some long hours in

Emergency before eventually being admitted to hospital. I then had to wait another three days until I finally went in for surgery.

Unfortunately the operation didn't go well. While the doctors did the best they could I don't think they'd had much experience with this kind of injury. They inserted metal pins to fix my arm back into place but it ended up facing a weird angle, causing me considerable pain. Fortunately, about 4 months later, I was introduced to Dr Warwick Wright, an amazing surgeon who built a new ligament into my arm and helped me develop a rehabilitation program involving swimming, physiotherapy and other strengthening exercises.

It's been a long process of rehabilitation over the last three and a half years.

It's been a long process of rehabilitation over the last three and a half years. Putting up with pain and functioning on very little sleep are things I've had to get used to. I've also had to learn to rely on my left arm a lot more. But it's the little things that seem to frustrate me the most. It's difficult to explain to people just how an accident like mine affects you on a day-to-day basis. Every day tasks like chopping up the vegies, doing my eye make-up or scooping ice-cream for my grandkids just aren't as easy as they used to be.

I was relieved when the TAC accepted my claim. Unfortunately I was not eligible for income support because although I was having lessons

at the time of the accident, I did not actually have my learners permit. But the TAC has paid my medical costs which has been an enormous help. Without their support there's no way I could have afforded my regular physiotherapy sessions. Dealing with the TAC has been frustrating at times - especially having to explain the story over and over as you deal with different people - but on the whole they have been amazing and I thank them for their continued support.

At the time of the accident my employer was not quite so supportive. It wasn't long afterwards that I found myself out of a job. I applied for some 20 jobs before finding something again. This was a bit of a kick in the guts because I was hoping that getting back to work might help me regain some dignity and self esteem; some of which I felt I'd lost after the accident. But for now I am happy doing contract work. I'm currently developing employment programs for young people who are out of work and soon I will be organising financial facilitation workshops for adults on a budget.

The accident changed my life in so many different ways, but it's amazing just how many of those

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changes have been positive. I honestly believe I've become a better person for the

experience. I've learnt a lot about myself and found strength and resilience during some pretty tough times. As for the arm, it's feeling ok. I just had a full reconstruction about a month ago. But the fact is it will never be like it was before. I just need to be patient, stay positive and do whatever I can to manage my injury effectively. I also hope to help other people who have gone through something similar by drawing on my own experiences and offering support.

There's no way I could have coped with everything that happened without the incredible support I've received. I'm eternally grateful to my doctors, my physiotherapist, the TAC, my friends, my daughter and two sons, and of course my wonderful husband, Grant, who has been with me every step of the way.

Did you know?

The TAC recognises that a client who has sustained an injury in a transport accident may benefit from a fixed-term gym or swimming program to assist with their recovery. As a general guide the TAC will consider reimbursing the reasonable cost of a 3 month gym or swimming program that has been recommended by your healthcare professional, who will monitor and evaluate the outcomes expected from participation. The TAC requires a written recommendation from your healthcare professional prior to the commencement of the program.

Once your condition has stabilised, the program will become one of maintenance and you will be responsible for any ongoing costs. Call us or visit the TAC website www.tac.vic.gov.au for further information.

Just one of those things

By Jim

I've never been one to dwell on things too much. I'm more of a doer than a thinker. So when the doctor told me I would need a series of operations for any chance of saving my leg, I had to agree with him that our best option was to amputate.

I've been a farmer my whole life. I studied agriculture in 1956 and grew up learning the grain growing trade from my father. When he passed away, I carried on looking after things. When I'm not out working the land, I'm normally out working on my golf handicap. Being president of the bowls club keeps me pretty busy too.

Bernie and I have been married for 46 years. We live on the farm in Murtoa, about 30 kilometres out of Horsham. Both of us remember the day of the accident pretty well.

It was about 9:30am on the 4th of February, 2006. I wanted to finish cutting the straw before heading off to the bowls club. I was trying to remove a clump of straw from my tractor-driven binder when suddenly it clicked into gear. My ankle got caught in the binder's knife and was left hanging by a tendon. Worse still, just like the clump of straw, I'd got myself stuck in a moving machine!

People often ask me whether I was scared to lose my leg.

The tractor and binder dragged me along for a few hundred metres until I eventually got my hands on a rope connected to the kill switch. While I managed to switch the machine off, I still couldn't get myself free. Surprisingly, the foot didn't feel too bad, but during all the rough and tumble I'd managed to break a few ribs and puncture a lung, so my chest was giving me a

bit of grief. All I could do was sit tight and wait for help.

I'd been there almost three hours when Bernie found me. I told her to ring the club to let them know I wasn't going to make it, but she insisted on ringing an ambulance first.



Now I scoot around the golf course in a motorised cart to save my leg getting sore.

The paramedics arrived from Horsham to assess my injuries and get my leg out of the binder's knife. I was barking instructions at them as to how they should go about it because I was already pretty banged up and didn't want the binder damaged as well! The paramedics then ordered a helicopter to come out from Bendigo and take me to the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

I checked into hospital about 7 hours after the accident. The prognosis was pretty grim. While the surgeons were confident they could fix my ribs and lung, they were not so sure about my leg. It had to be amputated 15cm below the knee.

People often ask me whether I was scared to lose my leg, but I wasn't really. To be truthful, I mainly felt relieved and lucky to have survived. Like I said, I don't like to dwell on things too much. I just try to take the good with the bad and make the best of whatever happens. To me, the accident was just one of

those things. I had a fight with a binder and came off second best.

That's not to say it hasn't been hard going at times. After they amputated my leg, I spent a fortnight in hospital recovering and then seven weeks in the rehabilitation unit. In that time they fitted me with a prosthetic leg which definitely took some getting used to. I found it tough to get my balance at first but I was up and about before too long.

The TAC has been pretty good to me. They've helped pay for my appointments with the prosthetics specialist and have covered me for the costs of regularly travelling to Ballarat for treatment. Also, last year, when my leg told me that planting 300 acres of crops was too much, I got my neighbour to finish the job and the TAC covered me for lost wages.

My life hasn't changed too dramatically since the accident. I just get frustrated sometimes when I find I can't do things like handle a big animal or catch a sheep. Usually I'll find a way to work around a problem though. For instance now I scoot around the golf course in a motorised cart to save my leg getting sore. And having one leg can even work in my favour; like if Bernie wants me to do something around the house I'll say "Sorry luv, I can't... got my leg off!"

Bernie and I turned 70 this year. We'll probably look to wind things down a bit now. I've already eased off the farming, so you could even say I'm more of a hobby farmer these days. But later this year I hope to play in the big Amputee Golf Day which should be a good day out. I'll also be jumping on a hot air balloon soon and flying over Bendigo. I'm a bit nervous about that to be honest but the kids got it for us as a birthday present so it looks like there's no getting out of it.

Going from strength to strength

By Irene

The accident happened in January, 2000. It was school holidays and I was on my way to my daughter's house to babysit the grandkids. Although she lived more than 200 kilometres away, I considered it well worth the drive because I love spending time with my family.

To this day I still don't know exactly what happened. One minute I'm driving through Morwell; the next I'm trapped in a crumpled car. Somehow I had veered off the road and driven straight into a large old tree.

I woke up in the Alfred Hospital with absolutely no idea what was going on. The first thing I remember is seeing spiders the size of dinner plates climbing the walls. I guess the medication I'd been given was pretty strong! Even still, my pain levels were through the roof. My body was badly bruised and I'd been stitched up in various places. I also had broken ribs to go with a number of other fractures.

In order to restrict my movement, doctors fitted me with a back brace and fixed a halo to my head (NOT the angel kind!). I couldn't look up, down, left or right, and all of a sudden, some of the simplest tasks had become impractical. I could no longer walk up stairs because I couldn't look down to see the steps. And even if I had been able to look down, I still didn't have the strength to lift my legs.

I spent four months in rehabilitation. In the beginning I had treatment twice a day including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, hydrotherapy and exercise therapy. Yep... just name a treatment that ends in 'therapy' and there's a fair chance I was doing it.

Despite all the medical attention, rehab was quite a lonely experience. I remember I actually started joining the smokers outside the hospital even though I didn't smoke. You could say I was craving social interaction like they craved nicotine. But those four months definitely tested all my patience and courage. I was determined to go home and get my life back on track.

When I finally arrived home I was faced with a host of new challenges. I was now finding it difficult to do the things I used to do. And then there were some things like hanging out the washing that I wasn't able to do at all! I just had to try to be patient and adjust my life accordingly. Arranging for my groceries to be delivered was another adjustment as I could no longer carry my shopping bags.

After I'd been home a couple of months I joined a gym.

Before the accident I was very house proud and I liked to keep the garden neat and tidy. Now the TAC pays for some hired help, and although I appreciate it, the results just don't live up to my standards. Not to worry though; I've trained myself to turn a blind eye.

For my own peace of mind I did see an occupational therapist before getting behind the wheel again. I also retook my driving test to ensure it was still safe for me to drive, not just for myself but for other people on the roads. But funnily enough, as a driver and a passenger, the accident hasn't affected me too much. Maybe that's because I still can't really remember what happened. The only significant change is that now I prefer to stay local.



After being home for a couple of months I joined a gym, at first just using the pool and then combining this with a gym program.

The thought of taking another long trip is a bit scary.

Since the accident, it would have been quite easy to stay at home feeling sorry for myself, but I have made a conscious effort to keep active and enjoy time with my friends. I have also continued to do community work, just as I did before the crash. While I've had to give up some of the more 'hands on' jobs, the work has helped me stay connected to the community and played a vital role in my recovery. More recently I've kept myself busy by researching my family tree. I've even managed to trace back as far as 1763 on one side.

After I'd been home for a couple of months I joined a gym. At first I was just using the pool but then I combined my pool work with a gym program. The TAC paid for the first three months of my membership and then I took over the costs. Since going to the gym I've gone from strength to strength. I still go 2-3 times a week and I've even got myself a personal trainer. My kids still laugh at that. They can't believe the transformation! But I just feel fantastic and look forward to keeping it up.

TAC Lump Sum Coordinator, Matt

By Matt

Hi, I'm Matt and I've been with the TAC since July 2007 as a Lump Sum Coordinator. No two days are the same and will involve speaking to clients and their representatives and reviewing medical information to determine if they have an entitlement to impairment benefits and financial compensation. I get job satisfaction from knowing that I am helping people injured in transport accidents at what can be a difficult time in their life. One of the rewards is being responsible for paying impairment benefits to eligible



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clients which assists them financially and hopefully ensures a better quality of life.

Outside of work I lead a pretty active life, I must admit this has wained a little over the years. Gone are the days of footy training three times a week and playing on weekends. These days I keep my fitness up by going for runs at lunch, so I can still chase my kids on the weekends - which in itself is a work out! A recent highlight was competing in my first triathlon, I entered with some work mates and we finished third in the men's whole course category, not a bad effort I reckon!

Calling all artists!

The TAC is seeking an expression of interest for a client art exhibition. Exhibiting your art could be a way to express and share your story following your accident. You don't have to be Van Gogh or Picasso to participate, we just want to showcase your talent to other clients and the wider community.

At this stage, the TAC has not made any specific plans – we just want to gauge your level of interest. If we receive enough interest the art exhibition will go ahead.

If you're interested please email a short paragraph about your proposed contribution to yourvoice@tac.vic.gov.au. We would love to hear from you and we'll contact you with further details.

Even if you just want to attend the exhibition please email yourvoice@tac.vic.gov.au. This is a great opportunity for our creative clients to express themselves!



Did you know?

The term 'impairment' means the permanent loss of a body part or function as a direct result of your transport accident. If you are likely to have a permanent impairment the TAC will arrange to have your injuries assessed. A lump sum payment can be paid by the TAC for this loss if your impairment rates a certain level.

If you are likely to be eligible for impairment benefits, the TAC will contact you and advise you of what you need to do. If you think you may be eligible for impairment benefits you may contact the TAC.

For more information about the impairment process, please call the TAC on 1300 654 329.