

Les

– a positive mental attitude

It's been nearly 25 years since I had my accident, back in May 1987. I was struck by a car in Yarraville, not far from where I lived and worked. My injuries were extensive: I had broken my leg in seven places and had an acquired brain injury (ABI) from where my head struck the road.

I spent a month in the Prince Henry hospital, and from there was moved to the Bethesda hospital in Richmond for another four months. I was in a wheelchair for over a year, and then spent another 12 to 18 months undergoing regular and intensive rehab.

Some of my injuries healed with time, however the ABI has left me with permanent balance issues, and I have a brace on my left leg and limited movement of my left arm. I also have problems with my short-term memory, and quite often forget things that have happened.

During my rehab I had speech therapy, physiotherapy and hydrotherapy, and these all helped with the healing process. However, the most important part of my healing came from having a PMA – a Positive Mental Attitude. Actually, while I was recovering my physio asked me if I had trademarked the term PMA, as it was working so well for me, she wanted all her patients to have it!

Having a PMA has been the key to my recovery – you could even say this is my philosophy on life. Your outlook and mental attitude play such an important part in how you recover and in achieving successful outcomes. Getting back into life and being part of the community helps you feel worthwhile, improves your self-esteem and does wonders for your confidence. I couldn't have done any of this without the love and support of my family though, especially my wife Margaret, who has been there with me every day of the last 25 years.

Even though my injuries still affect my day-to-day life, I've never let them stop me being a part of the community. I work part time as an integration aid helping children with special needs and I also volunteer my time for many different causes and organisations. In November I became a Soldier of The Salvation Army, and in 2007 I was recognised as Wyndham City Volunteer of the Year.

During my recovery I was limited in what I was able to do physically, however at one particular physio session I saw an opportunity to expand my horizons. There in the physio



practice was a tricycle, and since that fateful day it's become my faithful companion. Because of my balance issues I am not able to ride a regular bike, but a tricycle provides me with the stability I need to balance and has been an important method of transportation since the accident.

Prior to my accident I wasn't a bike rider, but I've embraced riding over the years and now I use it not only for getting from A to B, but also as a way of contributing back to the community.

In 2006 the Wyndham Rotary Club donated a tricycle to me so I could participate in a solo tricycle ride from Swan Hill to Werribee to raise money for the Salvation Army. I then did a number of other charity rides, always ending in Werribee where the local community would welcome me back with open arms. Being part of this community is so important to me, and when it was suggested that I ride around the community giving locals the chance to ride with me I jumped at the idea.

From this the Wyndham 1,000 was born. Now in its second year, the Wyndham 1,000 is a bike ride around the City of Wyndham where local residents, community groups, primary and secondary school students and disability groups can ride with me to raise funds to help the homeless, the disadvantaged and those most at risk in our community.

Over three weeks in October and November I ride around the city of Wyndham during daylight hours covering 1,000 kilometres. Local businesses and residents sponsor my ride, and this year we're also holding a cabaret night on the day my ride finishes. Last year I raised over \$7,000 – and I'm hoping to beat that this year.

Getting back into life and being a valued member of my community has been a major driver in my recovery. It's improved my self confidence, kept me active and been a key part of my rehabilitation. I'm looking forward to completing this year's Wyndham 1,000 and meeting all the amazing people in our community who help make this a great place to live.



Sakith

– back in the classroom

I was injured in a car accident in September 2010. After the accident I wasn't doing too well; my condition deteriorated during the journey to hospital and the doctors thought I might have a brain injury. Luckily for me there was no permanent damage and I don't have any side effects from the head injury.

During the accident I also fractured my leg, and was in a wheelchair for a few months. I couldn't go to school, and I wasn't able to do any of the activities I usually do like swimming.

While I was in the hospital most of my friends came to visit me and some of them even came to see me at home when I got out. It was good to have this support, as my family had only been in Australia for five months before my accident.

I went back to school in November once I was out of the wheelchair, and was getting about using a walking frame. My friends were really good at helping me when I had problems walking and playing at school.

Thanks to my rehab I was very quickly off the walking frame and riding my scooter to school again. I was walking with a limp for a while, but now I'm back to doing all the things I could before the accident. I love to read, watch t.v., play my Nintendo and swim – and I'm really happy to be doing all those things again.

I recovered from my accident after five months, and my family and I really appreciate the support the TAC offered during this time. I am happy to be back at school and to be playing with my friends again, and making new friends!

More information

The Transport Accident Commission publishes *Your Voice* three times per year.

Contact us

Telephone
8.30am to 5.30pm,
Monday to Friday

1300 654 329 (local call)
1800 332 556 (toll-free
outside the Melbourne
metropolitan area)

Did you know

- Occupational Physiotherapists can help you return to health / return to work in a fast and sustainable way. There is also no cost to you. If you are eligible, the TAC will pay the Occupational Physiotherapist directly for your consultations, even if you are subject to the TAC's medical excess.
- If you are able to work limited hours, you may be eligible for partial loss of earnings benefits while you gradually get back to your full time duties. If your employer pays you less than the TAC paid you before you returned to work, the TAC can top-up your pay.

Visit the TAC website www.tac.vic.gov.au to find out more.

Alpine challenge

**Running to Reduce Road Trauma
17 – 19 March, 2012**

Raising funds for Road Trauma Support Services, the Alpine Challenge incorporates the 100 mile Alpine Skyrun, 100km Corporate/Team Challenge and the 60km Alpine Experience run.

For more information, visit the Alpine Challenge website at www.runningwild.net.au

Events

Your Voice

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Getting back into life

Most health professionals agree that getting moving again and returning to your daily activities as soon as possible after an accident is good for your recovery.

Attending treatment for your injuries is just one part of getting better. Undertaking regular exercise to improve your fitness – as guided by your health practitioner – can have multiple benefits in your recovery.

Returning to your regular activities after an accident and improving your fitness can:

- improve self-esteem
- help build your muscle and bone strength
- get you active and involved with your friends and family

In this issue of *YOUR VOICE* we meet three clients whose return to health has been supported by their involvement in recreational activity. Mark adapted to his new life by taking long walks along the beach instead of mountain bike riding, Sakith started riding his scooter only months after getting out of his wheelchair, and Les found an innovative way to get around.

Get moving again

- Set short-term goals and talk to your health professional about how they can help you achieve them
- Different exercises suit different people, so ask what's best for your particular injury and lifestyle
- Start your activities slowly, gradually building your strength and endurance. Don't worry if you're sore to start with, that's normal – hurt is not the same as harm, and this soreness will normally pass.
- Try to do a little more each day, but don't push yourself too hard too soon. While exercise is vital to the recovery process, it's time to stop if you feel a sharp pain or you have the sensation that 'something isn't right'.

Mark

– in the gym



It was very important to me to get back into life and start doing some of the activities I used to do before the accident.

It was a sunny Autumn day back in May 2009 when I took my motorbike out for a quick ride. I was less than two minutes from home driving along the main road when suddenly a lady pulled out of the supermarket car park right in front of me. I hit the front wheel of her car and went flying 40 metres into the middle of the road.

I remember opening my eyes looking at the sky, and it took me a few seconds to realise I had been knocked off my bike. I knew it would be a bad idea to get up so I stayed on the ground where I was, hoping that no other cars would run me over. It took about a minute for the pain to set in, and that's when I knew I was in serious trouble. The lady who called the ambulance stayed by my side the whole time, right until the ambulance came.

I was sent to the Royal Melbourne Hospital and that night had my

first operation to stop the internal bleeding. My list of injuries was long – I had fractured my pelvis and left and right wrists, I had also torn the PCL ligament of my knee, and I had a ruptured bladder, lacerated liver, punctured lung and internal bleeding.

On my second day in hospital I underwent an eight hour operation to repair my pelvis and left wrist. After the operation I wasn't able to use my legs or my left arm. It was quite an experience for me, as prior to the accident I had never been a patient in hospital.

After two weeks in the hospital I was transferred to Dorset Rehabilitation. I spent six weeks there, and it was a very hard time. I had to learn how to slide onto a wheelchair using only my right wrist, and I wasn't allowed to put any pressure on my legs. The nursing staff and physios were great, and always managed to put a smile on my face no matter how bad a day I was having.

I started my recovery with gentle exercise to help with my mobility. There was also hydrotherapy, which is basically exercising in the pool, and that helped a lot. Seven weeks after the accident I started walking again. Learning to walk and regaining my mobility was difficult; I had to learn how to understand my injuries and work out what my limits were. My muscles had wasted away, and my bones still ached, making the process more difficult.

Initially the doctors didn't realise my right wrist was fractured, and it was only three months after the accident when I started experiencing bad pain that the fracture was discovered. I had to have a bone graft, which was done in January last year, eight months after the accident. About this time, as I was becoming more mobile, they also discovered my knee injury and I was back in hospital in May 2010 to have the left knee ligament replaced with an artificial one.

Discovering these injuries during my recovery process set me back a lot, as I had to wait months and months between operations. However, throughout all of my recovery I was involved in exercise physiology, physiotherapy and hydrotherapy, which was the key to helping me become more mobile.

Returning home from rehab was a bad time, as my family had to help me with every little task. They also had to endure the days when I was down and in pain. During this time I struggled not being able to exercise, and I ended up gaining 50kg as I was eating out of depression.

At the start of this year I turned my life around. My injuries had healed to a point where I could increase the exercise and slowly start to lose weight. I was still in a lot of pain, but I knew I had to get back into life. I gained more confidence in myself, and I became a member of a gym, with a personal trainer who focussed on the rehabilitation side of fitness. At the start I remember feeling exhausted after doing basic stretches, and the first time my trainer asked me to do lunges I was really worried; my pelvis was still sore, my knee was stiff and I hadn't pushed myself like that since before the accident. I held onto the rail and only moved down about an inch or two, but it was a start.

Now I can do full lunges with ease, and other quite advanced exercises. I've been pushing my body within the limits of what it can do, however there is still a lot I can't do. Before the accident I used to love mountain bike riding; I loved riding through parks, up and down hills away from all the noise of suburbia. Since the accident I've come to terms with the fact that I can't run, mountain bike ride or play sports anymore. I can't do all the things I used to, but I now enjoy going for walks around parks or along the beach, and I love going to the gym. I do

resistance and core training, which I believe is key to the way I feel today.

It was very important to me to get back into life and start doing some of the activities I used to do before the accident. It is a part of who I am, and while it breaks my heart that I can't mountain bike or run anymore, considering what I've been through I am happy to be walking and going to the gym.

I've lost 30kg since January, and I feel great! I've been seeing a nutritionist who is helping me learn to eat healthier, and I have even started cooking. I also returned to work early this year which was a significant milestone for me, as I had been off work for almost two years. It made a big difference returning to work slowly; it wasn't too much too fast. I couldn't believe how much the workplace had changed while I was recovering, but I'm really enjoying being back in the workplace and communicating with my workmates again.

If you're suffering from depression, there are organisations that can help:

Beyond Blue
1300 224 636
www.beyondblue.org.au

Lifeline
131 141
www.lifeline.org.au

Road Trauma Support Team
1300 367 797
www.rtstv.org.au

... one thing that's close to my heart is how we can really help clients recover from their injuries.



Jessica

– TAC rehabilitation coordinator

Hi. My name is Jessica and I am a Rehabilitation Coordinator at the TAC. I started working at the TAC in October 2008, moving down from Townsville to take the job. I was really keen for a sea change to Melbourne as Townsville just had too much sunshine!

My background is in psychology and forensics, and prior to the TAC I'd been working in prisons, child protection and worked as a disability carer. I was looking for a change in direction, and this job looked ideal. So I packed up and moved down to Melbourne, and when the TAC shifted to Geelong I went with them. I'm now a fully-fledged Geelong local, though I still think it's too cold to swim in the ocean down here.

There are many things I love about working at the TAC, but one thing that's close to my heart is how we can really help clients recover from their injuries. My dad was injured in a motor cycle accident back when I was 21, and he didn't have access to the support that we offer at the TAC. I can really see how we make a difference to someone's recovery. I love seeing a client of mine improve, watching their progress and seeing them get back into life and grow in confidence. I'm always hoping for a good outcome, and it's challenging seeing a client struggle with their recovery, but I know I'm here to help and that we're doing the best we can.

Outside of work I enjoy swimming (in the pool – not the ocean) and I've even tried surfing. I recently got a miniature dachshund puppy, Penny, who's 15 weeks old and just graduated from puppy school. She's taking up a whole lot of my time at the moment, and I'm looking forward to taking her along to the puppy activity group soon so she can play with the other dogs and learn more tricks.

TAC on Facebook



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Client stories, road safety updates and information on TAC events will be uploaded regularly, so get online today!