

Your Voice

TAC clients sharing their stories and information

Keeping a strong client focus



I'm privileged to be appointed as the new CEO of the TAC and I thank our former CEO Paul O'Connor for his contribution to the organisation. It is an exciting time for the TAC as we prepare to move to Geelong in January 2009. Although we are busy preparing for the move, we are

determined to maintain our focus on client service and build on the record client satisfaction score we achieved in June this year.

My background is in local government, where customer service is vitally important. With that in mind, we are recruiting many skilled people from the Barwon region who have a strong customer focus and personable approach. We may be moving and our workforce may be changing, but our commitment to you remains the same – to deliver the benefits you're entitled to as quickly and professionally as possible. Put simply, all of you are the most important people to the TAC. And we would love to hear your story.

This newsletter, *Your Voice*, is a great way to share information and your story of life after an accident with other TAC clients.

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On a personal note, I am inspired and learn so much when I hear stories from our clients – the challenges you face, your experiences with the health system and the TAC, your life at home and work and the goals you aim to achieve.



Janet Dore
Chief Executive Officer

If you'd like to share your story in a future edition of *Your Voice* please contact Erin on (03) 9664 6504 or email yourvoice@tac.vic.gov.au

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Things are looking up

By Carol

My name's Carol and I live in the country town of Bairnsdale. I love music, reading, gardening, shopping, movies, the beach, bush walking and getting together with friends. I have two boys and recently got engaged so things are looking up at the moment. Which is more than I could say about this time last year.

The accident happened in September 2007. I was on my way to visit a friend to have a coffee when a car went through a give way sign and hit my driver's side door. The impact propelled my car into the air and when it landed it skidded along the road, narrowly missing a lamp post. The next thing I

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remember was feeling a lot of pressure across my chest and my side. I undid the seat belt and when I tried to get up I fell straight down again. I was upside down in the car! Not only that, I was trapped and I couldn't get my leg out from under the dashboard! It was a real community effort of SES, ambulance, police and firemen to get me out. The car was leaking petrol all over the road too, so I was in further danger. I was in shock and in so much pain that they had to give me morphine. Eventually they used the jaws of life to cut me out. It was a terrifying experience.

In the casualty I underwent heaps of tests because my neck and teeth were incredibly sore.



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But when I told my sister and friends do you think they were paying attention? They were more concerned about how cute the ambulance guy was! They kept me smiling with their antics, but when they left the room I just burst into tears. I felt like I was on an emotional rollercoaster. The hospital was full and as the night wore on there was no bed for me to be admitted to, so reluctantly I went home.

When I woke up the next morning and the medication had worn off, the only thing I felt was pain. Lots and lots of pain. I had whiplash to my neck, back and shoulders as well as severe bruising all over my body, mainly where my seatbelt had held me up. The doctors suspected I had broken ribs too but luckily they were wrong.

To add to my predicament I was in the middle of a divorce, so there was no one but a few close friends to rely on. It was going to be tough with no car to

get around in either. The next few weeks passed by in a haze dealing with the pain and side effects of the medication. Thankfully my parents made the trip down from Morwell to take care of me for a few days and then my now fiancé, Andrew, stepped in and gave me the support I needed.

Fast forward fourteen months and sadly I'm not much better. I still go to physio once a week - twice a week when the pain is really bad. I also pay for massage out of my own pocket, which sometimes gives me the relief I need. They say that I've over compensated with my right arm because of the injuries on the left side, and now I've actually got right neck and shoulder pain and can't use my right arm properly. For the last month it's been really, really painful.

My life's changed completely. At first I thought y'know, I've had a car accident, I might have a few injuries but they will heal in six

to eight weeks. But it hasn't been that way and I feel a bit frustrated with it all. I certainly don't go out like I used to because I'm too sore. I spend a lot of weekends at home by myself or with Andrew keeping me company. I can't even walk the distances I used to walk, let alone play the sport that I used to. It's also those little things that I'd never even thought about that I struggle with like doing the shopping or housework.

My plan to work longer hours won't happen for a while.

Sleeping has been a huge issue. I wake up restless every night, and I'm usually up and down four or five times. It's been very disruptive for Andrew too because he starts work at five. He's been amazing though, every day I'm asking him to rub in Tiger Balm, Deep Heat or whatever I've got. This has been going on for months and I'm pretty sure he's over it and I can't blame him. But he still does it because he doesn't like to see me in pain - he's wonderful and extremely patient!

I work part time at the Commonwealth bank and went back into the office pretty much straight away on limited duties. In hindsight maybe I should have taken a bit more time off but before the accident I was planning to take on more hours because I was on a sole income so I didn't really feel like I had a choice.

It looks like my plan to work longer hours won't happen for a while. I still can't lift coin bags or heavy items and I feel a twinge each time I give it a go. I might even have to reduce my hours

soon, which is heartbreaking because I really enjoy the work I do. This accident has really put my life on hold.

In hospital they mentioned the TAC briefly to me and I think they gave me a card with a number to ring. I don't recall if they gave me any more information besides saying if I gave the TAC a call they would be able to help me. But when I first started to talk to the TAC, I was a bit confused with the whole process, between them, the police and the RACV. I wasn't sure who played what role.

I got a bit confused with the medical excess too - no make that really confused. I didn't understand it at all, though now I do and it seems plain and simple. Ross, my TAC claims manager, was really great with that issue, he took ownership of it and followed up with me until it had been resolved. It felt like he genuinely understood what I was going through and cared enough to get to the bottom of it for me.

A lot of times I've called the TAC and I never get the same person or sometimes the person I want isn't available so I have to wait for a call back. Even though all the people I have spoken to have been very nice, it can be quite frustrating to have to explain yourself over and over again.

My biggest goal is to have a great day in April next year when Andrew and I get married.

Overall I'd give the TAC a six out of ten, maybe a little bit more. They're helpful and do try and explain things clearly but mainly it seems to be in the form of

brochures and letters. In the early stages after my crash I found it difficult to process all the written information being sent to me. Just after an accident your mind isn't focusing on paperwork. If the TAC produced a DVD or something a bit more personal with all the information you need to know up front that would be a great help. Obviously with anything there's room for improvement and I think the TAC is moving in the right direction.

I'm hoping that with continued physio and an awareness of how to best manage my injuries I can get back to full health. I'd like to increase my walking cause that's something I enjoy doing with my boys as well.

As I mentioned earlier I love going to the beach, and even though at the moment I miss out on fun little things like swimming and going on the boogie board, I'm still going to enjoy the sun and the surf. But my biggest goal is to have a great day in April next year when Andrew and I get married. Yes, that's my biggest goal. I'm looking forward to that.

Did you know?

The TAC has authorised a group of registered physiotherapists to work specifically with TAC clients to help them get back to work.

These physiotherapists are known as Occupational Physiotherapists and they have at least three years experience in helping injured people return to work.

If you'd like more information about how an occupational physiotherapist can help you please call the TAC on 1300 654 329.

The TAC can also send you a list of Occupational Physiotherapists in your area.

The things that keep me going

By David

One rainy autumn day in 1991 I was involved in two accidents in the space of one hour. I'd taken two of my children, who were then aged 15 and 8 on a day trip to the Puffing Billy and we were on the way home. Coming around a notorious bend my car collided with another head-on. Despite the impact, I was still conscious and although I was pretty banged up I was more worried about the safety of my two kids in the backseat. An ambulance arrived about 30 minutes later to whisk me away to hospital. I was relieved to be in good hands, but my relief quickly turned to horror.

Unbelievably, the ambulance was also involved in a head-on collision and again I was thrown around like a rag doll. It wasn't a good day on the road, that's for sure. My two children sustained severe bruising but luckily escaped major injury. On the other hand, I was a mess when we finally arrived at Dandenong Hospital. I suffered fractures to my pelvis, right hip and nose. I had damaged teeth and numerous lacerations to my face which required extensive surgery. I spent two weeks at Dandenong as an inpatient then the next six months at Glen Waverley Rehabilitation Centre. Although I came home on weekends, it was tough being in a hospital environment for so long, away from my family and friends.

During this time I also noticed my left wrist was sore. After the doctors ran some tests, we discovered that it was broken – two months after the accident! This was probably the least of my worries. As time went on, I noticed problems with my diction and memory as well. Could my brain have been injured too?

I was looking forward to returning home to my wife Gabi and our only child together, Matthew. But when I finally did, I noticed my family relationships were strained. I definitely take some responsibility

for this. I've always been a perfectionist with very high standards and I think I was struggling to come to terms with how the accident affected my day to day life. For example, my speech

the patience and concentration to teach. I am now retired.

The TAC has been a great support through all of this. I've always felt like the TAC treated me as an individual, which is something you



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and short term memory just weren't the same and this frustrated the hell out of me. I had indeed suffered a brain injury and this contributed to our family difficulties. The tension between Gabi and I increased over time and affected my once close bond with Matthew too. Gabi and I separated in 1999.

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I didn't find much joy in my work life either. Following the accident, I attempted to go back to my teaching job but was unable to cope - the demands of teaching were just too exhausting. It also became more difficult to find emergency teaching work. With the help of the TAC, I completed another diploma to allow me to teach English as a second language. I got a job teaching adults instead of secondary students which was an exciting new step for me. Unfortunately this didn't last - I became easily frustrated and angry and realised I no longer had

don't expect from most organisations. I guess it reflects the people who work there and the caring culture that exists at the TAC. Anytime I've come to drop in paperwork at the TAC counter, the staff member there has been more than polite.

An area that the TAC could improve on is support for the family. My loved ones would agree with this. While I was going through my trauma, they were left in the dark and felt like there was nowhere for them to turn. Gabi was a social worker, so she was used to dealing with other people's issues. But even with her professional background, she struggled to come to terms with the effect of the accident on our lives. There was just not enough information and support. I think the road safety ads on TV had only just started when I had my accident – they are excellent. Hopefully the awareness they intend to create continues to cut the road toll.

What keeps me going? I take each day as it comes. I love travel, golf, music, reading, writing, watching Carlton play football, and I'm also a real movie buff.

We country folk are pretty tough

By John

My name's John and I'm married with three kids. I live in Nyah Victoria, which is on the edge of the Murray, in the Mallee area. It's pretty good living here. It's nice and quiet and it's got plenty of wildlife. There are birds flying around everywhere and heaps of fish in the water. My son Sam goes and looks for spiders and geckos and whatever else he can find out there. He's a real country lad. He and his sister have fun making mud slides on the banks of the river.

One rainy day, my family and I decided to drive to Swan Hill to visit mates. The roads were slippery and I lost control of the car on a sharp bend and hit a pole. It happened so fast and was bloody frightening. My first reaction was to check if my missus and kids were alright and thankfully they seemed to be in one piece. Me, on the other hand, had lost a piece! Let me explain...

Doing exercises the physio gave me have really helped.

As I unfastened my seat belt I noticed my little finger was missing. It had been ripped off when I banged my hand against a car mirror. Pretty gory stuff I suppose, but we country folk are pretty tough. I didn't see the point of kicking up too much of a fuss. I went straight to hospital and had surgery to reattach the finger, but you wouldn't believe it, they sewed it on crooked! I had to go back under again so they could sew it on straight. When I woke up I forgot I even was in a car accident, until I actually looked



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at my hand. Then I remembered what happened.

I had to wear a cast on my reattached finger which was annoying because it itched so much. But it was more frustrating not being able to use my left hand properly. For example, I couldn't open jars or beer cans. I couldn't drive a car and found it difficult to go to the toilet.

Doing exercises the physio gave me helped. These exercises involved all sorts of things from bending, stretching and squashing my finger to using hot wax and rubber bands. Today the finger is a bit better. I can grab onto a lot more things with my left hand and I can now use two hands to grip the steering wheel of my car. The question is, will I keep my finger? I have an appointment with my specialist soon to see whether it needs to be chopped off.

The first time I heard about the TAC was at the hospital the day after the car accident. When I rang them and they explained

that they paid for treatment and stuff like that I was rapt. I thought to myself, "that's good of 'em". I am pretty happy with the way the TAC treated me, they really looked after us.

I've never had any phone calls from the TAC because any issues I've ever had have always been solved before they became problems. The bills are getting paid so they don't really need to ring me, and I don't need to ring them. They send me letters every now and then to see how I'm progressing.

Well, I look at my finger everyday now and wonder if it will soon be gone. With any luck I'll get to keep it.

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

TAC Hospital Discharge Manager

By Shendelle

Hi I'm Shendelle and I began working at the TAC in May 2007. My first role was as a Support Coordinator for clients with spinal injuries, coordinating their services and support needs. It was a challenging job for me but extremely rewarding when I could really make a difference to the lives of my clients.

This year I had the opportunity to move into the role of Hospital Discharge Manager. This position allows me to work closely with hospitals, to identify any process issues and work out solutions to ensure TAC clients receive the appropriate care in



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hospital. I also work closely with staff at the TAC to ensure the way the TAC and hospitals work

together is as effective as it can be.

When I am not at work I love heading to the beach with my two dogs and playing netball and touch rugby. I am also trying dragon boating for the first time this summer. Being from Geelong, I am definitely looking forward to the move in 2009.

There is lots of enthusiasm and positive energy from staff regarding the move to Geelong (especially for those of us in Geelong!) and everyone is looking forward to working hard for our clients in our new, environmentally friendly building.

Did you know?

The TAC can consider paying for the medicine you need as a result of your transport accident. The medicine must be prescribed by your doctor and provided by a pharmacist. If you've paid for the medicine yourself you can claim reimbursement from the TAC. Your receipts can't just be from the cash register though. For the TAC to reimburse you, the account must include:

- a copy of the original script for private script medications
- Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) item code (where applicable)
- a full description of the medication including form, ie. tablet, capsule etc.
- quantity dispensed
- medication strength (where applicable)
- date dispensed
- amount charged per item
- whether the medication was prescribed as a hospital patient including outpatient or discharge patient

The TAC does not reimburse medication purchased from a supermarket.

When you claim reimbursement you need to send in your receipts with a completed *Pharmacy: Declaration* form. You can download the form and read detailed information about the chemist medication policy on our website www.tac.vic.gov.au. Alternatively, call us on 1300 654 329 and we can send the information to you.

Telephone:

1300 654 329 or 1800 332 556
(toll-free outside the Melbourne metro area)
8:00am to 5:30pm, Monday to Friday

Website:

Visit www.tac.vic.gov.au