

Your Voice

TAC clients sharing their stories and information

Welcome to Your Voice



Welcome to the *Your Voice* newsletter. This newsletter is about sharing information and your stories of life after an accident with

other TAC clients. *Your Voice* will be sent to you three times a year.

In this first edition of *Your Voice*, five people share their experiences of life after an accident. They touch on the challenges they've faced, their experiences of the TAC and the health system, their life at home and work, the activities they enjoy and the goals they aim to achieve. I hope you find their stories as inspiring as I do.

We would like as many TAC clients as possible to share their story in

future editions. If you are interested, please contact Erin or Rebecca on (03) 9664 6504 or email yourvoice@tac.vic.gov.au

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I look forward to reading about and learning from the experiences of more TAC clients.

Paul O'Connor, CEO

Getting back on the bike

By Terri Whelan

Before my accident I guess I was a typical 'bikie chick'. I loved riding my motorcycle on the open road, feeling the wind on my face. I also invested in a business that sold motorcycle memorabilia and women's motorbike attire. Motorcycling wasn't my only passion. My husband and I bought other 'toys' like a go kart and a boat. When you have seven active kids it's great to get out and enjoy the outdoors because things can get a bit cooped up in the house!

I had my accident on Mother's Day 2006. A day that the kids were supposed to spoil me rotten turned into one of the worst days of my life. I rolled my car when I swerved to avoid a fox and suffered a de-gloved forearm. There were fears I'd lose my right arm but the surgeon was able to save it by using tendons, muscles and skin grafts from my left arm. I come from a family of military men and I reckon my 'war scars' put theirs to shame.

After three weeks in hospital, I was rapt to

leave and be at home with my family again. But I quickly realised how such a severe injury can affect day to day life. Everything was hard to do, like putting on



Nothing's going to stop me from getting back on the bike again.

a bra, drying my hair, brushing my teeth, tying my shoelaces and having a shower. But when I achieved small milestones like cooking for my family again, I knew I was on the way to getting the old me back.

Fast forward almost two years. I have had lots of surgery and still need more which means I still need help with some everyday things. For example, my

daughter helps me wash my hair, hang clothes on the line and go shopping. The TAC helps me too by paying for treatment and some support. I've dealt with the TAC before when I had another accident in 1987. I think back then the TAC was quicker getting back to clients and correspondence was easier to understand. These days I feel like I'm always waiting for things - like six to seven weeks for a travel claim and a surgery approval.

I feel like this accident has put my life on hold because my arm just won't do what I want it to. But I refuse to let it stop me from pursuing my goals. I still want to be involved in small business. This time I want to open a bar. And I still want to get back on a motorcycle again. My family bought me a Honda Custom motorbike for my birthday, which I can't wait to ride. If I can't ride it because of my arm, I'll buy a special British motorcycle that has a left throttle. Nothing's going to stop me from getting back on the bike again.

Taking control of my life again

By Brian Lay

Almost five years ago, before my accident, I was already pretty frail. I had just had a hip operation and was hobbling around on a walking stick. Then, you wouldn't believe it, I was driving in Boronia, with a car full of passengers, when we skidded on black ice and ended up between two trees. The good news was that none of my passengers were hurt. The bad news was that my walking stick jabbed into my back and buttocks and I had to spend a week in hospital. The muscles and bones in my back were so sore that I could barely move.

It's funny, you don't appreciate good health until you're sick or injured. When I got home from hospital, I could no longer do the little things that I once took for granted. For example, I couldn't put my socks on. If I dropped the soap in the shower I couldn't pick it up. I couldn't even cook properly because lifting heavy pots and pans put too much strain on my back. My wife had to help me with everything.

For someone used to being active and independent, feeling so helpless was really hard. Although my family was there to support me, I felt worthless and alone.

I see this accident as a setback, not something that defines who I am.

Looking back, it's clear I was suffering from depression which is understandable when your life has been turned upside down by a car accident. I just wish I had received counselling at the time because things may have been much easier.

My baby grandson helped me snap out of it. While my daughter worked, my wife and I had the joy and responsibility of looking after him every day. This really helped

take my mind off things. I focussed on getting better and making the most of my physio and hydro appointments. I also talked to my employer about getting back to work. At the time I was employed as a baker and six months after the accident I tried to go back for a few hours a day. Unfortunately the physical nature of the job put too much strain on my back. The



"It's funny, you don't appreciate good health until you're sick or injured".

standing and lifting was too painful and I wasn't doing myself or my employer any favours. I decided to retire.

Not working was a real shock to the system. I was so used to the regular routine that I didn't quite know what to do with myself. I also really missed the social side of work, mixing with all walks of life. Don't get me wrong, I enjoyed spending time with my wife and grandson but I needed something more, something that made me feel like I was contributing to the community. Then one of the ladies at the local school suggested I volunteer as a school crossing supervisor. I decided to give it a go and I've never looked back. I've been doing it for over three years now and I just love the social side of it. I bring my grandson along as 'a helper' and we both enjoy chatting with the parents and kids,

some of whom have become good friends. It's also a great way to get some light exercise which makes my back feel better.

I don't think my back will ever be the same again but I try not to let it stop me from doing the things I enjoy. I go for walks, spend time gardening and have just started riding my bike with my grandson. We've recently moved from the hilly suburb of Mt Martha to Safety Beach which makes it easier for me to get out and about because I don't have to negotiate steep slopes. Still, some days after exercise I'm so sore I wonder why I do it. Other days I'm fine. They're tricky things backs, a bit of a mystery to me.

My back requires regular maintenance so I stretch, use heat packs and see a physio which the TAC pays for. Like most people I didn't know what the TAC did before my accident, I just thought they put on those road safety ads we see on TV. Now I know a lot about what they do and that's partly because they've explained everything so clearly to me from the outset. My experience of the TAC has been pretty good overall.

So where to from here? Well, I know I'll never play rugby or football again but I've set some short term realistic goals. For example, I want to get well enough to fly a kite with my grandson in the park. I've tried a few times before but because my back restricts my running, I can't move fast enough to get the kite in the air. It'll be amazing one day to see that kite perched proudly in the sky, it'll be a real sign that my back has improved. I also want to ride my bike for longer periods which will help me get fitter and stronger.

I see this accident as a setback, not something that defines who I am. And I am determined to enjoy my retirement and the time I spend with my family.

The importance of goal setting

It is important for people to pursue their goals after suffering a setback such as a transport accident. Goal-setting is the process of establishing **what** you want in life and work, and planning **how** you will go about achieving it. Research shows that

For example: “At the end of visiting workplaces, I will be able to **identify** the kind of work I can do” is a much more specific than “I will visit workplaces to get an idea of things”. (ii) Identify the high priority areas in your life.

match your capability and interests. Set goals that are not too easy or too hard, but challenging, so achieving them will give you personal satisfaction.

Realistic

Consider your practical circumstances before setting goals. If you don't have the time, money or ability to achieve a goal then it is clearly unrealistic. Instead build on the strengths and experiences you have. Be flexible and willing to change as circumstances change and you progress.

Timeframes

Setting a timeframe to achieve your goals gives you clear targets to work towards, commits you to a start and end date, maintains your interest and builds in a natural urgency to achieve.

Support

To help you through difficult stages, seek the support of people close to you and health professionals you trust.

Staying on track

To help you stay on track after setting your goals, it's a good idea to develop an action plan – a list of individual activities you can put in your diary so that you know when you will do what. The plan should be flexible and change if your goals change.

Having a plan is what goal setting is all about. Setting goals helps motivate us, build our confidence and move forward realistically from a state of inactivity to one of purpose and achievement.

Contributed by **Dr Andrew Remenyi**, Clinical Psychologist



people who pursue meaningful goals have happier and more successful lives. It's important to remember that goal-setting is a key step in the rehabilitation and recovery process.

Below are some tips to help you set goals. Good goals have **SMARTS** characteristics.

These are:

Specific, not general

When setting goals try to be specific, not general. For example, it is not a specific goal 'to be happy'. 'To be happy' is too general and is usually the result of achieving a more specific goal.

Your goals will be more specific if you:

- (i) Write down specific words and phrases to describe your intent.

For example:

Education: What skills do I need? What training or courses should I take?

Job: What work do I want to do?

Family: Have relationships with my family members deteriorated? If so what do I need to do to repair them?

Measurable

It's important to measure progress towards meeting your goals.

Include precise amounts, dates, etc, in your goals. For example, to be ready for work in four months time, I will have completed my training course, be able to walk two kilometres and stay awake for eight hours.

Achievable

You need to ensure that your goals

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To find out more about 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

Getting back on track

By Anthony Baker

G'day, my name is Anthony and I'm 19 years old. Like most young blokes I love my sport, especially football and cricket. When I was 18, I was playing some good football for Ringwood and looking forward to a potential career in the AFL. I was also playing a high standard of cricket. Life was good. I was enjoying my sport, working as a concreter and hanging out with my mates at the pub and local footy club. I was fit and looking forward to the future. And like most blokes my age, I guess I thought I was indestructible.

Then, in October 2006, I was in a car my mate was driving when he lost control on a gravel road. The car flipped and I landed on the roof, breaking my neck, cutting my head, and bruising my ribs. My world had been turned upside down in a split second.

I spent about two weeks in hospital and didn't walk for the first eight days. It was a frightening experience not being able to walk but when I finally left the hospital and went home, fear gave way to frustration and boredom. I couldn't bloody do anything! For a young guy used to physical activity, sitting around in a neck brace for nine months relying on others for support almost drove me mad. And the pain, well, there were some days when I almost felt like crying. I refused to take pain killers though because I didn't like the side effects.

My family was a great help and provided the extra support I needed during my recovery. And my mates would pop over on Fridays after work with stories of the week's events which lifted my spirits. Still I was alone at home a lot which made it easy to think



"It's not about having fun on the roads, it's about getting to your destination safely and looking after your passengers".

about things too much and get depressed.

I'm still recovering from the accident today, just taking it one step at a time. I'm not setting my goals too high because I don't want to be disappointed, but one goal I did achieve was getting back to work. I kept in regular contact with my boss after the accident and I returned to work part-time when I got a bit better.

I'm anxious now when I'm a passenger in a car because I don't have control.

I'm always checking the speedo, the driver's mirrors and looking over my shoulder. I also try and avoid the spot where we had the accident. In fact any reminder of the accident causes me stress. For example, the car stereo was blasting when we crashed and now I don't like loud music anymore.

Recently the surgeons told me I couldn't play footy again because if I received another hit I'd be

paralysed. This knocked me around a bit at first but I soon realised that it's only a game, not life and death. And the good news is that I can play cricket when I recover, so I can't wait. In the meantime I've been getting my sporting fix as the assistant coach of the local u/18's football team which has been great fun.

Throughout all this my experience of the TAC has been mixed. They've been okay but I think things could be improved. I think they could be more personal and understanding when they speak to their clients and they also should return phone calls more promptly. Sometimes I felt left in the dark about what was happening.

There were some good things to come out of the accident. I've grown up a lot more and now have different outlook on life. I don't take things for granted like I once did and I don't waste time worrying about trivial stuff. One thing's for sure, my attitude towards driving has changed – it's not about having fun on the roads, it's about getting to your destination safely and looking after your passengers.

One step at a time

By Chantelle Bucki

I love children. I work as a midwife at the Mercy hospital, bringing hundreds of babies into the world every year. I also have five gorgeous kids of my own and each day I count my blessings that I'm around to look after them and watch them grow. You see, two years ago I was involved in a terrifying car accident when I was heavily pregnant with the youngest of my brood, Isobel.

I was driving home from work after my last shift as a midwife before going on maternity leave. Then suddenly I had an accident



As part of her recovery, Chantelle set herself realistic, short term goals.

on the Calder freeway and my car rolled and flipped on an embankment. All I remember was flashes of bright white light, strange sounds of clattering metal, searing pain around my hands and mind numbing fear. I was petrified that I would lose my baby. I was rushed to hospital via air ambulance and could barely feel the baby move for most of the journey.

They ran some tests at hospital and mercifully the little one was okay. Which is more than could be said for me. My hands were a

mess. I suffered multiple fractures and one of my hands was de-gloved. For those of you who don't know, de-gloving occurs when a massive section of skin is completely torn from the underlying tissue and the blood supply is severed. This can be a pretty gruesome sight, and even though I wore plenty of bandages my kids were a bit scared of me when they first saw me in hospital. But with some encouragement they realised it was okay to sit with me and give me cuddles.

My hospital stay was very challenging. I was pregnant and

badly injured, needing three separate surgeries. So the doctors decided it was best to deliver Isobel first before I went under the knife. You think childbirth is tough – imagine giving birth when you're battered and bruised after a car accident! Afterwards was hard too, looking after a newborn while recovering from surgery and in pain.

Emotionally, I was a wreck. I tried to stay strong but I felt guilty for almost killing myself and my unborn child. I felt so bad that I had caused my family such worry

and grief in what should have been one of the happiest times of our lives. I also felt an overwhelming love for them because I was so glad to see them and know that they were okay and intact.

I guess such a traumatic experience makes you appreciate what you have.

Lying in my hospital bed I was determined to get back my normal life as soon as possible. I set myself realistic, short term goals. My first goal was to leave hospital and take my new baby home. I achieved that. My second was to concentrate on my rehab and to do everything the doctors asked of me. I did that too and slowly I was well enough to do the things that most mothers take for granted: changing nappies, breastfeeding and picking up baby. I was also able to take some of the pressure off mum who helped with daily tasks such as cooking and cleaning. My final goal was to get well enough to return to work and manage a house with five kids. I'm delighted to report that I achieved that too, but it was far from easy. Without the amazing support of my family, friends and community, I don't know what I would have done.

The TAC was a great support too. They answered all my questions in a straightforward manner and did a lot of work behind the scenes with all my doctors to make sure I was looked after.

Today things are back to normal but my mindset has changed a bit. Such a horrible accident makes you realise that life is so precious and that we should never take things for granted.

Pain won't get the better of me

By Mrs Merle Sholl

I know it's a cliché, but life can change in the blink of an eye. In 2004 I had just entered my seventies and was looking forward to enjoying my golden years with my husband, two daughters and four grandchildren. Then, shortly after my husband and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary, he passed away. I was so shocked. I felt lost and vulnerable. A big part of me died with him that day. Shortly afterwards, my grief was compounded when I was involved in a serious car accident. I don't even remember what happened but apparently another car rammed into the passenger side of my car.

I woke up in the ICU at the Royal Melbourne Hospital. After a few days in the ICU I was transferred to another ward for the next seven days, then spent two months in rehabilitation. I suffered three breaks in my pelvis, a broken left

leg and external head injuries. The TAC was very supportive, but at the time I would have liked more information about what the TAC can do and what happens next.

My body was broken and so was my heart. I didn't even have time to grieve for the man I loved so dearly. Now I faced a whole set of new challenges - to repair my body and stay in the retirement home my husband and I called home for the last seven years. The doctors suggested that I live in a hostel because of the care I needed. But I was determined to maintain my independence and stay at the home with my friends. And my daughters supported my decision.

The last couple of years have been hard because my recovery has been so slow - I guess being over 70 doesn't help. The doctors recently told me that one of the breaks in my pelvis will never heal, even with surgery. This was difficult to hear and it made me



I have bad days and good days, that's just part of life. I'm just determined not to let the pain get the better of me.

realise that I have to live with my injuries. But it hasn't stopped me from focussing on my recovery. I walk everyday, have hydrotherapy twice a week and also physiotherapy. The TAC has been fantastic - really helpful and professional. And I haven't stopped having fun either. I get out and about and enjoy spending time with my friends and family. I'm just determined not to let the pain get the better of me.

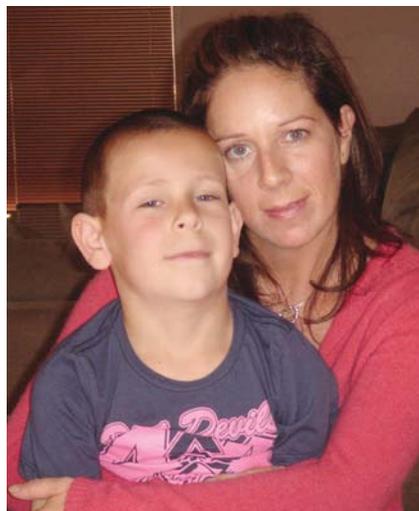
TAC rehabilitation coordinator

By Deborah Simmelmann

I've been with the TAC for five and a half years and I'm currently working as a rehabilitation coordinator. Part of my role is to help clients get back to the jobs they had before their accidents, or if this is not possible, help them find other jobs they may be able to do. It's an exciting role that differs each day and is extremely satisfying, especially when my clients gain employment in a completely new field. Helping a client increase their independence and achieve their goals is a huge honour and something I find rewarding.

I can relate and empathise with my clients as they begin the process of rebuilding their lives following a car accident. Five years ago my life

changed and I had to learn to adapt to a new way of living. I can now see how crucial it was for my recovery to



I enjoy spending time with my family and friends and my gorgeous six year old son who started prep this year.

set goals, return to the workforce and regain my independence. Like my clients, I too have good days and bad days and I understand the hurdles and setbacks you may have along the way. But the final outcome makes it all worthwhile.

Outside of the TAC I enjoy spending valuable time with my family and friends. I have a gorgeous six year old son who started prep this year, which was very exciting. We try to travel somewhere different each year, as we love to explore the many different places our world has to offer.

Working at the TAC along with my own personal challenges and triumphs, allows me to fully appreciate life and to live each day to the fullest.