

Wednesday, 30 August

SPINAL CORD INJURIES AUSTRALIA'S PEER AND FAMILY SUPPORT HAS COME TO THE HUNTER

As we head into September, which is Spinal Cord Injury Awareness Month, Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation is proud to see a grant of \$121,000 assist Spinal Cord Injuries Australia (SCIA) establish a community-based peer support program for people with spinal cord injuries in the Hunter region.

A spinal cord injury is a life-changing event and support during the initial discharge from hospital is critical, as people learn how to live with their injury and reintegrate into everyday life.

However, with 50% of SCIA's community clients based throughout regional NSW, travel to Sydney for acute care and rehabilitation is often required.

Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation Chair, Ross Griffiths, said SCIA's program would mean people with spinal cord injuries can feel empowered about their future in the Hunter.

"In the Hunter, we have an estimated 400 people living with a spinal cord injury. However, this doesn't mean someone should miss out on everyday experiences such as living independently, achieving career goals and even participating in sports," said Mr Griffiths.

"SCIA's Peer and Family Support team provide wheelchair skills, community and in spinal-unit support, education and training, and one-on-one peer support.

"The program also facilitates regular social catch-ups for those living with a spinal cord injury, helping to foster community and ensure people don't feel isolated.

"It is available face to face, through telehealth, and in online formats so people across regional NSW can access the support as well."

Ash Treseder is a part of the newly-formed Family and Peer Support team in the Hunter and brings his own lived experience to the role, having sustained a quadriplegia diving into shallow water at Port Stephens.

Mr Treseder said a simple conversation can have a huge effect.

"The first time I met my Peer and Family Support Coordinator I bundled him up for over an hour and talked his ear off," said Mr Teseder.

"From there I was able to start seeing people who were like me as a part of Peer Support."

Whilst he was staying in Sydney, SCIA's Peer and Family Support Team Leader, Dan Holt, introduced Ash and others new to life with a spinal cord injury to wheelchair rugby.

"I used to be very active before my accident and Dan started to bring us to rugby on Wednesday nights. It was very eye-opening seeing everyone living their life and getting into sport," said Mr Treseder.

Media release

But when he returned from rehabilitation back to life in Newcastle, Mr Treseder saw a gap in the support networks offered.

“I was definitely more prepared because of the education sessions but there was definitely a lot to learn by lived experience,” he said.

“I noticed when I got back to Newcastle from Sydney there was a big gap in support. You really had to reach out and it was an effort to catch up with anyone else with spinal cord injuries in the area.”

Mr Treseder is excited to empower people of the Hunter with spinal cord injuries to live as independently as possible, as well as for the opportunity for the community to share what they have learnt about themselves, so others don't feel lost.

“The biggest lesson for me was patience. Everything seems to be taking that bit longer these days,” Mr Treseder said.

“I definitely take a lot more value from the little things – I certainly take a lot more notice of day to day. I live in the present, focus on now and I'm grateful for the second chance.”

If you're interested in learning more about our Peer and Family Support team visit <https://scia.org.au/peer-support/> or email info@scia.org.au.

About Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation

Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation provides more than \$1 million in grants each year to charitable projects aimed at improving the health and social wellbeing of vulnerable people in regional New South Wales. Since its establishment in 2003, the Foundation has provided more than \$25 million to some 550 community initiatives.