



**Dealing with a loved one's life-changing injuries.  
We talk to Cathy Brown, page 6**

# Shine

Sharing stories, ideas and news across  
Lifetime Care and Workers Care.

Summer 2018

# Community Connections

*a Shine special feature*



*Arne in his handcycle.*

**Getting back to participating in recreational activities and engaging in the community can be a challenge after a life-changing injury.**

**In this article, we talk to four participants in Lifetime Care and Workers Care who have managed to re-engage in activities and connect with their community.**

**We ask what helped them get into their post-injury activities, what benefits they felt they gained, and if they had any advice on how other participants could manage the transition.**

## **Looking for ideas to help you reconnect?**

**dis-Ability Leisure, Arts, Sports and Lifestyle web guide**

**d-Ability.org** is a place to explore and learn more about life's possibilities following a disabling injury or illness. The site provides links to the websites of people and organisations from across the world.

For more information visit **[www.d-ability.org](http://www.d-ability.org)**

Arne has a wide grin as he shows off his new sports wheelchair.

Arne, 16, loves sports and loves playing outdoors. Being the second-youngest of seven children to his parents Phil and Mollie, he is keen to keep up with his siblings in outdoor activities on their large semi-rural property on the edge of Armidale.

Three years ago, however, Arne was a passenger in a ute that slipped on the road and hit a tree. Arne was thrown forward and broke his back sustaining a complete T5 spinal cord injury.

After five months in hospital and rehab, Arne returned to school. "It was good to be back with my friends," he says. "It took a while for the teachers to get used to his situation with the chair," says his dad Phil. "The school needed some modifications."

icare paid for four to five hours of specialised gym sessions a week for Arne, to strengthen his body after the long period in hospital.

But Arne was missing activities with his friends and brothers.

"We thought if Arne is in a chair and everyone else is running then it's not an even playing field," says Phil. "But if we had ten wheelchairs then Arne could play wheelchair basketball with his friends."

Arne and his family became the central organisers of a fundraising project to supply ten sports wheelchairs to the local community. With help from Wheelchair Sports NSW, Ability Links and local businesses associated with the family's church community, they raised the necessary \$30,000.

The chairs are kept at the university indoor sports facility where anyone can use them, but Arne and his school have first priority.

"It's a big asset for the whole region," says Phil.

"And I use the chair to play tennis, basketball and squash," says Arne. "Wheelchair basketball is really popular."

**Arne is a Lifetime Care participant**

**“We thought if Arne is in a chair and everyone else is running then it's not an even playing field. But if we had ten wheelchairs then Arne could play wheelchair basketball with his friends.”**



# Kerry Baulman

“I’d say to others like me – people with brain injury – get out there and talk to people and find an activity that works for you. You’ve got to keep yourself busy.”

*Kerry with one of her own paintings.*

Kerry was an aged-care nurse in her 50’s who loved her job. In 2010 she was driving to a client in a retirement village near where she lived on the Central Coast, the car started to play up, she drove into a wall and a roof collapsed crushing her car.

Kerry sustained a heart attack and a traumatic brain injury, broken back and limbs. She wasn’t expected to last the night but she survived and gradually recovered her ability to talk and walk.

She has two daughters, then aged 16 and 22. “They’re the only reason I think that I was able to pull myself through,” says Kerry. “My two beautiful daughters.”

Unable to return to work due to the ongoing effects of the brain injury on memory, mood and anxiety, Kerry tried to work out how to regain her life. “I couldn’t sit still. I couldn’t just sit here looking at the four walls. I needed to keep busy, to keep my brain active,” she says.

Kerry regained her driving licence. “I wanted to be independent, to be able to get out and about. Although I’m sensible – I don’t think I’ll ever go on the motorway again.”

She regularly visits an old friend – someone Kerry’s known since she was 17 and who is now in her 90s.

“I drive to Woy Woy to see her every fortnight. We just have coffee. It’s great for both of us – she’s pretty happy in herself.”

“I used to paint years ago, before the accident. One of my daughters and some of my friends are artists,” says Kerry. “I’ve taken that up again – it’s my joy.”

Once a week she goes to art classes. “My teacher Sandra is excellent. I’ve done pastels, watercolours and now I’m doing oils. Today I’ll be working on an oil painting of a shell that I’ve started.”

On Tuesdays Kerry goes to the local pool for exercise where she walks up and down the pool in the water, often losing track of how many laps she’s done.

On Thursdays, it’s the gym where Kerry works out with weights and on the treadmill. “It’s all about keeping active and building up strength, particularly upper body strength.”

Kerry grows plants as well – something she inherited from her father who was “an orchid fanatic”. “I grow succulents though. I love them. In fact I go a bit crazy with them.”

“I’d say to others like me – people with a brain injury – get out there and talk to people and find an activity that works for you. Don’t lock yourself away. You’ve got to keep yourself busy.”

**Kerry is a Lifetime Care participant**



*“I grow succulents. I love them. In fact I go a bit crazy with them.”*

# Fred Jackson



*Fred with one of his support workers, Clare.*

Fred is in his late 60's and lives on the edge of Sydney near the Blue Mountains with his wife Helen.

While Fred was at work in 2001, three pallets fell off a forklift truck onto his head and he was left with a traumatic brain injury. He lost a lot of his long-term memory and found that he had trouble walking.

Following his injury Fred was diagnosed with Progressive Supra Nuclear Palsy (PSP) a degenerative condition of the brain's nerve cells that affects balance, swallowing, speech and vision.

"I can walk a short distance," says Fred, "but the doctors wanted me to use a wheelchair because my legs can give way at any time."

"Before the accident I worked, worked, worked – six days a week. I loved what I was doing. I did fatherly things too, like taking the kids to soccer, but I had no hobbies."

"Afterwards I wasn't able to do much for a long time. I wanted to do things, but couldn't work

out what. I went to a craft workshop at Liverpool Brain Injury Rehab Unit for a while but it didn't really work."

"And I tried going down to the Men's Shed at Warragamba but only lasted about three months as I couldn't really use my hands.

"Finally I had a go at drawing. I went to an art class and started drawing buildings, cars – I need a picture beside me. Sometime it was hard as I get the shakes a lot, but I got into it and I got better.

"One day the teacher said 'I'd like to get someone out to interview you' and he got the local paper to come and talk to me.

"I was a star overnight," chuckles Fred.

His support worker, Clare, takes him to the classes every Tuesday. And Fred has lunch with friends afterwards.

"I've just had my cataracts done.

**“ My advice is when you're in a wheelchair, be happy, keep smiling and try your best to do something. ”**

Now I look at my drawings and I think they look terrible!" he laughs.

"But I do I love the classes and I feel proud of the work I've done."

Despite his ongoing health issues and the limitations in what he can do, Fred remains determined to be positive.

"I've got my good days and bad days," he says. "I don't worry about what will happen."

"My advice is when you're in a wheelchair, be happy, keep smiling and try your best to do something. Don't sit around moaning. Don't sit around at home even if you've got to get someone to take you out. Get out and talk to people.

"It's hard not to worry about the future but the more you worry the worse you get.

"I chat to my support workers and go for drives up the Blue Mountains.

"I've got a really good life."

**Fred is Workers Care Program participant**

**“ It's hard not to worry about the future but the more you worry the worse you get ... I've got a really good life. ”**



**Angus McConnell**

“ I’m so proud of our club and the fact we’ve opened the doors to a vast range of people – the beach going experience is so much richer for us all.”

## Life was good for Angus.

He was working as a construction project manager in Newcastle, he and his wife Kim had three young children and he was an avid cyclist and rugby player. He’d also become heavily involved in the local Cooks Hill Life Saving and Surf Club, age managing, patrolling, surf training, and eventually helping to run the Nippers Program with some 700 kids.

Then in March 2013 – Angus refers to it as “my second birthday” – he was riding his bike towards the surf club, was hit by a car and became a C7 complete quadriplegic with little feeling below his chest.

“I was six months in a neck brace and for the following year couldn’t do much at all.”

But Angus’s accident became the catalyst for the surf club to look seriously at the challenges faced by people living with a disability. The club community woke up to the issue of accessibility.

They raised money, built accessible ramps, installed a lift, and bought beach matting to lay across the sand. Thanks also to donations from Variety and the Lions Club the club has a fleet of five beach wheelchairs and another electric one, so that people with limited mobility can be taken down to the water. There’s even a hoist on hand if needed.

At first Angus found it difficult re-entering the surf. “I couldn’t balance myself, but it’s about using my upper body strength. Now they just throw me in unceremoniously and I find my own balance. I’m not catching waves but I can move around.”

Lots of disabled people now use the club. “It’s just grown and grown,” says John Mayo the club’s membership officer. “People find us online – even from Canberra, Melbourne, the UK. From accessibility it expanded to a wider form of inclusion. We have a program for Indigenous kids and for migrants who don’t understand the beach. We’ve had nursing homes bring their residents here for the experience.”

“I can’t overemphasise how therapeutic the surf can be,” says John. “I’ve seen people overcome with the joy of it.

“We run the Same Waves program, Nippers for kids with special needs. It no longer turns heads. It’s just a normal part of Sunday morning on the beach.”

“I’m more of an advocate for the club now,” says Angus. For each person with a disability who gets into the surf we need six or seven volunteer members to ensure the process runs smoothly and safely. The volunteers get as much out of it as the participants – if not more. It opens up a whole world for them. It’s great for the person being taken for a swim and it’s

fantastic for the volunteers also. “Being involved with these programs gets me back to some sort of normalcy. I’ve never stopped loving the surf and working with the life saving community. I’m so proud of our club and the fact we’ve opened the doors to a vast range of people with disabilities, migrants, Aboriginal kids – the beach going experience is so much richer for us all.”

## **Angus is Lifetime Care participant**

### **Going to the beach?**

For more information on the Cooks Hill Life Saving and Surf Club and their accessible beach options visit [www.cookshillsurfclub.com.au](http://www.cookshillsurfclub.com.au)

### **‘Beach Bums’**

Beach Bums is an online database for accessible beach and surf equipment throughout NSW. Beach Bums has been developed to assist people plan holidays and access the beach. [www.royalrehab.com.au](http://www.royalrehab.com.au) and search ‘Beach Bums’

### **Accessible Beaches**

A detailed directory of accessible beaches in Australia.

[www.accessiblebeaches.com](http://www.accessiblebeaches.com)

# Dealing with the grief of a loved one's injuries

Cathy Brown is the daughter of a Lifetime Care participant



June Lewis was a fit, lively 82-year-old. Her daughter Cathy Brown describes June as the matriarch of her close-knit Catholic family – well-read, talented, furiously independent and an “exercise junkie”.

Cathy's father had died two decades previously and June had retired from the job she loved – a “bus mother” helping residents in a home for the disabled get to school and work.

“There was a word Mum used a lot – ‘gumption,’” says Cathy, a warm outgoing woman in her late 50's. “Well she had a lot of gumption.”

June had only recently sold the family home in Merrylands and had chosen an over-55's independent village near Cathy's family for the next stage of her life.

## An accident walking home

June loved walking. One afternoon walking back from the shops June crossed Merrylands Road, as she had many times before, and was a hit by a car.

“When we got to Westmead Hospital, they warned us Mum mightn't make it through the night,” recalls Cathy.

June did survive. But she had sustained major injuries including damage to the frontal lobe of the brain. Her lower right leg had to be amputated, she had a tracheostomy and was left with significant cognitive impairment.

While June was in hospital for five months, Cathy and her brother Mike hoped for some recovery, a rewiring of the brain. But it didn't happen. They then had to find June a permanent home, a period Cathy describes as horrendous. “We'd been about to help move Mum into a new independent home, and now we had to pack up her house of 60 years knowing she could never go there.”

Cathy was originally a teacher but now works fulltime for the Catholic Education Office in Wollongong. Mike is a busy assistant school principal.

“Finding Mum a nursing home was a huge journey. We had lots of rejections because of the ‘triple whammy’ – brain damage,

amputation and a feeding tube. It was like your kids not being chosen for sport – that's how Mike and I felt – except it was our mum.”

Eventually Cathy and Mike found a place for June in a nursing home in north-west Sydney.

Soon after June moved, there was a period where she started to improve. There was more engagement with people around her and her “naughty” sense of humour seemed to be coming back.

But the improvement was short-lived. “It's like her body has caught up with her,” says Cathy.

As well as the memory loss – especially of her old life – June had lost the empathy that she had before. Cathy describes it as a personality change. June used to be so organised, structured and interested in the people around her, but now her life is much more a moment-by-moment scenario.

## Three things

“There were three things Mum said she wanted for her old age,” says Cathy. “One, to never go into a nursing home. Second, to be able to exercise or walk – her legs were so important to her. And third, to keep her independence.”

But while June was in ICU, a social worker told Cathy and Mike about icare.

“It was a healing process for me because I really was suffering trying to keep all the balls in the air at the same time.”

“ I’d recommend *wecare* most definitely for those struggling with their role as family carer. Although it takes some bravery too! ”



Cathy with Marika, one of June’s support workers at her nursing home.

“The partnership with icare has been wonderful for us,” says Cathy. “A silver lining to a very dark cloud. There’s a relationship there with *us*, separate from it being just for Mum.

“Without icare I don’t know how we would have got through. The team that works with Mum are fantastic. Sometimes we’ve challenged things because I feel we are Mum’s advocates, but they listen and are very accountable.”

### Support from *wecare*

“I needed to do everything for Mum. For the last year and a half I’ve been lucky in being able to keep my work time flexible, whereas Mike couldn’t do this. But because life had changed so much, I wasn’t sleeping. I was going through bad bouts of grief. And I have to say, Mum was becoming almost a full-time job.”

Sonia, June’s case manager, introduced Cathy to *wecare*, a program icare runs in conjunction with Carers NSW to help family members of injured participants and workers. The mentoring program includes six to eight sessions with the family carer to provide information and support to strengthen their coping strategies and wellbeing.

“Deb from *wecare* was phenomenal,” says Cathy. “She was very flexible about times and met me at my home.

She challenged me about the things that needed doing, about reviewing my life, about rebalancing it. It was about self-care.

“It was talking to someone else who not only listened but challenged. And I don’t mind that at all. It was a healing process for me because I really was suffering, trying to keep all the balls in the air at the same time.

“I think I’ve become a better work person for doing the program. I’m now more accepting that people might not have good days because of what is happening in their lives. It’s been a nice bonus out of a terrible time. I still ring Deb occasionally if I’ve been having a really bad day. How lucky am I!

“Even though it might be a streamlined program, I felt that it was individualised for me as well.

“When I talk to Mike I can use the sessions I’ve been through – so it has collateral benefit.”

“I’d recommend *wecare* most definitely for those struggling with their role as family carer. Although it takes some bravery too!

“I’d recommend it if you’re experiencing grief or even if you don’t know what you are experiencing. So you don’t forget about yourself. It can be part of the healing process and giving people the skills to cope.”

Cathy says she’d also like to give back as a mentor.

### A journey of acceptance

June has been at the nursing home for a year. She requires one-on-one assistance for all self-care and mobility. Cathy says she and her family are now at a happy medium.

“It’s taken a lot of energy to get to this point. A good nursing home, the right medication, the right support workers. My philosophy now is that I take Mum as she is. It’s been a real journey of loss. But also, of acceptance.”

Cathy drives to Wollongong every day for work. “I used to talk on the phone to Mum the whole way. There is a point where you see the ocean expanse for the first time, and Mum, who was a real beach lover, would say ‘Are you at that point yet Cath where you can see the water?’ Now when I get to that point, I always think of Mum.”

### **wecare**

*wecare* works with families to increase their knowledge, resilience and wellbeing after an injury. *wecare* has been developed in partnership with Carers NSW and includes programs for adult family members and children and siblings of icare participants.

**For more information, talk to an icare coordinator or contact Carers NSW by phone on 1800 242 636 or email [wecare@carersnsw.org.au](mailto:wecare@carersnsw.org.au)**

# Aiming high: from world record to recovery

Ryan is a Workers Care Program participant



*Top: Ryan, right, learning to fly again – this time as a helicopter pilot.*

*Below: Ryan's Piper Cub in which he returned to flying after his accident.*

Early on 28 December 2015, 21-year-old Ryan Campbell was at work as a commercial pilot on the Gold Coast. He literally had the world at his feet. Two years earlier he had become the youngest person to fly solo around the world.

But on that day, soon after take-off, the engine of his Tiger Moth failed. With limited landing options, Ryan's plane crashed, and he sustained an L3 incomplete spinal cord injury.

## Discovering his passion

Ryan's love affair with flying began very young. When he was six, the family flew to Vanuatu for a holiday. "I was invited up to the cockpit," says Ryan. "It was one of those moments of discovery. I'd found my passion – from that day I wanted to learn to fly."

Ryan grew up near Merimbula on the South Coast and held onto his childhood dream. At 14 he was taking flying lessons. "I worked at the supermarket, washing trucks and washing dishes to pay for them. Every spare dollar I had went into the lessons."

On his 15th birthday he flew by himself for the first time and a year later he was able to take passengers up with him.

## Alone around the world

At 17, when still in high school, Ryan got his private pilot licence. He could fly a plane by himself before he could drive a car. He googled 'aviation adventures' – "I discovered that the youngest pilot to fly around the world had done it when he was 23. I then googled 'how do you fly around the world?'"

Ryan emailed noted adventurer Dick Smith who told him that such an enterprise was hard, expensive and dangerous – but also possible. Smith would support him if he could find a mentor. Round-the-world air adventurer Ken Evers agreed to the job, and Ryan then had the support of two major figures in adventure aviation.

Ryan hid all the information at home. "At that stage I didn't want anyone to know – the idea just seemed so outrageous."

Eventually he discussed the plan with his parents, who gave Ryan their full support. For the next six months they worked in secret together building up a team. Over another 18 months they raised \$250,000, rented and modified a single-engine plane and put together a detailed plan for the trip.



“ I was so determined that I could get better. I think the biggest thing anyone has to overcome in that situation is their mind. ”

Ryan, centre, with his friends Mick and Andrew who introduced him to helicopters.

“ It was not the way my story - my life - was meant to go. ”

In 2013, Ryan, 19, took off on his adventure from Wollongong. After 70 days, 45,000 kilometres, 180 flying hours and 35 stops in 15 countries, Ryan landed back in Wollongong. He had survived thunderstorms that went to 20,000 metres, ice on the plane over Greenland, air-traffic control mishaps in Indonesia and fuel-range worries. “It held every emotion - happiness, sadness, elation, fear - all mixed into one,” says Ryan. “I wasn’t able to run away from it. The only way I saw myself getting home was in that aeroplane.”

He had fulfilled his dream of becoming the youngest person to fly solo around the world.

Ryan received many accolades for his accomplishment. He published a book, *Born to Fly*, and was included in an exhibition at the Australian Museum of Australia’s 50 greatest explorers. However, Ryan struggled when he returned. He needed something new to keep his passion alive. He already had his commercial licence, so he went back to work as a commercial pilot.

Then came the accident.

“It was not the way my story - my life - was meant to go,” says Ryan. “Until then it had gone predominantly the way I’d wanted it to.”

The engine failed only seconds after take-off with the plane barely above the treetops.

He was pinned upside down in the wreckage, his back broken in five places.

### Recovery

Ryan spent two weeks in Brisbane Hospital where his spinal cord journey started. He then spent close to six months in rehab at Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney.

“I’m a problem solver,” says Ryan. “I wanted to know the solution from day one and it’s kept me fairly positive - you can’t put a price on a positive mindset. I was so determined that I could get better. I think the biggest thing anyone has to overcome in that situation is their mind.”

In the first 12 months after the accident Ryan moved from very limited sensation and movement in his lower body to getting some minor feeling back below the waist, and then reasonable strength back into his legs.

“I owe so much to the hospital physios,” says Ryan. “The spinal physios at Prince of Wales were just amazing.”

“My balance is bad. I need AFOs [Ankle Foot Orthoses - customised leg and foot supports] for some activities such as stand-up clay shooting. Walking for me is like wading in a pool of waist-deep water. I walk all the time on my heels - I’ve got no push in my feet.”

Ryan still has his wheelchair but doesn’t need it as often now. “It’s purple with white wheels,” he laughs. “That’s all the incentive I’ve needed to get out of it.”

Ryan was restless. He hated having to be driven around. “I went and bought a new car while in my wheelchair”, he laughs, “and became one of the very few spinal patients to leave hospital with a driver licence albeit a limited one.”

But the lack of strength in his feet meant that he couldn’t handle the brake pedals in most fixed-wing planes. “It hit me like a ton of bricks - not being able to fly for my living. I was always so aware of how lucky I was to be walking in any form. But at the same time, it was flying that had made me who I was. It was a large piece of me taken away.”

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*On the motivational speaking circuit: Ryan in Detroit.*

### Back in the air

Ryan says that his icare coordinator Damien D’Cruz has been “the most important person in my recovery, always positive and encouraging.”

Ryan started to investigate the idea of flying helicopters where the leg and foot controls are not as arduous as in a commercial plane, and where he could continue earning a living as a pilot.

Ryan moved to Orange for two months of helicopter training. It started disastrously. After the first day, Ryan realised he had a serious pressure injury on his heel. “It was a kick in the guts. I was back in hospital for a week, then back at home for two months in a wheelchair.”

But he persisted and completed his training, receiving his full commercial helicopter licence at the end of last year.

“After the accident everything you do is different. But once you know the new normal, it’s OK, providing you have that drive in you and that belief that you’re going to be able to do it.”

### A new chapter

Now at 24, Ryan’s life is changing course again. The pressure injury persuaded him that he couldn’t work only as a helicopter pilot. To look after his body, he needed to mix that work with something less physically stressful.

Ryan had already done some public speaking before the accident. Then earlier this year he did a course with Josh Linkner, a well-known motivational speaker in Detroit. Ryan’s plan now is to work further with Josh’s team to get his message and brand right before launching himself on the US speaker’s circuit. He will continue with his helicopter work and balance the physical demands of flying with his public speaking.

Ryan is not sitting still. “After the accident everything is different and everything you do is different. But once you know the new normal, it’s OK, providing you have that drive in you and that belief that you’re going to be able to do it. Accepting the need to constantly adapt is the key.”

**Ryan is Workers Care Program participant**

## Tech spotlight

Welcome to our new ‘Tech spotlight’ feature where we’ll bring you news about the latest technologies icare is exploring.

### Home automation

Many icare participants have difficulty accessing their home and using devices in the home due to reduced mobility and hand function. This can include opening and closing doors, turning lights on/off, and controlling appliances such as a TV or air conditioner.

Over the last year, we’ve researched and piloted new home automation technologies that can give participants greater control and increased independence in day-to-day activities around the home.

This includes a tablet or smart phone app that provides integrated control of a range of home functions and features. We’ve also trialled voice controlled hands-free devices.

### Christine’s story

Christine was the first participant in our pilot and is extremely positive about the difference her new home automation system has made. You can watch Christine’s story here:

[www.icare.nsw.gov.au/news-and-stories/christines-story/](http://www.icare.nsw.gov.au/news-and-stories/christines-story/)

If you’re interested in exploring home automation, please speak to your icare coordinator.

# Rosie Attard: living life to the full

Rosie is a Lifetime Care participant



It was on the last day of Year 12 – before the start of the 2011 Higher School Certificate. Rosie Attard was driving to her final school assembly at Wauchope High on the NSW Mid North Coast.

“I swerved to miss an animal,” says Rosie. “The car rolled and something hit me on the top of the head that kinked my spinal cord. There was hardly a mark on me anywhere. Just a few scratches on my arm. And my broken neck.”

“Dad was the one who found me. He was on the way to the assembly too.”

John Attard called the ambulance and Rosie was flown to Royal North Shore Hospital where she was diagnosed with incomplete C7 quadriplegia.

## Three-sixty-one days

“It was the start of a whole year’s process – 361 days,” explains Rosie. “Three weeks in the hospital and the rest in rehab at Ryde.”

“The first few months were challenging, but I was really lucky. There were a few other young people there as well. The girl in my room, Cobie, we got along well and became really good mates. We used to have ‘Wacky Wednesday’ dinners with big dress-ups.”

“We had similar injuries and in the end we left rehab just a day apart – that made things easier. “It’s funny – I kind of miss the rehab,” says Rosie. If I could take

it back I don’t think I would. It would mean that I would also lose the people I met and the experiences I had.”

## A passion for childcare

Before the accident Rosie had a baking traineeship lined up. “But I realised that, with the injury, baking wasn’t going to work as an option for me career-wise.”

After rehab, Rosie did an admin course then went on to try volunteer childcare while job-seeking to see what worked for her. She started at Riverbreeze Childcare Centre in Wauchope.

“I loved it, so I extended it ... and then extended it again. icare helped me get my Childcare Certificate III, then Riverbreeze gave me a job and I’ve been there ever since!”

Four years later Rosie is still

passionate about working with children.

“It is a whole different outlook. It’s really hard to be cranky at work. If something’s happened in the morning and I’m in a foul mood, by the time I’ve been at work half an hour it’s forgotten.

“The children are so much fun – their honesty and innocence is just great.”

“You get to realise how amazing the world is through children’s eyes. Everything is exciting, new and interesting. Everything is what it is and everything is based on who you are as a person not what you look like. The children don’t ‘see’ the wheelchair. If they ask what it is, I just say I had a car accident and my legs have gone to sleep.”

Rosie’s dad, John, points out how important work is to Rosie. “It’s an outlet for her – somewhere for her to go during the day. She interacts with other people, meets kids, loves her work and comes home all excited. And that’s what makes a person happy – enjoying their job.”

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## In-Voc

Rosie explored her return to work opportunities through In-Voc, a program which provides early access to vocational services to people admitted to one of the three specialist spinal cord injury units in NSW. In-Voc is funded by icare and delivered by Royal Rehab’s NSW Spinal Outreach Service.

You can watch a video about how In-Voc helped Rosie return to work here: [www.royalrehab.com.au/client-stories/](http://www.royalrehab.com.au/client-stories/)



“ At the end of the day I’m still me. I’m the same person and life’s still good. I’ve still got great people around me and we just keep moving on. ”

### Driving again

Rosie still lives at home with her dad west of Wauchope. “It’s just him and me. He’s been a great support. During rehab we realised that I could drive, so this meant we had more flexibility about where we could live. We put a lift into the house, widened the bathroom, adjusted the benchtops and stove, and put a ramp down the front drive.”

“Being able to drive again was the best feeling. It means I don’t have to rely on others as much and I can go where I want.”

Rosie is currently learning to walk with callipers. “I’m seeing if I can use them around the house. It’s a long-term goal, but if it doesn’t work it doesn’t. I take it as it comes.”

“The other thing we try and do a lot are weights. I was right-handed before the accident but now my left arm is much stronger than my right so I do a lot more with my left hand. The weight work is to try and

“ If your head’s in the right place then everything else falls into place around it. ”

strengthen different muscles in my right arm.”

At the moment Rosie works three days a week – at Riverbreeze and two other centres. She’s studying a day a week for a Diploma in Childcare, and then physio and appointments take up the fifth day. In her spare time she breeds dogs.

“On the weekends I hang out with friends, go to movies, sometimes we go camping – it’s just like I used to really.”

“My friends have been great since the accident. I’ve had the same group of friends since school and they treat me the same as they always have. They take the attitude, this is what we’re all doing – now how’re we going to

get you there. Not, now we need to find something that suits you.”

### A celebration

“We celebrate the day of her accident every year,” says John. “We have a birthday cake. We’re fortunate to have her.”

Rosie’s advice is to stay positive. “If your head’s in the right place then everything else falls into place around it.”

“I’ve realised that there really is no point whinging. If I’m having trouble and feeling frustrated there’s no point breaking down and crying – it doesn’t fix anything. Just keep going. If you’ve got good people around you it should be good! Everyone struggles in their own way.”

“If you’re willing to help yourself then people are more willing to help you too.”

“With a spinal cord injury things are limited. But at the end of the day I’m still me. I’m the same person and life’s still good. I’ve still got great people around me and we just keep moving on.”

### We’d love to hear from you!

Do you have any feedback about *Shine*? Is there anything different you’d like to see in the magazine? Or maybe you’d like to share your story with other participants?

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