

FEATURE:

# HOW WE TRAVEL

SURFING HAWAII, EXPLORING SYDNEY AND LOVE IN ITALY PG08

FROM SWAGS TO TAJ MAHALS PG12

A CAUTIONARY TALE ON PARKING PERMITS PG17

ME & MY RIDE: BEN FAWCETT'S HILUX PG18

AND MORE



News, events and resources  
for people living with complex  
disability and their friends

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We love contributions from our community! If you have an experience you would like to share, or a story you would like to tell, please get in touch.

*Not a confident writer?*

*No worries - we can help shape or edit your story.*

For further information:

**p.** 03 9489 0777

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## A year of transformation and milestones

Coming to the end of the year is busy for most, and that's no exception for the team here at AQA. But it's also an exciting time as we prepare for our Annual General Meeting and Annual Celebration.

It's a time where we slow down and take stock of the achievements of our people and community over the year, and I often find myself in moments of amazement as I reflect on what and how much has been achieved. This year is no exception.

On November 17 we'll be coming together as a community to celebrate our achievements, and on behalf of AQA I'd like to extend a warm invitation to all of our NewsLink readers.

Whether you're staff, a client, a volunteer, a partner organisation, or friends and family of any of the above, you're a valuable part of this community. This event is about honouring and celebrating what we're building together, reconnecting after a tough couple of years, and welcoming new faces.

This year we're really excited to be hosting this event at our offices in Fairfield after having been online the last couple of

years. People and community are our strengths at AQA. And while the team adapted tremendously well to the challenges of the last couple of years and kept the strength of our community alive, the opportunity to feel the buzz of people coming together again is a wonderful thing.

We have special guest Judeland Antony (or Jude as he's warmly known as) who will share his story of migrating to Australia after a landmine explosion during the Sri Lankan Civil War threw shrapnel into his lower back, leaving him a T12 paraplegic at age 11. His incredible story of resilience shows how opportunity, goal setting and motivation has taken him from a place of loss to a place of immense pride, as highlighted by his recent win as part of Richmond Football Club's Wheelchair Football League, securing the 2022 Premiership.

ANNIE LILLYWHITE  
EXECUTIVE MANAGER OF SERVICES  
AQA VICTORIA

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### AQA ANNUAL CELEBRATION 2022

**When:** Thursday 17 November: 4:30pm

**What:** Light food and refreshments provided, with special guest Judeland Anthony and music by Olivia Joan Entertainment

**RSVP:** [Register here](#) or call 03 9489 0777 (but get in quick as spaces are limited!)

**AUTHOR NOTE:** *Annie Lilywhite is the Executive Manager of Services and Service Experience at AQA. In her role she oversees the development and delivery of services and supports at AQA and works with the AQA community to develop services in response to user and community feedback and experience.*

## KURT FEARNLEY NEW NDIA CHAIR

AQA welcomes the fantastic news that decorated ex-Paralympian and TV host Kurt Fearnley has been appointed as chair of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), the first person with a disability to hold the role. The organisation oversees the NDIS, and we've seen the need for someone with lived experience on the board or upper management since the rollout. Kurt hopes his lived experience and advocacy for disability issues will help to build trust and improve the NDIS. We're right behind you, Kurt.



Photo by Tim Bauer

### Looking for our classifieds?

Our classifieds section is  
online only this month, please visit:  
[www.spire.org.au/community/classifieds](http://www.spire.org.au/community/classifieds)

## CLASS ACTION AGAINST NDIS AGE DISCRIMINATION

Peter Feckelton's legs were paralysed due to polio when he was six, in the 1950s. By the time the NDIS was rolled out, he was over 64 and therefore ineligible. He's now part of a class-action lawsuit that's attempting to end this age discrimination in accessing the scheme. [Read more](#) on Peter's experience, and the lawsuit.

For a deeper look at the challenges of living with high care needs outside of the NDIS, [read about Noel and Colin](#), two community members who were 65 and 66 when they were injured.

## AQA STAFF MEMBER STARS IN DOCO ON DATING AND DISABILITY



Image by SBS

"We Are Sexual Beings" is a doco that follows three young Australians who are living their lives to the fullest, and, by doing so, are challenging preconceptions around sex and disability. Congratulations to Maya, AQA's Community Engagement Coordinator who stars in it. Maya, thanks for being such a powerful role model and for helping raise these important conversations. You can [watch the program](#) for free on SBS On Demand.

## SPORTS UPDATE

### RUGBY

In mid-October the Australian Steelers won gold at the 2022 Wheelchair Rugby World Championship in Denmark, with a 58-55 victory over the United States. Go Steelers!



Image by Paralympics Australia

### AFL

In mid-September, the Richmond Tigers won their second Victorian Wheelchair Football League senior premiership, defeating Essendon by 30 points, to a raucous crowd of 800 fans. Congratulations Tigers! And congrats to Teisha Shadwell for taking home the best-on-ground medal.

# Upcoming events

## OUR AQA EVENTS



### WHEELCHAIR SKILLS

Join us to develop your wheelchair skills and build your confidence when moving about in the community. Be guided by Specialist Peer Trainer Dave Ball in negotiating your way through a variety of obstacles and terrains.

Each course runs twice a day at the AQA office in Fairfield:

- 11 November: 10:00am - 1pm and 1:30 - 4:30pm
- 12 November: 10:00am - 1pm and 1:30 - 4:30pm

### AQA CELEBRATION EVENT

- Nov 17, 4:15 - 7pm:**  
AQA Office, 416 Heidelberg Rd, Fairfield

### COMMUNITY NETWORK EVENTS

- 9 Nov, 12-4pm, Shooting Come and Try:**  
Marong Rifle Range, Marong, Vic.

### SKILLS FOR INDEPENDENCE (SFI) COURSES

Our tailor-made SFI courses are developed to equip people with spinal cord injuries or other similar physical disabilities with the skills, knowledge and confidence to further their independence and wellbeing.

- 24 - 27 November - Family Connections:**  
SFI residential course, Sargood on Collaroy, NSW. This course is designed to involve family members (including children) or companions who are a key support.
- 2 - 4 December - Women's SFI course:** Mecure Melbourne, Doncaster, VIC. This course has been developed specifically for women, with residential and non-residential options.

## OTHER EVENTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

### SPORT AND RECREATION

#### Para shooting Come & Try days

The sessions cost \$20, and start at 10:30am. The club rooms are cosy, there's an open fire and a cafe, and family members are very welcome. Contact: [louisetingate@hotmail.com](mailto:louisetingate@hotmail.com)

- 5 Nov, 3 Dec: 10:30am:  
Melbourne Gun Club, 192 Victoria Road, Yerring.



#### Boccia

The Melbourne Boccia squad play every Wednesday between 12-2pm, at the North Melbourne Community Centre. The sessions cost \$25, and beginners are very welcome. Contact: [bocciavicinc@gmail.com](mailto:bocciavicinc@gmail.com)

#### Rugby

Social rugby nights every Wednesday at the Royal Talbot, Heidelberg, 6:30pm.

### FUNDRAISING

**Ready, Set, Move!** Challenge yourself and help kids and adults living with a disability to cycle for the very first-time by choosing an activity to complete in November and fundraising for it. More info at: <https://www.readysetmove.org.au/home>

### EXPO'S

**Melbourne Disability Expo: 25 & 26 November,**  
Melbourne Exhibition Centre

**Like to find out more or  
get involved?**

Call **9489 0777**

or email [community@aqavic.org.au](mailto:community@aqavic.org.au)



# Taking aim

## COMMUNITY NETWORKS UPDATE

by **Georgina Fiorentino**  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & NETWORK COORDINATOR

### OUR WOMEN'S NETWORK TAKE UP THE BOW

First, some facts about archery. The word comes from the Latin word arcus, meaning bow, and a person who practices archery is called an archer, bowman or toxophilite.

Archery is the practice of using a bow to accurately shoot arrows at a target, marked with 10 scoring zones, from a set distance. It is mainly an outdoor sport, however, with the existence of indoor ranges, it can be enjoyed all year round. Thankfully, archery requires minimal, if any, adaptation to play if you're a wheelchair user.

Now for a fun fact. Archery was the first sport where women could compete in the Olympics (1904 - St Louis). It was fitting then that in mid September, the Women's Network were set to meet at Kew City Bowmen, in East Kew. As it was an outdoor range, we faced the risk of being accompanied by some kind of La Nina weather event.

When the morning of the day came, I was not only disappointed about the weather forecast, I was certain that many of the women would pull out. The forecast was 14 degrees with rain! Much to my surprise, all of the women who'd rsvp'd bravely turned up. Armed with their raincoats, beanies and umbrellas, they were ready to confront the slippery trip from the car park to the undercover verandah spot, where we were to raise bows and fight against La Nina. Many of the women proved to be naturally talented, with some saying they will take up the sport. Special thanks to Master Bowman Rob McKenzie, volunteer club



member James, and Anita Foran from AQA who were very supportive and helpful, particularly in their retrieval of our arrows in the pouring rain!

If you're interested in playing archery, Kew City Bowmen offer Come 'n Try sessions on most Saturdays and Sundays at 1pm. The sessions run for 2 hours. You can visit their website at: <https://www.kewarchery.com>

### REGIONAL NETWORKS

During the months of August and September, we organised a couple of free wheelchair skills days, outings and lunches with the regional SCI Community Networks. Places included: Bendigo Art Gallery, Wheelchair Skills days (Gippsland & Mornington), Little Creatures Brewery (Geelong), Back to Bacchus restaurant (Baccus Marsh) and the MOVE Museum (Shepparton). Check out our events page(5) to see what's coming up.

# TRAM TRAINING

by Josh Hose

PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY.



In September, AQA held a public transport wheelchair skills day. This took place at the Yarra Trams Preston depot, with the help of Yarra Trams. We had people come from the Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre, along with members of the community. The main aim of the day was to expose people to public transport in a safe and controlled environment, so they could build their skills and confidence. We had a tram allocated to ourselves for

a couple hours, where we had representatives from Yarra Trams speak to the different accessibility aspects of the tram. This was followed by a short trip on the tram to a public tram stop where we got off, and then pushed our way back, practising crossing roads and negotiating curbs. We finished up by sharing lunch. We're looking forward to holding more of these public transport days, so stay tuned.



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**B | BRAUN**  
SHARING EXPERTISE

# How we travel

In this travel series, we hear three stories of people navigating travel with a spinal cord injury. Josh travels to Italy for two weddings, Robert and Laurie sample the waves and mountains of Hawaii, and Mitt heads up to Sydney for a family reunion.

Covering a range of both travel and lived experience, these three accounts offer a wealth of tips. But, we know that accessible travel will mean something different to every one of you. So, for a general resource, AQA's Naz Erdem and Josh Hose have put together a comprehensive travel checklist, drawing on their many years of travel, [found here](#).

## SURFING HAWAII

### Robert and Laurie

Robert has been living with an incomplete C4 spinal cord injury since early 2020, and uses a powerchair. He and his wife Laurie are experienced travellers, and over the last year they've been exploring how to travel post-injury with a few domestic trips. In August, they made their first foray back into overseas travel with a three-week trip to Hawaii. We picked their brains for travel tips, and to hear a few highlights.

#### TIP 1: GIVE YOURSELF PLENTY OF TIME, AND ALLOW PLENTY AT THE OTHER END

When we left Melbourne, we gave ourselves 3-4 hours before the flight. That meant we were able to have really good conversations with the ground crew about how we wanted things done, and we got really good seats. We were able to show them how to put the powerchair into freewheel mode, and things like that. When we were in Hawaii, we didn't have control over transport to the airport, so we only got there two hours before, and it seemed really rushed.



#### TIP 2: IF YOU'RE TAKING A POWERCHAIR, DISMEMBER AND INSTRUCT

Thankfully, our powerchair didn't get damaged in transit. We took the legs off - we've got actuators on the legs - so we put them into a separate case, and we took the controller off. The airport staff were very concerned about the batteries. We've got a gel battery, which can't be taken out. And when the controller's off, it discharges the battery anyway. But they still took a bit of convincing, so just stay patient and stand your ground.

We had put the instructions that came from the manufacturer with the chair - but next time we'd write our own, stating: this is a gel battery, these are the dimensions of the chair, this is the weight - so it's all there for them. Plus, when we were moving around Hawaii, knowing the weight and dimensions came in handy for boarding buses.

#### TIP 3: IF YOU CAN SELF-TRANSFER, CONSIDER LEAVING THE POWERCHAIR AT HOME

Because Robert can self-transfer, next time we wouldn't take the powerchair. We'd take a manual chair with power assist. There weren't many maxi taxis, and the ones they did have were very expensive. Public transport was very accessible, but it limited where we could go. If we had a manual chair, Robert could have transferred into a normal taxi, or we could have hired a car. If self-transferring isn't an option, we did notice you could hire a powerchair over there for \$250 US dollars a week, so that could be something to explore.



Robert's dream of surfing at Waikiki was born earlier in the year. While at a Skills For Independence course on Sydney's northern beaches, he was shown a jet-propelled surfboard.

**TIP 4: MAKE FRIENDS WITH YOUR CONCIERGE, AND DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP**

We'd spoken to a group that takes disabled people out surfing, but the beach they planned to go to was really difficult for us to go on. So we spoke to the concierge at our hotel, and she was able to put us in touch with a local surf company that was able to accommodate us. Concierge desks are great resources, make sure you use them!

**TIP 5: ASK FOR A ROOM WITH MINIMAL FURNITURE**

Because Robert can stand and walk for short distances, we booked a normal hotel room, but with a roll-in shower. Unfortunately, our room had two queen sized beds, which meant there wasn't enough space to move around. They couldn't move a bed out, so we moved into a normal room without a roll-in shower. So, make sure you ask for a room with as little furniture as possible.

**ROBERT'S HIGHLIGHT:**

For me, the highlight was surfing. I had a one-on-one session with an instructor called Uncle Max. He took me out to where the waves were forming, pushed me off, and followed me down. There was another guy waiting closer to shore, and he'd catch me so I didn't hit the rocks.

We did have a wipe-out though. There I was, lying face down in the water, and Laurie's yelling 'roll Robert, roll!' But Uncle Max got to me in no time. And the people who helped me onto the board were surfing quite close, so if there was a problem they could come over and help - I felt totally safe.

The guys helping got as much of a buzz as I did - you could see it in their faces. It was great. And the water! It was 24-25 degrees, and absolutely beautiful.

For Uncle Max, the minimum physical ability he'll work with is being able to get up on your elbows. But I've seen a video of how other companies can do it for people that can't lie



on their stomach. They have them sitting up, and they have another person that sits behind them. And then they have a third person who paddles them out, turns the surfboard around, and surfs in behind them.

I came up with the idea that I wanted to surf in Waikiki while I was at Sargood in NSW, for the Skills for Independence course. The staff there showed me a surfboard with jet propulsion. Eleven years earlier I was surfing with my boys in Waikiki, and so I thought if I'm going there again, I'm going to surf - I'm going to make it happen, somehow.

You get these harebrained ideas on goals and activities you want to achieve, and you've got to follow them - if you sit there waiting for them, they're never going to come.

**Laurie's HIGHLIGHT**

We went on the most incredible helicopter ride. I found a company that could take Robert, which was called Blue Hawaiian. They had a chair which was attached to a slide. Robert transfers onto that, and then they move the chair next to the Helicopter, and a mechanism pulls him up the slide to the door, and then he slide transferred into the helicopter. I loved seeing the different colours of the water. And you get to fly over parts of the island that nobody can get to because the terrain is too rugged. You see waterfalls 1000 ft in the air. It was awesome. And very reasonably priced - about \$300 US per person.

# EXPLORING SYDNEY

## Mittrajsinh Gohil

Mittrajsinh, or 'Mitt', moved from India in 2019 to pursue a master's degree in computer science. In September 2020, he sustained a T5-7 complete spinal cord injury. Because he was injured during covid, his parents couldn't visit him until earlier this year. Making up for the almost three years apart, they stayed with Mitt for seven months, exploring Melbourne together, as well as Sydney. Heading to Sydney was Mitt's first trip away from home since being injured.

### How prepared were you feeling for the Sydney trip?

I asked Josh at AQA about how it's all going to work with flights and accommodation, so I was feeling pretty prepared. And they taught me a lot in rehab, with wheelchair skills and transfers. We also went on a day trip while in rehab, which was good practice. Physically I was feeling ready - I go to the gym 2-3 times a week, every morning I push myself to a local cafe, about a 1km round trip with a big slope.

### How did your transit go?

Getting on the plane was fine. Everyone was really helpful. Plus, I have some habits which help - my father is a teacher, so I learned to ask lots of questions from him.

I went to a Flight Centre, and went with Virgin airlines. On the flight they had empty spaces, so I had a whole row to myself. And I used a condom catheter, which worked well for me.



Not only was this Mitt's first trip post-injury, but it was also his first time visiting an aquarium.



*Physically I was feeling ready - I go to the gym 2-3 times a week, and every morning I push myself to a local cafe, about a 1km round trip with a big slope.*

Before I left, I called my taxi provider in Melbourne and asked if he had any contacts in Sydney I could use, and he did. But when I called to organise a maxi taxi at the airport they were going to take an hour to come. So I had a look at the train, and I just caught that to my hotel, which was easy. I'd never seen a double decker train before!

### And accommodation?

The hotel we stayed at was nicer than our apartment, it was called the Wyndham hotel. I chose a nice hotel as I thought the accessibility might be better, but I also had a good look at the photos to make sure it would work for me, and it did.

### What did you get up to in Sydney?

We went to the Blue Mountains, they were really beautiful, and we did a cable car up there. We saw the Harbour bridge via a ferry ride. Instead of the more expensive sight-seeing specific ferries, which were sold out, I just found a public ferry, which was a great experience, and wheelchair accessible.

We also checked out Madame Tussauds wax museum, and the aquarium, which were both awesome. I've never been to an aquarium before! Everything was new for me, so everything was good. But you really need someone behind you pushing in Sydney, there's lots of steep hills!

Just before my parents left, the Narvartri festival had begun, which is a Hindu festival. We went to a Garba night, which is a dance involving traditional dress. We danced together and it was a really special way to say goodbye.

# DUE MATRIMONI IN ITALIA

by Josh Hose



*Having a conversation can also give me a sense of the hotel's actual knowledge of access, which will help me decide if it's suitable.*



In late May I ventured across to Italy, where I attended not one but two weddings of friends of my partner. This trip was spread across three weeks, and covered northern Italy, Milano, to as far south as Sorrento and the Amalfi coast.

As you would appreciate, especially those among us with an SCI, there are many layers of planning that go into an overseas trip. Most of which now is second nature for myself, probably because I have lived with a spinal cord injury for almost 18 years, and I've been fortunate to have done a bit of travel in that time. I would like to share my insights on how I managed one of these layers on this trip: booking accommodation.

I had several locations to choose accommodation for. Starting in Cislago, Riccione, San Demetrio Ne Vestini, Vasto, Sorrento, Napoli and ending in Roma.

So my first point of call is the old Google, where you can use an accommodation search platform. Many of these platforms now have disability filters, but I've learnt to take these with a grain of salt. For me, the key is to see a picture of the bathroom where I can evaluate its suitability for myself. From here, I also do a Google Street View to see what the access to the hotel is like.

Depending on how satisfied I am with these two processes, I may send an email and/or call the hotel asking for additional photos or a measurement.



Having a conversation can also give me a sense of the hotel's actual knowledge of access, which will help me decide if it's suitable.

For example, when booking accommodation in Sorrento, from the photos I saw on the website I had some queries about the entry and width of the bathroom door.

There was one minor step in the photo. In my past experiences, one step tends to lead to other steps throughout the hotel. So I got the number of the hotel manager and did a video call with him so he could walk me through the premises (and yes, I was correct, there were other steps, but it was manageable). The key takeaway I've learned over the years is that people's perception of disability and access varies. So, be objective, and ask plenty of questions.

What came from these many questions was, overall, a very enjoyable trip of great travel, food, wine and sunshine. As with most trips away, we learn from our experiences, good and bad, to add to our "tool bag" to make the next getaway even more seamless.

So from this trip I had an epiphany that, for my future holiday endeavours, I'll add a power assist option to "my bag". A Smart Drive is good but getting over cobblestones I found is still an issue. I'm talking about something like a Batech, which will lift the front of my chair, negating all the cobblestones. So, for this trip I will concede defeat to the cobblestones. But, I will play the long game and return to win this cobblestone war.

# From swags to Taj Mahals

Hear from people with lived and professional experience of how to navigate camping and outdoor activities with a disability, no matter your age.

edited by Dan Nathan

As the weather is improving, we ran a [panel discussion on all things camping and outdoors](#). The following is a summary of some of the presenters' thoughts and experiences, structured as mini profiles. First up, hear how community members do camping and outdoor activities differently, and pick up some tips along the way. Then, listen to a few people working in the recreation and assistive technology fields talk about resources to help you plan your own adventure. Dip into the people and experiences that are relevant to you, or enjoy it all.

## LIVED EXPERIENCE

### DAVE JACKA (54)

**INJURY LEVEL/YEARS POST:** C5/6 quad, no finger function and limited arm function, 34 years

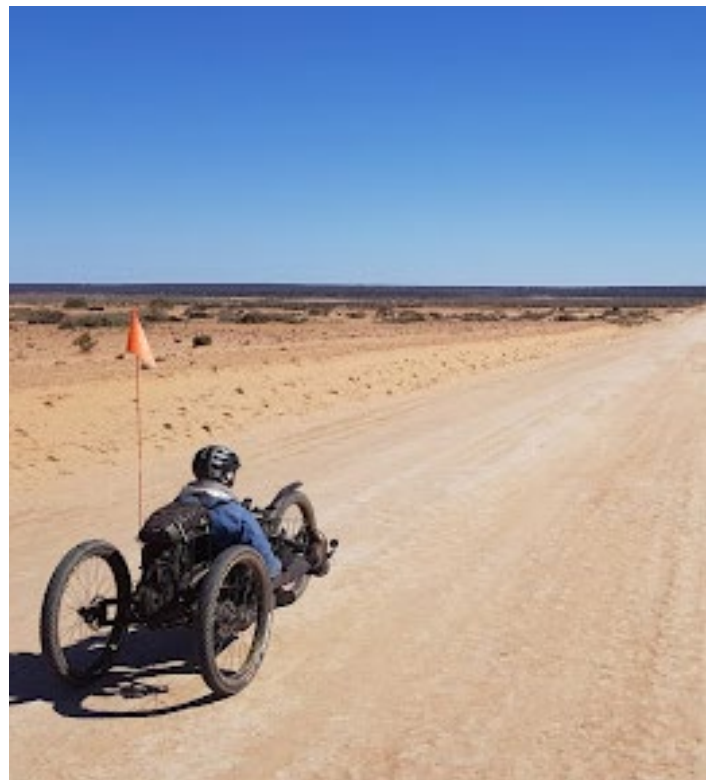
**ACTIVITIES:** Handcycling, kayaking, camping, and flying

**Handcycling:** Handcycling is really accessible - once I'm in, I can head off on the trails around Melbourne on my own. I use a Lasher handcycle, and I installed a power assist which allows me to go up any hills and through sand. It really opens up the world for me. The longest trip I've done was from Melbourne to Broken Hill.

**Kayaking:** In 2016 I paddled the length of the Murray, in 89 days. I used a sea kayak with a nice big cockpit. I put some outriggers on it for balance, side supports to keep me balanced, a sip/puff system to control the rudder, and I taped my hands to the oar with duct tape.

**CAMPING STYLE:** Taj Mahal

**SHELTER:** I've got a four person Blackwolf tent, with lots of head room, and enough width for carers to help me with my morning routine. I use a self-inflating mattress with a latex topper, on a cot, so it's very comfortable and I haven't had any issues with my skin. I've also got a bed made for the back of my van, which I use on some trips.



**OTHER GEAR:** On the kayak trip, I borrowed a generator, which meant I could use a blow heater in my tent - I hate the cold, as a lot of quads do. For the same trip, I made up a kit that meant I didn't have to take a commode - which I now use for any trip. I take the upholstery off my wheelchair, clip a toilet seat on my chair, a bucket underneath, and then a plastic bag on the backrest so the upholstery doesn't get wet. It only takes a couple of minutes to set up, and the kit takes up very little space.

**WHAT YOU LOVE ABOUT IT:** Nothing better than having a fire on the side of the road, pitching camp and watching the stars.

**TIPS:** Outdoor adventures can be big or small. With a little bit of planning, and the right support, anyone can get out and have some form of adventure.

**ANDREW HARRISON (35)**

**INJURY LEVEL/YEARS POST:** C6/7 quad, 18 years

**ACTIVITIES:** Fishing, shooting, hunting, and camping

**CAMPING STYLE:** Rough and ready when solo, comfortable with the family

**SHELTER:**

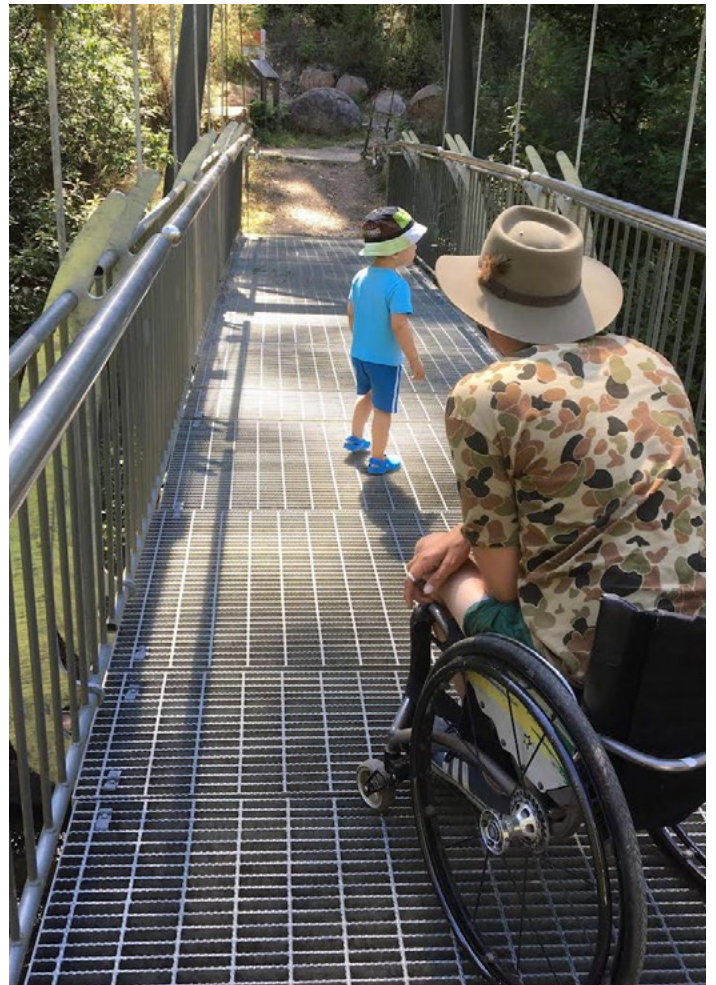
**Solo:** Swag, plus self-inflating mattress, total thickness: 150 mm

**With family:** Camping trailer. It takes a bit over an hour to set it up, but once we're set up it's perfect. I sleep in the main tent in a stretcher, on a self-inflating mattress.

**WHAT YOU LOVE ABOUT IT:** I've always been very outdoorsy, I just loved being in the bush. I found I could get rid of a lot of stress there. After my accident, I didn't think I'd be able to get out there anymore. So when I realised I could, it really gave me all this energy, and the feeling of being able to fend for myself was great. Now I have a son, I love being able to take him out on bushwalks.

**TIPS:** The heat and the cold can be a big factor when you're camping. You really need to work out well in advance where you're going, what facilities are available - is there water to cool down if it's really hot, will there be space for a fire to keep warm at night. When you're buying a sleeping bag, always go with a lower temperature rating. Once that's all figured out, the sky's the limit.

My best advice is to just get out there and give it a go - even if it's in your backyard - buy a tent, set it up, and try it out. And if you hit problems, just brainstorm it. Once you get out there and find something you love, you'll want to do it more, and you'll find ways to make it easy for you.



Andrew now shares his love of the outdoors with his son.



For Noel, teaching his grandkids to cook has been particularly rewarding.

**NOEL MCKENNER (59)**

**INJURY LEVEL/YEARS POST:** C6 quad, 32 years

**ACTIVITIES:** Camping, camp cooking, fishing

**CAMPING STYLE:** Old school but comfortable

**SHELTER:** Early on, post-injury, I tried doing an overnight fishing trip. I slept in the car and I almost froze to death. So, I tracked down an old canvas tent. I designed and built my own slatted bed with a proper mattress and adjustable legs, like caravan jockey wheels, which I can jack up with a drill.

**OTHER GEAR:** A homemade hot water service. An old keg with pipes running through it, sits next to the fire - you pour cold water in and hot water comes out. We're in the process of building a hoist with pneumatic wheels - I'm getting a bit long in the tooth to be transferring and knocked about.

**WHAT YOU LOVE ABOUT IT:** Taking the grandkids out, spending the days building memories with them. Getting their bums walking around and doing stuff, staying out of trouble, learning how to help each other. I've always been the camp cook wherever I've gone - I teach the kids and the grandkids now. We do heaps of roasts, and we even made cinnamon scrolls recently. It's very rewarding.

**TIPS:** It's just about finding a good spot, with a good flat bank to go fishing. Get a fire going and just enjoy it.

**LYNNE PANAYIOTIS (59)**

**INJURY LEVEL/YEARS POST:** T12 para, 16 years.

**ACTIVITIES:** Touring, bowls, bodyboarding, handcycling

**CAMPING STYLE:** Comfortable

**SHELTER:** I've done the tent thing, and like Andrew I've done the camper trailer, which I loved, but I couldn't put it up by myself, and independence is really important to me. That, combined with wanting a toilet and shower, was why I moved on to a caravan.

When I was injured in 2006, I had the goal of travelling around Australia in 2008. I haven't made it yet, but the ambition is still there: I have the caravan, and I've got the car on order. I intend on spending my long service leave travelling around Australia.

The caravan is on air bags, so it drops down, and a ramp comes out. I've travelled up to Canberra by myself, so I know I can hitch and unhitch, set up and packdown by myself.

**WHAT YOU LOVE ABOUT IT:** The feeling of being an explorer.

**TIPS:** Cars can't tow as much as they used to, especially wagons that we can get into easily. So if a camper trailer or a caravan is something you're interested in, you'll probably need a van.



LEFT: Lynne takes a break after some bodyboarding.

BELOW: Simon has found that his friends are willing to go above and beyond to accommodate his needs.

**SIMON BIBBY (49)**

**INJURY LEVEL/YEARS POST:** T11 para, 2.5 years

**ACTIVITIES:** Camping

**CAMPING STYLE:** Basic

**SHELTER:** I've got a camping cot - about 50mm below my wheelchair seat, so it's not hard to transfer into. I've got some shoulder issues, so the height transfer is critical. The cot is called The Bunker, a Dune product from Anaconda. It's a double, so you've got two narrow spots for sleeping, or you can store your clothes.

**OTHER GEAR:** I've got a Batec Scrambler for my wheelchair. I took it on a recent trip up to the Rubicon with a mate, which meant I was able to go along rough terrain with him.

**WHAT YOU LOVE ABOUT IT:** I've always been an outdoors person - sailing, skiing and whatnot - so it's been frustrating being in a chair. But then last year I went away with some mates. I was very apprehensive about it at first, but I got through that and it was great.

**TIPS:** In my experience, friends will go above and beyond to help - ask them to join you on a trip. And be prepared: if you think you need two packs of baby wipes, take four.



An electric hoist is available on the Patterson River boat ramp, in Carrum.

**INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES**

**AMBER SMITH**

**ROLE:** Access and Inclusion Coordinator at Parks Victoria

**THE PITCH:** Stay abreast of accessibility upgrades happening in Victoria's parks.

The Victorian Great Outdoors program is a four-year \$100 million project to improve how people can access the great outdoors. This project has allowed us to maximise the accessibility of all the amenity and trail upgrades being undertaken by building in universal design principles early.

While many of these works are underway or in planning, some have been completed, and there are accessible trails and campsites in Victoria you can explore right now. To see what's possible for you, check out this collection of [accessibility resources on our website](#).

Or reach out to me for a chat:  
Amber.smith@parks.vic.gov.au or 0438 544 218

### ALLISON VON MOGER

**ROLE:** Technology and Innovation Lead at TOM Melbourne

**THE PITCH:** Meeting unmet needs through innovation

At TOM Melbourne we run a program to design assistive technology for people with a disability. We're currently working with Parks Vic to develop an accessible camp bed, as part of their Point Nepean accessible campsite project.

TOM, or Tikkun Olam Makers, is a global movement that started in Israel. The name roughly translates to 'repair the world', which TOM communities attempt to do in small ways by developing affordable solutions to neglected challenges. If you have an unmet need that's limiting your ability to explore the great outdoors, and you think some custom assistive technology might do the trick, submit a challenge on the TOM website and we might be able to help.

Learn more [on our website](#) or get in touch at [info@tommelbourne.com.au](mailto:info@tommelbourne.com.au)

Trail upgrades and accessibility improvements have been happening across Victoria's parks .

### ELYSIA GUSTAFSON

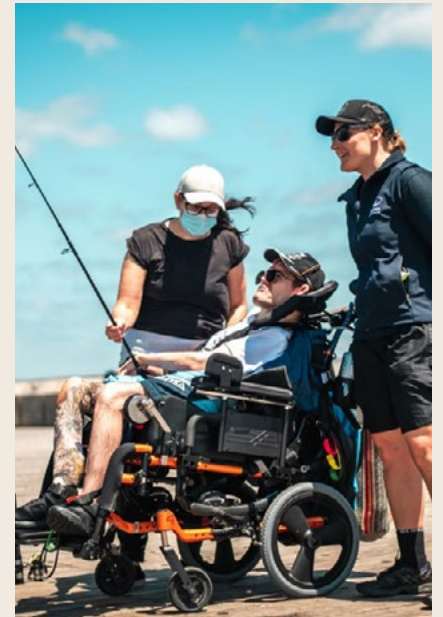
**ROLE:** FishAbility Facilitator with Fishcare Victoria

**THE PITCH:** Get fishing!

Fishing is one of the most accessible sports that you can imagine. All you need is a body of water, and a fishing rod, which can be adapted if need be, and you're off and away.

We deliver all ability fishing programs about once a month, between September and May. The programs have been largely metro focussed, hosted along the Maribyrnong River and on the St Kilda and Mornington piers. But we've also done programs all over regional Victoria, and hope to expand that focus.

We've got battery powered reels - which allows for the retrieval of your bait, or, best case scenario, a fish, with the press of a button. They can attach to any rod. And we've got a strong arm, a device which helps to keep the rod secure against the forearm. With these simple pieces of equipment, the benefits of fishing - physically, mentally, and spiritually - are available to people with a wide range of mobility concerns. Learn more about our programs, or throw us line [on our website](#).



FishAbility runs monthly all-ability fishing programs throughout Victoria.

### NICOLE GOSBELL

**ROLE:** Austin Leisure Specialist

**THE PITCH:** Start small, and take your time

The range of outdoor activities is so broad, and the way people participate is so broad - there's no right or wrong way of doing it. It's just about taking the time to work out what you want to do, and how you want to do it. Then you start looking at what options and resources you have available.

You need to think about temperature, and whether you've got shade. In a tent you've got to think about insulation. If you're on the ground, different mats have different R ratings, which tells you how much insulation they provide. Having a mat on a stretcher can help, as can having insulation across the whole floor of the tent.

Personal care while camping is a common question. There are so many ways I've heard people manage it. Dave had the insert for his wheelchair, other people might use a commode over a bucket, or a campground where there's an accessible toilet, so it's really about what works for you. It's good to talk to an occupational therapist if you need something specific.



# Have you lost function of your limbs?

This is a research study to investigate the safety of using an implanted device called the Stentrode™, used to control a computer by thought.

A new medical device and surgical technique has been developed to record brain signals without open brain surgery. This is an investigational device that uses a thin wire with a stent placed in a blood vessel.



## Who is Eligible?

- Aged between 18 and 75 years of age
- Have severe disability to both arms, which is affecting the ability to use digital devices
- Can have an MRI scan and are well enough to have general anaesthesia
- Be fluent in English
- Have a study partner/caregiver who is willing to provide support during this trial
- Be willing and able to access all clinical testing locations and not be impeded by geographical location

## For More Information: SWITCH II Study

Please contact Melissa Ugalde - Research Coordinator  
[melissa.ugalde@mh.org.au](mailto:melissa.ugalde@mh.org.au)

CAUTION: The Stentrode™ is an investigational device. Limited by Federal (or United States) law to investigational use.

# The haircut that cost \$215

AQA Practice Leader Naz Erdem gets stung by an expired disability parking permit, and encourages others to be mindful.

by Nazim Erdem



A few weeks ago I went to Epping Shopping Centre for a long overdue haircut. I was lucky to find a disabled parking bay right near the entrance of the shopping centre.

I thought I'd be ok going to a hairdresser that was not my usual. I'd been putting this off for weeks. If you know me, you'd know I have had long locks for many years and love having my hair long.

It was a busy Saturday with the whole centre full of people going about their business. I came across a hairdresser that seemed very busy, and they told me to take a seat. When my turn came up, I made sure they understood that I wanted my hair trimmed to shoulder length (it was at nipple length at the time). Because of the barber chair, I couldn't sit across the mirror. When the hairdresser started cutting away, I was sure he was cutting much more than what I asked for but I thought to myself "I'm sure he knows what he's doing, because I told him what I wanted... twice".

Anyway, this story isn't about my haircut so much as the surprise I got when I returned to my car. Stuck on the windscreen looked like a parking ticket. I thought it must be a mistake because I have a disability parking label on my windscreen. I thought they probably booked me as the parking label wasn't fully visible. Easy, I thought, I'll just write a letter to the council highlighting their mistake. The fine wasn't a small amount, it was a massive \$185.

When I got home, I grabbed my parking label to take a photo and email it along with an explanation, asking for them to withdraw the fine. I was shocked when I had a good look at my label. It had been expired for nearly 2 years.

This is a warning to other people out there to check the expiry date of their label. The council that provides you your disability label aren't obliged to notify you when your label is about to expire. It's your responsibility.



.....  
ABOVE: The scene of the crime.  
RIGHT: Naz's updated permit moves him to the new scheme.  
.....

On doing further research, I found out renewing or applying for a disabled parking label had changed. To find out more about the new system, and to apply, visit the [accessible parking permit webpage](#).

## APPLYING FOR A FINE REVERSAL

At the back of the ticket, it lists ways to pay the fine, disputing a fine, along with other options. I followed the instructions to dispute the fine, which pointed me to the website. I would not recommend disputing the fine over the website because the options given aren't specific to what I wanted. I feel if I had completed the form on their website, it would have been rejected. Instead I sent them an email with my request explaining the situation, along with a picture of my "new" parking permit.

## WHAT WAS MY OUTCOME?

It took weeks for them to reply to me. Fortunately they withdrew the fine, with a stern warning that next time I wouldn't be as lucky.

Going back to my haircut... I probably shouldn't have gotten out of bed that day... bad haircut and a huge fine. I sent the hairdresser an email of complaint the next day with some pictures. They apologised and asked me to return so they could fix it, but it was unfixable. I'll just have to let it grow out again and go to my usual hairdresser.



## Me & My Ride: Ben Fawcett

Hear about the cars people in our community are driving, modifying and enjoying.

by Nazim Erdem

In a new series for NewsLink, we talk to people in our community about their personal transport, or as we like to call it "their rides". Naz Erdem, Practice Leader at AQA, interviews Ben Fawcett about his current transport and other vehicles he has, or has had in the past. It was actually Ben's idea to start this series, knowing readers would love to hear about what transport other people use.

Ben has a C6 spinal injury and is a long time member of the Australian Wheelchair Rugby team. His Commodore ute is the perfect vehicle to carry his rugby chair, along with his spares. Naz can appreciate this because he also has a love of cars.

Cars are not only a means of transport for Ben, they are a hobby and lifestyle.

"I have two cars; one that is my daily driver, a Holden VE Ute that is equipped with push pull hand controls", says Ben.

"My second car is a Toyota Hilux that was originally supposed to be my everyday car however, a few years ago, I started making some modifications starting with 20 inch chrome wheels and air bag suspension. Now I take it out on weekends and the occasional car show. Over the years, I've been doing it up slowly but I still haven't quite finished it yet. I have updated the interior with nice looking leather and I'd like to finish wrapping the interior and give it a

*"If anyone is interested in modifying their car, it's really important to do a lot of research on the modifications."*



custom paint job. One of my favourite modifications is the wooden bed liner in the back of the tray."

Ben added that his first car after his spinal cord injury was a VT Holden Commodore wagon that was very useful and spacious for carrying his sports chair and equipment when he first began playing wheelchair rugby.

Modifications for cars are pretty standard these days. Other than hand controls, Ben has a few unique modifications that he has done to his vehicles.

"I have some very unique modifications done to my cars. Both have aftermarket stereo systems that connect and

talk to my mobile phone. With voice recognition, I can make calls and send texts through dictation."

"I have also extended both the passenger and driver's seats so they are as close

as possible to the door seals, which means I no longer need a slide board to get in and out. The gap between my wheelchair and the car seat is minimal."

"The most unique modification is on my Commodore ute. I have a canopy that lifts up and down on one side and is operated by a remote control operated from the driver's seat. A Bruno lift takes away my wheelchair after I have transferred into my car and stows it under the canopy.

This saved me having to pull my chair apart to put it in the passenger seat."

"My Hilux ute has airbag suspension which means I can set the height of my car in any position I want, from as low as a race car, to looking like a four wheel drive. I can set the height from my mobile phone."

And Ben's dream car? "This is a really tough question and my answer would be different every month. At the moment it would be a 1962 GMC Crew Cab, and I believe they only made six of them."

*"I have some very unique modifications done to my cars."*

Asked if he has any advice for others looking at setting themselves up with a modified vehicle, Ben concluded "If anyone is interested in modifying their car, it's really important to do a lot of research on the modifications you want and the quality of work that a shop can provide. Some modifications require engineers' certificates and every state is different."

If you'd like to see a video of Ben and both his cars, follow [this YouTube link](#).

*Have you got a story you'd like to share with our community about a hobby or passion of yours? We'd love to hear from you! Send an email to: [news@aqavic.org.au](mailto:news@aqavic.org.au)*



## WIN a 4-day stay at the Healthy Living Centre

*Accessible accommodation in the heart of Cairns*

Being away from home doesn't have to be an overwhelming challenge. That's why Coloplast has partnered with Spinal Life Australia to give you the chance to win a trip to tropical Cairns. Take a break from your routine and try new therapies and services, meet new people, and explore the area!

### Go in the chance to win the Health Retreat Package:

- Three nights in a spacious two-bedroom apartment; perfect for family or group stays
- One hour of allied health services per day (Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Exercise Physiology and Hydrotherapy)
- Access to adaptive equipment at the onsite specialist gym during your stay
- \$1,000 pre-paid Visa Card

To enter, scan the QR code to visit our website and complete the online form during the promotion period.

[coloplast.to/HealthRetreat](https://coloplast.to/HealthRetreat)



Entries open 12:00AM AEDT 02/10/2022 and close 12:00AM AEDT 08/01/2023. Open to all Australian residents aged 18+ only. Limit one entry per person. Drawn at Coloplast Ltd, ABN 57 054 949 692, Level 4 1 Acacia Place, Notting Hill Victoria 3168 at 12:00 noon AEDT on the 09/01/2023. Winner name published online at [coloplast.to/HealthRetreat](https://coloplast.to/HealthRetreat). The total prize pool is valued at \$2,723.98. Full terms and conditions are available at [coloplast.to/AU\\_TermsandConditions](https://coloplast.to/AU_TermsandConditions). Promoter: Coloplast Ltd, ABN 57 054 949 692, Level 4 1 Acacia Place, Notting Hill, Victoria, 3168. Ph:1800 333 317.



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AQA

*Resourcing you to live well*

# Can I... will I... What's next for me?

*We've been there and aren't afraid of the tough questions.*

After hearing the words spinal cord injury and spending weeks in hospital, rehab or bed your mind can race with a million questions: Will I be independent, can I have sex again, what happens when I get home, will my life be the same... *Is there anyone I can turn to?*

It can be hard to see what's next or what's possible for you, and your family & friends can have similar questions.

While few can honestly say *"I know what you're going through"* we've got peer mentors with lived experience of disability, who have been there and who have worked alongside other people facing similar situations.

If you'd like a confidential chat to one of our peer mentors, please get in touch.

Call **(03) 9489 0777**  
or email: [community@aqavic.org.au](mailto:community@aqavic.org.au)