

# THE **Advocate**

A VOICE FOR ACCESSIBLE, EQUITABLE AND EMPOWERED LIVES | WINTER 2024 ISSUE

**Relationships and dating: Peer Support tips**

**How playing sport changed Wendy's life**

**Learn more about our Allied Health Assistants**

*These precious moments*

**ERIC'S JOURNEY AS A STAY-AT-HOME DAD**

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**Editor** | Rachel Toune  
**Writer** | Ginny Cumming  
**Design** | Melissa Azavedo  
**Publishing and Printing** | VRC Printing

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## Growing your community

Welcome to another issue of *The Advocate*, as we enjoy the change in season and the cooler weather that it brings.

In this issue, we are hearing from our members about how they've navigated relationships, particularly post-injury. From making new connections and friendships, it can be a challenging time, and we encourage you to reach out to our Peer Support team if you would like to speak to someone who has lived experience with this journey. You can read more on Page 14.

With Sporting Wheelies becoming part of Spinal Life earlier this year, we're also sharing more about how sporting and recreation activities can help you connect with others. Even if playing a sport isn't your thing, you could consider volunteering as a referee or timekeeper to come along and be part of the team.

We're also sharing a beautiful story from one of our members who has been supported by our team to be a stay-at-home dad while his partner returned to work. Our tailored approach to services is something we are incredibly proud of here at Spinal Life. We work with individuals to understand what you wish to achieve and how we can support you in your daily life and help address any challenges you may be facing.

In news from the Board, thank you to all Spinal Life members who voted at our General Meeting that was held on 17 June. Members voted on a Special Resolution to amend our Constitution to include references to sport and recreation, in line with bringing Sporting Wheelies into the Spinal Life fold earlier this year.

We value your feedback in guiding our organisation, as we endeavour



to achieve our mission of supporting people with disability to live accessible, equitable and empowered lives.

In May, the Board travelled to Cairns to host our monthly meeting from the Healthy Living Centre and catch up with our members and community in the region.

The visit was also a chance to share more about our services with new Board Director, Mark Fenton, who was appointed to the position in February. Mark has more than 25 years' experience as a finance executive, spanning multiple sectors including disability, aged care, retail, manufacturing, professional services and membership services. You can read more about Mark on Page 22.

We value the professional skills and expertise that our Board Directors bring to Spinal Life, leading the organisation to grow and continue to deliver exceptional services.

In recognition of the need to attract and retain suitably qualified and experienced members to the Board of Spinal Life Australia, we will be proposing remuneration for Board Directors at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in November 2024. More information will be available to members in the next copy of *The Advocate* magazine, and in other communications ahead of the AGM.

As always, please reach out to [chair@spinal.com.au](mailto:chair@spinal.com.au) if you have any questions or feedback.

*Gyl Stacey*  
 GYL STACEY

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?



Email us at [theadvocate@spinal.com.au](mailto:theadvocate@spinal.com.au) - we'd love to hear from you!





### 3 QUESTIONS WITH THE CEO

## Mark Townend

#### Can you tell us more about the National Year of Accessible Tourism?

Last year, we experienced first-hand the success of the 'Year of Accessible Tourism' in Queensland, which resulted in many positive outcomes for operators across the state; who were able to access funding grants and other opportunities to support them to become more inclusive. The Queensland Government has now extended this funding for a further two years.

We have commenced a campaign calling on the Australian Government to consider nominating 2025 as a National Year of Accessible Tourism. This campaign has included writing to the Prime Minister and Federal Tourism Minister directly, along with all State Tourism Ministers.

Designating 2025 as the National Year of Accessible Tourism would not only showcase Australia's commitment to inclusion but also stimulate further action and collaboration in this important area, leading to long-term positive change for visitors and residents alike.

#### What else has been happening at Spinal Life?

We successfully completed an audit of our NDIS services, demonstrating our commitment to delivering the highest quality support to our clients.

The review was conducted by independent auditors, and ensures service providers are meeting the NDIS Practice Standards, with a final report provided to the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission.

These audits are an important part of the NDIS process, aimed at protecting participants and ensuring they are

receiving safe, respectful, quality support services and achieving their goals.

As part of the audit, some of our clients and team members were interviewed about their experiences, in person in Cairns and Brisbane as well as over the phone, while our systems and processes were also examined.

#### How are you growing Spinal Life's regional footprint?

We celebrated the opening of Move Mobility's showroom in Bundaberg, which is also home to Spinal Life's new office, with plans to grow Sporting Wheelies services in the region.

To mark the occasion we held two events, including a sneak peek for our members and customers, as well as another event to showcase the new services to local allied health professionals, support providers and equipment suppliers. A big thank you to everyone who came along.

Spinal Life's team has relocated from our previous office, delivering services to the Wide Bay region including in-home personal care, community access, occupational therapy, NDIS support coordination and plan management, advocacy support and veterans' home care.

In the new space, we can collaborate with Move Mobility and ensure our members have access to the latest equipment, mobility aids and assistive technology to suit their needs.

As always, please don't hesitate to contact me at [ceo@spinal.com.au](mailto:ceo@spinal.com.au) if you ever have any feedback or suggestions on our advocacy campaigns or anything else.

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*Eric and Janet Cook, with their gorgeous daughter, Zoe. Images courtesy of Gary Peters.*

# The family man

## A Spinal Life member's journey to becoming a stay-at-home dad

Life with the Cook family is as chaotic and loud and beautiful as you'd expect in a home with a 22-month old child.

"Excuse me," apologises devoted stay-at-home dad, Eric Cook, when we're interrupted mid-sentence, "Zoe's using me as a climbing frame!"

Stay-at-home dads are still relatively rare in this country, but Eric's story is even more exceptional, given that he's doing the job from a wheelchair.

"One of my biggest fears at first was, would I be able to hold Zoe properly... but I mastered that pretty easily," he says. "Once she started crawling and then walking – and now running – the big thing was making sure I don't run her over in my wheelchair. I've actually set up a reversing camera!"

Zoe loves laughing, playing in her sandpit and with the family dog, Jack... and falling asleep while lying on top of her Dad.

It's moments like these that Eric thought he'd never get to experience, after a car accident when he was 27 left him with high-level quadriplegia (C6/C7 complete). But together with his wife, Janet, they have made this life possible.

"Janet's the primary breadwinner, so when she went back to work after her maternity leave Zoe took a bit of time to adjust," explains Eric. "But after a while she came around and understood that if Mum's not there, I'm the next best thing. >





From left: Eric loves his role as stay-at-home dad to little Zoe; He also gets to hang out with their beloved family dog, Jack.



The Cook family home in Perth is loud and lovely.

"I became the protector, the disciplinarian, everything. If Zoe falls over or hurts herself, she comes to me for reassurance."

Born and bred in Perth, Eric has welcomed a helping hand from local Spinal Life Personal Support Workers.

"I've been a personal support client with Spinal Life for around three years," he says, "and during the process of signing up we talked to them about our desire to start a family. The discussions were all positive, and Spinal Life basically said, 'no problem, we'll work it all out when it happens.'"

Which is exactly what they did.

Eric has help from Support Workers seven days a week, morning and night. "They come in specifically to help me, and then other Support Workers come in to help me with Zoe when Janet's at work. We've got a really good crew looking after us."

The Support Workers do everything from light domestic work, to taking Eric and Zoe to appointments or to do a bit of shopping. They also ensure Zoe gets to enjoy the outdoor playtime she loves so much, not to mention her favourite show, *Bluey*.

"They're the arms and legs for Eric, basically," explains Janet.

Zoe's the dearest, happiest little girl and a constant delight to Eric, but he understandably still experiences frustrations.

"It's because I can't do the things that an able-bodied person can do, like changing clothes and nappies, feeding her, or just getting down on the floor and playing with her," says Eric. "But at the same time I've also found ways to adapt so that I can help where I can and actively participate in Zoe's upbringing."

Eric's also fortunate to have such an incredible partner in crime. He and Janet initially connected through an online game called Dark Warriors.

"A friend recommended it to me as my hands can't manage active, flowing games, but Dark Warriors is a text-based game," explains Eric. "I was talking with fellow gamers all around the world so it was great to find Janet, who was actually in the same country!"

They might have been in the same country, but Janet was all the way over in New South Wales, where she worked as a chaplain. She and Eric chatted online for nearly five years before they finally met face-to-face in 2012. It was the start

of something big, and required some big moves too: "Janet made the brave decision to move all the way over to Perth," says Eric. "She gave up just about everything to be with me."

They got married and these days live in Perth, in an accessible home that they built together even as they were hoping to build a family.

"We had our very first referral to a fertility clinic back in 2012, when we'd just started dating – I definitely wasn't ready for it then," laughs Janet. "They told us that the fertility process was going to be long and very difficult. And that it was even more complicated than usual because almost every aspect of male reproduction is affected by a spinal cord injury."

"I don't remember much about the immediate aftermath of my accident, but I do remember the doctors asking me about freezing my sperm," says Eric. "At the time all I could think was, 'What's the point, no one will want me!'"

The longest part of the process, therefore, was the five years it took to get Eric's stats up high enough to commence IVF treatments. The next part of the process, happily, moved a bit faster: "So many people go through so many rounds of IVF, but we were lucky enough to get pregnant the very first time. Sadly we lost that baby, but on the very next round we got Zoe," says Janet.

"All up, the medical journey to get Zoe took about 10 years. It was a real miracle," says Eric.

"She's very, very precious," agrees Janet. "And she's such a sponge! It's amazing how quickly she learns things, and it's

really cute when she tries to help her Daddy. She knows he can't pick things up off the floor, so she's learnt to do that to help him. She watches me and the other carers looking after her Dad and wants to help – she's starting to instruct the nurses and loves to help the carers to moisturise Daddy's feet or decorate Dad with medical tape."

So, as Eric reflects on his journey, does he have any advice for other people with a spinal cord injury who are contemplating starting a family?

"If anybody's even thinking about it, don't be afraid to try," he encourages. "It's a hell of a lot of work and yes, there will be setbacks, but with support from carers, your family and your spouse, it is possible. And it's so rewarding: having a child is just priceless."

Eric and Janet love parenthood so much, in fact, that they're thinking about a sibling for Zoe.

"During the last IVF process we ended up with three other embryos that are frozen and ready to go," says Janet. "It's really exciting to think we could potentially expand our family." [A](#)

For more information about Spinal Life's Personal Support and Home Care Services, visit [spinal.com.au/personalsupport](https://spinal.com.au/personalsupport) or call 1300 774 625.





# Nothing but net

How getting back into sport helped Wendy find her tribe... and saved her life.

“If you had told me three years ago that any of these things were going to happen, I would have laughed at you.”

The benefits of participating in sport can't be underestimated, and no one knows this quite like Wendy Passfield.

Wendy was just 32 years old when she went into hospital for the birth of her second child via caesarean and ended up contracting an infection – a hospital superbug – while she was there.

She lost both her legs, has had 100 surgeries, and continues to battle the infection even today, which is resistant to antibiotics.

The mother-of-two is the first to admit that she hit rock bottom.

Wendy shooting some hoops at the Sporting Wheelies Para Clubhouse in Milton.



“I was taking so many painkillers I couldn't get out of bed. I couldn't put a sentence together, I couldn't do anything,” she says.

Three years ago, Wendy made the brave decision to go back to what life was like before her world turned upside down. That life was all about sports.

Wendy took a chance and went to a Sporting Wheelies program called Equal Ops, which she says is 'like CrossFit for people with disability'.

The inclusive group class is led by an Exercise Physiologist and involves equipment such as dumbbells, barbells,

kettlebells and ropes, with each movement adjusted to suit the ability of each participant.

Shortly after starting with the Equal Ops program Wendy was

encouraged to try wheelchair basketball, and it was there she found a whole new lease on life.

“I found the way out of that deep dark hole and that was through sport and Sporting Wheelies,” she says.

“I'd never seen a sports chair until I came to Sporting Wheelies and then I got in one and I don't think I've been out of it since!

“Basketball is where I met my tribe. We all understand each other and it's all about having fun with people who don't say they get it, they really get it.

“It's opened up so many worlds.”

Wendy now volunteers as a coach and teaches wheelchair basketball for all ages, from six all the way up to 70.

Sporting Wheelies offers basketball as a social sport, where participants can come along, try the first two sessions for >



free, and then sign up for the program. Sports chairs are provided to anyone who comes along, to see if they like the sport and eventually they may wish to purchase their own equipment.

Players can also look at competing at regional, national and international levels, including at the Paralympics.

This year, Wendy was selected to be part of the women's National Wheelchair Basketball League, playing for the Queensland Comets.

"My whole drive for doing it was showing the kids we coach that if I can make a national league team at 48 years of age, then there's nothing stopping any of them."

Wendy said she enjoys the social aspects of the sport most of all.

"I love being out there with people with similar interests who want to get out there and have a go and have a bit of fun," she says.

"We've been dealt some blows, but we live life the best we can with what we've got."

Sporting Wheelies also offers other sports programs including wheelchair sport fundamentals, which focuses on things like ball skills and movement, while there's also boccia, para powerlifting and goalball. There are also programs specifically for children with disability to join and have fun.

For people who want to get involved but may not be ready to play a sport just yet, volunteering may be a good option. This involves helping out during sporting competitions with things like timekeeping or participating in fundraising events to help raise vital funds for Sporting Wheelies services and programs.

Wendy's role at Sporting Wheelies has also expanded to becoming a Game Changer; visiting schools to share her story and educating students about disability by giving them the chance to try inclusive sports for themselves.

She also presents to corporate groups, particularly focused on improving access and inclusion in the workplace.

"I'll give them a bottle of water without the lid and ask them to go 100 metres without spilling it – if you don't use a wheelchair you don't know not to put it between your legs," she laughs. "For some of them it's a reality check and a wakeup call that things can change overnight."

Reflecting on her experiences, Wendy said that getting back into sports, and being part of Sporting Wheelies, was the turning point in her life.

"If you had told me three years ago that any of these things were going to happen, I would have laughed at you," she says.

"Sport can do so much for someone with a disability.

"I was at a crossroads, and I was so down and out in the world that I'd given up. If I didn't find Sporting Wheelies, I wouldn't be here today.

"Now I don't take any pain medications at all. When I'm in pain, I come to the gym. I focused my pain into sport and it really does help."

She encourages anyone thinking about signing up to give it a go.

"I was so scared to start and I think I pulled out two or three times before I finally got through the doors at Sporting Wheelies," she says.

"I'm glad I did because it opened up so many other doors, from meeting a whole new group of friends, to finding a job, to playing a sport on a national level, to just getting my life back." [A](#)

For more information about Sporting Wheelies, go to: [sportingwheelies.org.au](http://sportingwheelies.org.au) or call 07 3253 3333.



## Wheelchair Basketball: The basics

- Was one of the foundation sports at the first Paralympic Games in Rome, 1960
- Open to athletes with physical impairment
- Basic rules are very similar to running basketball including the height of the basket, distance to the foul line, three-point line
- A player may wheel the chair and bounce the ball simultaneously, however, if the ball is picked up and/or placed on the player's lap, they are only allowed to push twice before being obligated to shoot, pass or dribble the ball again
- Players are assigned a point value from 1.0 to 4.5 depending on their level of impairment
- Teams consist of five players and must not exceed a total of 14.0 points on the court at any one time
- For more, check out the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF) rules which have been modified from the Federation Internationale de Basketball (FIBA)



Peer Support Team Leader, Katie Hammond, speaks to Joel Fernandes from Spinal Life's Advocacy team.



# You're so out there!

## Peer Support Worker Katie Hammond shares a few tips on 'getting out there' after a spinal cord injury

When it comes to 'getting back out there' after a spinal cord injury – be that dating, making new friends or exploring hobbies, new or old – there's a definite journey to be taken. We asked Katie Hammond, 43, who's been a Peer Support Worker with Spinal Life Australia for the past 15 years, to tell us more. She's helped loads of people get back into the friendship/dating world after a spinal cord injury... not to mention done it all herself!

"Working in the Spinal Injuries Unit at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, I'm meeting people whose lives have just been turned upside down," she says. "As Peer Support Workers our job is to share our lived experience, and we spend a lot of time just chatting. In many cases people don't realise they're receiving peer support at the time; only when they look back on their journey. We always try to sow little seeds. Before you can get back out there, you actually have to work on yourself first. It's a real journey of self-discovery: you have to develop a sense of self outside of your injury and find out who you are, what you love and why you love it."

### Doing what you love

But even simply talking about what they love can evoke a sense of mourning in some people.

"That's because they're thinking that they're never going to get to do that thing again," says Katie. "For example, they might say that they used to love fishing, but now they'll never be able to do it again. My job is to go, 'Hang on, let's work out *exactly* what it was that you loved. Do you want to actually drive the boat or are you okay with someone else being at the controls? Do you even need to be on a boat or would you get the same feeling if you went fishing from a pier? What if you didn't catch a fish, would that bother you?' We're really tearing the experience apart to find out what the person *really* loves about it; what speaks to their soul. Maybe it's just being out in the sunshine and feeling the sea spray on their face, or maybe they truly love the actual act of fishing and so we can look into fishing trips on a boat with all the necessary devices and staff to make it possible. Our job is to find workable alternatives that fit in

“ People with spinal cord injuries have all the same goals as anyone else, it just looks a little different sometimes and you have to do a lot of work on yourself. ”

to that person's new life and change their perception about what they can do."

### Maintaining friendships

According to Katie, it's perfectly normal to lose friends after an accident. "It's very normal for some people to drop away for a whole host of reasons, but once you get settled and feel the time is right, there's always an opportunity to reconnect," she says.

"Like any relationship, a friendship is give and take. But after an injury one of the challenges is that you feel like you can no longer *give*. For example, once upon a time if your friends called and said, 'hey, we're moving house, can you come and help', you'd be there in a flash, lugging boxes, transporting items in your car and just doing anything you can to help. And even though you can't do those specific things post-injury, there are other things that you can do. You can be in charge of communicating where everyone is and what needs to be moved next. You can organise pizzas, coffees and energy drinks. There are ways that you can still be a friend and fulfil the 'giving' role."

### Making new friends

And then of course there's the opportunity to make new friends.

"Just because you have a spinal cord injury doesn't mean you're only going to hang out with other people with spinal cord injuries," says Katie. "Again, it's about thinking about what you love and what you want to do, and using that as your starting point. It can be literally anything: an art class, cooking school, attending a reading at a library or book shop, improv classes, *anything*. Whatever it is, you need to make a plan to get out of the house, away from your normal environment, and be with other people. You've got to mix it up."

### Practise makes perfect

Getting out there and meeting people means you'll be practising your conversational skills and, as Katie rightly points out, this should always be about listening as much as talking.

"One of my tips is to make sure you ask people three questions about whatever it is they're telling you about. It shows that you're really listening to them and that you're interested in what they have to say," she says.

"Some of us have to work really hard at the art of conversation," she continues. "Not only are we out of practice after spending so much time in hospital and rehab, but we might also be on medications that can make us struggle to remember things, put sentences together and follow a conversation. So it's vital to get out there and practise."

### Dating

Making new friends is one thing; dating is a whole other world. And it's one that Katie doesn't just talk about in theory – she's been there and bought the t-shirt!

"I got my spinal cord injury at 16, got married at 19, became a mum at 21 and had my second child at 24," she explains. "A decade or so later I turned around and went, 'Whoa, hang on a minute, this isn't reflecting what I think a marriage should be. I'd like to opt out now, thank you.' After the breakdown of my marriage I found myself with my kids full time, a job... and then entering the dating world. Dating is hard enough anyway, without adding a disability into the mix."

For many people with a disability, the hardest thing about the entire dating process is writing a bio.

"It can be incredibly confronting," says Katie. "Because who are you? Most of us lose a sense of our worth after a spinal cord injury. We're like, 'I don't know who I am anymore. I don't know what I can do, I don't know what >



I can bring to a relationship and I don't know what I'm willing to take.' But not knowing who you are or what you want isn't a bad thing. It just means that there's some work to do."

It was certainly that way for Katie.

"Coming out of my marriage I didn't have a lot of belief in myself," she remembers. "I'd been a mum and a wife for so long, my idea of who I was had really diminished. So I started a journey of rediscovery. I had to really work at it: to renegotiate my own boundaries on who I am and what I want in life."

There's another big challenge when it comes to writing a dating profile, according to Katie. "Do you write that you have a disability? Is it something you should mention even before you've met someone? Let's be honest, everyone hides parts of themselves on their dating profiles, which you only get to figure out when you lay eyes on them – or six months down the track when you know them a bit better! But being in a wheelchair is something I can't hide so it means I'm open to instant judgement, which is very scary."

So Katie took a scientific approach to the whole process.

"I would test the waters and mention in my profile that I have a disability, and then cast that net and see what it would bring in. Later, I'd change my profile and *not* mention that I have a disability and see what happened. The conversations were always very different. But I wanted to find somebody who liked me for me. Seeing past a disability is a lot to ask. So if I could find people who didn't already have a preconceived – and unhealthy – notion about what people with disabilities can or can't do, they were the people I was looking for."

And even when you find people like that and arrange a date, the anxiety doesn't end there.

"There are so many fears. 'What if we're going to a restaurant that's not wheelchair accessible? Will the fact that I have Support Workers with me 50% of the time be too much for them? Who would want to sign up to this life?' I've had people go, 'Um, no thank you, I didn't realise that you had a disability, that's scary, good luck to you in the future, see ya'. Or I've been told that I would hold them back. So we need to do the work on ourselves and empower ourselves to be okay with who we are, no matter what else happens or what anyone else says. There are so many different thought processes that can absolutely sabotage your ability to move forward."

### Doing the deed

And as if dating isn't hard enough, then there are 'overnight dates'.

"On top of everything else, you have to know how your body works after an injury when it comes to doing the horizontal Mambo," says Katie. "What can you do and what can't you do? As always, it's different for everybody."


It's totally understandable that an able-bodied person who's on a dating app might have questions when it comes to a person with a disability that they're considering matching with. "They might be unsure of what is physically possible and the notion of pleasure," says Katie, "but the challenge is that the person who's experienced the injury doesn't know either until they try. And how do you get the practise? So there are lots of other layers that you don't have to contend with in other relationships, but if you go in with an open mind, willingness to explore and that sense of self it's just going to make everything a little bit easier."

### Katie's dating life

For Katie herself, the online dating thing did work, but she ultimately met someone the 'old-fashioned way'.

"I'd been using online platforms and actively dating for about 12 months before I gave in to my now-husband's request for a date," she says. "I'd actually known him for five years and – full disclosure – he actually has a spinal cord injury and uses a wheelchair. 'Yep,' I thought, 'My life is really complicated, how can I overcomplicate it even more?!"

The couple eventually married and baby number three for Katie is now seven years old. However complicated it was, they made it work and Katie is living proof to her Peer Support clients that 'normal life' does go on after a spinal cord injury.

"People with spinal cord injuries have all the same goals as anyone else," says Katie, "it just looks a little different sometimes and you have to do a lot of work on yourself. And that's what Peer Support is here for. We listen to what makes you tick and what it is that you're looking for, and then steer you in the right direction to find what it is that you need. Our job is literally helping you on that journey back to you." 

For more information, go to [spinal.com.au/peersupport](https://spinal.com.au/peersupport) or call **1300 774 625**. You can also join the closed Facebook group by searching 'Peer Support Spinal Life Australia'.



The Healthy Living Centre Cairns offers one and two bedroom units fitted with industry-leading adaptive equipment and home automation. Available for short and medium-term stays, there is also the added benefit of having Spinal Life Allied Health professionals, a fully accessible gym and hydrotherapy pool on-site to assist with all your rehabilitation and wellness needs.

If you need support during your stay, or when you're at home, our Personal Support Workers are ready to assist.

### AVAILABLE SERVICES





# Back on the tarmac

How Ashley returned to work and doing what he loves



Ashley, back at work as an aircraft engineer.

“ I couldn’t have asked for better support from Tania and Airwork, my employer. ”

As an aircraft engineer for 52 years, Ashley Northcott has become an expert at problem-solving. And he needed to draw on these skills when he recently sustained a spinal cord injury.

In May last year Ashley had finished watching the football on TV and got up to walk. It’s unclear what happened – doctors suspect some sort of medical episode – but he woke up three hours later and couldn’t move one side of his body.

The Sandstone Point resident was transferred to hospital for tests and an MRI found he had sustained damage to his spinal cord and two of his vertebrae at the C3 level. He was placed in a neck collar and transferred to the Surgical, Treatment and Rehabilitation Service (better known as STARS) which is part of Brisbane’s Herston Health Precinct.

Ashley met Spinal Life’s Back2Work Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counsellor, Tania Goossen, at STARS before he

was discharged, and got in touch for support before he was due to go back to work in August.

At the time of his injury, Ashley had been working for Airwork Australia for three years, and he was keen to return as soon as possible. After realising he wasn’t quite ready to get back on site after an initial attempt to return to work, Ashley was looking for another solution.

“Ultimately Tania asked whether there was anything I could do from home, which I had been reluctant to do,” he says.

Still, Tania and Ashley spoke with Airwork and as it turned out, they were looking for someone to analyse data and review training packages, which could all be done via a home computer.

It was the perfect opportunity for Ashley to return to work gradually, while having physiotherapy weekly to continue his progress.

In March this year, Ashley was ready to try returning to the physical work site again in a supervisory role, with modifications to his work hours and lifting limits.

“I just felt better being around the guys and getting back to the aircraft,” he says.

He’s now back full time, even working night shifts, again with Tania’s support and medical clearance from his doctor.

“Tania was very supportive and it was her idea in the first place to see if I could work from home, which worked out to be the best thing I did,” says Ashley. “I couldn’t have asked for better support from Tania and Airwork, my employer.”

Former AU Engineering Manager for Airwork Australia, Ron West, says it was important to support Ashley through his recovery.

“We did it in steps and when he was showing improvement, we were able to build on that,” says Ron.

“Ultimately, he got to a point where he said to us, ‘I think I could benefit from coming back into the workforce and being part of the team again’ so we worked with Tania and put together a plan around that to ease him back in.

“Tania’s professionalism, understanding and knowledge around managing the return-to-work program were just fantastic. It’s a great outcome for the business to be able to support him in that way and we’ll continue to support him however we can.”

In his role as an aircraft engineer, Ashley has travelled to 73 countries, from fixing the Royal Flying Doctors aircraft in Mount Isa all the way to stints in France, India, Africa, New York and Vietnam.

“I’m nearly 70 but I don’t see me ever fully retiring as long as I’m physically or mentally able to do something,” he says. “It’s a very interesting industry to be in – no two days are the same.” [A](#)

Spinal Life Australia’s Back2Work project is offered to newly injured patients while they’re in the Spinal Injuries Unit at Princess Alexandra Hospital, and other select hospitals including STARS. Back2Work is proudly supported by the Motor Accident Insurance Commission (MAIC). For more information, go to [spinal.com.au/back2work](https://spinal.com.au/back2work)



# Support Squad

Introducing Douglas Mori, one of the members of Spinal Life Australia's experienced Allied Health team



Douglas loves his role as an Allied Health Assistant in Cairns.

Douglas Mori is a truly international health expert. He holds a Bachelor of Physiotherapy from Brazil, plus a Master of Health and Welfare and a PhD in Biological Systems Science, both from Japan. And while he's getting his qualifications here in Australia, he's working as an Allied Health Assistant at the Spinal Life Healthy Living Centre in Cairns. We asked him to tell us about this important service.

#### How does the Allied Health Assistant service work?

"We're part of a multidisciplinary team that helps to deliver the overall rehabilitation service, assisting our clients to implement their individually tailored treatment plans and exercise programs. These are prescribed by other allied health professionals – people such as Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists and Exercise Physiologists. Allied Health Assistants monitor progress and help prevent injuries by ensuring correct form and technique is maintained."

#### How is the service different from seeing an Exercise Physiologist or Physiotherapist?

"Anyone wishing to see an Allied Health Assistant will first be assessed by an Exercise Physiologist, Physiotherapist

or Occupational Therapist, depending on their individual circumstances. Their rehabilitation plans are then created specifically to help them achieve their particular goals. An Allied Health Assistant can then be allocated to them, to help carry out these individual exercise plans, monitor their progress and report back to their Exercise Physiologist, Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist."

#### What are the key benefits of seeing an Allied Health Assistant?

"The main benefit is that Allied Health Assistants can help clients achieve their health, wellness and rehabilitation goals by following a tailored treatment plan while stretching their dollar further."

#### What are some of the tasks you do as part of an appointment?

"Tasks differ depending on each individual client's rehabilitation plan. For clients with hydrotherapy sessions for example, I will assist them to safely get in the pool, show them how to do their exercises and assist if necessary, and then assist them to safely get out of the pool. Similarly for



Cairns Allied Health Assistant Catherine Traynor encourages client Imogen with her exercise program.



Brisbane Allied Health Assistant Grace Gonzales supports client Tim to achieve his fitness goals.

gym sessions, I will show the client how to properly use the specific gym equipment to execute their required exercise, constantly check that they're comfortable and gauge the recovery time needed between each exercise."

#### How long is each appointment?

"Gym sessions and home visits are for one hour. Hydrotherapy sessions are also for one hour, however this includes 10 minutes at the start and 10 minutes before the end to assist clients to safely get in and out of the pool."

#### How often do you see clients?

"This depends on their individual rehabilitation needs. Some clients I see only once a week. Others I see twice a week. But they can come up to five times a week."

#### Why is it important for people with disability to maintain their health and fitness?

"If a person has reduced, limited or no ability to move a particular muscle, limb or area, that particular muscle's mass slowly deteriorates and eventually they'll be unable to move the muscles in that area. The resulting loss of function will in

turn affect their independence and quality of life. That's why it's so vital that people with disability maintain their health and fitness."


#### How do you help people to be more independent or increase their quality of life?

"By ensuring their rehabilitation plan is followed through to the letter and that exercises are conducted properly so clients don't exacerbate their condition with an incorrect or unsupervised movement. I also ensure this is done at the optimum frequency per week, with the goal of maintaining or even improving their independence and consequently their quality of life."

#### What's the most challenging part of your role?

"Understandably, clients may not always be feeling their best when they arrive for their session or they might just not like exercise in general, so motivating them can sometimes be challenging. This is why I try to add a personal touch so that they don't just feel like they're coming to do their rehabilitation exercises, they're coming to see me. Hopefully that will perk them up a bit."

#### What do you enjoy most about your role?

"I really enjoy working here at Spinal Life in Cairns. The camaraderie between staff is wonderful, which creates a fun, relaxed and cheerful atmosphere for everyone, and the clients can see and feel that. I love coming to work every day. What I love most is getting to know each and every one of my clients, chatting with them, joking with them, and seeing if I can make them laugh. I hope this makes their sessions not so serious, so it doesn't feel like exercising and more like catching up with a friend. Through getting to know them and finding out their likes and dislikes, I can also think of creative and fun things that add a personal touch. For instance, I once made a *Star Wars* poster for two clients who were avid fans of the movie. I photoshopped our faces onto the faces of the three main characters and gifted it to them as a surprise. We all had a good laugh and their expressions alone were well worth the effort!" 

Spinal Life's Allied Health Assistants are available in Cairns and Brisbane. For more information, go to: [spinal.com.au/alliedhealthassistant](https://spinal.com.au/alliedhealthassistant)





GETTING TO KNOW...

Mark Fenton,  
BOARD DIRECTOR

Mark Fenton is Spinal Life Australia’s newest Board Director, having joined in February this year. He brings a wealth of expertise to the Board, as a seasoned finance executive with more than 25 years’ experience spanning a multitude of sectors, including disability, aged care, retail, manufacturing, professional services and membership services.

With his broad experience in the arts, education, supportive housing, aged care and member services sectors, Mark has worked with both not-for-profit organisations as well as entrepreneurial for-profit businesses, showcasing a leadership approach that is versatile and adaptable.

**What made you want to get involved with Spinal Life?**

Spinal Life’s purpose and values align with my own. I have been fortunate to have enjoyed a successful career as a businessperson and a company director. I have worked in the disability services sector for several years and served on the Board of a variety of organisations that work to support people.

**What personal or professional achievement are you most proud of?**

I successfully navigated the early years of the NDIS implementation as the Chief Financial Officer at Endeavour Foundation. I led an unprecedented amount of change that was required by the corporate services team. I am proud of the team’s achievements.

**How do you define effective advocacy?**

At its core, advocacy creates an effective voice for those who individually would not otherwise be heard. With a voice, there is an opportunity to drive positive and progressive outcomes that measurably improve the lives of those people being represented.

**What’s the best piece of advice you’ve received?**

One of the most influential mentors in my early career was an inspiring gentleman and CEO called Robin Rust. He taught me that chance favours the prepared mind. It always taught me to work hard and to apply myself. Opportunities will find you when you are prepared and aware.

**What do you like to do in your spare time?**

My wife and I spend a lot of time on our family beef cattle property in Nana Glen in New South Wales. This also allows me to spend quality time with my mum. I am also a marriage celebrant, which allows me to bring people together on one of the best days of their lives.

**What would you like to see Spinal Life achieve in the future?**

Become an even more influential voice for people living with spinal cord damage and to consistently deliver the very best services that really do improve people’s lives in the wider disability services community. All done through world-class facilities.

**Describe your dream holiday.**

It would definitely be a month in a warm sunny beach paradise with my wife, Jules, surrounded by our nearest and dearest loved ones. There would be no mobile phone coverage or Wi-Fi access (at least for me).

**Finish this sentence: “I’m passionate about Spinal Life Australia because...”**

We really are committed to living by our values and to stretch ourselves to ensure that we deliver on our purpose. I already sense that the Board and management team are committed to bringing out the best in each other.



FIND AN EVENT IN YOUR REGION

Our Peer Support Catch-Ups are held regularly across Queensland, and are a great opportunity to connect with others, share information and advice, and hear about Spinal Life’s latest advocacy initiatives.

You can visit [spinal.com.au/events](https://spinal.com.au/events) for upcoming event dates, or use the contact details below to get in touch with our Peer Support, Post Polio or Transverse Myelitis groups.

**SPINAL LIFE PEER SUPPORT GROUPS**

- BRIBIE ISLAND:** Wayne Slattery 0449 923 887
- BRISBANE:** Fred Nitz 0412 190 585
- BUNDABERG:** Steve Richter 0413 457 284
- MORETON BAY:** Ross Duncan 0475 077 080
- ROCKHAMPTON:** Robynne Clifton 0473 576 107 or Anne Guthrie 0407 116 035

**POST POLIO GROUPS**

- CAIRNS:** Joy Hay 4055 5795
- GOLD COAST:** Lyn Glover 0448 206 856 or Joan Radanovic 0413 178 073

**SUNSHINE COAST:**

Noel Allen 0427 148 724

**TRANSVERSE MYELITIS GROUP**

Ross Duncan 0475 077 080

We email regional event invitations to Spinal Life members, along with news and advocacy updates. Join our community at [spinal.com.au/membership](https://spinal.com.au/membership) or call **1300 774 625** to find out more.

**Know a CEO or community leader?**

We’re calling on CEOs, business, and community leaders to spend a day using a wheelchair on 30 August 2024.

The CEO Wheelie Challenge is aimed at highlighting access and inclusion, with participants able to see first-hand where improvements could be made. They’ll also be raising vital funds to support Sporting Wheelies.

Nominate a leader today at [sportingwheelies.org.au/ceochallenge](https://sportingwheelies.org.au/ceochallenge).

**A menu of Takeaways**

Each month we share a bite-sized segment on our website and Facebook, called Takeaways, aimed at giving you a taste of topics that are important to you.

From NDIS support coordination to sport, to romance and relationships, you can hear from our experts and hosts, who share their experiences and valuable information, as well as ways you can find out more on each topic.

Catch up on our website at [spinal.com.au/takeaways](https://spinal.com.au/takeaways).



**Leave a gift in your will**



Spinal Life has partnered with Gathered Here, a free will-writing service that makes charitable giving as easy as possible.

All gifts will help support our mission to make real and tangible differences in the lives of people living with a physical disability.

If you would like to find out more about Gathered Here, and other ways you can support Spinal Life, you can visit [spinal.com.au/donate](https://spinal.com.au/donate) or call **1300 774 625**.



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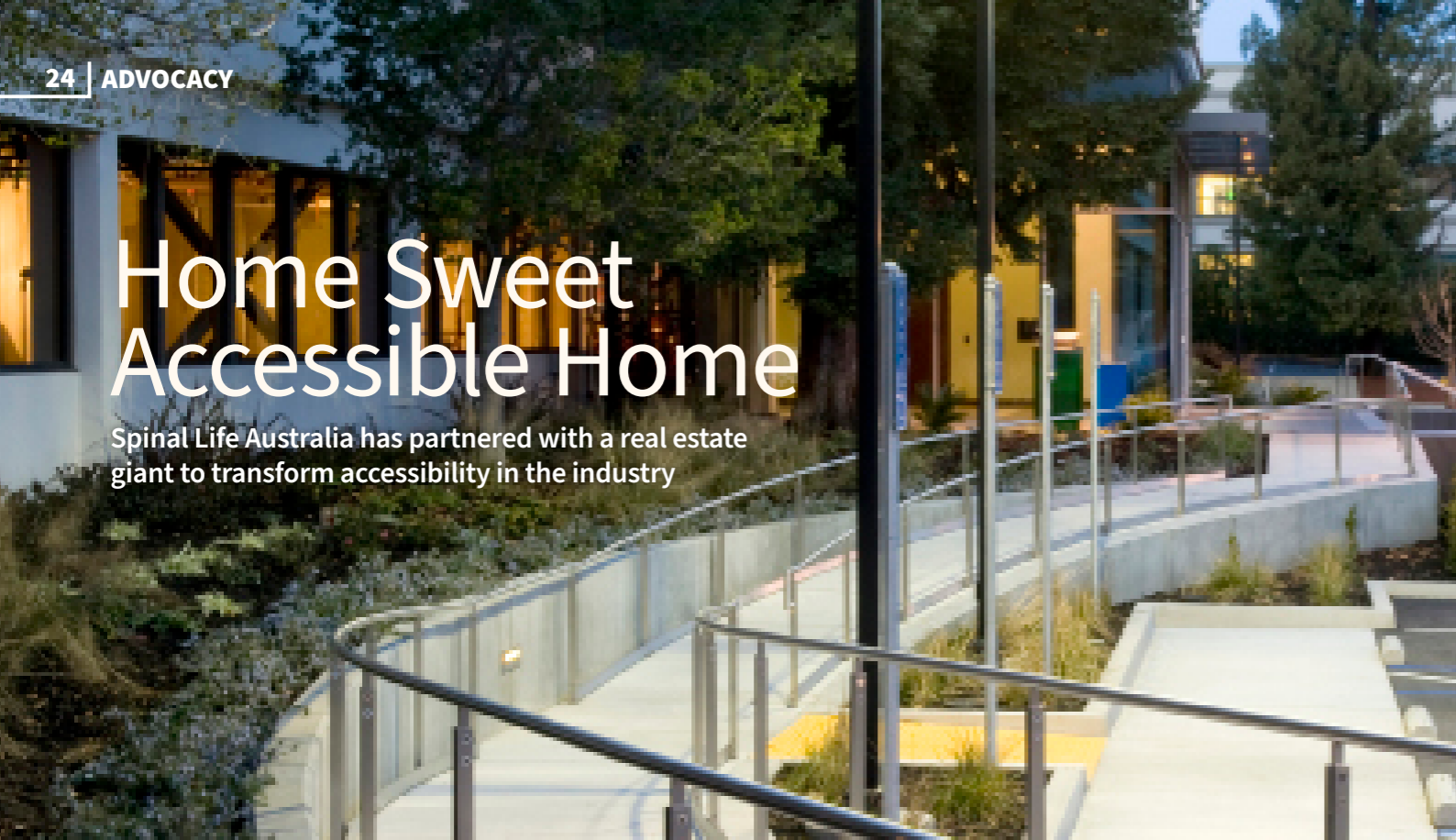


Your home in Hobart...



# Home Sweet Accessible Home

Spinal Life Australia has partnered with a real estate giant to transform accessibility in the industry



For many Australians living with disability, the simple act of searching for a home can feel like an insurmountable challenge. It's all thanks to information about accessibility and accessible features being so difficult to find. Promising listings quickly turn into disappointment when you turn up for a viewing and discover things like stairs at the entrance, narrow doorways or bathrooms that are impossible to use.

But change is on the horizon thanks to a groundbreaking partnership between Spinal Life Australia and leading real estate platform, REA Group.

Together, they have helped to design the first iteration of accessibility filters that will now feature on REA Group's consumer website, realestate.com.au.

This innovative collaboration is a beacon of hope for millions who face daily challenges in finding suitable housing. It will revolutionise the way they search for homes, turning what was once a source of frustration into an empowering experience.

## Transforming the search experience

The newly introduced accessibility filters on realestate.com.au are a game-changer. They've been designed to align with the Livable Housing Design Guidelines, providing users with the tools and resources needed to make property searches more productive and less stressful.

There's a huge demand for accessible housing in Australia, with almost 20% of people living with disability. In fact, an estimated 60% of Australian homes will, at some point, be occupied by a person

with disability or injury, and 90% will have a visitor with disability or injury. And as the population ages, the need for accessible homes will only increase. All of these people will benefit from being able to use the filters.

Spinal Life Australia's CEO, Mark Townend, highlights the importance of this development: "We've been working with REA Group closely for a while to tackle this issue, which impacts people living with a disability significantly. Not being able to search easily for a home with the right features is preventing people from being able to live their life to the fullest and they're making do with a home that doesn't effectively suit their needs. Accessible housing is a right, not a privilege, and these filters are an important first step in improving Australians' ability to find their next home."

## A call to action for agents and landlords

To maximise the effectiveness of these filters, it's now crucial for real estate agents, property managers and landlords to clearly identify and highlight accessible features in their property listings. By using specific keywords in the listing descriptions, these properties will appear in searches for accessible homes on the realestate.com.au platform.

"Highlighting features such as step-free entry or wide doorways is key to helping connect people to suitable properties, reducing the pain points of this process that millions across the country feel," says Mark.

"We are eager to continue collaborating with organisations to reduce barriers for Australians who are living with a disability, and in REA Group we have found an organisation keen to lead and influence positive change.

"Now we need real estate agents to come on board and help improve the way properties are described."

As more agents and landlords embrace these changes, the vision of accessible housing for all Australians will come closer to reality.

## A commitment to ongoing innovation

"This new experience is the result of really listening to our consumers, and the ability to filter for homes with accessible features is just the start of our journey," says REA Group's Executive General Manager – Consumer Product, Jonathan Swift. "In addition to the new search filters, we know that including high-quality photographs and clear floor plans will also go a long way in helping countless people assess whether a property meets their needs. It's progress over perfection, and there is more to come as we continue to innovate the property search experience to meet the needs of all Australians, whether they're buying, renting, or seeking shared accommodation."

There are also plans to continually update and refine the filters, ensuring they remain responsive to the evolving needs of users.

## A brighter future for accessible housing

In a world where inclusivity is often an afterthought, this partnership between Spinal Life Australia and REA Group shines as an example of what can be achieved when innovation meets compassion. This initiative is not just about making home searches easier; it's about making lives better, one accessible home at a time. [A](#)

For more information about our advocacy work, go to [spinal.com.au/advocacy](https://spinal.com.au/advocacy)

## Accessible housing reforms underway

Across Australia, work continues to ensure all new housing is accessible and safe, which will have a flow-on effect in the real estate market in future.

The Australian Building Codes Board updated the National Construction Code in 2022 to include minimum accessibility requirements in new houses and units.

These requirements reflect the silver level of Livable Housing Design Guidelines, including:

- at least one step-free entry
- slightly wider internal doors and corridors
- one step-free access into a bathroom and shower
- an accessible toilet
- reinforcing of bathroom and toilet walls to allow handrails to be installed later.

A transition period for the new requirements to be implemented ended on 1 May, with exemptions made for narrow or steep blocks, elevated Queensland homes and renovations which are less than 50% of the home.

The Building Better Homes campaign is continuing to push for change in Western Australia and New South Wales, who were the only states that did not sign up for the reforms.

You can visit [buildingbetterhomes.org.au](https://buildingbetterhomes.org.au) to read more about the campaign.

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# This is how we brew it

This Ipswich entrepreneur was determined to open a fully accessible cafe, by whatever beans necessary

Caption

When Alicia Coop decided to open a coffee shop in Ipswich with her sister, Narelle, there wasn't a business plan in sight. This was a decision she made from her heart.

The busy mum-of-three already ran a gift shop, Embers and Twine, which she and Narelle had opened five years earlier. It was during a visit from one of their suppliers, Shelly from Chewy Charms, that the coffee-shop seed was sown.

"Shelly came in to restock one day and was with her son, who's in a wheelchair. I casually asked her if they were going to grab a coffee afterwards and her response changed everything. She said they never went out for coffee because there was nowhere they could go where they didn't feel like they'd been tacked on the end of a table or plonked in a walkway, because of the wheelchair. They couldn't even enter some places."

The conversation had a profound effect on Alicia.

"It just made me so angry to think that just because you're with somebody who's in a wheelchair, or you're in a wheelchair yourself, that you couldn't go out for a coffee," she says. "It just seems like such a simple thing, but it hadn't even occurred to me that it's *not* a simple task for everyone. It really upset me. To be honest, I was probably also a little bit upset with myself, because I hadn't really ever thought about it; it just wasn't my world. So yeah, I had a real lightbulb moment, and I decided to open an accessible coffee shop."

And so, The Mill Coffee Shop was born.

"I never thought it would be easy," says Alicia, "because it was something I'd never done before. It was a totally new world."

Little did she know, however, just how big a challenge lay ahead.

First of all, a hiccup in the contract meant that the promised lift, which would make the coffee shop accessible to all, took *two years* to be installed.

"The whole purpose of opening this place was to be disability-friendly, so I refused to open until we could ensure that everyone got the same experience," says Alicia. "So I ended up paying two years of rent for an empty space while we waited for the lift to go in."

Furnishing the space was also a disappointing experience initially: "We went to two different hospitality supply companies in Brisbane and explained that we needed tables that would be accessible for someone in a wheelchair," says Alicia.

Their reactions floored her.

"Not one person could tell me which of their tables would actually suit a wheelchair. Both places said we'd have to provide wheelchair dimensions ourselves in order for them to be able to determine what might suit. They seemed to have zero awareness when it came to disability."

Alicia eventually ended up ordering office desks online to be modified to suit.

"They're all height-adjustable, so if you're in a custom wheelchair that has higher arms than a standard wheelchair, we simply raise the table slightly," she says. "They were designed to be used as sitting or standing desks, but we

adapted them into dining tables and they're actually super cute. We designed the entire space to look a bit industrial, so the tables suit the aesthetic perfectly. Apart from the fact that there's a bit more space to manoeuvre around, people who aren't in a wheelchair or with someone in a wheelchair don't even notice that there's anything different to our setup. It just goes to show that making your space accessible doesn't mean that it has to look clinical."

The Mill Coffee Shop opened at the end of June last year and the results have been incredible, despite the fact that they rely solely on word-of-mouth advertising.

Earlier this year, the team joined Spinal Life's EnABLED Business program and also took part in a Realistic Race; a tailored workshop that gives participants a first-hand insight into disability by getting them to complete a series of tasks while experiencing common accessibility issues.

"We were all given a wheelchair or a walker or a blindfold, and then had to complete a series of tasks. To put yourself in someone else's shoes even for half a day gives you a greater appreciation for what people with a disability go through on a day-to-day basis," says Alicia. "The idea is to encourage businesses to make things more user-friendly for their customers. Just a simple change could help make someone more comfortable. Anyone who has the opportunity to do the Realistic Race should definitely do it because it is a genuinely phenomenal experience."

As Alicia looks ahead to an exciting and accessible future, she thinks about one particular customer. "There was a lady in a wheelchair who came in and thanked us so much for making a space that's comfortable for her. She was so wonderful and lovely, and she made me cry. If that's the only comment I ever get back about the coffee shop, that's good enough for me." **A**

The Mill Coffee Shop is open seven days a week and is located upstairs in Ipswich's landmark heritage-listed Old Flour Mill building in the historic Top of Town precinct: [themillcoffeeshop.com.au](http://themillcoffeeshop.com.au).

## EnABLED Business

Spinal Life Australia's EnABLED Business program provides one-on-one mentoring to businesses, disability awareness training, and connections to potential employees with disability. The free program provides businesses with the tools, resources, and knowledge necessary to create a more accessible and inclusive environment for all individuals, including those with disability. It does this by taking the time to understand the business and its staffing needs to deliver a tailor-made approach. The EnABLED Business program is currently delivered in the Sunshine Coast, Wide Bay and Ipswich regions.

For more information about the EnABLED Business Program, go to [spinal.com.au/enabled-program](http://spinal.com.au/enabled-program)

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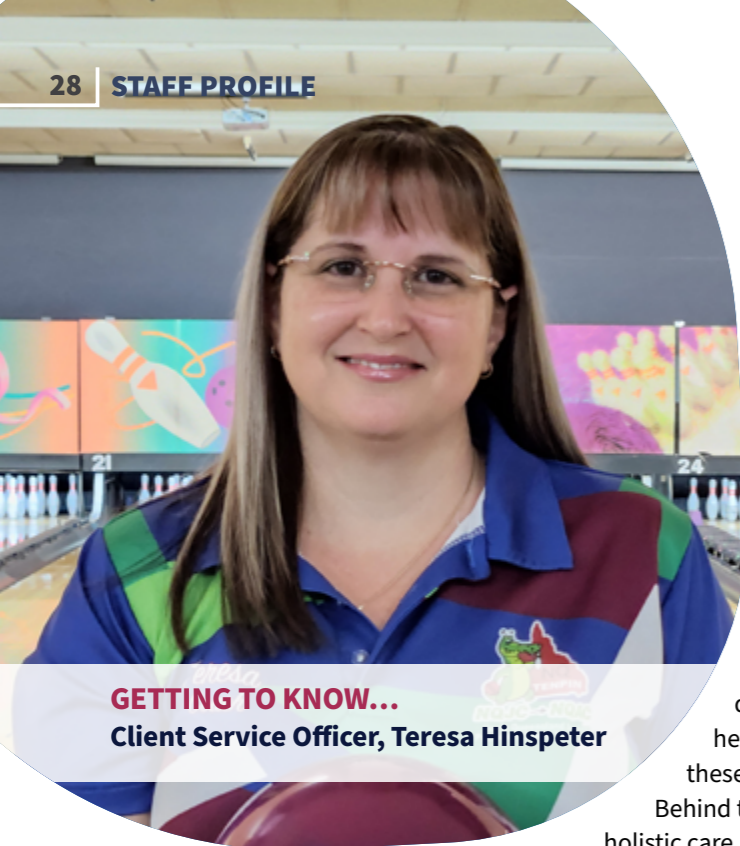
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**GETTING TO KNOW...**  
**Client Service Officer, Teresa Hinspeter**

As part of National Volunteer Week this year, we recognised our incredible volunteers at Spinal Life. This included Townsville Client Service Officer, Teresa Hinspeter, who is also an active volunteer in her community.

Teresa is an inclusive Junior Coach, Disability Rep and Secretary with the Tenpin Bowling Association of Townsville and Tenpin Bowling Association of Queensland. In these roles she holds individual and group training sessions, and helps participants prepare for upcoming events.

We wanted to share more about Teresa and why she loves volunteering, as well as her role with Spinal Life. In addition to these roles, Teresa is a mum-of-four to Emily, Brooke, Ava and Liam, and has two dogs, Peppa and Koda.

**What three words describe you best?**

“Reliable, honest and compassionate.”

**How long have you been working at Spinal Life?**

“Eight months.”

**Can you tell us about your experience and qualifications?**

“My experience includes customer service, management, rostering, payroll and clinical knowledge – as I have a Bachelor of Nursing Science.”

**What are the main responsibilities of a Client Service Officer?**

“My role involves many different things, like assisting clients with advice and support, reviewing and completing service documentation, and managing client rosters and vacancies. I also help to interview new Personal Support Workers (PSWs) and lead these teams through induction, support, communication and education. Behind the scenes, I liaise with internal and external departments to provide holistic care, attend meetings and training, and lots more.”

**What’s the best thing about your job?**

“Engaging with people and supporting clients and staff. I have a great team of office staff and Personal Support Workers who work collectively to provide client-focused care.”

**What’s the hardest thing about your job?**

“Managing daily competing and unpredictable priorities.”

**What made you want to become a volunteer?**

“I enjoy helping people and believe I make a difference by investing time and sharing my knowledge and skills.”

**How often do you volunteer, and what does your role involve?**

“I volunteer two to three times per week on individual and group coaching sessions, but it can increase with the demands of training for events and participation at events. I also attend regular meetings in my role as Disability Rep and Secretary.”

**What do you enjoy most about your volunteer role?**

“Having a positive influence on individuals and watching their skills and ability develop is incredibly rewarding. Coaching provides opportunities to teach new skills, build resilience, participate in teamwork and foster good sportsmanship. The coaching journey is fulfilling when witnessing athletes achieve personal milestones and success.”

**What would you say to others who are thinking about becoming a volunteer?**

“Volunteers play a crucial role in sport, and dedicating your time and skills ensures that everybody has an opportunity to participate, compete and enjoy the benefits of sport, which is incredibly rewarding. Volunteers have such a positive impact on individuals and the community. If you’re thinking about volunteering, reach out to other volunteers to find out how to get involved. Any help volunteers provide is always appreciated and highly valued.”

To nominate a Spinal Life team member to feature in a future issue, email: [theadvocate@spinal.com.au](mailto:theadvocate@spinal.com.au)



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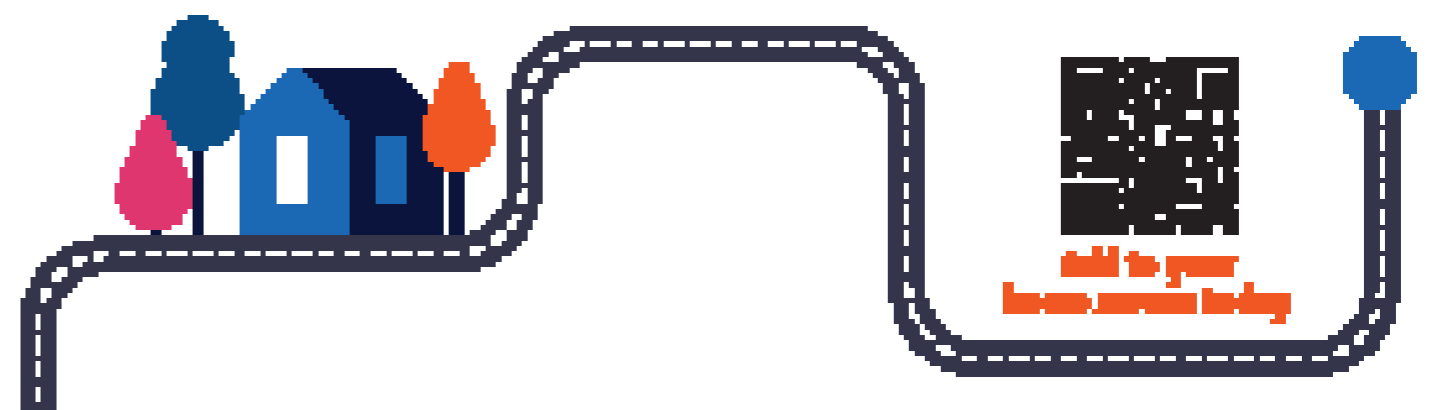
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Dynatec Consulting's Kenton Matthews, with his partner and fellow automation expert, Chelsea Abel

## The hub of the home

Spinal Life's Assistive Technology room has had an epic glow up: we speak to the man behind this brilliant tech transformation

If you've visited the Assistive Technology room at Spinal Life's Healthy Living Centre in Brisbane recently, you might have noticed it's had an upgrade.

Or, actually, maybe you haven't.

"In all honesty, it doesn't look very different," says Kenton Matthews from Dynatec Consulting. "The difference is that it does a lot more."

Kenton partnered with Spinal Life Australia to design, install and set up a fully integrated home automation system. He also arranged for Control4 to donate all of the hardware for the system: approximately \$35,000 worth.

You can control the room via a number of methods, including voice, a touchscreen panel on the wall, phone, iPad or remote control. Lamps, lights, blinds, TV, security cameras and doorbell, plus motorised kitchen benches, overhead cupboards and a bed are just some of the equipment that has been integrated.

"We are typically engaged business-to-business to assist in the delivery of large commercial projects, but I wanted to give something back to this community, so I reached out to Spinal Life and offered our services," says Kenton. "As well as consulting, we'll handle the technology component and install whatever's needed, and then provide 24/7 support services – but only to Spinal Life clientele."

Not everybody needs a high level of automation, and a trip to JB Hi-Fi or Bunnings might be all that's required if you're just after something like a smart video doorbell.

"But once you start wanting multiple services all seamlessly controlled in one user interface, or you want advanced automations where systems need to be able to talk to one another, that's pretty much the tipping point into our world," says Kenton. "We do things with professional-level

hardware that you can't buy off the shelf, and take things to a level that you couldn't do as a consumer."

Yes, it can be expensive and no, the NDIS can't approve everything, but Kenton still wants to be able to help people make the right decision, even if they don't end up needing the services of Dynatec Consulting.

"Jocelyn Stocker, the Assistive Technology Mentor at Spinal Life, is obviously the first port of call for anyone considering home automation, and will work with us if needed," says Kenton, who also works very closely with Occupational Therapists.

Kenton's motivations for connecting with Spinal Life are also deeply personal.

"I'm someone who lives with a spinal cord injury myself," explains Kenton. "I had a mountain biking accident in 2018, went over the handlebars, slammed back-first into a tree, and then when I went to get up I couldn't move my legs."

Kenton was helicoptered from Toowoomba to the Princess Alexandra Hospital where he underwent multiple surgeries and was in the Spinal Injuries Unit for a couple of months.

"I had a fractured T2 and a burst fracture of L1 – that's what did all the damage," he recalls. "I had 60% compression of the spinal cord, but with a little bit of motor function in my legs – just enough for me to build on each day. I'm very fortunate: while I might be totally incontinent, I've got full mobility."

After working in the building automation industry for years Kenton launched Dynatec Consulting in April last year and has already had to take on five other staff members. But he's charmingly low-key about his success.

"I just like helping people, to be honest," he says. "When you're genuinely helping someone in a way that completely transforms their way of life, to me that's so much more fulfilling than just automating some rich guy's house. I'm a lot more motivated and passionate about helping people who really need it."

For more information about Assistive Technology with Spinal Life, go to [spinal.com.au/assistivetechology](https://spinal.com.au/assistivetechology) or call **1300 774 625**.

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