

THINK

SPINAL CORD INJURY AWARENESS WEEK
A SPLIT SECOND COULD LAST A LIFETIME

Photo Opportunity

10 November 2014

A split second decision can cause a life-long injury

Victoria's Paul Mariager was just 16 years old when a single moment changed the course of his life.

Paul had always lived a carefree life that revolved around having fun. One of the things he enjoyed the most was riding his BMX. Ironically, it was a BMX jump gone wrong however, that resulted in him becoming a quadriplegic, just four weeks after his 16th birthday.

"My life was turned upside down. Instead of having fun with mates, going to parties and riding bikes, I was now hospitalised and having to confront the new reality of living life as a quadriplegic. It was an incredibly hard transition. I questioned whether I could go on."

It was a long road to recovery, but with the fantastic support of his family, friends and community he made the commitment to keep living.

"After my accident I returned to school and finished my VCE. Eventually I moved out of home and I went to university, graduating with a bachelor degree and graduate diploma. I'm now more than six years into my career and I've bought my own place. I have travelled, and seen many of the wonders of Australia. Most importantly, I've had fun."

"My past life of being able-bodied is just that, the past. I look forward to the future. A future where I continue to have fun, continue to make something of myself."

Paul shares his story ahead of 2014 Spinal Cord Injury Awareness Week (9-16 November) with the aim of inspiring people to take simple precautions that may save them from a life-long disability.

"There are more than 10,000 Australians living with a spinal cord injury and this number continues to climb, with around 350 to 400 people sustaining this injury every year here in Australia," Paul said.

"At present, there is no cure for a spinal cord injury so prevention is crucial."

Road trauma, water-related accidents, falls/crashes, and incidents involving sporting/leisure activities are the major causes of spinal cord injury and in many cases, these injuries could be prevented.

Paul is a speaker for Independence Australia's SpinChat program that sees young people with spinal cord injuries speaking to secondary school students about spinal cord injury and risk prevention.

About Independence Australia

Independence Australia is part of the Australian Spinal Injury Alliance, a collective of the country's eight leading spinal cord injury-specific service providers.

Peter Turner, CEO Independence Australia said the Alliance was formed in 2011 to raise awareness about spinal cord injuries and to promote the capability of people who have a spinal cord injury as valued members of our community.

9-15 NOVEMBER 2014

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"The role of the Alliance is to represent, at a national level, the interests of all Australians who have sustained a spinal cord injury via five key priorities: government liaison, advocacy, injury prevention, information sharing and awareness raising," Peter Turner said.

"Research and incidence data has revealed the urgent need to focus on prevention. In many cases, people are simply not aware of the true risk of what they may be doing, be it at the beach or river, on off-road trails, on the farm or from falls, which results in no preventive action being taken to avoid devastating accidents.

"Staggeringly, over a third of falls resulting in spinal cord injury are from a height of less than a metre." Young Australians in the 15-24 age group are the most likely to sustain a life-changing spinal cord injury.

"Understanding the real risks in what are often everyday activities for this age group and getting the message across that 'it could happen to me' are of paramount importance in driving home the prevention message," Peter Turner said.

Spinal Cord Injury Awareness Week activities are running across all states this week, concluding in Victoria with Accessibility Weekend; Saturday 15 to Sunday, 16 November.

Interview opportunity

Paul Mariager is available this week for interviews and can be contacted directly on 0438 431 558.

Photo / filming opportunity

Paul is presenting a SpinChat talk this week to year 11 students. If this is of interest, please call Suzanne for more details.

For more information, visit

www.sciaw.com.au

www.spinchat.org.au

www.accessibilityweekend.com.au

or contact

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