

Improving the Quality of Life of People with Physical Disabilities

AQA Information & Peer Support Update – June 2011

Welcome to our June 2011 newsletter where we update you on the progress of our work to assist people with spinal cord injury improve their independence, participation and quality of life. Your continued support contributes to this work and for that we thank you.

Peer Mentor Network - progress

AQA is expanding the reach and diversity of our Peer Support service by involving a network of volunteer mentors who are engaging with people in rehabilitation after a spinal cord injury and continuing supports as they return to their community.

We are pleased to report in the six months following our December newsletter, the volunteer peer network has grown to include 34 volunteer mentors assisting 63 clients. 46 of these clients have now returned to their communities after spinal rehabilitation and 17 are completing their rehabilitation, preparing for life in the community.



Each one of the volunteer mentors have been invaluable in providing direct one on one peer support and more informal visits to rehabilitation centres to have conversations about how people are travelling and to hear more about their interests and aspirations.

Regular peer support visits at the rehabilitation unit between mentors and peers usually occur during business hours although we have now expanded the time schedule to include evenings to assist people who aren't available during business hours. Opportunities for informal mentoring also occur when the rehabilitation centre is used by local wheelchair rugby and wheelchair basketball teams for training sessions.

Peer Support Evaluation

As part of the ongoing development of our Peer Support service, we completed an independent evaluation of the service in 2010. Using a variety of strategies including client interviews and focus groups, to understand people's experience of the peer support service, and practice in other sectors, this review found that AQA provides a peer support service that is highly regarded and valued by those who receive support.



It found that consistent with contemporary practice in health, disability and social services policy, the Victorian State Disability Plan 2002 – 2012, peer support programs are best delivered from a community platform as offered by AQA, rather than as a hospital or health based service.

We look forward to progressing the recommendations arising from this evaluation.

Naz Erdem & Peter Van Benthem & the AQA Peer Support team

SpinalHub Website

AQA recognises how important access to reliable information is to people with spinal cord injury. To this end AQA is participating in a collaborative with the TAC, Department of Health, Austin Health, Caulfield General Medical Centre and Independence Australia to develop a website targeted at people with a spinal cord injury. SpinalHub.com.au will be educational and full of information for Victorians with a spinal cord injury. For the first time this site will bring together set content about SCI with community resources and an interactive capability so that registered users can make comments & upload content. AQA has contributed to the navigation and content for the website. We look forward to the launch later this year and then to continuing to grow the site with user generated contents and reviews.

Member Research Participation

AQA has actively promoted opportunities for members and subscribers to participate in research projects which have the potential to improve quality of life after a spinal cord injury. These research opportunities have come to fruition with AQA's ongoing liaison with Research Centre's at LaTrobe, Melbourne and Monash Universities.

AQA has supported several research projects to connect with potential research candidates and report back to members on progress. These projects include;

- Employment cessation - LaTrobe School of Public Health
- Social Support - LaTrobe School of Public Health
- Vehicle ride - LaTrobe - OT department
- Spinal Cord Injury Physical Activity - Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre

AQA has linked a number of these studies with spinal cord associations in other states and in doing so, drawn research subjects from across Australia.

We thank you for your continued interest and hope you will consider once again supporting this important work.

Peter Trethewey
CEO