

## **Brain Injury Waikato – a change of name and a birthday!**

Brain Injury Waikato had a name change in December 2016, from THINK! The Head Injury Network for Kiwis. They are turning 30 this year and will have a celebration with cake at the office in March 2018 during the Brain Injury Awareness Week.

A new brain injury occurs every 15 minutes in New Zealand. Brain Injury is called the silent epidemic because it goes largely unseen and the majority of clients deal with the long term consequences of brain injury which impede on their quality of life. Difficulties such as fatigue, memory loss, depression, anxiety, personality and cognitive changes impact on clients in their day-to-day functioning in a wide number of ways, including: slow processing of information, concentrating on tasks, recall of information in a functional manner, consistently planning and organising the day and problems with staying on task, sleep difficulties, poor reasoning skills and judgment that can change the individual dramatically. It is very difficult for others to understand these changes.

Brain Injury has a ripple effect. No family is ever prepared to comprehend the full magnitude of the life changes the brain injury creates. Family members have difficulty dealing with the person who has sustained the brain injury, due to emotional and behavioural problems which jeopardise their ability to hold down a job, and may also result in issues with the justice system.

For example, findings from the Brain Injury Incidence and Outcomes New Zealand in the Community (BIONIC) study, undertaken by researchers at the Auckland University of Technology in the Hamilton (urban) and Waikato (rural) regions (March 2010 – 2011) revealed that at 12-months post injury, sleep difficulties and post-concussive symptoms were reported by 40-50% of adults, and children had a nearly three-fold risk of clinically significant behavioural difficulties compared to children free from brain injury.

Edward (name changed), understands the difficulties of living with a brain injury. On the night of Valentine's Day, 1978, Edward had been partying with his friends in Tasmania. He was a passenger in his car when it collided with an oncoming car with its headlights burned out. Edward does not remember how long he was in the hospital, but he knows that he was in a coma for 13 weeks. His first memory involves a tea lady: "He can talk," he remembers the tea lady complaining, "but he's just too lazy."

The physical effects of the accident were easy to see; his entire left side, once dominant, "wouldn't work." His more hidden deficits, though more difficult to recognise, became clear to him over time. He could not remember things he had done one hour ago. Edward couldn't remember his wife, son or brother who had come over from N.Z.

After rehabilitation Edward came back to Auckland in 1979 and realised that, without the physical skills he had lost, his life would be drastically different. According to his specialist he would be institutionalised for the rest of his life. Family was too helpful – Edward didn't want to succumb to what they wanted to do for him. He moved in with a friend and then later decided to move to Hamilton and bought a house.

It didn't take Edward long to realise there wasn't enough done in Hamilton or the Waikato for people who have sustained a brain injury. He went to Auckland and attended a meeting there to look at the kind of support they have. He couldn't remember much about the meeting, but knew Waikato need a group for people who have sustained a brain injury.

One of the reasons' being Social Welfare – they would phone and ask for documents, when Edward showed up for a meeting, he wouldn't have the documents or other papers they asked him to bring because he couldn't remember it. He used to volunteer at Social Welfare and realised no one had any knowledge about brain injury. Social Welfare wouldn't or didn't want to believe he had memory problems as a result of his brain injury, he realised he really needed an advocate.

Edward started the first Support Group meeting in 1983 in Hamilton. They had a big turnout. People didn't really speak up and acknowledge they had a brain injury – it was sort of a stigma to say you have a brain injury.

The Brain Injury Waikato office was established in 1987, because there was a big need to have someone to advocate on behalf of people who have sustained a brain injury. Employees at ACC, social welfare and other government departments had no idea about the problems people with a brain injury experience i.e. fatigue, memory loss, slow processing of information, mood swings and more.

Edward became President of the Society and was on the board for several years. He became the first life member of the Society, and still volunteers where he can.

“It is really good to know the Brain Injury Waikato staff are there when you need support. So a big thank you to Marion and Ella and all those who work quietly behind the lines” says Edward.

Brain injury does not discriminate, it can happen to anyone. Statistics show that those under 35 make up 70% of all brain injuries. A mild brain injury which includes a concussion may have long term effects that are not so mild after all.

Brain Injury Waikato affiliated to the National Office, Brain Injury NZ Incorporated with all the other Brain Injury Associations and Head Injury Societies around the country. In line with this, the Board felt it would be a good business decision to change their name to Brain Injury Waikato Incorporated as it would be a more inclusive name. They remain autonomous and still carry out the business as usual providing services to people and families affected by brain injury.

Brain Injury Waikato have a community based Seminar focused on the many aspects of Living with a Brain Injury for Health professionals and Service Providers and anyone interested in brain injury. This year they are focusing on Children and the impact of brain injury as well as adults. The topics for adults are around the rehabilitation pathway for the 'whole person' and a community based rehabilitation model.

This Seminar will give Service Providers and Health Professionals a better understanding of brain injury when working with clients and families whose life has been changed as a result of a brain injury. It will further raise awareness of brain injury and the impact on the person, their family and the community. At the seminar a parent will share her journey following her son's brain injury at age 3.

This seminar is on 16 June 9.30 till 3pm, Chartwell Room, Hamilton Gardens. Registrations from 8.30am. Another public seminar will be scheduled later in the year for adults with a focus on concussion.

Information will be available on our website [www.braininjurywaikato.org.nz](http://www.braininjurywaikato.org.nz) and Facebook [www.facebook.com/BrainInjuryWaikato](https://www.facebook.com/BrainInjuryWaikato)



Caption: Ella Scheepers and Marion Baird from Brain Injury Waikato with the sponsored car by Suzuki NZ and Nicholson Auto Morrinsville