

Community Spotlight: THINK! The Head Injury Network for Kiwis

Brain injury is called the silent epidemic because it goes largely unseen and in many cases has long term consequences for the person and their family, requiring a wide range of support and medical services. The estimated cost on the health system is \$100 million a year, but it is expected that this figure will rise significantly. Brain injuries, including stroke and traumatic brain injury, are the leading cause of disability and death in New Zealand.

However, the real cost in terms of rehabilitation, family impact and far reaching social implications for people whose head injury lasts a lifetime, is incalculable.

Brain injury does not discriminate; it can happen to anyone, anytime, anywhere. Statistics show that those under the age of 34 make up 70% of all brain injuries. The consequences of a mild brain injury which includes a concussion may not be mild at all. (Prof Valery Feigin AUT, 2012)

A new brain injury occurs every 15 minutes in New Zealand.

THINK! The Head Injury Network for Kiwis provides information, support, advocacy, education and raises awareness of brain injury in the community. The goal of THINK! is to increase the awareness and prevention of head injury throughout Waikato.

Think! has organised a community based seminar focused on the many aspects of living with a brain injury irrespective of the cause. Topics include: defining brain injury, behavioural issues, relationships and coping strategies, working with brain injury in the community. A wide range of specialist speakers including a Neurologist, Neuropsychologist, Senior Research Fellow, Social Worker, Speech Language Therapist, and a panel of family members sharing their perspectives of a person with a brain injury.

This seminar will bring a range of community providers, health providers and people who live with brain injury together to gain knowledge, network and share their experience.

To find out more visit www.thinknz.org.nz, or contact Ella Scheepers, Manager, ella@thinknz.org.nz
Seminar: Living with a brain injury, 24 June 2016, Hamilton Gardens

Join THINK! for their balloon release to help raise awareness for all survivors, and loved ones lost to traumatic brain injury. This event will take place on Tuesday, 28 June 2016 at 12pm at THINK! office, 11 Somerset Street, Hamilton. Contact Ella on 8391191

Leonie's story

Leonie Moxham-Smith received a brain injury when she fell off her horse. She had owned and ridden horses all her life, and cannot recall any details of her accident. What she has been told is, the horse she was riding was spooked and took off unexpectedly. When the horse swerved to miss a tree, Leonie fell off head first into that tree. In her hurry that morning Leonie had not put on her usual skull cap that she wore riding, and had on a felt hat instead.

Leonie was air lifted to Palmerston North Hospital, and had to spend time in an induced coma. She was then transferred to Hamilton so that she could be nearer family. Doctors told her family she would probably never walk or talk again, and would probably end up a vegetable.

“To my family’s credit they stuck by me, showing love and support. Without their many prayers and love, I would have been a lot worse off” says Leonie.

Leonie has since proven the doctors verdict wrong, and has far exceeded their original diagnosis.

The biggest hurdle Leonie had to face was coming to the realization that her husband and then young children weren’t around anymore. Her husband was not able to cope with all the ramifications, and left her. Her children were faced with the reality of not having a mother involved in their day to day life.

“I coped with this by telling myself it was all a bad dream” says Leonie.

Eventually Leonie realised she had to come to terms with it being actual reality.

“I was dealt with two big whammies at once. The breakdown of my marriage, and the fact that I now lived alone in Hamilton after suffering a severe head injury” says Leonie.

Leonie was unable to return to her job she had loved prior to her accident. The meds she had to take caused weight gain, and she has found it harder to shed the kilos – especially with not being able to ride and be around horses anymore.

THINK! has supported Leonie in a number of ways. It has provided a forum where people can get together and share their stories in an informal way, and support each other.

“I think we are truly blessed to have this facility. We have not been left to fend for ourselves under the Hamilton bridge, and the people I have met through this experience have been quite mind blowing!” says Leonie.

“I feel rather like the \$6 million dollar woman, rebuilt from scratch and ready to take on the world!”