

The official magazine of

# **CATWALK**™

Funding research to cure spinal cord injury

July 2023



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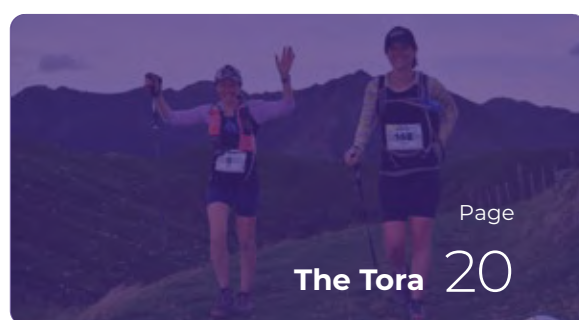
# July 2023

## This issue

A special thank you  
to our supporters  
who help us produce  
this magazine

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**On the cover:** CatWalk Ambassador Sophia Malthus and Indy Henman - This is Wheel Life

# Founder's Footnote



## Dear CatWalkers

Time flies when you're having fun and that's exactly what we were doing back on February 9 in Hawkes Bay!

It was a simply super weekend, with CatWalk hosted by good friends Sally Apatu and Johnny Bostock at their beautiful home and garden in Havelock North to celebrate the Dig Deep campaign. It was all fabulous, and we were particularly fortunate to secure the incredibly generous gift of "The Falls" from Paul and Fran Dibble and the Gow Langsford Gallery to kick off proceedings.

There's more on this further in the magazine, but I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank the organising team behind this campaign - Sarah Delmonte, Kath Elworthy, Emma Higgins, Paula Petrie, Anna Petro, Kirsty Rueppell, Angela Williams - who all gave up enormous amounts of time to sell trowels (there's still a few available - so make sure you secure one

before there's not!) and create an unforgettable event in an idyllic location, all for CatWalk's benefit and surrounded by a collection of wonderfully fun and generous guests.

Onto other news, and we are getting closer to launching the Wheelie Accessible Campervan. Thanks to Chris Cunard at ACM Motorhomes this campervan will be something we can all be extremely proud of and I personally cannot wait to hire it as soon as we are able! Darren Milner and Milner Mobility are managing the day-to-day hiring and running of this special vehicle and as soon as we have a definite 'on road date' we will be releasing the web link to our list of interested people so you can book your time in your very own home away from home. To be put on this list or just be kept up to date on the campervan please send your name and email to [chris@catwalk.org.nz](mailto:chris@catwalk.org.nz)

A couple of important things to note about the campervan is 40% of the rental rate will go to Milner Mobility towards management, whilst 60% is returned to CatWalk and the NZ Spinal Trust so you know that when you hire it your money is going to two great causes.

We all agreed that the absolutely No.1 non-negotiable was that the wheelie got to travel up the front so they could enjoy the views and NZ at large, I'm so pleased this will definitely be the case and can't wait to hit the road!

We now need a name for our wheelie cool campervan: please send your suggestions to [chris@catwalk.org.nz](mailto:chris@catwalk.org.nz). Happy Glamper is one that's just been suggested to me, and I've got to admit I quite like it.

Enjoy winter, it's jolly cold at the moment! But we're already planning 2024 adventures after a covid NZ hibernation...cycling/horse riding in Mongolia is on the agenda if the stars align. More on that soon.

Keep being amazing you and if you're looking for a good audio book, try Sam Neill's...I've loved it!





The only time  
we're looking for  
*below par*  
support!

Come join us for

# The CatWalk Open

SUPPORTED BY JARDEN

Thursday 14th March 2024  
@ Wainui Golf Course,  
North Auckland

**Wainui.**  
EAT. PLAY. MEET

Teams will compete for the coveted  
**CatWalk Blazer** while  
supporting spinal cord injury research.

**Special prizes** and events  
throughout the course!

**For further information and registration**  
[www.catwalk.org.nz](http://www.catwalk.org.nz) or email [info@catwalk.org.nz](mailto:info@catwalk.org.nz)

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AVAILABLE!**

 **JARDEN**  
New Zealand's leading investment and advisory group

 **CATWALK**<sup>TM</sup>  
Funding research to cure spinal cord injury

# See who you're supporting with your donations

Auckland

## The NZ Brain Bee Challenge (NZBBC)

This high school competition encourages students in Year 11 to learn about the brain and its functions, the latest advances in neuroscience research and career pathways.

Annual commitment

Auckland

## Spinal Cord Injury Research Symposium

A collaboration of stakeholders with a mutual interest in improving the lives of those with spinal cord injuries.

Auckland

*Dr Simon O'Carroll*

## Spinal Cord Injury Research Facility (SCIRF)

Underpinning our research, the goal of the SCIRF is to maintain ongoing research programmes to develop novel treatments for SCI and to attract new ideas through local and international biomedical and clinical collaborations.

Total commitment: \$580,880 (committed until 2025)

Sydney

*NeuRA, SpinalCure and CatWalk*

## Project Spark: sparking a revolution in the way spinal cord injury is treated

Building on the eWALK trial evidence, this project aims to take the research out of the lab and into mainstream use. Project Spark involves a series of rigorous clinical trials and community-based studies with the initial aim of improving respiratory, hand and upper limb function.

Total CatWalk commitment: AUD\$1,121,500 (committed 2023-2026)

Auckland

*Dr Bruce Harland*

## Electroceutical therapies to treat spinal cord injury in a preclinical model

This fellowship will create and test second-generation bioelectric implants that are flexible, and use electrodes that are less prone to degeneration. It will focus on one of the most promising therapies to spinal cord injury and explore how well the implants are tolerated; seeking to provide evidence for axonal regeneration.

Total commitment: \$246,362

	2023 1 April '22- 31 March '23	2024 1 April '23- 31 March '24	2025 1 April '24- 31 March '25
The NZ Brain Bee Challenge (NZBBC)	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
Spinal Cord Injury Research Symposium	\$14,000		
Spinal Cord Injury Research Facility (SCIRF)	\$116,176	\$116,176	\$116,176
Project Spark: sparking a revolution in the way spinal cord injury is treated	\$320,116	\$364,079	\$364,079
Electroceutical therapies to treat spinal cord injury in a preclinical model	\$123,181	\$123,181	



Auckland Dr Brad Raos

## Computational modelling and analysis to inform electrical treatments following spinal cord injury and assist in development of electrical biomarkers

This impressive project will provide a means to both record and stimulate directly from the spinal cord. It has high potential to provide breakthroughs, not only in terms of treatment but also in understanding of spinal cord injury.

Total commitment: \$246,362

Auckland Associate Professor Darren Svirskis

## Applying sustained electrical fields to achieve functional recovery after SCI

This project aims to determine the efficacy of sustained electrical fields incorporated into a bioelectronic implant to direct axonal regeneration after SCI.

Total commitment: \$337,942

Auckland Dr Sheryl Tan

## Calcium binding buffer proteins and neuroprotection

A series of functional studies will be conducted using human spinal cord tissue and stem cells to see if the distribution of calcium binding buffers are altered in the injured spinal cord and therefore if they create neurodegeneration.

Total commitment: \$216,586

Auckland Dr Amy Chapman

## Generating human oligodendrocyte precursor cells from adult human dermal fibroblasts – Project funding

Extension payment due to COVID-19 lockdown

This project will compare the viability and differentiation of cells encapsulated in 3D bio printed hydrogels versus the traditional flat 2D substrates.

Total commitment: \$55,833 +extension

	\$106,884	\$106,884
\$64,700		
\$115,592	\$11,768	
	\$1,952	
2023 1 April '22 31 March '23	2024 1 April '23 31 March '24	2025 1 April '24 31 March '25
<b>\$768,765</b>	<b>\$ 739,040</b>	<b>\$602,139</b>

**Total :**

Thank you for all your support!

Your generosity enables critical research and gives hope to those with spinal cord injuries that they will walk again.

# Spinal Cord Injury Research Facility

## Progress Update July 2023 - Dr Simon O'Carroll

### In 2023, the SCIRF has two new exciting areas of research underway.

These build on our previous work showing that blocking inflammation and removing scar tissue from the injured cord are beneficial in promoting recovery after injury. Spinal cord injury is complex, with many different processes going on in the spinal cord. We are developing our experiments to be what is known as a combination approach – where we target different parts of injury to improve the likelihood that it will be successful in the clinic.

#### A combination approach using our scar-busting gene therapy.

We now know our gene therapy that removes scar tissue, promotes nerve cell growth and functional recovery also changes the immune system in the spinal cord and is involved in the growth of support cells called oligodendrocytes – which are crucial for nerve cells to function correctly and are lost after injury. We are now using our gene therapy in these support cells to 1) help protect these cells and 2) remove the scar, 3) change the immune system to reduce inflammation, and 4) promote nerve cell growth.

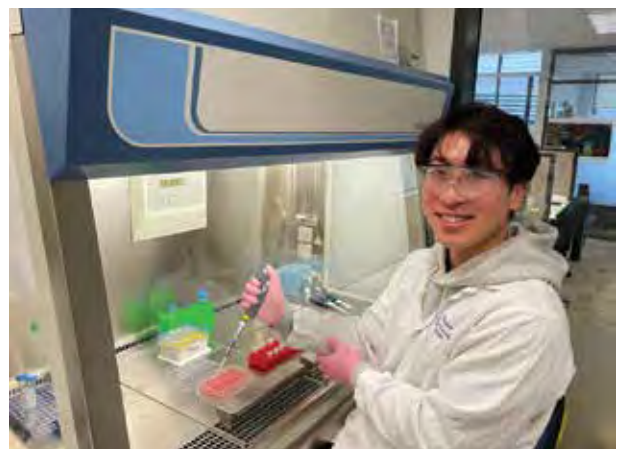
We will then combine this with exercise rehabilitation to promote regrowth and the proper reconnection of nerve cells in the spinal cord. Masters student Calvin Young has just finished modifying the gene therapy so that it can target the support cells. The next step will be to test if it protects these cells after injury.

#### A combination approach using a clinically used drug as a treatment for spinal cord injury

Another project that we have got underway this year builds on our previous work with the peptide that stopped inflammation in the cord. We are now testing a different drug that not only reduces inflammation but has the added benefit of promoting the growth of new support cells, the nerve-protecting oligodendrocytes. We believe that having a drug that does both of these things will lead to a more effective treatment. We ultimately plan to use this drug in combination with exercise rehabilitation. Importantly, this drug is already in clinical use and can be 'repurposed' for use in spinal cord injury – speeding up the process, as it has already been through trials in people to prove that it is safe. We have just completed the first set of experiments with Honours student Kevin Roy, who is now starting to analyse the data.



Honours student Kevin Roy



Masters student Calvin Young



**“As we test our electric field treatment, we also use our implant to record electrical activity from neurons in the spine”**

## Progress Update July 2023 - Associate Professor Darren Svirskis

**Our research projects have produced some very exciting results recently.**

Previously we demonstrated that our custom bioelectronic implant can be inserted and maintained directly on the spinal cord of rats for 12 weeks. We currently have our first cohort of eight animals receiving electric field treatment. These animals had bioelectronic implants installed and a thoracic impact injury delivered to the spinal cord at a T11 level. Starting the day after surgery, they have received an hour of electrical field treatment to the injury site administered every weekday (delivered using our implant). The treated animals have shown an improved recovery profile versus control animals who do not receive treatment. Interestingly, recovery of leg function was worse for treated animals in the first 2 weeks, became equal to the control animals at 3 weeks, and have then improved compared to the control animals from weeks 4 to 10. Treated rats also show recovery of touch sensitivity compared with controls. We have additional animals and surgeries planned from July to complete group numbers and confirm the effects are real. We will then investigate whether the treatment results in axon (nerve) regeneration around the injury site by looking at nerves that extend between the spinal cord and the brain.

As we test our electric field treatment, we also use our implant to record electrical activity from

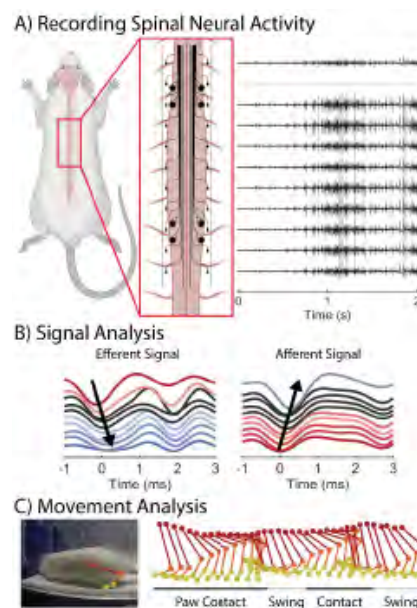
neurons in the spine. Brittany Hazelgrove, who has recently been confirmed into the PhD program after 12 months of research, has developed methods to detect and analyse this neural activity. In the figure below, (Panel A) shows where our implant records electrical activity from in the spinal cord – each spike in these graphs represents a neuron sending a signal through the spine. The early stages of our signal analysis (Panel B) classifies these signals as either (1) efferent (signals travelling along the cord from the brain to the body, like motor signals traveling from the brain to muscles), or (2) afferent (signals travelling from the body to the brain, like sensory signals travel from the tips of your toes to your brain).

In order to further understand this neural activity, we are developing methods to track the movement of animals using AI-based (artificial intelligence) motion capture (Panel C). This will allow us to determine which neural signals are related to different parts of an animal's movement. As we combine these signal and movement analyses, we aim to develop biomarkers that describe the severity of a spinal cord injury, the success of our treatment and the progress towards eventual recovery.

Building on our research to date, we have been successful in winning a prestigious funding award from the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program, which falls under the Department of Defence (United States). This funding, worth more than \$800,000 over the next three years, with further funding from

CatWalk, will help to support and extend our exciting findings. We will look specifically at two things: Firstly, a promising type of electric field stimulation to regenerate damaged nerves, and secondly, to further develop electrical biomarkers of spinal cord injury and recovery.

This funding also supports research being done by Professor Maria Asplund at our partners lab at Chalmers University in Sweden, where our implants are designed and made. In addition, this then further allows us to draw on the expertise of Professor Riyi Shi at Purdue University in the US as a consultant.





# Project Spark can change lives



Alex Richter, participating in the Get a Grip Trial.

**Project Spark aims to prepare the evidence required to approve a range of treatments for people with spinal cord injury, the kind of treatments that reconnect brain and body, returning meaningful levels of function.**

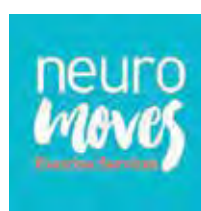
It also aims to fully explore neurostimulation, alone as well as in combination with other therapies, providing global efforts with a solid data set so that the body of science can move forward as a whole.

Thanks to co-funding from CatWalk and SpinalCure Australia, two world-leading clinical trials are underway in Australia and two more have received funding from a \$10m grant round that SpinalCure secured from the

Federal Government. These four trials are part of the broader 'Project Spark' initiative.

1. The eWalk trial: Australasia's first neurostimulation clinical trial, aiming to restore walking ability for incomplete paraplegics — recruiting in Sydney, Melbourne and three international sites.

Around 50% of eWALK's 50 participants have now been through the 12-week protocol across all five trial sites. The NeuRA team expects to complete enrolment mid next 2024 with preliminary results expected at the end of 2024. The major issue now is securing suitable volunteers. The research team need to recruit people who live further away, and therefore provide funds for them to stay in suitable accommodation close to a trial site for the 12-weeks of treatment.



**SpinalCure has launched a major recruitment campaign to help find suitable volunteers for eWALK and other cure-related clinical trials.**

2. Get a Grip: The second neurostimulation trial aims to improve hand, arm and respiratory function for people with quadriplegia. Dubbed "Get a Grip" this study is initially recruiting volunteers at Sydney's Clyde and St Peter's NeuroMoves clinics with the first of up to 96 volunteers commencing treatment this month. A Perth site will follow during the coming months as planned.

**The two additional trials are due to commence towards the end of this year:**

3. The first, led by Professor Jane Butler at NeuRA, will test neurostimulation's ability to restore or improve walking in people with incomplete spinal cord

injuries, similar to eWalk. This is an expanded phase 2/3 trial and will widen the eligibility criteria to recruit 142 incomplete quadriplegics and paraplegics.

4. The second, led by Professor David Berlowitz at The University of Melbourne, will compare two promising therapies with a combination of the two — neurostimulation and acute intermittent hypoxia (short periods of low oxygen levels) — with the aim of restoring arm, hand and respiratory function for those with quadriplegia.





© Eva Bradley Photography

## Dig Deep for CatWalk - 'The Finale'

**The Dig Deep campaign has consumed the past two years for a passionate team of CatWalk girls, working through the constraints and challenges of Covid.**

A fall for CatWalk founder Catriona Williams when being carried down some steps, and suffering a second broken neck, instigated this particular push but overall (as always) the aim was to represent all those who at various times in their lives have had to Dig Deep physically and emotionally to get up and get going again.

So Catriona's tight knit group of friends once again gathered together to turn a negative into a positive and raise as much as they could for CatWalk. What's equally important in telling this story is that each girl involved had been through a big loss or trauma in their lives which meant they truly understood the enormity, commitment and sheer tenacity required to Dig Deep when the going gets tough.

So, thinking outside the box as always, Dig Deep was born.

Importing the very best hand forged trowels from Sneeboer in the Netherlands, individually embossed and including a lifetime guarantee, was the first part of the campaign. Something for Mum, Dad, auntie, uncle, brother or sister ... everyone can benefit from a little time in the garden.

Happily, the trowels have sold incredibly well but there are still a few left and you can buy them via [chris@catwalk.org.nz](mailto:chris@catwalk.org.nz) Don't miss out as they will eventually run out, and even more importantly getting your hands on one means owning a collector's item!

The second part of Dig Deep was this year's incredibly generous offer of Sally Apatu and Johnny Bostock to open their beautiful Hawke's Bay garden for up to 50 people to enjoy the very best of the Bay and their home, with all money raised going to CatWalk.

The big-ticket item on the night was the gift from Paul and Fran Dibble, thanks to Gow Langsford Gallery. An iconic piece which drew in the arty connoisseurs who truly understand excellent art.





The amazing DigDeep4CatWalk Team. L-R Waz Delmonte, Sam Williams, Angela Williams, Sarah Delmonte, Hannah Petrie, Georgia Petrie, Paula Petrie, Tundy Petrie

The generosity of all - from the committee organising it with their time given, along with suppliers, sponsors, donators and guests -- was extraordinary. Artists were swinging from trees (literally), CatWalk's deputy chair, Grant Sharman, was mouth painting a stunning bottle of Hawkes Bays best red, and the music which filtered through from various garden corners was second to none. Please note the list of supporters, choose to use their products whenever you can and even more importantly let them know it's because they 'backed' CatWalk.

And then the world turned upside down. Just 72 hours after this event Cyclone Gabrielle struck, much of that gorgeous garden was uprooted and many of the guests had their property damaged.

Homes were washed away, local vineyards disappeared and apple orchards and vegetable gardens were smashed to pieces.

A nightmare after a magical evening. So from all of us at CatWalk and Team Dig Deep, we wish to extend our heartfelt thoughts to all affected by 'Gabrielle' throughout the North Island.

We thank everyone for their belief in our team and who supported this very special event by 'digging deep.' We promise to do the same for you.

### Our grateful thanks to the following;

- |                     |                    |                   |
|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Kerre Woodham       | Lesleigh Jermanus  | Kathryn Elworthy  |
| Ben Plumley         | Grant Sharman      | Emma Higgins      |
| Claire Boswell-Ruys | Stephen Davis-     | Paula Petrie      |
| Tony Phelps         | Howard             | Anna Petro        |
| Novastar            | Paul & Fran Dibble | Angela Williams   |
| Johnny Bostock      | Top Notch Topiary  | Catriona Williams |
| Sally Apatu         | Greg Morice        | Olivia Apatu      |
| Waz Delmonte        | Sarah Bryant       | Issy Elworthy     |
| Ans Westra          | Christine Cottle   | Georgia Petrie    |
| Claudia Campbell    | Matthew Gough      | Hannah Petrie     |
| George Saville      | Raewyn Newcombe    | Tundy Petrie      |
| Fiona Pardington    | Sarah Delmonte     | Sam Williams      |





Anna and Stanley

## Anna Hiatt – Ambassador

**A**nna counts herself as one of the “lucky” ones. After fracturing her T5,6 & 7 and spending three and a half months at the Burwood Spinal Unit, Anna was able to walk out of the hospital on discharge.

Anna has been an Ambassador for CatWalk since 2007, was a member of the volunteer committee that organised the very successful 2008 ‘Up and Away’ event held in Christchurch, and the 2017 ‘Remarkable’ event in Queenstown.

Now living in Wānaka, along with her two gorgeous 4-legged friends Dudley and Stanley, Anna runs

two exciting businesses – Pure Chaos, a bespoke event consulting company, and Hiatt & Co, an edible gardening business, designed to teach busy beginner gardeners how to create their own gorgeous edible gardens.

**Q: You suffered a SCI injury – can you tell us how you sustained your injury, and your experience with recovery?**

I had a car accident that resulted in my SCI injury. It was all a quick learning curve to understand a whole new language around what a SCI injury is, brings and means. I had the most amazing unwavering support while I recovered in hospital. At the time my injury, it was deemed too risky to operate, so bed rest it was while I healed.

My family and friends were incredible coming to visit me and kept me entertained while I was on ten plus weeks of lying flat on my back. Not so easy at times for a sporty active outdoors type who wasn’t keen on staying still, but I learnt pretty quickly that I could move, most others around me couldn’t.

Nowadays with the advancements of medicine, science and amazing technology, if I had the same injury as I did then, the amazing team would have operated on me. All the staff I had while was in Burwood Spinal Unit were incredible, supportive, kind and positive helping to getting me back on my feet.

**Q: How did you become involved with CatWalk?**

I knew how lucky I was to walk out of the unit and although I wasn't sure how, I knew that I really wanted to help in some way those less fortunate than me with SCI's. A little further down the track I reached out to Cat, a long-time friend, to let her know if there was ever anything I could do to help CatWalk in some way in Christchurch then I was keen. Well if you know Catriona, and you offer to help, that's it, game on... the rest is history.

**Q: You have been involved in some major events through your company Pure Chaos, including the World Triathlon World Champs, held in Auckland in 2012. Tell us about your views on accessibility for those with a SCI and how these are factored in when planning events such as these.**

I have been lucky enough to work on a variety of major international sporting events where para sport is included in the overall programme. These have included World Triathlon events, Winter Games NZ and Challenge Wānaka. For me, accessibility is part of delivering a great event for all athletes regardless and ensuring they have the best experience possible. Accessibility is something I feel strongly about and wherever possible would strive for this to be included in all aspects of the event, and make this happen. Ideally this is from event inception, but if the event is already established, then always looking at ways for the event to make it happen. If accessibility hasn't been actively considered you can bet your bottom dollar it will have been by the time I get involved.

**Q: Tell us about your role as a CatWalk Ambassador and why it means so much to you?**

To be involved in the amazing organisation of CatWalk is an utter pleasure and an honour.

You only have to spend a little time with the likes of Catriona and good friend Hamish Ramsden to want to be able to be involved in some way to make a difference to find a cure for SCI's.

To witness their infectious enthusiasm for life, their courage, how positively they cope with the daily challenges they are faced with that we totally take for granted (or don't even know they face) never ceases to amaze and humble me. I have a deep admiration for them both, they are a constant inspiration to me personally and many others to positively live life no matter what cards we are dealt.

Being involved with the CatWalk Trust is one way I can help a tiny bit to make a difference to those less lucky than me.

# SAVE *the* DATE

FOR THE

CATWALK GALA DINNER

SATURDAY  
22<sup>nd</sup> June 2024

ELLERSLIE EVENTS

CENTRE,  
AUCKLAND





CatWalk Ambassador Hamish Ramsden

# Working With Kids

with CatWalk Ambassador  
Hamish Ramsden

**What's that saying? Never work with children or animals, or is it never film with children or animals? I'm not sure, but one thing that I do know, is that I help out in at my local school with children and I love it.**

What my work involves is working in the Learning Support Department of my local school and helping children on a one-to-one basis, from years five to year eight (8 to 12-year-olds) who are a little bit behind in spelling, reading, comprehension, and/or maths. It is an interesting position as every child is different, some test the metal and others don't test the metal enough. What I do know is that I have the utmost admiration for teachers who have to try and corral 25 to 30 kids at one time to concentrate, whereas I have enough challenges just trying to maintain the attention of one child!

I did wonder initially whether there would be lots of questions about my electric wheelchair, but such is the beautiful honesty of youth,

there really have been no more leading questions than, How fast does it go? And what does this button do? I am more than happy to answer any questions but they just accept me as I am, a salient fact that we adults can all learn a lot from. I'm not blind to the fact that it is also healthy to have someone zipping round the school in a wheelchair, as not only does it normalise it somewhat, but it also shows that there is no reason why anyone or everyone can't get out and about and contribute.

Being in the age bracket that the children are, they are just old enough to think that I know what I'm talking about! but not too old to tell me to get stuffed! (which, I hope wouldn't happen anyway, but you never know). The thing that does strike me time and time again, is that at that age the kids are a direct clone of one of their parents, as puberty and the time to start challenging thoughts and ideas is not really upon them yet. If little Johnny is a very shy child then invariably one of his parents will be very shy and if little Susie is perhaps a little arrogant then indeed one of the parents will exhibit those same traits. It really is strong evidence that nature at this stage has a stronger influence than nature.

So how do I connect with the kids? In a relationship sense. Initially I really try and focus on what spins their dial, what is the one thing that they love to do, and once I've found that, it gives me something to fall back on if I'm trying to engage them in conversation and get them to feel good about themselves. In a hard educational sense it can be disheartening at times when you put in so much time and effort with a particular child but do not make as much progress as you would have wished for. I don't feel alone in this, but resign myself to the fact that if I've managed to get the child to feel more confident in themselves, then perhaps that is more important than them being able to quickly recite the times tables? I hope so anyway.

Occasionally I get to have some interaction with the child or parent a year or three after they have left my clutches, and occasionally just occasionally, I might get a bit of feedback that the child that I'd seen did indeed find value in my lessons. I can tell you one thing for sure, that feedback, no matter how small or where it comes from leaves me with a nice warm glow inside.



ACM Motorhomes produce top quality vehicles such as this example\*

# Wheelie Camper Build Update

[acmmotorhomes.co.nz](http://acmmotorhomes.co.nz)

**The purpose-built wheelie friendly motorhome is progressing well with the build at ACM Motorhomes in Auckland.**

CatWalk founder, Catriona Williams, had a dream...to be fair she has a few but when these dreams make the light of day by getting shared with friends they become a challenge to complete with their help of course. The accessible motorhome was one of these. The main criteria for the build was to ensure the wheelchair was in the front passenger position, or for some with an ezi-lock system, the driver.

“Too often, the wheelie has to sit in the back, and I wanted to change that”, says Catriona. “Chris at ACM, along with Darren at Milner Mobility, have been working together to make this happen, and I am excited with the progress that is being made. ACM builds are exceptional in quality, and the inside of the camper has been carefully thought out to ensure ease of use for us wheelies. The materials used and the workmanship is supreme, and I cannot wait to see the vehicle finished ready to use.”

At this stage, the plan is for the booking site to be available within the next couple of months, with a launch of the motorhome in Auckland towards the end of the year.

Thanks to the generosity of the sponsors who have supported this project, CatWalk and The NZ Spinal Trust will each receive 30% of the rental fee as a donation.



\*This is not our wheelie van



# THE GREAT NEW ZEALAND TEE OFF



**NOV 24  
2023**

The Great New Zealand Tee Off is proudly supporting Catwalk Spinal Cord Injury Trust, Hope without Fear and Movember. This November 24th thousands of kiwis will be teeing off for charity at golf clubs across the country, at the same time.

Get involved [oliver.bradshaw@greatnzteeoff.co.nz](mailto:oliver.bradshaw@greatnzteeoff.co.nz)

[greatnzteeoff.co.nz](http://greatnzteeoff.co.nz)

[@thegreatnzteeoff](https://www.instagram.com/thegreatnzteeoff)







Photo by Meg Speirs

# The Tora

**Situated in the Southern Wairarapa, a short drive from Martinborough, the Tora Coastal Walk is an exhilarating three-day walk that's second to none. It's one of the longest standing private walks in New Zealand, and widely regarded as the best.**

The three-day walk has long been fully booked for the 2023/24 season (2024/25 season now open for bookings). However, thanks to the generosity of owners Kiri and Sky Elworthy, on Saturday 27 May, the spectacular location was once again opened to the public for a one-day trail event.

"The Tora" was first held in 2022 and proved so popular with both seasoned and amateur trail athletes that it was put on the calendar again for 2023. The event provides three different walking and running options along the private Tora Coastal Walk trail, with a portion of proceeds from the day going to CatWalk and our mission to fund world-class research and innovation to cure spinal cord injury.

Usually only open from September – April for the three-day fully catered walk, The Tora gives entrants the opportunity to experience the magnificent landscape of the rugged Tora Coast up to the hilltop ridges, offering amazing 360-degree views, native bush and flowing streams.

Once again, the event was expertly organised by sport event company Total Sport. The Tora offered three distances to choose from, with options of running or walking 13.5km or 21.1km, or taking part in a self-paced 5km supporters' walk - this walk took participants up to "The Trig" and provided impressive views of the Pacific Ocean.

Strategically placed aid stations along both courses provided hydration and nutrition, including some extra special Tora treats of jam and cream scones, and cheese and crackers.

"We are extremely grateful to Kiri and Sky, who have given us access to The Tora Coastal Walk track for this event once again" says Meg Speirs, General Manager of the CatWalk Trust. "Along with the expert organisation from the team at Total Sport, we feel privileged to be sharing this beautiful part of New Zealand while also supporting our goal of curing spinal cord injury"

The Tora was all-inclusive trail event, with the ticket price including entry fee, home baking, the choice of a variety of homemade curries, barista coffee, local wine, beer and non-alcoholic refreshments, and post-event entertainment provided by local musicians.

With thanks to everyone who attended, \$7800 was raised for spinal cord injury research.



All photos above: By the official Tora event photographer – photos4sale.co.nz  
Left: Photo by Meg Speirs



[toracoastalwalk.nz](http://toracoastalwalk.nz)



[totalsport.co.nz](http://totalsport.co.nz)





# Ben Clark – Adapt to Perform

**I had the great pleasure of meeting Ben when he and his wife Alice were on their NZ travels recently. Ben was a professional swimmer who, at age 19, sustained a SCI in 2010 when diving into the sea, resulting in tetraplegia.**

Working to regain his strength after his accident, Ben created Adapt To Perform, an online platform with the aim of making fitness accessible to all. By providing adapted workouts, nutritional advice and motivation, Adapt to Perform has grown to have members from throughout the world.

In 2022, Ben and Alice made a life changing decision. Selling up their home in the UK they have embarked on an around the world adventure. Prior to coming to NZ, they had spent a month in Bali volunteering at a charity that assists disabled people.

**Q: How did your previous experience as a professional swimmer help you adapt to your life with an SCI?**

I think that my life as a swimmer taught me lots of skills that were highly transferable to my new life as a disabled man. Just the aspect of training towards a goal helped me in the early stages of my rehab in understanding that things don't happen immediately and that it requires hard work and sacrifice to

get to where you want to be. Also, it taught me a lot about failure and overcoming adversity as there were many times in my swimming career they didn't quite perform as well as I wanted to, or I had setbacks with injury and illness at very inconvenient times. A spinal cord injury is inconvenient at any time. So, having previous experience of having setbacks made me more prepared than I otherwise would be. Saying that, it wasn't easy still and I still had challenges to overcome but my swimming career positively helped me.

**Q: Why did you start to Adapt to Perform?**

I'd always had a keen interest in health and fitness as a professional athlete which continued once I had

become disabled. I also got very interested in the world of YouTube regarding creating informative content for viewers. One day somebody showed me a YouTuber who was doing fitness content so I looked to see if there was anybody making content for wheelchair fitness. I soon realised that there was a significant lack of it out there so I started to create my videos. I didn't realise how much this was needed as a resource until I started to get feedback from the audience about how much they are enjoying what I was doing. This led me to do more of the same and eventually create my website which is a premium version of what I do on the YouTube channel as I'm not restricted to the limitations of the platform.

**Q: Since you left the UK, where have you been and what have been your highlights?**

We left the UK in October and have since been to France, Morocco, Singapore, Bali Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Vietnam, and each place has been unique and wonderful in its own way. We got married in France, so that will always hold a special place in our hearts. Morocco was a crazy hot mad adventure which felt like stepping back in time. Singapore was like going to a utopian civilisation whereby everything was perfect and the accessibility there was second to none. Bali is somewhere that we have been before and we are volunteering to help out other disabled people who are born on the island. Australia is somewhere that I have been to four times now and love. I have family there and visit as often as I possibly can so, it's very relaxing but also very nice to catch up with them. New Zealand was a very unique experience for us because we travelled right from the top to the bottom with a hire car. We got to experience the natural beauty that New Zealand has to offer first-hand, which for me has been my favourite part of the journey so far. In Malaysia and Vietnam, we were mostly working from our laptops but still experiencing what these countries had to offer in our free time. Which we loved to do!

**“...training towards a goal helped me in the early stages of my rehab in understanding that things don't happen immediately and that it requires hard work and sacrifice to get to where you want to be.”**

**Q: You did some work with a charity in Bali which helps those with disabilities to be accepted more into the community – can you tell us a bit more about that?**

So in Bali, we were doing some charity work with a community of disabled people which set up a place for them to live, work and enjoy life together, as well as get into sports and cultural activities to support themselves in life. The reason for this is in their culture it is seen that if you are disabled you have sinned in a previous life, so therefore it brings shame to the family and they tend to be hidden from society, not having access to education and basic social needs. However, over the last few years, the charity has reached into the communities to find these disabled people and bring them into sports and activities that allow them to break free of the preconceived notions that have been put upon them. We stayed on-site and provided them with both English lessons and fitness sessions to help them to live the life that they wanted to live. This was super rewarding and it's great to see the progress from the last time I went to Bali in 2019, and to be a part of their journey.

**Q: What and Where is next for you and Alice?**

Alice and I still have many places to tick off are travelling bucket list and this summer we will be travelling through Europe on the train starting in London and getting the Eurostar to Brussels then heading to Athens stopping in most countries along the way. After that, we are heading to either South America or South Korea/Taiwan/Japan. We haven't quite decided yet, but whichever one we do first we will do the other one after. We're very lucky our work allows us to travel as we work 100% online so we decided why not travel and work full time and experience what this world has to offer.

**I would also like to offer an exclusive discount for CatWalk friends to the Adapt to Perform website. Here I have handcrafted thousands of exercises into hundreds of workouts and fantastic programs that tell you what to do every day to reach your fitness goals.**

**The offer is for 50% off your first-year membership which is a huge saving and a great way to get you started on your fitness journey today.**

**50% offer for ATP: FREE50. Visit [adapttoperform.co.uk](https://adapttoperform.co.uk) to register.**



Ben and Alice



# The Poetical Lobe Project

## The Poetical Lobe Project is seeking submissions of brain-related poetry!

The Poetical Lobe is an upcoming anthology of poetry about the brain and neurological conditions, and is seeking submissions from New Zealanders with a connection to the

world of neurology; such as patients with neurological conditions, their family members, medical students, doctors, healthcare professionals, researchers, and anyone else with a connection to neurological diseases. All proceeds/royalties from book sales will be going to the Centre for Brain Research (CBR) to go towards furthering neurological research.

The project is being run by Loredana Podolska-Kint, a final year medical student based in Whangārei. It is her hope that the book may inspire members of the general public to look at patients with brain conditions with new eyes, and also to gain an understanding of the importance of brain research.

Submissions to the project are open from now until 11:59pm, 31st October 2023, via the Google Form: <https://forms.gle/sXrHhsopYmZiQCdX8>. The poetry anthology will be launched in early 2024. Poets whose work is included in the book will receive a complimentary copy of the anthology and be invited to perform their poetry at the launch event.

More information can be found on:

**Instagram:**  
[instagram.com/the.poetical.lobe/](https://www.instagram.com/the.poetical.lobe/)

**Facebook:**  
[facebook.com/the.poetical.lobe](https://www.facebook.com/the.poetical.lobe)

Information about poetry workshops later in the year will be announced here, for those wishing to contribute a poem but unsure how to start.

Please do consider writing a poem for this anthology if you have a connection to the brain or neuro conditions, or share with whānau/friends/patients who may be interested in submitting!

This project is made possible by the generosity of FMAS, AUMSA, and FMHS.



The Poetical Lobe Project

The Poetical Lobe is an upcoming anthology of poems about the brain and neurological disease.

New Zealanders with any connection to neurological conditions are invited to submit a poem in English or Te Reo Māori and will receive a complimentary copy.

All royalties will go to the Centre for Brain Research (CBR) to further neurological research.



**Submissions open till 31/10/2023.**



Submission form via the QR code.

**More info:**  
**Instagram** [@the.poetical.lobe](https://www.instagram.com/the.poetical.lobe)  
**Facebook** [facebook.com/the.poetical.lobe](https://www.facebook.com/the.poetical.lobe)

Or email [the.poetical.lobe@gmail.com](mailto:the.poetical.lobe@gmail.com)

Project supported by:



# Book Reviews

Ben Clark shares two book recommendations

## Driving Forwards - Sophie Morgan

**“Sophie is a good friend and she’s becoming quite the star in the UK. She presents the Paralympics, Crufts, amongst so much more.”**

<https://www.cntraveller.com/article/beyond-barriers-introducing-the-monthly-accessible-travel-column>



On the precipice of starting her adult life, aged eighteen, Sophie, a rebellious and incorrigible wild child, crashed her car and was instantly paralysed from the chest down.

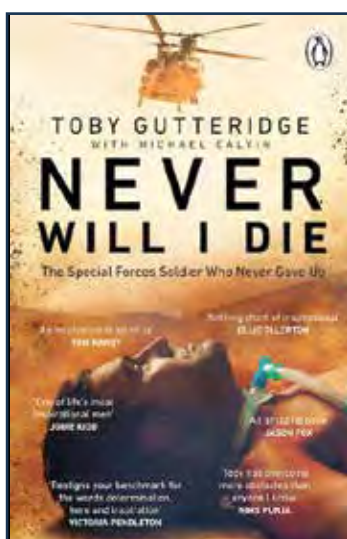
Rushed to hospital, everything she had dreamed for her life was instantly forgotten and her journey to rediscover herself and build a different life began. But being told she would never walk again would come to be the least of her concerns.

Over the next eighteen years, as she strived to come to terms with the change in her body, her relationships were put to the test; she has had to learn to cope with the many

unexpected and unpredictable setbacks of living with paralysis; she has had to overcome her own and other people’s perceptions of disability and explore the limits of her abilities, all whilst searching for love, acceptance, meaning, identity, and purpose.

Driving Forwards is a remarkable and powerful memoir, detailing Sophie’s life-changing injury, her recovery, and her life since. Strikingly honest, her story is unusual and yet relatable, inspiring us to see how adversity can be channelled into opportunity and how ongoing resilience can ultimately lead to empowerment.

## Never Will I Die - Toby Gutteridge



**“Toby was in the Spinal Unit at the same time as me.”**

Toby Gutteridge left a difficult and destructive childhood to join the Royal Marines, before becoming one of the youngest-ever recruits to join the Special Boat Service.

In November 2009, he was shot through the neck during an operation in Afghanistan, and his life changed forever.

Today, Toby runs Bravery, an extreme sports brand that aims to support and empower those who have dug deep within themselves to overcome their own adversities by finding courage, strength and the resilience to bounce back stronger than ever.

The powerful and deeply moving account of a Special Forces operator who suffered life changing injuries in Afghanistan. A passionate story of life triumphing over death, and a manifesto for overcoming adversity and appreciating what really matters in life.



# Thanks

**T**hanks to Toby Arnell who ran the “Middle Earth Marathon” at Hobbiton on the 24th March and raised \$560 for CatWalk.

A car crash in July 2022 resulted in Toby’s partner sustaining multiple neck fractures amongst other injuries, and Toby chose to raise funds for CatWalk to support and raise awareness of the research we are funding.



Toby Arnell



Nadia and friends

**F**ollowing on from their efforts last year, Nadia Mackle and her wonderful bunch of friends pulled together and completed the Redbull wings for life world run for 2023 and raised \$1020 along the way.

“So proud to have such wholesome friends who love supporting this cause - aren’t we lucky!”

We even had 7 year-old Frankie-Rose join us this year who biked along next to me, big efforts for a little girl at that hour of the night. Both Frankie’s parents did the run last year and this year, so no surprises she was keen to put her hand up. Can’t wait to do it all again next year!”

Thanks Nadia and your wonderful crew!

# This is Wheel Life

If you were a quadriplegic, would you hire your cousin to be your full time carer? Well, that's exactly what CatWalk Ambassador Sophia Malthus did!

Together Sophia and Indy Henman have created a new digital docu-series, This Is Wheel Life. The series takes a look at such things as housing, dating, sex & relationships and careers, all through the lens of living with a disability. Soph & Indy show how fun an inter-abled friendship is, and answer questions you never knew you had!

You can watch the full series on Tahī FM - <https://www.tahi.fm/the-tahi/tiwl-out-now>, or search YouTube.

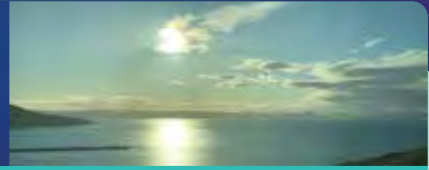
Made with the support of NZonAir and Tahī FM



## Corporate Supporters







### Donate to spinal cord injury research

Your donation will help fund world-class spinal cord injury research and contributes to our vision of a world free from spinal cord injury research.

### Become a Core Supporter

Just as a strong core is needed to support our bodies, our Core Supporters strengthen our ability to fund innovative spinal cord injury research by giving a donation regularly.

### Leave a legacy by naming CatWalk in your Will

Leaving a gift in your Will could benefit spinal cord injury in a transformational way by ensuring the vital research endures until a cure is found.



[Donate Here](#)

### Credit Card, Internet or Phone Banking

Donations can be made using either Visa or Mastercard or by internet or telephone banking:

Account name: **The CatWalk Spinal Cord Injury Trust**

Account number: **02-0108-0525933-00**

Bank: **Bank of New Zealand**

Branch: **Private Bank**

### International donations

The additional details required for an international transfer are:

Physical address: **Level 29, 188 Quay Street, Auckland 1010, New Zealand**

Our banks details: **Bank of New Zealand, Wellington, New Zealand**

SWIFT BIC code: **BKNZNZ22**

Clearing code **NZ020108** (If required)

If paying by Direct Credit, please ensure the following details are provided so we can track and receipt your donation:

In the Internet bank field called "particulars" add your name

In the Internet bank field called "reference" add your phone number

