

How and why I lived in a nursing home:

At the age of 21 after sustaining an acquire brain injury (ABI) I was discharged from rehabilitation at Rankin Park Rehabilitation Unit. I was not able to live at home with my parents as the funding to support a suitably adapted home and care wasn't available to me.

I inspected four group care homes and the instant I set foot in each one I knew I didn't want to live there. Even before leaving my house to inspect the homes I knew that I was going to face living with people much older and not relatable to me. The homes seemed dirty, they were full of people at least 20 years older than me and I knew I'd be living with people I have no common interest with.

I entered the nursing home in 2005 and stayed there until to 2011. Upon leaving rehabilitation I was motivated to set goals and push myself to be as independent as I could. The life I led in the nursing home did not include any rehabilitation. I was demoralised, I felt full of melancholia and sadness, I thought it was a place where people went at the end of their life, I wanted to start living my life again but instead I felt imprisoned.



Within the first week in the home I knew I was going to spend the rest of my life there. It just felt wrong, people there couldn't communicate with me, they didn't remember who I was and I lost my ability to make choices of things I wanted to do. I was devastated that my rehabilitation was stopped. I was dedicated to my rehab, I would set myself rehab goals and achieving them gave me motivation and helped my confidence. I felt low and despondent almost immediately when I entered the home and developed feelings of depression and eventually suicide. I was doing the same things everyday, I had no choices and nothing to do, I was locked in and had nothing to motivate me or keep me interested in life. Life in the nursing home was designed for those people of old age, food choices were non-existent and repetitive, of a processed and pureed nature, and seemed to be appropriate for people at the later stages of their life not someone like me. Outside activities were also limited and didn't drive me to be more motivated or interested in life.

I'd had suicidal thoughts for a long time, not due to my physical disability but due to my living arrangements and quality of life. I felt like I wanted to end my life. My best friend committed suicide and the grief of that event was a catalyst to me deciding that I couldn't put my friends and family through the same thing and I decided then to not let the life I lead beat me. I set up a Facebook support page "No more suicide in the hunter". I had helped a person to change their thoughts on ending their life and made them want to;

"KEEP On POPPING In The FREE WORLD!!!" which gave me motivation and reason to live and be better.

A catalyst for a new and suitable home:

The catalyst for me leaving the nursing home to more appropriate accommodation was led purely by chance. A meeting with a Trish a co-ordinator Northcott Disability Services following a trip to Sydney ABI rehab centre led to her assisting me to apply and be accepted to a sole occupant home in November 2011. The change to my living arrangements was a game changer in my life, I could have remained in the nursing home instead of where I am now living and loving life.



As soon as I was loaded in the van to leave the nursing home I was very happy. My life started again when the wheels hit the road and cooking my own steak that night was amazing, I actually liked doing domestic chores.

The care was much better, I had choice, I got to choose what I wanted to do, where to go, what to eat and when to do it. I had a huge smile on my face when we left the nursing home, I said to my co-ordinator "today was the beginning of my life again"! It was a much better place to live. My confidence improved as well as any feelings of depression which I had experience for a long time.

Where I am now and how better my life is

I moved from the sole occupant living to my current residence within a six person group facility. The house is set up with excellent adaptations helping me be independent in as many activities as possible, and I'm in a place where others with ABI are living, people I have common interests with and developing friendships I didn't have before. I'm much more active day to day than I ever have been. I will attend a gym, play bowls twice a week and go to the pub. I cook my own food and do what I want when I want.

Through each transition away from the nursing home facility my choices as a person with disability have gotten better and better. Caring staff at my current home can change regularly and it can be a challenge having to adapt to a new person with different ideas of my capabilities than the staff I had grown used to and bonded friendships and connections with. However my progress from my time in the nursing home has been incredible.

My recovery has also continued to improve through greater access to rehabilitation (local gym) and the type of environment I'm living in. When living in the nursing home my memory was terrible and I had little motivation to apply myself to anything engaging; I felt my brain just didn't heal. My memory is now significantly better, due to improved socialising with people with similar interest and being able to make my own choices. My physical strength has improved and I am now at a stage of semi independent bed transfers.

Where I live now is the best place I've been, I can do what I like when I like, as Kramer from Seinfeld says "GIDDI UP" and I "GO FOR IT"! I have since completed a certificate 2 in Community Service at Lampton Tafe and am planning on completing certificate 4 in Youth Work soon. I open my eyes in the morning and I love my life, from where I was in the nursing home where I felt everything was stolen from me, I now love life to the max.

My ideal world and goals for the future

The goal within the next five years is to be living alone, as independent as I can be and to get a job. I want to be able to have as many choices in my life to make opportunities happen. The steps to get me there are to engage in better rehabilitation. I still feel I have so much potential for improvement if I had the access to appropriate rehabilitation. I don't see myself in this chair, as any less of a person than an able bodied person. If I'm asked where I'm going I say "I'm walking down the shops" I don't say I'm wheeling. I don't want to be seen any different as before my disability, I want to help people change there view of people with disabilities, and to

influence the people who make decisions realise a nursing home is not right for a young person with disabilities. I want to continue to open up all my choices to help me achieve all my goals.

For more background to my journey please view my digital story:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DceSSxGG0nw&index=3&list=PLElxlnPqnmzmK3KJ_URjl4Z3SAOGZVAVI