

Pauline's story

I'm a 32 year old woman living with Spina Bifida (SB). I am currently employed with Spinal Cord Injuries Australia as a Co-Facilitator of a Self Empowerment Program (and I love it!).

I have lived on my own, independently, since September 2006. I receive personal care support but manage everything else myself.

Getting around can be frustrating at times as I'm reliant on public transport and anyone who knows the public transport system in Sydney knows its not one of the best! I don't drive yet, but it's one of my goals for the near future.

My family have been my rock growing up. My parents, sisters and friends were, and continue to be, extremely supportive in everything I do. They have always made me feel like I was just like everyone else. I have never felt like I was a person living with a disability, in fact quite the opposite. The encouragement and support I've received has helped shape me into the person I am today.

My life hasn't always been easy. I don't believe anyone's life is. We all face challenges, but I've been fortunate that mine weren't anything to do with my disability. As I said earlier it's made me who am today, and for that reason I wouldn't change any of it for the world!

Life for me is different every day. Anyone who knows me knows that I go out a lot. I'm hardly ever home. Whether it's to a friend's place, the football (NRL), beach, city, concerts or comedy shows. I love stand-up comedy. I enjoy life. Laughing is my medicine, I don't touch any pharmaceutical stuff. I like to go out and have a laugh. I crave laughter!

I think living a good life is essential and it all starts with your mind and attitude. I don't feel sorry for myself at all, I never have and never will. Yes there are times in life that you think, "What if I was able bodied, and able to do this and able to do that". I believe I'm quite awesome the way God made me, and I know I'm a blessing to the people whose lives I impact in whatever way. As I said I wouldn't change being born with SB for the world.

One of my beliefs is that if I can impact somebody's life for the better, because of something I have done or said, that to me is achieving purpose in my life. I used to question "Why was I born with a disability?" I now know why. A lot of people look up to me and see the way I live my life every day being in a wheelchair. It inspires them to be better. They might think "Well, I'm better off than her. Why should I whinge and complain?". I'm all about helping people realise their true potential.

Throughout my life I've mixed with people who live with disability and I've found it hard to relate to them because a lot of them feel sorry for themselves. I didn't want to be around that. Since being involved with Spinal Cord Injuries Australia, I found I could relate to people with spinal cord injuries because they were once able-bodied people, who had an accident and who needed the willpower, the determination and the strength to get through

the challenges they've faced. They're strong people from the get go. You would have to be to get through it!

I once got talking to another young woman living with SB. I gave her some advice, I said, "Don't worry about people and what they think of you. Everyone is always going to be judged and criticised regardless of who they are, or where they come from, just live your own life, please yourself and always be approachable - just smile at people. Leave that door open and don't close yourself off". It matters heaps! I have been at the opposite end of that. I was once negative. Nobody wants to know you when you're down and out, and negative. Be open with people until they give you reason not to be!

I am proud that I wake up every day of my life and can be there for other people. If I can help somebody every day to live their life to their truest potential well that's my God given job done and my purpose in life.

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