

Caring for Spinal Injuries in the Pacific

Pacific Disability Support Trust was established to provide resources for the medical treatment and in-home care needs of Spinal Injuries in the Pacific. Most of these injuries are rugby related, which was the initial focus of the support offered, but others are from diving and car accidents as well. In Samoa, they support Marist Trust which distributes the aid where most needed.

The Trustees are

- **Dr Raj Singhal, Medical Director & Surgeon, Burwood Spinal Unit, Burwood Hospital**
- **Brent Thomas, Chief Operating Officer, House of Travel Group**
- **Andrew Hall, National Programme Manager, New Zealand Spinal Trust**

Personal biographies on the Trustees can be found at (<https://pacificdstrust.org/trustees/>)

The catalyst that led to the formation of the Trust was a fundraising event held in 2010 for Ben Lei'a, a promising rugby player in Samoa who broke his neck in a freak rugby tackle and became a life-long tetraplegic. A major fundraising campaign involving the All-Blacks and led by then Captain **Richie McCaw** and supported by the three men who would become the Trustees raised sufficient funds to build Ben a new home, provide a mobility vehicle, and orthopaedic bed.

Dr Singhal led a medical team to Samoa to treat Ben and also to evaluate other spinal injury needs in Samoa. A second fundraising dinner in 2011, again led by McCaw, and involving both the All-Blacks and Black Caps provided further funds which have been used for the care of spinal injuries throughout Samoa and Fiji.

Richie and a host of high profile athletes have continued to support the Trust ever since 2010. This has allowed the Trust to continue its work and also has provided the funding to send several containers of medical supplies to both Samoa and Fiji.

Rugby players and others suffering spinal injuries have a traumatic time, even in New Zealand where there is a Health System providing comprehensive life-long care. In poorer countries like Samoa and Fiji where the Governments have far less resources, the life of Spinal Injuries can be very bleak indeed. The Pacific Disability Support Trust continues to distribute resources to these injuries and their families who are often left to struggle in their own villages, sometimes without power and running water. The needs are great and resources are few. There have been no opportunities for fundraising during the pandemic, so the funds are now very short and urgently need a top up to keep up the great work of caring for so many tetraplegics and paraplegics in the Pacific.

The Trustees are very careful to ensure that all funds go to those with spinal injuries in the Pacific. The fund supports wheelchairs, beds, medical consumables and home modifications such as wheelchair and shower access. 100% of all funds raised are directed specifically to the care of spinal injuries. All trustees and support workers are volunteers and all administration is donated as well.

We respectfully suggest that the Rugby Community New Zealand throw in their strong support behind this charity which continues to take care of our paraplegic and tetraplegic rugby player colleagues in the Pacific. The close fraternity of Pacific Rugby, and the support given to New Zealand rugby from Island players mean that those injured in the Pacific are a part of our wider rugby family and they are our responsibility.

In 2022, the Trust's work continues with a **Gala Dinner** on 15th September at the Pullman Hotel in Auckland, hosted by Eric Rush and other high profile rugby greats. Award winning Chef Michael Meredith has donated his time to design and oversee the menu. \$250pp or \$2000 for table of 10.

You can help us by:

1. Circulating the dinner invitations to your data base
2. Sponsoring and filling gold and silver tables of 10
3. Donating generous prizes for live auction and silent auction
4. Add Pacific Disability Support Trust to your designated company charity list
5. Booking information to follow.

Website; <https://pacificdstrust.org>

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