



Andrew Hall, National Programme Manager, New Zealand Spinal Trust. Photograph supplied by Jordan Smith

New Zealand Spinal Trust making a difference

Jordan Smith

After breaking his C6 vertebrae when he was 19, Andrew Hall has been a wheelchair user for the last 42 years.

It wasn't until 19 years later where the now National Programme Manager became involved with the New Zealand Spinal Trust, occurring when the founder, Professor Alan Clarke, gave him a call.

"He asked me to be involved in seminars to see what we could do about improving the employment rate for people with spinal injuries" Hall said.

"I came along to the seminar and at the end of the day he offered me a job to come and set it up for the New Zealand Spinal Trust ... [I've] basically have been involved one way or another for the last 23 years in various roles."

Currently, Hall works with a team delivering peer support with patients who are going through their individual rehab at the Burwood Spinal Unit in Christchurch, as well as assisting whānau with their loved one's way of living. He also manages a network of community peer supporters in all areas across the country.

Through the nature of his mahi, Hall has supported and nurtured many road trauma victims, a process that can be distressing for the latter given the nature of their admission.

As a result, he was nominated and subsequently the winner of the Canterbury Award for Public Service (now known as National Award for Emergency Response and Healthcare) in 2020.

The recognition recognises members of the community that have provided outstanding care or support to a road trauma victim, whether that be roadside or influentially impacting their treatment, recovery or rehabilitation.

"It was a surprise and a real thrill," Hall said when asked about winning.

"I saw it as a real opportunity to showcase the work we're doing here."

He said the ceremony was a true highlight, as it gave those who have lost friends and family members a chance to "understand there's a whole system in place to prevent that stuff but also support it when it happens."

"It's almost a celebration of people's lives but also as well as the recognition for those doing some great work that's often unseen."



Andrew Hall, New Zealand Spinal Trust
2020 Award recipient

"They've just joined a club that they didn't really want to belong to, quite frankly. A lot of things will have to change for them but also a lot of things can remain the same," he said.

"Our organisation and my team get to wheel in there and give them good news. Yes, that job might be over, but there's other jobs possible."

"Hall emphasised that no two patients are the same, and everyone's recovery journey looks different due to a myriad of factors. The aim doesn't change however, that being to get them to believe that a fulfilling and rewarding life is still possible and then to help achieve it, regardless of their limitations.

"Our whole ethos is about setting positive expectations for people. Having a spinal injury is not like a terminal cancer diagnosis - this isn't going to kill you," he said.

In true Kiwi fashion, Hall shifted the focus off himself quickly and onto how the Award sheds light on those who work in what is very much a under the radar sector.

"They [first responders] do it because they're good bastards, not for any recognition."

"No one's expecting to be rewarded but there's no harm in getting a nice pat on the back when they've done it."