

This is the third in our series of knowledge sharing articles featured as part of Life Rehabilitation's Review newsletter.

Community organisations supporting neurological rehabilitation

QuadPara Association of South Africa (QASA)

QASA is a non-profit, service-providing and lobbying disability organisation, serving spinal cord and mobility impaired people in South Africa.

QASA is committed to developing the full potential of quadriplegics and paraplegics in order to support, service, capacitate, and empower these individuals and their families, friends and colleagues.

The organisation was established 28 years ago and is currently active in seven regions throughout South Africa.

For further information on QASA and its services, contact 031 767 0352 or visit www.qasa.co.za

Stroke Aid – Johannesburg

Stroke Aid is a self-help organisation for the support of people who have had a stroke, and their families. Since 1986, Stroke Aid has developed from an educational support group into three separate activity groups run in different communities around Johannesburg. These groups encourage social independence and self confidence, as the members engage in creative and therapeutic activities. Speech, physio and occupational therapists and students provide support to maintain and even improve function years after the acute rehabilitation phase.

For further information on Stroke Aid and its services contact 011 728 7585 or visit www.strokeaid.org.za



Stroke Aid works in close cooperation with the South African Stroke Foundation, run by leading medical specialists and researchers.

For further information on the South African Stroke Foundation, contact its helpline on 086 1101 066 or visit www.stroke.co.za.

Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa

The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa is also actively involved in stroke awareness, prevention and rehabilitation campaigns.

For further information on the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA, contact its national office on 012 447 4222 or visit www.heartfoundation.co.za

Headway Gauteng

Headway is a registered welfare organisation, established in 1995 by parents of brain injured children. Its vision is to provide an environment where brain injured people and their families can feel accepted, comfortable

and secure to become competent and confident to the best of their abilities, and to create challenges for them to achieve these goals.

With its main branch based in Hyde Park and an outreach branch (HOPA – Khomelela) in Alexandra, the organisation has approximately 350 families on its membership list and receives around 1 500 calls for information about brain injury from the public per year. The services provided at both branches include a family support group, lay counselling, call centre, and holistic therapy day programme.

For further information on Headway and its services contact 011 442 5733 or visit www.headway-gauteng.org

Other support organisations

There are a number of community organisations throughout South Africa that can assist in supporting those who have experienced an incident resulting in neurological disability. The organisations featured above represent a small sample, but can assist persons in other regions to access support systems.

Living life to the full – QASA’s Ari Seirlis

“I met somebody in the last 24 hours of my life who has changed the way that I think about life.” This was how the late Christopher Reeve, well-known Hollywood actor and disability activist, introduced Ari Seirlis, director of the QuadPara Association of South Africa (QASA) to the people of New York.

Ari, a C5-6 tetraplegic, has become an influential voice for the disabled, raising awareness on their rights and needs, and inspiring many others in similar positions to embrace life and not accept obstacles as permanent or insurmountable.

Ari describes his ability to take on challenges – demonstrated, for example, by his riding a quad bike from Durban to Johannesburg in the Quads4Quads event for two years running – as being motivated by wanting “to give disabled people hope and show them what can be done; it made me feel normal, as if I didn’t have a disability”. In the two years, over R2 million has been raised to facilitate the practical resolution of disability issues by QASA.

Ari’s passion and positive energy are reflected in this extract of an interview with Nina Strydom, Life Rehabilitation standards manager:

Q: People everywhere have come to know you as an advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. Why do you think that is?

“I wear a non-negotiable cap when it comes to advocacy and lobbying issues. Lobbying is very unpopular and sometimes so am I. However, I bring a solid stand on behalf of my constituency to meetings regarding these issues.”

Q: What role does QASA play in the lives of people with spinal cord injuries (SCIs) in South Africa?

“QASA is at the forefront of disability issues. For example, we protested against beaches that didn’t accommodate disabled people, resulting in the policies being changed. We also influenced the national building regulations being rewritten.

We contribute to people living with mobility impairments by means of our



motivational lifestyle publication, Rolling Inspirations, regarded as one of the best in the world. We have an innovative view on driver training, and offer training in many of the centres. We are focusing on self help centres and skills development. Our own guest lodge is completely wheelchair accessible and extremely popular.”

Q: How do you see the future for a person with a SCI in South Africa?

“Challenging – demanding a lot of patience and determination. QASA is scrutinising the health and medical aid acts to identify shortfalls that impact on disabled people.”

Q: Why is it that so few people with SCIs go back to work?

“For some the medical boarding option is a way out of a job that they disliked. Rehabilitation is a very important aspect in empowering people and our aim is to get them back to their workplace to avoid losing their skills.”

Q: How is QASA addressing the difficulties that people in rural areas experience due to the lack of resources?

“Quadriplegia has a different meaning for people living in rural areas. Cultural issues could also make it difficult for people to reintegrate back into society. We have been investing in rural communities and have opened a QASA branch in Mthatha, which now owns its own nappy factory. QASA also revived the Free State region and has two other developments in the pipeline.”

Q: Ari, where to from here?

“I might meet a rich girl who owns a nut farm (I love nuts) in the Karoo and who likes quad bikes. Until then, I am here to stay, and to serve my constituency.”

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