

Telling it like it is

Teina Boyd, a former patient of the Burwood Spinal Unit, describes in detail the pressure that a shortage of carers is having on her health



SMILE OF COURAGE: Teina Boyd has a great fighting spirit.

Teina Boyd was a patient in the Burwood Spinal Unit seven years ago. The Cantabrian was a recruit for the New Zealand Police when she fractured her neck at the C5 vertebrae. It changed her life in a moment. Her honest reflections give us a real insight to living life with a spinal cord impairment.

Damn it.

I know my new carer is scared to drive in the rain. After crashing last week, I should've known she'd be too scared to drive in this storm.

Here we go again, another night trying to sleep in my wheelchair. Another night of no bowel cares or stretches. Another night of extra painkillers to make sure I don't go dysreflexic. Another night trying to reassure bub that I'm fine.

And then looking down I realise... I'm going to have to go to work in the morning wearing what I've got on now. Grey trackpants and a hoodie. With little margaritas all over it.

Uuuuuugh...I let my forehead hit the table in front of me.

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—Teina Boyd

What day is this? Day three stuck in my wheelchair with no carer? Starting to get risky now.

“No carer again Mum?”

Turning in surprise, I reactively lift my arm for him to stoop under...” Hey bub... you're home early. How was your day?”

“Good,” he stoops down to hug me. “Is it just us again tonight?”

I nod as he stands up.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah of course, small things to giants, right?”

“Yeah. I guess so... But it's still crap for you. Want a coffee?”

Laughing, I accept his offer, knowing full well that he's buttering me up for Uber eats and a sleepover later on.

We chat about family while he makes us hot drinks, then he heads off to the other end of the house to get changed, leaving me with my thoughts.

What day is this now... Day three stuck in my wheelchair with no carer?

It's starting to get a little risky now. My body really needs to go to the toilet and get some pressure relief. I might have to swallow my pride and call one of the other girls.

But who?

Grace's arm is injured, Eden has already done me so many favours lately... I know she's exhausted. And that's it. I have two people and my teenage son making up my 24-hour care team.

I know my family would be here in a heartbeat but as much as I would love that, there's no point.

The help I need is specialised, and takes a lot of training to do without hurting me.

My girls are more knowledgeable about my body and its complications than any public hospital nurse. There is an ignorant perception of them being “just a carer”. To me

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—Teina Boyd

I know how lucky I am to be fully loved, if not fully staffed.

they are amazingly skilled and equally as humble.

Resigning myself to another night in the chair, I listen out for William. I can hear him singing some Matariki song from his room.

Wheeling quickly over to the kitchen sink I pour my coffee out. The last thing I need is that coffee telling my bowel it's time to unleash the Kraken. Refilling my cup with water I put the lid on and head back to the table.

Calling my care agency quickly, I check if they've got any interviews lined up.

Nope.

“There's just no one Tee...I've just moved two of my clients into retirement villages because I can't get them a team, and I'm having to let people go as of next week because they haven't had their boosters. My job is near impossible. I don't know what to do.”

Resting my head on the table again, I listen and sympathise. I can hear how much she wants to help and the frustration behind her words.

Picturing my friends being left alone... stuck, unable to eat, unable to move, unable to wash or toilet themselves. Unable to live.... And then being shipped off to a retirement village?

And here I am worried about wearing my PJs to work. Man, toughen up girl.

Hanging up the phone I bring my focus back to home. The reality is if I don't have someone turn up soon, I'm probably going to go dysreflexic and need urgent medical care myself.

My family are the best and I'm so grateful that they come and spend the nights with me when my team fails...But I don't need cups of tea, I need bowel cares. I don't need someone to sleepover to keep me safe, I need someone to put me in my bed and do a skin check.

Exhale.

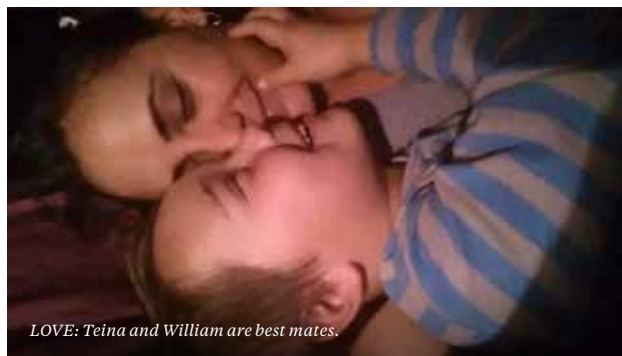
Ok, time to swallow that pride.

“Hey girls, if anyone is free this evening, may I please have some help getting into bed and doing cares?”

Putting my phone down on the table, I swallow hard, trying not to get my hopes up.

If someone can just come and get me into bed, and help my body do its thing at least I know I'm safe... I'll just have to zoom into work tomorrow from bed. No biggie.

I can still hear William singing from the other end of the house, so turning my chair I wheel towards his voice.



LOVE: Teina and William are best mates.

What is this boy doing? I bet he's looking in the mirror with his comb and a whole pot of gel in his hair again.

Quietly sneaking down the hallway I realise his voice is coming from my room. Oh...What's he doing in there?

Speeding up I race around the corner, ready to snap him getting up to mischief...But then I see what he's doing.

He has the curtains closed, with the heater on. He's raised the bed as high as it will go and put a pillow on the edge, so I can lean my chair back and lay my head down.

He's pulled the blankets down on the other side of my bed and put one of his teddy bears and his reading book there. I can see he's dragged the dog's bed into my room as well.

He looks at me... “Is that good Mum?”

Grinning at him full beam, I'm really proud.

“Of course, bub, whānau sleepover it is.”

He smiles back, hopeful that he's earned McDonald's for dinner.

Racing back to my phone I order his McDonald's and see the girls have replied. One is in Auckland and the other in Rotorua. But both willing to drive back if I'm in trouble.

“No, no I'll be okay 'til tomorrow, no biggie! See you in the morning Eden... We're pulling a sickie and giving this body a full wash, W.O.F and service.”

Smiling at my phone as I read their funny replies, I shake my head. Somehow between the four of us we are making this work.

With my overly sensitive body and how often it chokes, it's risky and I don't know how the bloody hell we are navigating these barely staffed waters without any damage... But we are.

And I guess, like so many other disabled New Zealanders, I'm just hoping for the day I have a full team- so I can have a full life.

But until then, we're coping.

Laying my head down tonight, trying to find space somewhere between bubs and his dog.... I know how lucky I am to be so fully loved, if not fully staffed. 🤗