

DISABLED CHILDRENS' LIVES TRANSFORMED BY WHEELCHAIRS

Hundreds of disabled children took part in a sports day organised by CEACOSIE (Central Eastern Council of Special and Inclusive Educators) at the National Gymnasium today (22/7/16). The event brought together the students of eight special needs schools in the region for a day of fun sporting activities.

Among the students were several whose lives have been transformed after being provided with wheelchairs under the Mobility Device Service (MDS), an initiative of the Spinal Injury Association of Fiji (SIA).



Vika Cagilevu, mother of one of the students, nine-year old Talei, said: “Before Talei received her wheelchair five years ago, she could only crawl to get around. She couldn’t feed herself and only stayed inside the house so she had no friends and did not attend school.

“Since being fitted with a wheelchair by SIA it is so much easier for me to take her around. The chair has helped her sitting posture and she can feed herself. Now she can get outside and play with all the other kids at school. She has been provided with a walker too, which she uses to get around.”

Sashi, aunt of Yash, 13, who has cerebral palsy added: “Before we heard about SIA through Hilton Special School, Yash just had a normal wooden chair that was too small for him, and he was not able to feed himself. It was not a proper chair for him.

“Now he can eat by himself and his posture has really improved which is important as he is still growing. He is going for a reassessment with SIA soon to fit him with a bigger chair – we are very happy about that.”

Joshko Wakaniyasi, Executive Director of Spinal Injuries Association, said of the scheme: “These stories really demonstrate the difference that proper assessment of wheelchair users needs and proper fitting of chairs by trained professionals can make.



“Since the MDS scheme started back in 2009 the demand for our services – from children and adults alike – has grown incredibly. We have been fortunate to have great support from donors such as PhysioNet UK and Vodafone, as well as Motivation Australia who have trained our therapy staff. But if we are to meet the demand and continue to change the lives of people like Talei and Yash we need continued support from the public and private sectors.”

For more information on the Mobility Device Service and the other services that SIA provides call: 330 7908

*****ENDS*****

Notes for Editors

Spinal Injury Association (SIA) of Fiji was first developed in the 1970s by a few spinal injured persons who were entering disabled people under 2019s sports tournaments at the time. The SIA was registered in 1994 as a non-governmental organisation and affiliated to the Fiji Disabled Persons Federation and the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons. Since its establishment, the SIA has always striven to improve the lives of persons living with a spinal cord injury and physical impairment in Fiji with services for its members, including the provision of mobility equipment and medical supplies.

The organisation also works to develop strategies to improve the living standards and independence of member through workshops for training, capacity building, employment opportunities, fundraising and provision of walking aids and wheelchairs. The SIA focuses on people who have a physical impairment, including those with a spinal cord injury. Members are drawn from all over Fiji, and the organisation works nationally. The Constitution of the Association states that all people who use a wheelchair (permanently) may become members.

In more recent years, the SIA has had an increasing focus on service delivery; and has become the main provider of mobility devices for people with a mobility disability living in the community in Fiji. Initially mobility devices were provided directly to individuals on receipt of donated equipment from overseas.

Following training delivered in Fiji for SIA volunteers and Fiji National University physiotherapy and community rehabilitation assistant students, the process of provision of equipment has changed to include an element of assessment, prescription, fitting and follow up. In addition, the SIA have become increasingly selective regarding the quality and type of mobility equipment being donated.

To date, the SIA mobility device services are run almost fully by volunteers, with extremely scarce resources. Currently the organisation has a total of 16 staff including volunteers and works across two sites, the main office located with other Disability Organisations and the second site at the Rehabilitation Hospital which is approximately 8km between each site.

More photos / interview available on request.

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