



Who we are

New Zealand Rugby Foundation is a national organisation that cares, advocates for and champions the safety of all players in the game we love. Formed in 1986, by All Black great Kel Tremain and Hawke's Bay philanthropist Sir Russell Pettigrew to "assist areas of rugby in need", the Foundation now works to ensure that the message of safety first is front of mind for all rugby players, alongside the comprehensive support they provide to all seriously injured rugby players financially and emotionally, for life.

The Foundation co-ordinates and provides immediate and more long-term support to seriously injured players and their wider whānau to navigate through this life-changing process. This is done in tandem with the incredible clinical care provided by the New Zealand medical system and the ACC.

We are experts in our field and have since the inception of the Foundation, supported 112 seriously injured players, for the duration of their life. Our experience shows that each seriously injured player and the whānau that supports them is completely different, so we tailor what we provide and recognise that each person will need to access a range of resources, across their lifetimes.

Support for Life

"They have given me lots of help, lots of assistance. Without them, it would have been a far greater struggle. They care about you and what your family has got to go through."
– Ben Larson, a seriously injured player supported by New Zealand Rugby Foundation since 1999

In 1940, the average life expectancy after spinal cord injury was only 18 months. By 1998, the estimated life expectancy became more in line with that of the general population. This is credited not only to increased survival rate from initial injuries, but also improved ability to recognize and treat secondary complications such as bladder infections and pneumonia.

A longer and better quality of life is met with an abundance of opportunity for our seriously injured players. All of the people we support make extraordinary efforts to pursue whatever they can to make life for themselves and their whānau worthwhile. Whether it be careers and interests in business, academia, sports or art, we work in partnership with them to ensure they are able to lead their life as fully and independently as they are able to.

As positive as these changes have been, international research and our own experience shows that while people with spinal cord injuries are now more likely to experience many of the chronic health problems that arise in the general population with aging (such as pulmonary disease, neurological disease, diabetes or cancer) they are doubly hit with chronic health conditions that are unique to

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their circumstance like muscle atrophy, loss of fine motor skills and loss of autonomic functions like bladder and bowel control or respiratory function¹.

With advances in technology and clinical research, the treatment, rehabilitation and accessibility tools that our seriously injured players require to maintain their quality of life are much more complex than they once were, as well as much more expensive. For example, there are more modifications in equipment needed, more complexity to their rehabilitation and treatment plans, a longer term need for physical therapies that assist with muscle strengthening, communication, and mobility, and a deeper level of intricacy when it comes to the strategies needed to manage spasticity (abnormal increases in muscle tone or stiffness), pain, diet and exercise. Whilst not directly involved in the clinical interventions of seriously injured players, we do coordinate and link up seriously injured players to the support networks they need, which by nature are increasingly complex and multi-faceted.

Anxiety about losing independence is also common for those who suffer a SCI. As our seriously injured players age and their physical independence decreases, it is likely that their social networks age alongside them. This may require a greater reliance on professional caregivers which can be a tricky psychological transition for a lot of people. The Foundation spends a great deal of time to cultivate and sustaining support networks and activities that promote positive mental health for this very reason.

We have a duty of care to all seriously injured players and are committed to working in partnership with them for the duration of their lives. Over half of the people we support were injured prior to the All Player Insurance Policy being established in 1998 and we have been supporting five seriously injured players since 1974 – prior to ACC even being established. No matter what their need or where their journeys may take them, we are there.

What we do

"The foundation is there to make sure despite a rugby injury, which is pretty damn sad, that we have the potential to live our life. If the foundation is able to assist, they are in boots and all."
– Grant Sharman, a seriously injured player supported by New Zealand Rugby Foundation, injured in 1977

Our work centres on four key pillars – these pillars hold up the 155,000 registered rugby players in New Zealand that safely play our most loved sport. Like any recreational pursuit, there are an unlucky few who are seriously injured playing rugby. The Foundation is there from the moment a child, amateur or professional player steps out onto the pitch to if the unimaginable happens and they suffer a serious injury during play.

Pillar 1 – Support

When a player even steps on to the pitch, we have them covered. Every registered rugby player between the ages of 5–64 is covered by an all-player insurance policy that goes over and above any support they would get from crown entities like ACC, or government departments like MSD.

Every serious injury is reported and often we are advised of a catastrophic event from the side of the pitch. This enables us to get in next to the player and their whanau instantly. The immediate needs

¹ 'Aging with a Spinal Cord Injury' - June 9, 2009, by Rina Reyes, MD, Medical Director, UW Medicine SCI Rehabilitation Program and Assistant Professor, UW Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, and Ivan Molton, PhD, Clinical Psychologist and Acting Assistant Professor, UW Department of Rehabilitation Medicine.

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of that player and their whānau are met as best as possible during what can be a physically, emotionally and financially draining time.

In the medium term, our aim is to ensure seriously injured players can safely transition into a new life. This might include trauma counselling and mental health support and a support network with other seriously injured players and their families.

We are with a seriously injured player for the duration of their life, ensuring the best quality of life possible. This might look like practical day to day support like home and garden maintenance, re-training or gaining

qualifications to follow a different work path, recreational pursuits, or even legal assistance with trusts, deeds, wills and other advocacy matters.

Short and long term, our seriously injured players often tell us that the most meaningful thing we can do at this time is take some of the pressure off – that we care, like a listening ear and a cup of tea weaves all of the work we do together.

Pillar 2 – Prevention/Research and Education

The Foundation isn't just the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. We support leading-edge research into injury prevention and also promote for safe play for all New Zealand rugby players. We champion safety in the game we love, so when a player even steps on to a pitch, we know that they will be playing and refereed in a way that ensures safety and is backed by peer reviewed and published research.

We partner with education institutions on ground-breaking research to enable better concussion management and work closely with our partners New Zealand Rugby and ACC, to encourage fewer rugby injuries through prevention and outward education.

Pillar 3 – Advocacy

As well as one-to-one support, we also act as champions at a national, governmental or community-based levels on behalf of our seriously injured players. We want to ensure they receive appropriate quality levels of care, that their right to access everything a non-injured person is unhindered, and that policies and systems are in place to achieve the best outcomes for them and their families.

Pillar 4 – Funding and Resource

To achieve all of these things we have to be responsible stewards of our funds, that will ensure our operations are financially sustainable and that we are able to support our seriously injured players for life.

Our Need

[Brogan Watt] credited the support he has received from his loved ones, his employer Isaacs Construction, and Lisa Kingi-Bon from the New Zealand Rugby Foundation for his rapid recovery.

"[Kingi-Bon] has gone above and beyond for my family," he said.

– 'Wedding bells for badly injured rugby star' New Zealand Herald - 29 January 2017

The New Zealand Rugby Foundation is a small but effective team of four consisting of Lisa Kingi-Bon (CEO), Ben Sturmfels (Commercial Manager), Gwendoline Jessop (Executive Assistant) and Angela Davies (Accountant). Our commitment to our seriously injured players is for the duration of their life and as such, the long-term financial sustainability of the organisation is paramount.

Thank you