

Conference 2014: Janice Frost.

Elisabeth Cottam and I attended conference in Nelson at the beautiful Trailways Hotel. It was my first conference and I had been told conferences were an enjoyable experience so was keen to find out.

Friday night Elisabeth and I arrived to hear all the National Executive items and cast Manawatu's vote for the election of officers. It was a first look at the new amputee logo that is now being used.

As promised on Saturday morning Nelson society was up to the challenge of providing transport to wonderful activities. I enjoyed going to the wearable arts museum and the Nelson markets which were awesome. Nelson has a lot of cottage industries.

An enjoyable lunch was followed by guest speakers that talked about osseointegration or direct skeletal attachment and the impact on lifestyle and range of movement that this surgical procedure has for AK amputees over the current socket wearing way. One of the amputees that has had this done was from Christchurch and it was impressive to watch her perform a dance routine with able bodied people and no step was too hard for her to do. It showed that the future for amputees has exciting roads ahead. The limb Centre representative gave updates on how things are going/and answered many questions from people.

A yoga session was organised and it proved to be a lot of fun and a lot of laughs.

Everybody then retired back to their rooms to dress up for the pirate themed dinner. This was a lot of fun, a fantastic meal, easy listening band, loads of dancing and a good opportunity to practice pirate language. Prizes for the best costume were awarded as well. Sleep came late that night full of good memories.

Sunday was a chance to meet the young people who were on the Give it a go weekend. They did many outdoor pursuits pushing their boundaries further than many had before with horse-riding, running and quad biking.

Many of the older amputees, myself included were envious as we listened to the youth speak of what their weekend had incorporated. I have been to Outward Bound Anakiwa so it was easy to reflect on the joy of rushing past barriers regardless of life experiences. It was magical seeing the joy on their faces as they reflected on their weekend. This is the way to make lifelong friends.

After lunch it was time to say goodbye and head home. I offer a big thank you to Amputee Society of Manawatu for giving me full funding to attend and to experience this magical weekend. Thanks also to Nelson Society for funding activities on Saturday morning and for a great weekend. To Claire and all your team a great job. It's Wellington's turn for conference 2015.

Give it a Go (GIAG) Youth Conference by Bryna Dassler.

The GIAG youth conference was held alongside the national conference. With 16 fellow young amputees in tow it made for a great weekend.

At the beginning we met with the full conference attendants. The mayor of Nelson welcomed us and then the youth went and did their own thing while the “older” members dealt with business.

For 2 hours we wandered around beautiful Nelson looking for Dominoes to have tea, but thanks to the navigation of one of the girls we managed to get lost and had to ask for directions to get us back in the right direction of the hotel. We then decided it was easier to order in Dominoes than to go hunt down their store. While we were waiting we got to know each other with a question game consisting of level of amputation, where we came from, what we did and our favourite fruit and animal. It was decided then that the boys would cook us all breakfast before heading off for our activities planned for that day.

After polishing off the pizza we went and met with the rest of conference for supper. There I met with the sales rep for Ossur and discussed different issues I face with my current prosthesis.

Saturday we got an early start meeting in the boy’s room for cereal and pancakes made by the boys. Then we set off to Happy Valley where the bulk of the day’s activities were to be had. I originally opted for to try horseback riding but had difficulty mounting my Clydesdale horse so did quad biking. There were a few hair moments where I thought I would lose traction or end up in a bank, but all in all it was a great morning. Lunch was followed by the fly wire, the tallest and longest in the southern hemisphere. Unfortunately I was unable to overcome my fear of heights, but enjoyed watching and hearing the shrieks coming from the others.

Then we met Hadley Peirce the talent ID scout for Paralympic NZ and played a game of sit down volley ball. Had my good leg sat on a few times and spiked the ball accidentally into one of the others head. We did a sprint trial before going to the pool the first time I had been swimming since becoming an amputee two years ago learning how to get in and out of the pool. We then headed back to the hotel to get ready for dinner.

The dinner was a lot of fun, started with a quiz which we “young’uns” won. The music was then cranked up and the party begun. Most of us were too timid to get up on the floor but the “oldies” weren’t having any of it, grabbing each of us and dragging us onto the dance floor.

Sunday was a morning of motivational speakers before having our final lunch together. Phone number and face book pages were swapped and plans to catch up before the next conference.

From the conference I took away a new look on life, decided to stop allowing my amputation to be a barrier to activities and a restriction to participation. Made some great friends and found new ways of overcoming obstacles.