

Introducing Ben Leia

Ben was a very promising rugby player with the Marist Club in Samoa. He had recently been selected for the emerging Manu Samoa youth squad. Late in January 2010, during a training run for an upcoming Marist tour of New Zealand, Ben suffered a horrific neck fracture which left him as a life-long tetraplegic.



Above: Ben Leia (right) with friends shortly before his accident.

He has no feeling below his upper chest, and can only move his neck and head. The Samoan Health service is not equipped to take care of a tetraplegic. They have no wheelchair available for him, and even if one was available, it would be a manual which would still leave him dependent on someone being around to push it at the time.



Above: Ben shortly after his accident.

They also have no hospital bed of any kind available for him to take to his home. He recently had a short time in his home, but contracted a severe infection from his catheter insertion and had to return to the hospital.

As the conditions are very stretched in the hospital, as well as the severely infected catheter insertion which needed corrective surgery, he has also developed fever and skin infections, and has had internal bleeding. These constant struggles have left him lying in despair.

The big danger is bed sores, and with no proper electronic bed for his care, this danger is greatly increased. In the hot climate, once he contracts bed sores, they would be extremely difficult to heal.



Above: Ben after his accident with Coach Brian Lima and members of his Marist Rugby team

There is no Government or aid money of any kind available for someone in Ben's severe condition. We have sought expert second opinion from Dr Graeme Inglis, spinal specialist attached to Burwood hospital who has confirmed after reviewing his CRI scans that there is no surgery available at this time that can make any appreciable impact on his condition.

There is no aid to take him off-shore for rehabilitation, and even if there was, it would be questionable as to whether the benefits would out-weigh the value of living in his village amongst his family who love him and want to care for him.

Ben is a very deserving young man. He has to fight off pits of despair, yet at the same time remains extremely grateful for any help that is given to him. For instance, when we offered to buy him a radio to listen to, he politely declined, saying that he didn't want to be a burden to anyone. We subsequently bought him a radio and a DVD player.

There are no words that can express how difficult the future must look from Ben's point of view. We are committed to giving him the best quality of life we possible as he returns to life in his home.

The best way we can do that is by helping him return to his family, and have his family equipped to take care of him with the least discomfort or risk of further deterioration of his condition. We are also seeking funding to buy him an electronic bed and a modest vehicle for his family so they can take him for outings. Otherwise he will be totally housebound, adding to his despair.

Any help you can give will be very urgently needed and very gratefully received.