

# Family and colleagues a great support for worker badly injured in car crash

**When Philip Watkins was badly injured in a car crash in June 2008, his family and the colleagues at his workplace – Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute – rallied around to help him recover and get back to work.**

Phillip, the Artistic and Cultural Director of Tandanya, was travelling with three colleagues to a settlement at Point Pearce on the Eyre Peninsula to discuss a new exhibition when his car collided with a truck.

His vehicle was pushed 30 metres along the side of the road.

Philip was knocked unconscious, and doesn't remember the accident. But he does recall the moment he opened his eyes, to find the truck's bull-bar just centimetres from his face. Despite being injured, Philip managed to scramble clear of the vehicle, as did his fellow passengers. "I was in survival mode," says Philip. "I had to get out."

His injuries were severe: he had a broken pelvis and ribs, a bruised liver and a collapsed lung. He remembers a man at the scene, who talked to him while they waited for help to arrive. "He kept me with it, he kept me here. He was an angel. I've no idea who he was."

When the ambulance arrived, Philip was taken to Ardrossan Hospital, and then evacuated to the Royal Adelaide later that night.

"There was a moment at Ardrossan where there was this rush of pain, and I couldn't breathe. I went into a bit of a spin – and they kept me alive. The medical people at both hospitals were just great," he says.

He stayed at the Royal Adelaide for the next 10 days, first in the ICU, then in a ward. When he was discharged, he couldn't walk at all, and was totally incapacitated for the next two months.

"My approach was that it was an accident, and that I just needed to get on with things. I was thankful – it could have been much worse in terms of the injury."



'Getting on with it' involved months of intensive physiotherapy, and once he started physio, his recovery picked up the pace. After four or five months, he eased off the physio, "but I found I needed to continue, as I was stiffening up."

He also did yoga, pilates and meditation. "I found it useful in terms of keeping me stable psychologically, as well as flexible." Philip found that certain things would trigger memories and take him back to the accident, such as a loud truck passing by: "Meditation helps me come back to the now."

He also had six sessions of trauma counselling, and found that talking about the event also helped "to get it out".

# Family and colleagues a great support for worker badly injured in car crash *continued*

In terms of work, Philip says he couldn't have asked for better support. "As a key leader, to be taken out instantly like that had ramifications for the whole organisation. But every staff member – from junior to senior – stepped in and filled the gap.

"There was no pressure to return to work, but at a certain point I was ready." He returned to work on reduced hours in October 2008.

"There were moments when I was healing that I probably pushed myself – but it taught me to listen to my body. I was healing and I had to give myself time.

"Once, when I had just returned to work – I was getting ready, and I moved in the wrong way. There was cramping throughout my whole back, and I ended up on the floor – I had pushed too hard. It put my healing back a week. I was being gung ho – I wanted to get back to work, but I realised I had to slow down a bit. I had certain physical restrictions, and I had to listen to that.

"Besides that it was painful! But it was a good lesson in understanding my body and learning how much I should push myself."

With the accident came other lessons.

"The things that are important are highlighted – I just wanted my family with me in the hospital, my partner and my sons. It had a huge impact on our lives – my partner took time off without pay to care for me, when I couldn't move.

"The lease came up on our house, and we had to move while I was in hospital! Dad came down from Alice Springs to help pack everything up. And my extended family and work colleagues really helped too.

"They'd cook a meal, for example. Little things – but they all add up.

"And I was grateful for the safety net that WorkCover provides. My case manager from Employers Mutual was nothing but helpful – on a personal as well as a work level. She helped guide the organisation [Tandanya] through the whole process, as well as myself."

Philip returned to fulltime work almost a year after the accident. "I kept telling myself – I'm going to survive this. I'm going to be stronger and healthier than before I had the accident. And I'm well on track towards that."

"It's all about balance – between work, family, friends and myself. It jolted me in the sense of making me stop and re-evaluate my life and what's important."

## WorkCoverSA

100 Waymouth Street, Adelaide South Australia 5000

General enquiries: 13 18 55

Fax: (08) 8233 2290

Email: [info@workcover.com](mailto:info@workcover.com)

Website: [www.workcover.com](http://www.workcover.com)

**Free information support services:** TTY (deaf or have hearing/speech impairments):

(08) 8233 2574. Languages other than English: call the Interpreting and Translating Centre - (08) 8226 1990 and ask for an interpreter to call WorkCover on 13 18 55.

Braille, audio, or e-text: call 13 18 55 and ask for help in an alternative format.

Document: Philip Watkins, Tandanya director, car accident Dec 09.doc

File name: Philip Watkins, Tandanya director, car accident Dec 09.doc

Last updated: February 2010

The information produced by WorkCover Corporation of South Australia in this publication is correct at the time of printing and is provided as general information only.

WorkCover is a statutory authority funded by employers to rehabilitate and compensate South Australians injured at work.

