

Thanks, Dr. King. And thanks to the Royal Rehabilitation Centre Sydney and the Brain Injury Unit for the invitation to speak to you this morning.

I'm a former client of this Brain Injury Unit. Brain Injury Australia's office is in a flat 100 metres up the road from here. I'm not sure whether it's right to talk about my giving this speech today, giving it *here*, as...ironic, or as the closing of some circle. Neither am I sure how it feels. Perhaps it's like a coming back to what was once my second home, perhaps it's just like coming home.

What I *do* know is that there's no more certain - and no more quick - a death to an audience's attention than wasting time talking about what you are *not* going to talk about. But I was asked for something motivational, even inspirational. And I was struggling so desperately over the weekend to come up with something that would fit the bill that, I resorted to Wikipedia, and came across this; "inspirational speakers often deliver a 'warm, encouraging message, sometimes based on a story of overcoming great obstacles', with a desired outcome of enlivening or exalting emotion. In contrast, motivational speakers may deliver a presentation that is more energetic in nature, with a desired outcome of moving attendees to action. Becoming a motivational speaker requires that you have both an open mind and the ability to give people hope through your words. A good speaker can bring something positive from a personal negative experience and be able to transfer that experience in a way that gives new hope and a sense of self-worth to others. If this is *something you feel you could do*, then becoming a motivational speaker may be right for you."

Look, "this is not something I feel I could do." I've got some fairly trite and obvious things I could say - that no two brain injuries are the same, that recovery from a serious brain injury is more often a marathon than a sprint. But they're derived from *job*, rather than *personal*, experience. And whatever obstacles I overcame weren't that "great", certainly not as great as those faced by people I've come in contact with in this job, or by many of you here today. And they weren't overcome by me, alone, I cannot claim the sole credit. And that is something I'd like to briefly talk to you about.

My accident happened in February, 1996. When I'd left the Brain Injury Unit a little over a month later, when I'd returned to work full-time by August, I'm sure I thought of myself as...lucky. My thinking's, well, matured since then. I've never believed in fate. Nowadays, I don't much believe in luck either - let alone, as I can remember a famous rugby league coach once saying; that his team, his players "make their own luck". I come to believe, instead, in systems, in structures - whether they be governments, their publicly-funded services, the economies those services depend on for money, and I believe in communities, in families. Make no mistake, I'm sure an individual's - whatever you choose to call it - his/her motivation, drive, determination are crucial, perhaps even indispensable, to recovery from any injury, any adversity. But one of those screamingly obvious life lessons you can only truly learn in the crucible of going through something like rehabilitation and recovery from brain injury is that; all of us live and operate in the world armed with, and protected by, the stories we can tell about ourselves. And our *life* stories - all those accidents of birth, birthplace, of family, and of a person not just born but created. Look, my purchase on the memory of my rehabilitation and recovery from brain injury may not be crash hot - and I don't deny that the distance in time can distort things - but I still reckon the greatest part of the reason for my recovery *is* my life story - the kind of formed, created and supported person -

supported by family, by communities of friends and work colleagues - the person I was *before* I hit the cars. And all the relative advantages they bestow, that I took with me into - and through - my brain injury. My only two cents worth of...motivation would be to search out those parts of the person - whether it be you, your loved one's, your client's - your, their abilities, their passions, what gave them, *will* still give them, joy. And tap those parts, put them to the service of rehabilitation and recovery.

I'm intrigued - as someone working in disability advocacy from a background in journalism - by the preference for stock narratives about individuals "overcoming disability", by the parade of - some say - "super-crips", "super-cripples". And I'm worried - not out of sentimentality, out of hand-wringing but as a matter of pure pragmatic reality - that within a broader culture of creeping competitive individualism (of sink or swim with some safety nets) we risk losing sight of the role that these structures - of governments, of communities, of families - the role that they play, as they always have done, and as they did with me. And call me quaint - I just don't think that a society's capacity for "overcoming", its quotient of resilience (of rebounding from adverse events) gets shared around equally. Between individuals, between communities.

Which is why NSW's Brain Injury Rehabilitation Program - Ryde's Brain Injury Unit being one of 14 statewide - is such an asset; compensating, correcting for, levelling out such an uneven distribution of advantage. I travel a fair bit. And, while I'm hardly an official visitor - let alone an inspector-general - of brain injury rehabilitation facilities in other States and Territories, the experience that strikes me as being typical of brain injury - especially in regional, rural and remote Australia - is that people exit hospital and fall off the edge of a cliff. And even if there's an ambulance at the bottom of that cliff to receive them, it commonly takes the form of access to generic, non-specialist, non-brain injury specific rehabilitation services.

One last thing, hardly motivational, hardly inspirational...more of a commitment statement: as good as the best available, any, brain injury rehabilitation can be, return to the community can be as intimidating as the edge of another cliff - especially when *you've* changed but *it*, the community hasn't. Brain Injury Australia's, its State and Territory Member Organisations' experience is that the community's awareness, its understanding of brain injury lags around 20, 30 years behind that of other disabilities. And what we're told daily is that this is the most re-disabling aspect, doubly disabling for people with a brain injury. So, though Brain Injury Australia's funding agreement says that it's paid to provide policy advice to governments. And I guess we do that, in our journeyman fashion. But the real guts of its, my day-to-day work - and certainly not confined to just *one* week of any year - the work is really basic community awareness-raising about the disability. You have Brain Injury Australia's, its State and Territory Member Organisations' commitment that we will persist with this work until *that* cliff is transformed into level ground.

Thank you.