

March 2009

48 Iona Road  
Havelock North

To whom it may concern

**RE: Testimonial for Back-Up New Zealand**

I am a Volunteer and carer for Back-Up New Zealand. I am still actively rehabilitating from a serious traumatic brain injury and multiple physical injuries received in July 2007 when a teenage drunk driver fell asleep at the wheel at 8am on a Sunday morning, swerving into 3 unsuspecting cyclists and dramatically changing our lives.

I have helped on two courses so far this year, and provided various other voluntary supports to the amazing small team at Back-Up. The second course I was both a carer and assistant cook! There were five adults on the course. The design of the programme is unusual and somewhat risky from my experience in adult learning, but it worked fantastically. The carers, all volunteers, changed each day of the course. We had the option to stay 24 hours which most of us did. I was there everyday too as cook of course. All involved quickly developed a close and trusting relationship with each other and a really tightly bonded team, despite my initial concerns.

The level of independence of those on the course varied considerably, hence the need of volunteers with health backgrounds, but believe me, we had competition from the more able bodied participants who so wanted to help and support their "team mates"!

Without knowing, I suspect the programme goals include:

- Know No Boundaries – "Give it a Go"
- Gain self confidence and self belief
- Face fears
- Attempt new skills and challenge yourself
- Encourage or re-energise motivation (if required)
- Team/group work
- Attempt new experiences

- Have purposeful fun

I don't know what the evaluations said, but I believe all five participants gained/achieved all and more of the above. What is more amazing is that all of us challenged ourselves and gained from being part of this experience. I was physically and mentally exhausted at the end, but, would do it again in a moment! Life is all about perspective, caring, sharing, challenging ourselves, working together, looking forward not back and this programme really delivers.

I keep in email contact with one lady who is now being supported locally back in Auckland thanks to Back-Up and may for the first time ever get work at 52 (she suffered a stroke at age 16). She got so much out of her week in Hawke's Bay and was so grateful to everyone who organised and helped on it. It was really humbling to think that I could give a little of my time while recovering to help someone else up the ladder of life!

I also see two local participants quite often and we have become friends. We all participated in a local Triathlon in Back-Up teams or as supporters.....and my husband (another crash victim) is now a volunteer – it is contagious!

Yours faithfully

**SHONA BROWN**

Volunteer Back-Up Carer