

## **Andrew Mitchell, Life after Stroke: Second time around**

**Bridges Symposium 26/04/2011**

### **'Bit by bit, the more I did the better I felt'**

Andrew Mitchell had a right cerebella stroke in 2006, following which he was unable to walk, spending several months in hospital and at home recovering. As may be the case with many stroke survivors, he was not aware of the term 'self management' as a formal label until becoming involved with the Bridges programme. Several key factors assisting his recovery stood out during his talk; his young daughter Betty as a motivator, being prepared to take risks, having a supportive environment/network and getting back to doing his hobbies.

Becoming a father and having a stroke are life changing events, for Andrew these occurred just a few months apart. From the outset he described how his beautiful daughter was a motivator for him, to work towards getting home and spending more time with her and also feeling and seeing a link between his child's development and his recovery.

During his hospital stay Andrew reported becoming institutionalised quite quickly, everything being provided for him, he wasn't panicked with his condition and the reality of everyday life. The lack of this routine on returning home meant he became worried the smallest things could be his condition worsening or a new issue arising. However the environment of the hospital also aided his recovery, in particular the long railed corridors were a great place to practice and improve his walking. At one point he decided to continue walking all the way home to surprise his girlfriend and daughter, despite limiting symptoms of dizziness and pain and the risks of this ambitious task. However he made it home and back to hospital, quite a feat and despite the risks a memorable personal achievement in his recovery.

Andrew was particularly appreciative of his employer, who were hugely supportive in his taking time out to recover and facilitating a graded return to work, which he described as a 'real crumb of comfort which made all the difference in his recovery'.

Further opportunity for self- management came in disguise when the child minder called in sick and his girlfriend had just started a new job. Andrew decided he would look after Betty and so through the daily activities, house hold tasks and play groups, he was set to play and slide his way with Betty further towards recovery.

During his recovery Andrew developed post stroke pain which he noticed increased with tiredness and stress, he was seen by a pain specialist and prescribed medications, however found the most lasting solution was through achievement of his long term goal of returning to cycling. He set small targets, gradually increasing his cycling, and with what he describes as a huge amount of concentration and focus, he returned to his previous level of cycling and found the pain dissipating. He felt this was due to his change of focus, taking his mind away from the symptoms, to the activity at hand and the next target, "bit by bit, the more I did the better I felt".

Andrew also took up playing the guitar and again found that through the concentration of doing this activity his pain continued to decrease. From these positive experiences he thought of the cycling and guitar practice as part of his therapy/treatment, but this was not prescribed by a therapist or doctor but developed from his own aspirations to do these activities.

He now reports 4.5 years on still having some bad days, but now knowing he can do something about it when these days come along.