

# Burns survivors share scars and stories at international conference

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*Burns survivors Brayden Warnock-Hannon, left, Ocean Johnson, Melissa Paterson and Burn Support Group president Peter Sharp were most looking forward to meeting other burns survivors.*

Melissa Paterson didn't meet a fellow burns survivor until she was in her 20s.

The Auckland mother-of-three was just a baby when she was burnt by boiling water, which scarred her physically and emotionally.

"The good thing about being burnt when you're young is you have no recollection of it happening," Paterson says.

It was really tough accepting her scars growing up and she missed out on some typical teenage rites of passage as a result.

Then, as an adult, she was put in touch with the Burn Support Group, a charitable trust for New Zealand burns survivors based in south Auckland. It was through that group she managed to accept her story.

Now, she's joining two other young survivors and the president of the group on a trip to the United States for the Phoenix World Burn Congress.

The annual event brings together survivors, families, firefighters, and burn care professionals from around the world.

Groups of New Zealand burns survivors have been attending the event for 15 years now and Burn Support Group administrator Michele Henry says it's an amazing experience.

For Ocean Johnson and Brayden Warnock-Hannon, it's an opportunity to meet with other survivors, hear their stories, and lament with them about things like dressing changes.

Brayden was five-years-old when a cooking accident left him with burns to 45 per cent of his body.

The Timaru resident spent most of his life in and out of hospitals and he used to think he was the only person to get burnt and live to tell the tale.

Now 14, he's got the Burn Support Group to thank for helping him meet others with similar stories and develop a confidence about his journey.

"When people come up to you and say 'what happened to you' you get to tell your story about what you've been through and what your experience is," Brayden says.

Ocean's a more recent survivor, after getting her legs burnt by a petrol can from a bonfire two years ago.

The 16-year-old from Pahiatua spent two months in hospital, and her recovery is still ongoing.

"It still comes back every now and then. You get down days and then you get good days too where you realise you can overcome this," Ocean says.

Burn Support Group was established 30 years ago by Delwyn and Alan Breslau, with an aim to support people with burn injuries and educate people on burn prevention.

It has about 2500 survivors and families on its database. It funds hospital equipment, hosts events, visits patients in hospital, and has an annual summer camp for children and teenagers.

According to the University of Otago Injury Prevention Research Unit there have been 3440 hospital discharges for burns related injuries between the years 2011 and 2015.

About 60 per cent of those injuries were related to hot substances, like boiling water, compared to 30 per cent a result of fire.

In the past year there have been 423 new claims and 689 active claims for burns injuries through ACC, costing \$4.9 million in total.

Burn Support Group is hosting a quiz night fundraising event on November 18 at Pakuranga Football Club. Email [michele@burns.org.nz](mailto:michele@burns.org.nz) to register.

**- Stuff**