

19 November 2023

To Board of Trustees
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c/o Michele Henry

Re: 2023 Phoenix World Burn Congress in Maryland, USA.
Attendance Report

To the team at New Zealand Burns Support Group Charitable Trust.
Inc.

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Board and Staff of the New Zealand Burns Support Group Charitable Trust for the life changing and incredible opportunity it was for me to attend the 2023 Phoenix World Burn Congress in Maryland USA.

The trip from start to finish with the New Zealand team has been instrumental in providing me with an enriching and transformative experience.

Participating in the Phoenix World Burns Congress 2023 (WBC) has allowed me to meet so many other burn survivors, each with their own unique and inspiring stories. I have made many new friends and connections. I have been deeply humbled by listening to other fellow burn survivors stories, and how they have not only faced the challenges of the physical, psychological and social pain of being a burns survivor, but also dealt with the double whammy of overcoming a burns injury, alongside other adversities such as violence, family harm issues or loss of family members in accidents.

I met with WBC attendees who are living fulfilling and rewarding lives, and came to WBC to celebrate their and fellow burn survivors successes, and inspire fellow burn survivors to chase their dreams and find meaning in their burns experiences. The overarching message from the burn survivors seemed to be to not let a burn injury define you, limit you or become your only identity.

The insights which I gained whilst attending the WBC have been significant, and have reinforced the coping and operating techniques and strategies I have used though out my life. Whist at the WBC, I participated in workshops and group sessions such as 'Adults Burnt as Children.' I heard personal stories of individuals overcoming stigma, social isolation and bullying and utilising humour to combat awkward or negative social interactions. Notwithstanding, I listened to powerful uplifting stories of resilience love and strength, despite individuals dealing with negative social experiences such as; family disfunction, stress, the inability of some to acknowledge the burn and relationship breakdowns associated with a burns injury.

I really enjoyed the keynote speaker Aaron Volpatti and listening to how he found success in his professional Ice-Hockey career through the use of Cinematic Visualisation, techniques which I am proud to say that my Father taught me to utilise as a child in the 1970's-1990s ,to manifest my dreams and aspirations and build identity. So, Aaron's presentation resonated a lot with me reinforcing my own strategies to build resilience.

My absolute favourite WBC event was, the two sessions of the 'Healing Through Our Stories-Open Mic Session'. Listening to other Burns Survivors stories had the biggest impact on me without doubt. It was raw, riveting and very emotional. I was so inspired by the braveness of each and every individual who stood up and told their unique story. Some were very young, possessing the confidence to stand in front of hundreds of people, in a safe and loving room, filled with others who understood them, and share deeply personal details of their experiences from the heart.

The universal underlying atmosphere and energy of the WBC was a feeling that you were in a supported, safe space and cared for and among empathetic friends. This 'feeling of love' in the air was mentioned by attendee and speaker J.R. Martinez - Army veteran, Burn Survivor, actor and motivational speaker, who is a great ambassador for the burns community, and whom brought a lot of fun and energy to the WBC and disco night.

Everyone attending, volunteering and hosting the WBC were so welcoming and kind. It was a pleasure to be involved in all the varied and different activities and workshops. I look forward to catching up on some of the workshops I couldn't get to as The Phoenix Society will be posting videos of some of the workshops on their website to see if missed.

A practical workshop I attended which was of great interest to me was listening to speaker Taryn E Travis, MD, FACS on 'Burn Hypertrophic Scars - What we know, what we can learn, and how we can help.' This was a very informative session on scar formation and the most current available treatment for burn scars, with special emphasis on how good Lasers are for treating hypertrophic scars. After this session I felt very hopeful about the significant improvement that Laser Surgery can have on scars. I now would definitely like to revisit some of the Laser treatment options on my facial burns, as well as on my keloid scarring that has been restricting movement on my arm, instead of 'Z plasty,' which I recently had in some previous scar revision surgery in 2021. Interestingly, after talking with other burn survivors at the WBC, many of the American attendees commented that Laser Surgery was very effective for them with positive outcomes for scar reduction.

The connections made with other burn survivors, have been truly life changing for me. Although I have always had a massive appreciation and gratefulness for my family, Doctors, Surgeons and medical staff involved in my own burns journey, I felt really amazed at the love, compassion and devotion to burn survivors that the plethora of people involved in a burn survivors journey have, such as; the first responders, emergency workers, the medical profession - Plastic Surgeons, Doctors, Nurses, Occupation Therapists, Physiotherapists, Counsellors, associated Charities and support groups, and all the wonderful people who care so much about a burn survivors' recovery. WBC gathered all of these amazing people in one place to share ideas, offer support and share new medical ideas and methods for burns treatment.

Once again I'd like to express my heartfelt thanks to the New Zealand Burns Support Charitable Trust Inc. for your amazing commitment to all of us 'Burn Survivors' by enabling such meaningful and rewarding opportunities like attending the Phoenix World Burns Congress. I am so grateful to have been given the privilege of attending the WBC. The experience has strengthened my confidence, and allowed me to be more open about my burns journey, and share my own personal burns story with others.

Being part of the Kiwi crew felt really special with the close connection that Delywn, Michelle and the New Zealand Burns Support Group has with the Phoenix Society. I really appreciated having Michele's support and help during the WBC, where the schedule was fast paced and it seemed like my feet did not touch the ground from start to finish. Michelle introduced us to so many of the attendees and staff of the WBC. It was very obvious that Michelle, Delwyn and the 'kiwi's' are affectionally known at the WBC and are a popular addition to the scene, as I become a recipient of that love and affection. These free flowing introductions to fellow attendees and WBC staff, enabled by Michelle created a very comfortable and warm social introduction and back ground.

I would love to attend the next WBC in Grapevine, Texas, USA 2025 with my Mum especially, because she travelled my same burns road with me. I look forward to meeting back up with my new WBC friends and the NZ Burns Support Group crew.

Yours Sincerely

Angelique Barnes