

Burns survivor uses 'horrendous upbringing' to make positive change

Emily Ford 16:06, Sep 22 2018

Joshua Sade-Inia attempted suicide as a child, suffering damage to nearly half of his body. He's now motivating other survivors by setting an example of what can be achieved despite suffering abuse while in state care.

If Joshua Sade-Inia's burn scars could talk, they would have a lot of stories to tell.

The scars, which cover nearly 50 per cent of his body, represent a journey through foster care, alleged abuse, and depression.

Sade-Inia has overcome a lot in his 20 years – and now the Auckland man said he wanted to make something of his life, instead of dwelling on his traumatic past.

"If you have a story you have a responsibility to share it," Sade-Inia said.

"While it was a pretty horrendous upbringing I want to use that for something good."



CHRIS MCKEEN/STUFF

Joshua Sade-Inia once wanted to end his life. Now he wants to use it to inspire others.

Sade-Inia was just a toddler when he and his younger brother were put into foster care.

He was shuffled from home to home around the North Island and suffered abuse, he said.

By the time he was 13 he'd had enough, and he tried to take his own life.



CHRIS MCKEEN/STUFF

Despite years of abuse in state care, the 20-year-old is now a thriving university student.

He survived, but his body was now covered in burn scars as a result.

Initially put in an induced coma and flown from Whangarei to Middlemore Hospital's burns unit, he spent more than six months in and out of hospital recovering.

Seven years later, he still needed some reconstructive surgery to parts of his neck, and admitted the scars were a point of insecurity for him, particularly when it came to dating.



CHRIS MCKEEN/STUFF

Scars cover almost half of Joshua Sade-Inia's body. He wants to share his story to help others.

"I put a massive amount of weight on how others view me."

Despite that, he said he wanted to inspire others with his story. He was selected to attend this year's World Burn Congress in the United States in September, joining a cohort from the Burn Support Group Charitable Trust.

While he has had a bit to do with the south Auckland organisation over the years, Sade-Inia said he hoped to get more involved so he could connect with other survivors.

"It's opening my eyes. Because I'm self-conscious about my scars it's a good opportunity to learn from others."

Now an ambitious student – he studies law, sociology and politics at the University of Auckland – Sade-Inia has big dreams of entering politics. With that he planned to effect changes "from the top", he said.

"I've gone through this and come out positive when statistically I shouldn't be.

"I have a responsibility to use the fact I came out positively so future kids don't go through what I did."

Along with changes to foster care, Sade-Inia said more needed to be done to address mental health issues and suicide rates.

He said New Zealand's culture, which expected men to bottle up emotions was "very dangerous" and only made men feel inferior when they expressed their feelings.

If he'd had the courage to express himself when he was a child maybe he would have been able to reach out for help, he said.

"We should be teaching kids from a young age how to deal with emotions. We're not being equipped to deal with those and build up resilience."

WHERE TO GET HELP

Lifeline (open 24/7) - 0800 543 354

Depression Helpline (open 24/7) - 0800 111 757

Healthline (open 24/7) - 0800 611 116

Samaritans (open 24/7) - 0800 726 666

Suicide Crisis Helpline (open 24/7) - 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO). This is a service for people who may be thinking about suicide, or those who are concerned about family or friends.

Youthline (open 24/7) - 0800 376 633. You can also text 234 for free between 8am and midnight, or email talk@youthline.co.nz

0800 WHATSUP children's helpline - phone 0800 9428 787 between 1pm and 10pm on weekdays and from 3pm to 10pm on weekends. Online chat is available from 7pm to 10pm every day at www.whatsup.co.nz.

Kidsline (open 24/7) - 0800 543 754. This service is for children aged 5 to 18. Those who ring between 4pm and 9pm on weekdays will speak to a Kidsline buddy. These are specially trained teenage telephone counsellors.

Supporting Families in Mental Illness - 0800 732 825.