

I was lucky enough to get the opportunity to attend the Phoenix world burn congress in Washington DC 2023.

First day of the congress at 12pm we were lined up to get our registration done and get our t-shirts and name badges ready for the next few days ahead. The lanyard that we got had my name on it and that we were attending for the first time and if you wanted you could get a red heart sticker that meant that you were okay with being hugged. At this point I was starting to feel a little nervous about meeting all the new people but at the same time I was really excited because of the experience and meeting all the different people and getting to be among people who all have one thing in common! In the first hour we had met a range of people from all over the world and from all different walks of life, it was a little overwhelming with all the hugs and kindness that everyone was giving to complete strangers. It was such a wonderful thing to be a part of. We had an opening dinner that night where all day 1 arrived and had access to the indoor/outdoor atrium where they had 3 buffet dinners set up for us and a couple of bars. We all ate and sat around and got to know people. It was a really good way of breaking the ice between everyone. The dinner made me feel a lot less nervous about the next few days and gave me a few more friendly faces to spot in the big crowd,

The second day started with a buffet breakfast in the hall, this is where we stayed for the Opening Ceremony where the bagpipes walked in the fire brigade and one of the Firemen sang the American National Anthem. This was a very moving experience, a once in a lifetime moment and it was one I won't forget. After this we had our first keynote speaker His name was Aaron Volpaddy a professional Ice Hockey Winger and a burns Survivor. He was really passionate about never giving up on your dreams and reaching higher using visualizing techniques - he was really interesting to listen to in the way that he fought to get to where he is in his life today and his story really is proof that if you put your mind to it you can do it.

Open Mic was something that I really wanted to experience. We were given 4 minutes to share our stories and experiences with what we had all been through. Lots of people put their hands up to share and it was a very emotional time. When people were sharing their stories you could hear the bravery and pride in their voices.

I then went to Nutrition and mental well being. This is a deep dive into mindful eating and being more present in our food and eating habits. It was a really interesting and informative seminar and I really liked the information that we were given - things like - if you still feel hungry after dinner or a big meal wait 20 minutes and if you are still hungry after that time then eat again, eating late at night could make you more hungrier in the morning because your body clock changes and that by listening to your body it's okay to eat how we need to eat.

We were also lucky enough to have the time to go to Healing Power of Laughter - This was one of my favorites. It was about picking fun at the situation and finding the humor in a dark time whether it was a silly thing a nurse or family member said or just a bit of dark humor. It was freeing to know that it's okay to laugh at the situation. You don't always have to be serious and

miserable, you can laugh at yourself and others, sometimes that can be the best way to get out of the place that you are in. And see something beyond the scar.

Another one of my favorite things and I wish there had been another opportunity to go to was the Young adult female support group - it was such an incredible experience of women at all different stages of healing coming together and sharing the good, bad and ugly. It was just a very moving and emotional part of the day. For me this wasn't something that I was really looking forward to as I was a bit nervous about sitting in the circle and sharing but I'm so thankful that I went in with an open mind cause it was something that I took a lot from.

We finished day 2 off with a really good talent show!!!

Day 3 started off with the panel. The 2 ladies who were on the panel talked about rebuilding life after your injury and letting your mind know that it's okay to not be at 100% all the time, which is something that can be really hard to grasp when you are in that moment!!

I also attended a sleep seminar where we were given advice on what good sleep can do for the body. It helps you maintain more knowledge which means you are learning more. 30 minutes of sun exposure in the morning can help you sleep better at night. There are 5 golden rules to sleeping 1. Use your bed for sleep and intimacy. 2. Get in bed only when you're sleepy. 3. Don't stay in bed unless you are asleep. 4. Consistent sleep schedule - waking up at the same time everyday. 5. NO CLOCK WATCHING. I really liked the information that was given in here.

Ending day 3 we had the Dance Party where I got to see line dancing for the first time and everyone in the room moving together just like in the movies. It was crazy to see something like that in real life. The dance party was a really great way to end our last night together talking and dancing and just having fun all together.

The last Morning at the Phoenix world burns congress means that it was time for the Closing Ceremony and the Walk of Solidarity. The closing ceremony was a heartfelt goodbye to those that had come from all over the globe to be together for the 4 days. Thanking everyone who had put in the time and the effort to organize such an amazing event for all who attended. Unfortunately due to weather the Walk of Solidarity was done through the hotel instead of through the streets of Washington. When we walked down the hallway, the firefighters lined the way, all clapping as we walked past in what was a very moving and emotional experience, to think that is what they would do for us. When we reached the end, there were 5 fire trucks lined along the side of the road from volunteers to the firemen and women that work for the fire department. Knowing that all those people gave the time out of their days to be there for us was a really amazing feeling.

I'm so thankful to the support that we are offered here in New Zealand, and am so thankful that I was given the opportunity to do this. 6 years ago I never would have thought all of this could come from being burnt. Thank you very much New Zealand Burns Support Group and Charitable Trust and also to the Board of Trustees for selecting me to attend on behalf of the

support group. A once in a lifetime experience and I can't wait to share more of what I learnt at the World's Burns congress. Thank you to Michele for always being there with open arms. It meant alot to have you there supporting us. And to Richard, Angelique, Nick and Aroha thank you for making it a trip to remember!!!