

## Rhiannon Tracey | Biography, 2016

On September 18, 2009, Rhiannon Tracey awoke with elation on a warm, blissful day in Bali on a dream holiday. Little did she know that the day was to end in tragedy; after diving into a pool, Rhiannon's life would change forever. A spinal cord injury from the accident meant that Rhiannon was diagnosed as a C-5 quadriplegic. She was given only the faintest of hope of being able to walk again, just a few months away from turning 21.

After the accident, Rhiannon's emergency surgery was delayed by nine hours due to a horrific earthquake on Indonesian shores. She was moments from death after her lungs had collapsed, and a hospital ward was left deserted as people ran for cover. Later, two nurses were flown in from Australia under her travel insurance, and they treated her for the huge amounts of water that were in her lungs. Then finally two weeks after, she was flown to an Australian hospital and underwent two more lifesaving surgeries.

With a strong love for animals, Rhiannon worked as a veterinary nurse before the accident, and was an aspiring singer. Her outgoing and bubbly personality was contagious, and an extremely bright future lay ahead of her. But when doctors told her she would never walk again, they advised her to sell her beloved RAV4, as she would never be physically able to drive it again. Being the tenacious person she is, Rhiannon would not simply accept this, and she set out to prove them wrong.

Her only ambition from then on was to be able to regain her independence. In 2011, two years after her accident, Rhiannon proved the doctors wrong and can now walk short distances with crutches, and can drive her modified RAV4.

Rhiannon is living proof of the limitless potential of the human spirit. For long distances, she still requires a wheelchair, but through her hard work and commitment she has surprised doctors and proved that anything is possible.

Since her injury, Rhiannon decided to use her experience to create a positive outcome for others living with spinal cord injuries. In 2012 Rhiannon, with the help of her mother Sharyn, founded The Next Step (TNS) as a not-for-profit organisation, and opened The Next Step Spinal Cord Injury Recovery Centre in 2014 in Thomastown, Victoria. The Next Step Spinal Cord Injury Recovery Centre is a recovery facility for those with neurological disorders who want to obtain a greater quality of life and regain their independence.

Since her accident and founding TNS, Rhiannon has dedicated her life to helping others and building awareness for an injury that could happen to anyone. In 2012, Rhiannon joined SpinChat, which saw her visiting Victorian schools to raise awareness, promote prevention and educate students about spinal cord injury. Later that year, she was recognised for her work and awarded the title of Young Australian of the Year.

Rhiannon has also been awarded a string of other prestigious accolades. In 2013, she was nominated for a Women of the Future award, and in 2014 was the recipient of two Australia Day Awards for Access & Inclusion. In 2015, Rhiannon was made an ambassador for the Wings for Life World Run, a position she further took up again in 2016.

This year has been one of Rhiannon's best since her accident. It has been challenging, but she has finally regained her self confidence and taken the next steps in her life. She was made a top 12 finalist for the Suncorp Hidden Local Heroes, as well as fulfilling her latest goal of becoming a makeup artist after fundraising through friends to be able to enrol in Napoleon Perdis' makeup course.

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