

FREDDY TYLICKI ON SATURDAY



Proud to be the newest patron of such an important charity

I AM very proud this week to announce I have become a patron of the spinal cord injury charity the INSPIRE Foundation. Since I suffered my injury almost a year ago, as well as focusing on getting my own life back together I've been keen to do as much as I can to raise awareness surrounding some of the many issues affecting those who have suffered devastating spinal cord injuries.

As I've said before in this column, the things that suddenly become vital when your life is turned upside down when suffering an injury like mine are very often things you had never considered beforehand. Indeed, I had not even been aware of the existence of INSPIRE this time last year.

However, one of the most positive things to have come out of what happened to me has been to learn about this wonderful charity and meet some of the fantastic people working there.

My first interaction with INSPIRE came this summer when I attended their annual polo day in Salisbury, where I enjoyed events such as a wheelchair relay race and a jockeys v eventers polo match, which included familiar names such as Nick Scholfield and Will Kennedy.

It was uplifting to get a sense of some of the things that could be possible for me in the future and I was delighted to be asked by INSPIRE to become a patron. So let me tell you a little bit about what it does.

INSPIRE, which stands for Integrated Spinal Rehabilitation, is the only charity dedicated purely to research science to consider quality-of-life issues for those with spinal cord injuries.

The foundation receives no government funding for its research programme and so it relies entirely on fundraising efforts to support its invaluable work.

INSPIRE
FOUNDATION

I am the third INSPIRE patron to have suffered an injury as a result of a riding incident. The first was Baroness Masham of Ilton, a crossbench member of the House of Lords who has been championing the cause of disabled individuals since she was injured in an accident back in 1958.

The second is Gillian Matthews MBE, who broke her back in a fall from Sunsketch, a subsequent Royal Artillery Gold Cup winner, at Larkhill point-to-point in 1965. She has represented the UK at four Paralympic Games and was made an MBE in 2004 for services to charity.

When I met the foundation's director Rory Steevenson at the polo event in Salisbury, he joked that they were in need of some younger blood and I am proud to join both of the amazing ladies mentioned as well as the other

patrons, who each have remarkable stories of bravery and determination of their own.

Equally inspiring is the work being carried out by the foundation, which is coming off its best year in terms of recruitment in its 27-year history. It is currently funding eight projects across Britain, worth a combined £1.1 million, with each focused on improving the quality of life for the 40,000 people in positions like mine.

For example, many people with spinal cord injuries suffer from awful pain and research is underway at Glasgow's Queen Elizabeth University teaching hospital, using some of the country's leading MRI technology, to understand why somebody who cannot feel or move their legs can still be blighted by terrible neuropathic pain.

The foundation is also set to embark on a major project that could have an enormous impact on the lives of those with tetraplegia. A pilot study was recently conducted that enabled an individual to use their hands again

after a loss of control of muscles and nerves running from the neck to the hands had left them unable to do so. Mr Steevenson is confident this research can result in a number of individuals with tetraplegia regaining hand function.

It is vital his work continues to be funded and the eagle-eyed racegoers among you may have noticed those efforts were under way at Exeter on Thursday afternoon.

Mr Steevenson was at the course selling, among other things, cards featuring the excellent work of Ollie Ellwood, himself a former amateur jockey, and a message from me

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reading: "When I broke my back at Kempton Park in October 2016 things changed for me in a big way! Thanks to the wonderful support of the doctors and specialists during my long rehabilitation, I have been able to come to terms with my life in a wheelchair rather than a saddle."

I was pleased to hear that the cards were selling well and I sincerely thank everybody who picked one up. Even small purchases like this do so much to support research that is improving the lives of people in unimaginably challenging circumstances.

Such INSPIRE fundraising efforts are commonplace at courses across the south and south west, not least at Salisbury where the foundation is based.

The aim is to expand those efforts in the coming year and I would urge racegoers to keep an eye out for its stalls and help if possible.

I am excited to have been given this opportunity and I am looking forward to seeing what doors can be opened to me via the remarkable work made possible by INSPIRE.