

**Background.** INSPIRE is a medium sized, national charity which raises funds for a scientific programme to ‘research independence, quality of life and dignity after spinal cord injury’ (SCI). Such injuries are life changing, often permanent and affect more than **60,000** people in the UK, with **three new cases every day**. Unlike other larger research charities, we receive **no** NHS or Government funding support, so we absolutely depend on support of Grant Making Trusts (our main source of income), sponsored events, donations and bequests.

**Management.** Our office is located in Salisbury, adjoining one of the UK’s 11 spinal injuries units. **Stephen Croft** took over INSPIRE as **Director** on 1 May 2023; he undertakes all fundraising, the management of the research programme, publicity and the programme of events. He also acts as Secretary to the charity’s two executive **Governing Bodies**:

**1. The National Scientific Committee (NSC).** The NSC consists of eleven subject matter experts from universities and hospitals throughout the UK and Ireland, from Dublin to Cornwall, Birmingham to Newcastle and Glasgow. They meet twice a year in London to monitor and assess current projects and consider new research applications. Their focus is on ‘rigorous scientific relevance and merit’. Those new applications it recommends are then submitted to the Trustees for funding approval.

**2. The Board of Trustees.** With backgrounds in business, medical science and law, Trustees also meet biannually to ratify the NSC’s recommendations. They are also responsible for managing the charity’s Five Year Research Programme and overseeing other funding and management issues. Six current Trustees live with the effects of SCI.

**Patronage and Membership.** We enjoy the support of 13 **Patrons** from a disparate array of backgrounds. Our principal Patron is **Baroness Cox of Queensbury**. Patrons’ non-executive role as ‘roving ambassadors’, ensures our cause is known within professional and social circles. Four of our Patrons live with SCI, as a result of riding, rugby, car and skiing accidents. We also have a wide network of friends and voting members across the UK. We have dispensed with joining fees and annual subscriptions, but enjoy regular voluntary donations throughout the year.

**What is spinal cord injury?** SCI is a neurological rather than orthopaedic condition, often caused by the catastrophic dislocation of vertebrae. ‘Broken backs’ and ‘broken necks’ normally relate to damaged nerves in the spinal column rather than broken bones, which can repair with time. The spinal column shields a complex array of delicate nerves relaying ‘motor’ messages from the brain to the body and communicating ‘sensory’ messages back to the brain. When spinal nerves are damaged, functionality and sensation below the level of the ‘lesion’ is impaired and can be lost altogether. Currently, severed spinal nerves cannot be repaired.

**Tetraplegia/Paraplegia.** A high spinal lesion in the neck (Tetraplegia) can result in impaired hand and arm function, upper trunk problems and breathing issues. In extreme cases, the use of a mechanical ventilator may be necessary to ensure a constant supply of oxygen to the lungs. Lesions in broken backs (Paraplegia) can result in lower body issues, especially paralysis. All those who experience SCI are likely to encounter bladder, bowel and pain issues as well as frequent and recurring pressure sores, sometimes many years after their injury.

**Areas of Research Interest.** Our areas of interest focus on quality of life and independence and include bladder and bowel function, hand function for Tetraplegics, mobility for Paraplegics and pain management; we are also keen to develop research into pressure sores.

**Caveats.** The INSPIRE Foundation's commitment is to SCI and nothing else. Our specific purpose is in researching practical issues that could benefit people living with the effects of SCI anywhere in the UK. We do not sanction R&D for commercial manufacturers, nor do we address 'the cure'. Instead, our focus is on improving the lives of those living with SCI.

**INSPIRE's journey.** From our conception in 1987 at Salisbury Hospital Spinal Unit, we have seen considerable growth in the 37 years we have existed.

**1. Research.** In the last 10 years we have raised more than **£2.5 million** for research. Today's five year programme of eight projects is being funded to the tune of more than **£1.4 million**. Our projects (some multi-sited) are in Salisbury, still our home base, Glasgow and others in London, Bath, Newcastle, Stoke Mandeville, Stanmore and Birmingham. Our 3 year average annual research expenditure until 2020 was **£269,873**, reduced by the Covid pandemic to **£156,775** in 2021/22 and remaining around that level since then.

**2. Further Fundraising.** Our 'chicken & egg' evidence proves that good quality projects which deliver results for the SCI population in the UK are still the catalyst for successful fundraising. To date, we have secured more than **£850,000** towards the programme, so while we have made considerable headway, we still have a financial mountain to climb. The difficult pandemic period made this especially challenging, but we are persevering and making real headway. The irony is that we have a considerable list of scientists and further exciting projects on hold that we could start today if only we had the funds!

**Profile.** Although a relatively small charity, INSPIRE's work is highly praised by SCI experts nationally. We are registered with both the **Charity Commission** (No. 296284) and **Scottish Charity Regulator** (No. SC048863) and our membership with the **Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC)** was re-confirmed with the successful 5 Year Audit on 2 September 2021.

For further information please visit our website, email [office@inspire-foundation.org.uk](mailto:office@inspire-foundation.org.uk) or call me on the number below at any time.

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[www.inspire-foundation.org.uk](http://www.inspire-foundation.org.uk)