Spotlight on paediatric strokes

By Ash Bolt

The Peacock family. (Supplied)

A Geelong father will be sharing his experiences as part of the first ever advisory group formed to represent the needs of survivors of paediatric strokes and their families.

Tony Peacock will be one of 12 members of the Stroke Foundation's committee, where he will use his experience with daughter Georgia's paediatric stroke to help guide the foundation with the support it provides to families.

Georgia was just 11 months old when she suffered an aneurysm when a blood vessel burst in her brain.

Like one-in-three infants that suffer an aneurysm, Georgia also had a stroke.

"People think of stroke as an older person thing, but they affect children as well," Tony said.

"You're never lucky to have a stroke, but Georgia was as lucky as she could be as she was already in hospital in intensive care.

"She was in hospital for about four months, and after all that she had complications from the stroke.

"She's coming up to eight [years old] now, and so for seven years she's been having intense weekly therapy."

Tony said Georgia had previously had "complete neglect" of the right side of her body, but was now considered high functioning and enjoyed playing tennis and going to school.

But it was his and wife Kim's experiences in the early days of Georgia's journey that he hoped to share with other parents going through similar times.

"It was not that long ago, but there wasn't a lot of information out there," he said.

"We knew it was never the right thing to do coming from health backgrounds, but we turned to doctor Google to find anything – scientific papers or whatever was out there – that gave us some sort of insight into possible outcomes and expectations we could have.

"It's a very confusing time when you don't know what's going on."

Tony said his family had been lucky to be connected with another family who had gone through a similar experience, and learned a lot from their journey.

"This is a space that's been empty," he said.

"The committee is made up of people who are parents or adults who had strokes themselves when they were young, so everyone is bringing their own experiences.

"We're there to help the Stroke Foundation as it builds up its services around paediatric strokes and build resources for parents.

"It's all about identifying what are the challenges families face when they are in that situation and then provide guidance.

"These things make a difference to families and children who are going through treatment … and it's something I'm proud to be involved in."

Stroke Foundation acting executive director of stroke services Eamonn O'Toole said the members, who have been selected from all over the country, will meet four times a year to inform Stroke Foundation activities and projects.

Their valuable insight will also assist with research which has the potential to benefit future generations, he said.

"Approximately 600 Australian children have a stroke each year," Eamonn said.

"Awareness of paediatric stroke is gradually growing amongst health professionals and in the community, largely driven by passionate people with lived experience, including those in this group.

"But there is much more work to be done to ensure children receive their stroke diagnosis and treatment faster to improve their chances of a better recovery."

The advisory group's lived experience represents different stages of the stroke journey – from the early days of navigating information and a child's specific needs to adult survivors who can reflect on the physical, cognitive and emotional challenges they faced while growing up.

Stroke strikes the brain and can change lives in an instant. Between 50 and 85 per cent of childhood stroke survivors will experience disabilities that last a lifetime.

According to the Stroke Foundation, approximately 600 Australian children have a stroke each year.

FormFlow rewarded for world-first innovation

The FormFlow team is presented with the Innovation, Research and Development Award by Glen Pasque, Engineering and Maintenance Manager of VIVA Energy. (Supplied)

Founded in September 2016 by two manufacturing experts from Geelong, FormFlow has rapidly risen to the top of the innovation industry pack and has been rewarded accordingly with the Geelong Chamber of Commerce's Innovation, Research and Development Award, sponsored by Viva Energy Australia, at the 2021 Business Excellence Awards.

Co-founders Dr Matt Dingle and Associate Professor Matthias Weiss implemented world-first technology to create sharp bends in corrugated metal sheets, enhancing bushfire resistance and the energy efficiency of buildings.

Admired by the award judging panel for their production and availability of "beautiful, functional and sustainable housing," FormFlow was nominated for the award by the Geelong Manufacturing Council.

"Obviously we were chuffed when we found out we were nominated," Dr Dingle said.

"As a fairly new business, it's really nice when an industry body and people that you work with put you forward for an award like that."

Dr Dingle previously worked as lead engineer at Ford's Product Development Facility in Geelong, co-founded several other businesses and lectured at Deakin University. He is now working full time as FormFlow's managing director, alongside Associate Professor Weiss, who is currently FormFlow's research and development director.

Associate Professor Weiss is internationally renowned for his work in the roll forming industry, has been part of five successful nationally competitive large research grants and has published more than 80 refereed articles.

FormFlow staff watched the awards as a team in a COVID-safe environment with a big screen, takeaway and a few drinks.

"It was almost like a real celebration," Dr Dingle laughs.

Despite some hiccups in the last few months with lockdowns, construction industry closures and material cost increases, FormFlow has an abundance of work awaiting it, including contracts booked until July and a variety of interstate projects.

"We work very closely with our collaborators – it's a key part of our success and we could like to acknowledge the role that Deakin University and BlueScope Steel have played in our achievements so far," Dr Dingle said.

The 2021 Geelong Business Excellence Awards were held as a virtual awards night on Tuesday, October 19and celebrated the region's clever, creative and resilient businesses and business leaders.

Elle Cecil

FormFlow co-founders Dr Matt Dingle (left) and Associate Professor Matthias Weiss have partnered with Deakin University and BlueScope Steel to provide their world-first C90 product. (Supplied)