



Chris's Story

My name is Chris Latimer and I am a mother of four children who have all been affected by road trauma.

I experienced the loss of my 16- and 17-year-old daughters Wendy and Melissa in 1997. They were passengers in a car driven by Wendy's boyfriend Matt (18) who also died in the collision. He was the only son of a Bendigo family and I couldn't imagine what his mother had to go through with Matt's death and the finding that there was an illegal substance in his system, which would have contributed to his judgement that day.

Then in 2007 my only son Grant was a passenger in a car driven by his best mate Marcus who was driving 140kmh on a country road at 2am. He misjudged the road and went end over end into a paddock eight times destroying the car and killing himself instantly. My son was trapped in the back seat with head injuries and a nearly severed arm. If it hadn't been for the back seat air bags he would not have survived. He was airlifted that night to the Royal Melbourne Hospital. He recovered from his physical injuries but has struggled for many years with post-traumatic stress disorder.

On 9 October 2009, on a clear spring morning, my youngest daughter Nicole was in a car driven by her boyfriend Dave. They were going to breakfast when he went too fast through a roundabout and hit a sign. The car spun around at high speed and hit a pole. Nicole suffered a catastrophic head injury. She was 21 at the time of the collision with a two-year-old son named Blake. Her injuries were so severe that she only had a 30 per cent survival rate. It is now nearly five years since that day and Nicole's brain injury is extreme. She is conscious of her environment but has no

consistent responses and has severe spasticity. She is totally reliant on 12 carers to look after her on a rotating roster. She will never walk or talk again.

After that event, I didn't sleep because of stress and night terrors for many years. I couldn't read or listen to music. I had been practicing a daily meditation, but now it was hard to sit still except when I was exhausted from hospital visits, speaking to therapists, doctors, lawyers and the TAC. I had been seeing a psychologist and dealing with Centrelink and then had to deal with my mum's death as well. But through all this I was feeling that I was making progress for, after all, I had an amazing partner David and many friends and family who supported and encouraged me as we now had Nicole's son to bring up. Blake's a beautiful grandson too, and also has his own challenges with autism.

I was at Westfield in South Morang nearly two years ago with Nicole and one of her support workers watching Blake play on the indoor play centre when one of the other parents ask me if he could ask me some questions regarding Nicole and her circumstances. I told him what had happened and some other things about my family. He introduced himself as Chris and he was an ambulance driver who volunteered for this organisation - RTSSV. He said they did information nights where they would educate road traffic offenders who were mostly sent by the courts and solicitors. He explained that he was a volunteer and would go and share his experience. He asked me if that would be something I could do. He gave me a contact number and suggested that I think about it.

I had done some volunteer work in the past with some public speaking and knew how valuable a personal experience it could be, so it didn't take me long to find the website and ring Chris Harrison. I was then introduced to some amazing people who worked diligently to make a difference to people's lives - Gillian, Puspa, Daryl, Amanda and of course Chris the ambo who I regularly get to work with, and many many more.

Every month I get the opportunity to tell people my story in Greensborough and occasionally at Collingwood. I have also been fortunate to be part of the information mornings at the Victoria Police Academy in Glen Waverley to share my involvement with them over the years due to road trauma.

Being able to speak about my children and their tragedy, to have a voice, to at least try to change the reckless action on the road, gives me purpose and helps me in my recovery. It can be challenging to remember the details but if it can save someone's life it's worth it.

My children would want me to be trying to make a difference and I can't let them down.

If we can make a difference to change even one person's attitude towards their driving and commit to a safer community on the roads we have hopefully saved heartache and loss for another family. We need to aim high - the road to zero is the only acceptable toll.