

# *Multiple Sclerosis (MS) – Fiona's Story*



My name is Fiona Grierson and I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) in year 2000 when I was 33.

My husband and I were living in Port Hedland and I had been having a range of varying symptoms. I was always tired but I put this down to the amount of travelling I was doing on my own with my job – it was not unusual for me to travel a couple of thousand of kilometres in the remote Pilbara each week in scorching heat). I then started to experience blurred vision, muscle weakness, pins and needles in my hands and feet, loss of sensation and my body ached all the time.

I had been to numerous doctors and eventually went to a doctor who reviewed all my symptoms and advised me that he thought I had Multiple Sclerosis. He referred me to a Neurologist and after a number of tests, an MRI scan and a review of my history the GP's diagnosis was confirmed. It was a shock to both my husband and I and apart from telling my closest friend we kept the news to ourselves. We were having enough trouble working out what we were going to do and just needed some time to process what my diagnosis meant for us and our future.

Twelve months after my diagnosis we decided we should tell our family and friends and my employer about my condition. We had had 12 months to process the diagnosis and felt emotionally able to answer any questions. Many of our friends and family were shocked and devastated with the news. Some were in disbelief and didn't believe it as they said I looked too well and was too positive. My employer was excellent. I had a very understanding boss who surprisingly knew a bit about MS and said he would ensure I got the support in the workplace I needed. This was a huge relief as I had been a career public servant and my job was everything to me.

I continued to work effectively in my position however in 2005 the department I was working for abolished a number of positions including mine and I was made redundant. It had been getting harder and harder for me to keep up with the demands of working full time in a very hot climate (heat brings on severe fatigue) and after much thought I accepted a voluntary redundancy in 2007.

After 22 years of working for the State Public Service I was now unemployed and at a bit of a loss what to do. I knew it was doing me no good sitting at home thinking about what my life could have been if I did not have MS. I continued volunteering my time in the community including being a member on a number of not for profit committees. I also became heavily involved in caring for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife as a part of Pilbara Wildlife Carers Association. This was my saviour. When you have animals that need constant care you don't have time to dwell on your own problems and sink into depression.

In 2009 with my body starting to "seize up" we decided that we needed to be closer to medical resources. I needed some intensive rehabilitation to see if I could regain some of my mobility that I was losing very quickly. My husband was granted 12 months leave without pay and we relocated to Perth in December 2009. I am happy to say that with the holistic approach to my wellness provided by Perth Integrated Health with Ian and Lucy and the rest of the team (Julian – Exercise Physiology and Jill – Podiatry) my mobility is much better than it was 12 months ago. I can even walk up and down stairs (slowly) something I never thought I would be able to do again.

I still do a lot of voluntary work and a bit of community and business development consultancy work. It is important that I reduce stress levels, remain positive and active as I do not want to give up and let this disease destroy my body and mind. As for the future we don't know what it will bring but I am determined to make the best of what I have and to enjoy life as much as my body will let me.