



Rotary's polio history: longer than you might think

Did you know that polio survivors make up the largest single physical disability group in Australia?

Up to 40,000 Australians were diagnosed with the most severe form of the disease, paralytic polio, between 1930 and 1988. In Australia today there are an estimated 400,000 polio survivors.



The extraordinary work undertaken by Rotary International over the past three decades to eradicate polio worldwide is an achievement every one of Australia's polio survivors is aware of. However, in addition to the lengthy *End Polio Now!* campaign, Rotary International has an even longer history with polio.

In 1925 the Rotary Club of Sydney, NSW, sent one of its Directors, Mr BR Gelling, to the US to examine the support Rotary was providing for polio survivors. He was introduced by Paul Harris to Mr Edgar 'Daddy' Allen, who had recently established the National Society for Crippled Children. Paul and Edgar were fellow Rotarians and close friends and in the early 1930s framed the Declaration of Rights of Crippled Children. Paul Harris became the Patron of the National Crippled Children's Society.

In December 1929 the Rotary Club of Sydney convened a meeting of concerned citizens and as a result the New South Wales Society for Crippled Children was established. In fact, of the seven state-wide community organisations around Australia once known as Crippled Children Societies, six were established by Rotary.

Back to 2013, a growing number of polio survivors, once fully active members of society, are now experiencing new and debilitating symptoms known as the Late Effects of

Polio. Many polio survivors who walked independently must now use braces, crutches or wheelchairs, as well as make significant lifestyle changes. Polio Australia was incorporated in 2008 with the aim of providing vital and life changing intervention programs for the post-polio community.

Every October, Polio Australia observes Polio Awareness Month to raise awareness and every year on October 24, Rotary International celebrates World Polio Day.

This October, in recognition of our common history, Polio Australia would like to invite Districts and clubs to explore strengthening relations by:

- Inviting a polio survivor to speak at your club, especially in October. Phone 03 9016 7678 or email office@polioaustralia.org.au to book.
- Challenging your members to see how many polio survivors they know of and/or can track down to sign them up to the Australian Polio Register via www.polioaustralia.org.au.

The Australian Polio Register was set up in October 2010 to capture statistical details of polio survivors – there is no other data source recording this information.

For more information about Polio Australia's work visit www.polioaustralia.org.au. •