
The Sargood Centre:

The world's leading Life Learning facility for people with traumatic spinal cord injury

Concept Brief (Draft)

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Introduction

Collaroy, on Sydney's beautiful northern beaches, is about to become the location for the world's leading life learning facility for people who experience traumatic spinal cord injury.

The Sargood Centre is named in honour of Frederick Sargood, whose original bequest to the Royal Alexandria Hospital for Children in 1921 of a stunning waterfront site with direct access to Collaroy Beach created a legacy that will live on in the new Centre. He would no doubt be thrilled to know that land he once owned will now provide a place where people will re-gain the skills and the confidence to return to a life of full participation in our society.

Three things will make The Sargood Centre unique in the world.

First, its **design** and its facilities will make use of the most innovative minds and the most advanced techniques and technologies available—and its look and feel will be truly inspiring.

Second, its **culture** will be based on the philosophy that nothing is impossible for a person with a spinal cord injury if they gain the confidence, skills and tools they need to get back in control of their lives.

And third, the Centre will be an integral part of the local **community**, physically and culturally, helping those who use the Centre to re-engage with the community and the community to embrace them.

All of those involved in its development—those who are designing and building the Centre, the people who will gain their independence at the Centre, those providing the funding, and the local community who are so enthusiastically engaged with the project—are driven by a simple philosophy: traumatic spinal-cord injury does not and should not stop a person from living a wonderful, rewarding and independent life.



The Centre is not a hospital—people who spend time there will have already spent an average of four months in one of Sydney's spinal injury units and will be back on track medically. It is not a rehabilitation centre, although some traditional rehabilitation may be provided. It's a Centre for life learning.

The Centre's primary focus will be providing an environment where people who are injured and their family and friends gain the confidence, learn the skills and acquire the tools they need to take control of their lives. Its objective will be to see each of the people who pass through the Centre enthusiastically returning home equipped, confident and ready to go back to work, to school, to their community.

The result will be a win for people who experience a traumatic spinal cord injury. A win for their families and friends. And a win for us all as we benefit from the contributions that people with disabilities are so willing and able to make to our society.

Background

Spinal Cord Injury

Each year, more than 300 Australians damage their spinal cord through accidents in the workplace, playing sport and a host of other ways. Over 50% of spinal cord injuries result from motor vehicle accidents. For most people, the paralysis that results is permanent and they are faced with perhaps the greatest challenge they will face in their lives.

Most will use a wheelchair for mobility and those with the most severe injuries—those with neck injuries resulting in quadriplegia—will require ongoing support for basic life tasks including showering, toileting, dressing, meal preparation etc.

In the past, spinal cord injury not only resulted in a loss of body function, but often in a loss of independence and opportunity. Today, though, many people with the most severe spinal cord injuries are leading independent, fulfilling lives and are participating in all our society has to offer.

They are living at home, accessing and directing the services they need to live independently. They are raising families, going to school and university, travelling the world, working in challenging and well-paid employment.

But the journey from the day a person is injured through to independence and full participation in society is a challenging one. Not only do people face the physical challenges of their disability, they also face the emotional challenges of living with a

disability, and the often demotivating effect of a well-meaning community that fails to recognise their potential and aspirations.

Returning to the Superhighway of Life

For most people, the journey of life is like a superhighway. While we all aspire to different things, most of us live life at a fast pace. We do many things, and we achieve many things. Things go wrong along the way, of course, but we mostly pull over to the side of the road for a bit, regroup, and rejoin the flow of traffic.

And when things do go wrong, one factor more than any other makes the difference between a person successfully regrouping and rejoining the flow of traffic or staying permanently on the side of the road. That factor is the person's capacity to deal with life's challenges.

Those challenges come in all shapes and sizes. For most people, though, those challenges are relatively minor and we usually deal with them quickly and effectively, mostly by drawing on the life skills we have learnt since we were born. As the challenges become greater, the skills we need to apply to deal with them also become greater. Those who have had the opportunity to gain highly developed life skills are usually those who can deal with life's challenges best.

For many people with disabilities, though, the Whole of Life factors described below—particularly in combination—can make the future look more like a life travelling on the back roads, full of potholes, broken bridges.

But many people who experience spinal cord injury, after regrouping on the side of the road for a short while, return to the flow of traffic on the superhighway. And many move back into the fast lane where they were travelling prior to their injury.

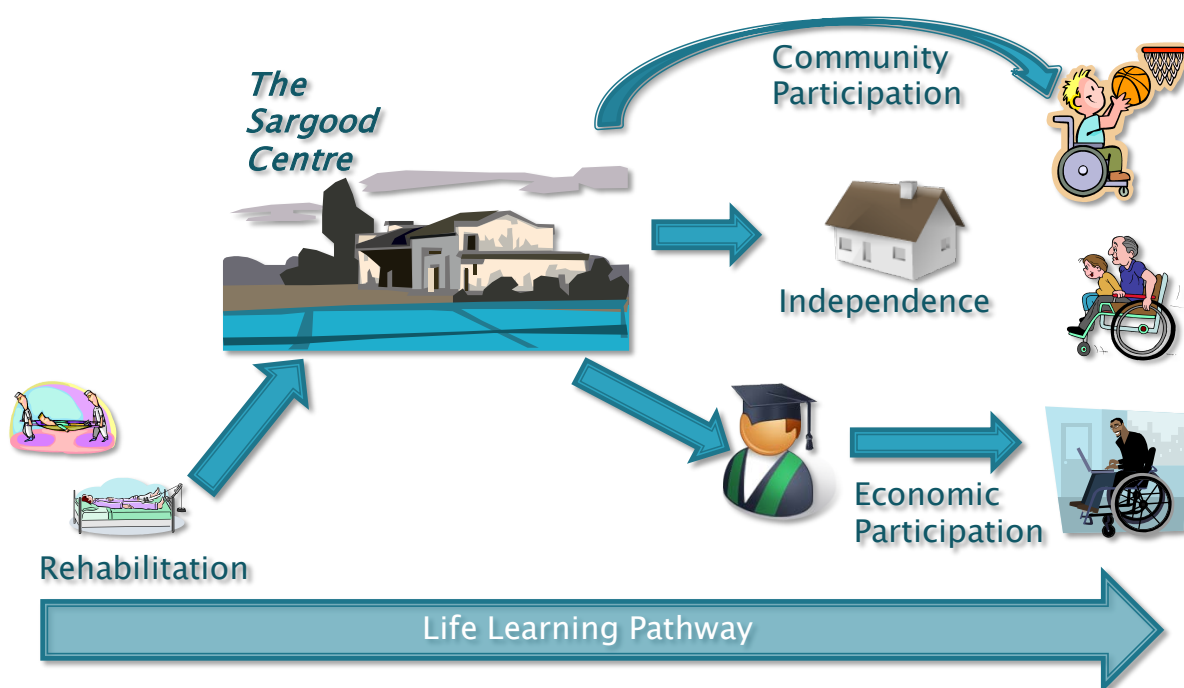
The key to their success? Those people have, through whatever means (either prior to their injury or afterwards), developed their life skills—decision-making skills, communication skills, planning skills. As a result they have been able to manage the challenges they face living with a disability and have developed the confidence and strength to return to lives of independence and participation.

The Sargood Centre will be where people who experience a spinal cord injury pull over to regroup, ready to return to life's superhighway—to develop the life skills they will need. Those who move through its doors won't be heading for the nearest exit. They won't spend their lives travelling the back roads of life.

The Sargood Centre on the Life Learning Pathway

The journey a person who experiences a spinal cord injury will take from the day the injury occurs through to the time they return to a life of independence and full participation in society will involve a number of different stages from early trauma care, through rehabilitation, learning to live independently, reconnecting with the community, gaining or refining vocational skills and acquiring the necessary equipment, technologies and tools that can make life so much easier.

While traditionally each of these stages has been delivered as a series of separate interventions and programs, we believe that the best outcomes will be achieved when these stages come together as a continuum through which a person with a spinal cord injury progresses quickly and seamlessly. Central to this model is the recognition that, in one way or another, each of the stages a person will pass through represents an opportunity to gain life skills.



The first task to be undertaken in the development of The Sargood Centre will be a strategic planning process bringing together key people from all aspects of the "Return to Full Participation after Spinal Cord Injury" business including people who have experienced spinal cord injury, medical and rehabilitation professionals, those who provide ongoing support, people from housing, education and transport, etc.

The purpose of this exercise will be to create, we believe for the first time, an integrated "business model" to bring together the currently fragmented programs and interventions to create a smooth pathway for people with spinal cord injury to return to full participation as quickly as possible.

At the conclusion of that process, not only will the Sargood development team have clarity about the role or roles that The Sargood Centre can best play in supporting people with spinal cord injury, each of the other programs and interventions will benefit as they enhance and develop their services. Even more importantly, we will create connections between all of the services so that people with spinal cord injury can move quickly and smoothly through each stage of the recovery process.

The exact role and function of The Sargood Centre will emerge at the conclusion of the twelve-week strategic planning process. The Sargood project team will then use the knowledge gained in the strategic planning process to develop a business model for the Centre that supplements and complements other existing programs and interventions.

While the detailed business model for The Sargood Centre will emerge over the coming months, we already know that the Centre will play a crucial role at a crucial time in the journey back to full inclusion in society for people who experience a traumatic spinal cord injury in New South Wales.

The Centre will mark a transition from the medically-focused and largely protected environment of the hospital to the more familiar, but also challenging life back home. For many, the prospect of leaving the protected environment of a spinal injuries unit where a person's needs are mostly taken care of by others, to return to an environment that he or she will need to control, is daunting.

And, like most other things with human nature, not everyone responds to a spinal cord injury in the same way and a "one size fits all" approach seldom meets everyone's needs. A key objective in the design of the Centre's business model will be its capacity to respond to individual needs.

For some people spending a period of time—potentially several months—immediately after leaving the hospital spinal unit, usually 2-4 months after an accident, will be the best way for them to benefit from the services provided by The Sargood Centre. For others, shorter stays over a period of time after they return home may be more appropriate.

The Whole of Life Approach

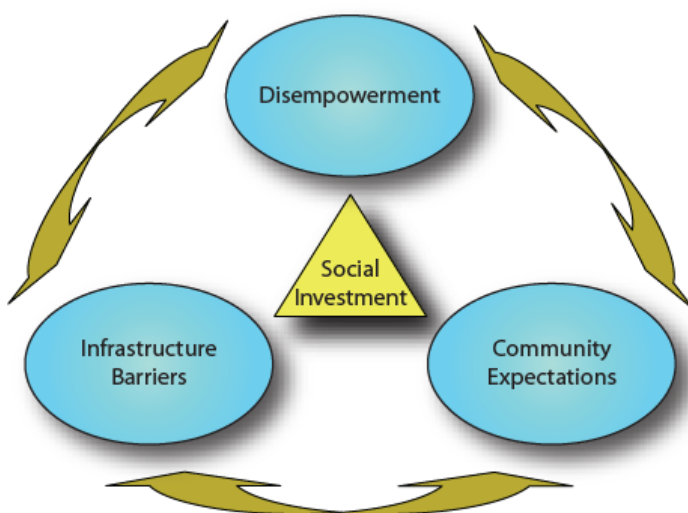
To help people make the journey to return to full participation as quickly and as effectively as possible, The Sargood Centre will base everything it does, from its design and construction through to its daily operations, on the concept of the *Whole of Life Approach* to disability.

The Whole of Life Approach describes three interrelated factors that affect the life of a person with a disability. It argues that, for a person with a disability to participate fully in society, all three factors must be understood and addressed.

First, people with disabilities face significant **infrastructure barriers** that can make participating fully in society much more difficult than it is for people who don't have disabilities. For people who experience spinal cord injury the challenges of accessing public transport, buildings and other infrastructure, and of obtaining assistance with personal care and other daily living tasks are particularly significant.

Second, our community often believes that people with disabilities are unable to participate fully in society and the **expectations** of the contribution that people with disabilities can make are low. Even people with disabilities themselves and their families and friends can often believe that a disability will lead to a life of unfulfilled dreams.

And third, the magnitude of the challenges ahead can often seem insurmountable, leading to an overwhelming feeling of **disempowerment**. It can all just seem too hard.



Central to the Whole of Life Approach is the recognition that the time, effort and resources that are required to support people with disabilities in their journey back to full participation in society represent an investment—a social investment—that will produce a significant return to people with disabilities, to their family and friends and to our society as a whole. We all benefit.

The Sargood Centre will be designed, physically, structurally and

culturally, around this model.

During the time people spend at the Centre, the infrastructure barriers each person faces will be identified, where they can they will be removed and where they can't, together with the Sargood team, each person will learn alternative ways to overcome the barriers.

At the same time, and in partnership with the Collaroy community, each person will learn how to reconnect with our society, physically and emotionally. Already the Collaroy community has committed to creating a fully accessible environment for people with disabilities, making this vibrant area an accessible and welcoming place for people with disabilities. And the community will see first-hand that people with spinal cord injury are as willing and able to join in with all the community has to offer as anyone else.

With the support of the Sargood team, of others who have experienced spinal cord injury themselves and have overcome the challenges they face, and of mentors from the local community, people will learn how to take control of their lives. They will gain the confidence and enthusiasm they seek to return to fulfilling and productive lives.

The Sargood Centre—From Concept to Reality

The Sargood Centre is far more than bricks and mortar. It represents an exciting new way of approaching the challenges of a spinal cord injury.

Its physical presence will be truly inspiring. The Collaroy site itself couldn't fail to lift the spirits. Not only does it have glorious views over Collaroy Beach and the northern beaches coastline, it has direct access to the beach, to local shops and facilities and to public transport. It's a perfect location to connect the Centre to the community and the community to the Centre.

It won't look or feel like a hospital or a rehabilitation centre. And it doesn't need to. In line with the Centre's philosophy that "anything is possible", its design will demonstrate that it is entirely possible to create an environment that is fully accessible for a person who uses a wheelchair—and looks and feels wonderful at the same time.

The Centre will include the latest technologies that demonstrate the difference that technology can make to a person with spinal cord injury. People will learn how to use technology to enhance their lives and how to integrate it into their lives on a daily basis.

Wherever possible, the families of people with spinal cord injury will be directly involved in the person's time at the Centre, including potentially staying at the Centre with the person for all or part of his or her stay.

And the Sargood Centre will be designed, built and operated as an integral part of the Collaroy community. In parallel to the creation of the Centre itself, the local community and Warringah Council will undertake work to make all aspects of Collaroy fully accessible to people with disabilities including the beach itself, the local surf club, local shops and restaurants, education and transport facilities, etc.

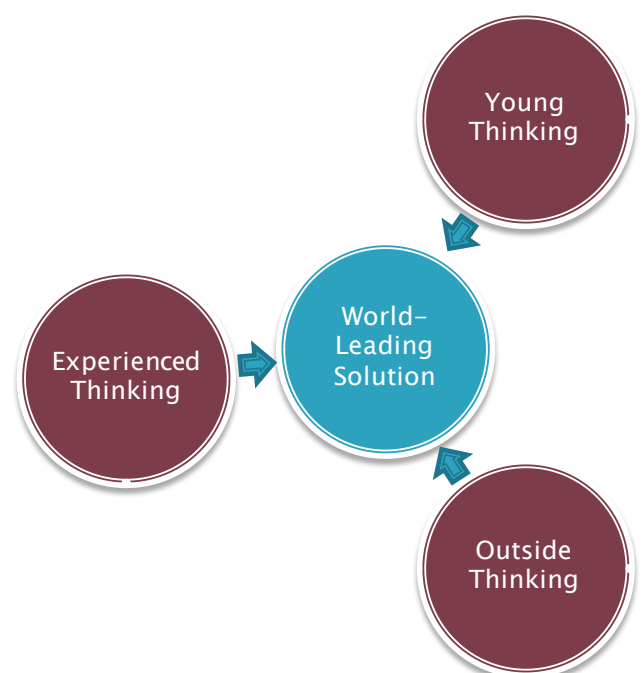
The people designing and developing the Centre will be looking for every opportunity to connect the Centre and the community, including the possibility of including facilities that everyone in the community can use at the Centre. This particularly exciting aspect of the Centre's development is based on a very simple notion: people with spinal cord injury who come to the Centre will be returning to their communities at the end of their stay. Learning to reconnect with the community, and helping the community to understand what it needs to do to embrace people with spinal cord injury, is what the Centre is all about. That process will start on the day a person arrives at the Centre and will continue throughout the person's stay.

Design Criteria

With such an exciting vision for the Sargood Centre to lead the world in showing people with disabilities and the world as a whole that a spinal cord injury does not mean a person can't participate in everything life has to offer, the process of creating the Centre will start by developing a set of design criteria that will guide every aspect of the Centre's development.

Diverse Thinking → World-Leading Solution

The development of the design criteria will be a community-wide effort. Often the best ideas come from the least expected sources, so innovative ideas will be sought from people with many different perspectives. By bringing together three complimentary types of thinking – Experienced Thinking, Young



Thinking and Outside Thinking – we will create a truly world-leading facility.

Included will be ideas from those with long experience living with spinal cord injury, from those who have worked with people with spinal cord injury, from people who understand technology and those with a penchant for innovative design. Community leaders will contribute, as will those who like to think "outside the dots". Most sought-after will be new ideas, fresh ideas—ideas that see what is possible, not what can't be done.

Initial thoughts on the Centre's design criteria are based on the philosophy and core objectives of the Centre and relate to key areas of the Centre's development and operation. And the design criteria will relate not just to the physical design of the Centre itself but also to its establishment as a vital link to the community.

Purpose

The Sargood Centre will be a place of life learning. As such, key criteria in its design, construction and operation will include:

- creating an environment where people can absorb knowledge quickly and effectively, so the Centre will include spaces where people can connect and share knowledge, thoughts and ideas about managing life with a spinal cord injury;
- providing a space for emotional healing, where people who have been directly affected by spinal cord injury—those who have been injured and the families and friends who are closest to them—can acknowledge their grief, express their fears and uncertainties and rebuild their emotional strength in an environment that nurtures, encourages and builds high expectations for the future and a resilience to match;
- engaging life learning specialists who will bring the latest thinking about personal leadership and development into the design, construction and ongoing management of the Centre;
- incorporating learning technologies to ensure that the people who come to the Centre will have the broadest possible opportunity to learn about all aspects of living with a spinal cord injury;
- providing ongoing opportunities for people at the Centre to learn about living in the community, and its overall design will take into account that much of the learning will take place, not within the four walls of the Centre itself, but in the local community;

- positioning the Centre to act as a catalyst for the community to learn about spinal cord injury, requiring the design and marketing of the Centre to consider how best to encourage community involvement;
- developing a culture and an environment that demonstrates—in everything it says and everything it does—that our community believes that people with spinal cord injury are worth the very best ... the very best facilities, the very best support, the very best tools, and the very best people;
- creating a Centre that celebrates the contribution that people with disabilities make to our society – a Centre that makes us all proud.

Physical Design

The criteria for the physical design of the Sargood Centre will be particularly important. As spinal cord injury is a physical disability, some of the most significant practical challenges that people with spinal cord injury will face are related to the physical environment. Key criteria will include:

- ensuring that every aspect of the Centre itself will demonstrate exemplary accessibility, making use of the broadest range of knowledge, innovations and technologies about how we make a physical environment not only accessible but welcoming and productive;
- creating a flexible environment that can be configured for the specific needs of each individual—the traditional "one size fits all" approach restricts many people from achieving their full potential;
- building a facility that encourages independence and self direction;
- providing an environment that encourages and facilitates family involvement, including accommodation arrangements where families can develop the confidence and skills to rebuild their lives together;
- considering the potential to enhance the Centre and its facilities as new solutions and ideas become available, thereby "future proofing" the Centre;
- taking full advantage of the restorative and invigorating potential of this magnificent sight;
- including the latest technologies in automation, aids and appliances, environmental control, communication and information technology, etc—and incorporating a capacity to upgrade, enhance or replace the Centre's technology to keep it at the forefront;

- creating a Centre that is visually beautiful, demonstrating that creating an environment that is fully accessible to people with spinal cord injuries does not mean that aesthetics and function become mutually exclusive outcomes;
- providing direct and easy, independent access to Collaroy Beach and its environs for people at the Centre—and similarly easy and welcoming access to the Centre for the Collaroy community.

The Centre in the Community

Connecting the people who use The Sargood Centre with the local community, and the local community with the Centre is a key objective. Key criteria related to the Centre's design, development and operation that relate to achieving this objective include:

- taking advantage of the central and high-profile location of the site itself to encourage the development of a close relationship between the Centre and its people and the Collaroy community;
- developing a physical design and operational business model that encourages activities undertaken by people with spinal cord injury at the Centre to be undertaken where possible in local community facilities rather than replicating facilities at Centre—examples include using the local gym at the Collaroy Surf Club instead of building a gym at the Centre; delivering some of the learning programs at the local school, TAFE or community college; encouraging group activities including recreational get-togethers to be held at the local Surf Club or local restaurants (this criteria is as much about what ISN'T included in the Centre as what IS);
- exploring opportunities to host local community activities at the Centre and to provide spaces for complimentary community or even commercial activities as part of the Centre's design (possibilities include establishing space for a coffee shop on the beachfront side of the site or providing office space at commercial rates for a suitable Job Network or Disability Employment Service provider or an appropriate Registered Training Organisation, the presence of which could encourage people at the Centre to explore education or employment opportunities);
- establishing relationships with key members of the local Collaroy community, including the local Council, local shopkeepers, community groups to improve the community's understanding of spinal cord injury and its effects—and

particularly to encourage the community to make every aspect of its physical environment fully accessible;

- consideration of how the physical and organisational design of the Centre could encourage the establishment and nurturing of personal relationships between people at the Centre and local community members, including mentoring partnerships, informal "disability action teams" involving people at the Centre and community members, and other yet to be thought of connections;
- to identify opportunities for people with spinal cord injury to undertake training or work experience with local businesses while they are at the Centre, considering how the Centre's physical and organisational design and its management processes could encourage that.

Organisational and Management Structure

The design of the organisational and management structure of the Centre is as important in the overall design of The Sargood Centre as the physical design of the Centre's facilities. Design considerations include:

- creating a legal structure for the Centre that acknowledges the contributions and investments made by its stakeholders and encourages an overall sense of ownership;
- establishing a capacity and structure for strategic guidance of the Centre that keeps the Centre's vision alive, maintains its thought leadership, and ensures that it meets the expectations of all of its stakeholders;
- building a management team that is smart, motivated, professional, respectful and that establishes, maintains and nurtures the "can do" culture that is so central to the Centre's philosophy;
- leveraging the core strengths of the Sargood Centre initiative, including its philosophy and culture and the strength of its community connections;
- developing a culture—and the management structure and the systems and processes that flow from it—that understands how empowering people with spinal cord injury to make informed choices about their future is key to their future success;
- developing and implementing structures, systems and processes that are accountable to its stakeholders, that apply its resources efficiently and

effectively, and that demonstrate a level of professionalism that reflects the importance of the role performed by The Sargood Centre.

Marketing and Communications

Key to the success of any initiative or enterprise is effectively communicating what it does, why it exists, what value it brings, why its activities should be supported. Key design considerations for the marketing and communications aspect of The Sargood Centre include:

- developing an overarching marketing and communications strategy that not only communicates to the world what The Sargood Centre is and does, but also helps to change the attitudes of the community overall and people with spinal cord injury and their family and friends about what spinal cord injury is, and how, with the right support, people with spinal cord injury can lead rewarding, productive lives, participating in and contributing to all our society has to offer;
- determining how the considerable resources available to The Sargood Centre, particularly the people in the local Collaroy community and its wealth of talented, dedicated and influential individuals who have committed their support, can be best utilised;
- recognising the importance of communicating a clear and positive message in everything the Centre does and says, and equipping all of those who will deliver that message, to do so effectively ... and at every possible opportunity.