



# Two new friends with a shared story of triumph in the face of adversity



PHOEBE Rutter and Michele Colmer have only just met, but they share a common bond. They were the same age when they suffered an acquired brain injury.

Ms Colmer, now 30, was only two years old when she strolled away from her mother outside their home and on to the road, suffering serious brain injuries when she was hit by a car.

Phoebe, now three, had surgery last year to remove a malignant tumour on her brain stem.

What followed for both survivors was a gruelling recovery process including long hospital stints, several surgeries and a struggle to do things most little girls take for granted like learning to walk, talk and play again.

Phoebe's mum, Liz Rutter, from Kingswood, said her daughter

was a "bright, active and happy girl" until she began feeling sick and started walking differently, which led to her diagnosis. She then had an operation to remove the tumour followed by radiation therapy.

But because of the tumour's location on her brain stem, it left her with an acquired brain injury.

"When they diagnosed her, I was devastated and shocked," Ms Rutter said. "But we look at her now and see that she is just getting on with (life) - she inspires us. I asked her what she loves most and she said 'Mum, I just love playing'."

Phoebe yesterday was given an achievement award by the Brain Injury Network of South Australia. The award ceremony, which coincides with Brain Injury Awareness Week, recognised Phoebe's

rehabilitation efforts, her positive attitude and being well enough to now attend kindergarten two sessions a week.

Meeting for the first time yesterday, Ms Colmer's message for Phoebe was that while the recovery process "never ends", persistence is the key to a fulfilled life.

Ms Colmer, from Glengowrie, now works as an inspirational speaker, telling her story to young people and Adelaide's corporate crowd. She has also just returned from a speaking trip to the US.

"I think it's really all about persistence, that message to keep trying," she said.

According to Brain Injury Australia, more than 500,000 Australians have an acquired brain injury.

**“She inspires us ... I asked her what she loves most and she said ‘Mum, I just love playing’**

LIZ RUTTER



**COMMON BOND:** Michele Colmer and Phoebe Rutter. 3. Picture: TAIT SCHMAAL