



Samantha Barlow

Back From Hell

We're celebrating the spirit of change at Fitness First with these stories of members whose passion for fitness transformed their lives.

Policewoman Samantha Barlow has made a miraculous recovery after a brutal attack in May 2009. While on her way to work at Kings Cross Police Station she was dragged into a park and her skull crushed and right hand shattered. Her assailant grabbed the \$200 from her wallet and fled leaving Samantha, mother of two, left for dead.

Although in a critical condition, Samantha pulled through: so much so that she was the Health category and overall winner of Fitness First's 2011 "New You Achievement Award". Since that award, she has made even more progress. She still can't smell or taste food, and sometimes experiences vertigo. In cold weather her hand locks up and she feels pain in the back of her neck.

But her determination continues to inspire. After coming second place in a biathlon last year, she has now set her sights on doing a triathlon and maybe even a half marathon.

When she looks at the long road back from the attack, she has no recollection of the time she spent in hospital. Doctors

call it a "typical coping mechanism" when it comes to dealing with trauma. "They were the worst days. When I see pictures of myself and was told of what I was like, I go 'I'm sure I wasn't that bad,'" she explains.

Intent on regaining mobility and her previous health and fitness before the incident, Samantha got straight into rehab. "I knew I had the hole in my head and severe vertigo, but I still wouldn't accept that as a hindrance," she says. After three months, a titanium plate was inserted into her skull and she was allowed to begin her road to recovery.

"I was very focused. They weren't expecting everything to improve so quickly – I refused to give up," says Samantha. "My hand was so mangled, I had pins and plates put in and had to retrain my whole hand."

It took almost two years of painful rehab and training until Samantha was able to pass the physical tests that allowed her to return to work. "My aim was always to get back into the police force and be able to do everything I did before. I worked extra hard and the exercises were really draining, but at the end of the day, no one else can do it for you."

Her daily gym visits included PT sessions, spin classes, and swim sessions. After the reconstruction of her hand she began using weights, and sand hill running proved a safe environment for any vertigo induced falls. But most importantly exercise became her coping strategy. "It was a big stress relief, I could go and think about something other than my body and my pain," she says. "I set lists and goals and worked step by step until I got there."

Read Samantha's journey to recovery in her book "Left for Dead", written with her husband Laurence.

