Setting sail for better life

DEBILITATING pain that left Kristi Foster switching from crutches to wheelchair and back for many years became mostly a thing of the past after a chance encounter in 2009.

Injured in a car accident when she was 21, Kristi broke her back in another accident just 16 weeks after surgery. As a result, the young woman spent years following doctors' advice to be careful what activities she took part in.

It wasn't until she discovered charity organization Sailors with disAbilities in 2009 that her life turned around – she lost weight and emerged from the depression that had made the injuries even harder to cope with.

"I was in and out of the wheelchair. I was on crutches, then back in the wheelchair," Kristi said.

"Pain is a fairly fickle thing, so I was going backwards and forwards, never further than crutches."

But the pain faded into the background as she sailed and two years later she was off the crutches, having built up her strength.

"I'm totally free of crutches now," she said.

"I actually sold my wheelchair two years ago, which was absolutely wonderful."

Now she's working with SWD to help others feel the freedom she does on the water.

"The charity as a whole is a fantastic org and one I feel I can contribute to," she said.

"They take people out for free. Being able to sail on a boat that does race to Hobart is a fantastic feeling.

"You hand over the remote control to someone in a wheelchair and they can tack the boat themselves."

Kristi's next aim is to race in the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race next summer.

For more information about Sailors with disAbilities, visit the website at sailorswithdisabilities.com.