

## Life as a young carer by Chloe

The summer months are busy for Alfred Health Carer Services. Much of our time is spent coordinating respite for families. For our Young Carer Program, it means finding some opportunities for time out and some summer fun where possible. Chloe Gill, 16 is one of the many young carers connected with our service and she shares her story.

My role as a carer really started when I was born, because I became a part of a family, and in a family you care for each other.

My mother is a strong, independent woman who managed to shake off her dark past and create a family, which is all she ever wanted to do. She cherished every moment of becoming a mum and never failed to look after me.

My sister joined the family not long after and Mum still managed to keep us occupied. She bought giant rolls of paper and we would finger paint huge pieces of art. She bought lots of art gear and drew pictures with us. She would sing and dance with us in our



Young carers enjoy time out and fun activities in school holidays

lounge room. She'd make fruit platters to feast on and would answer the many questions our young minds had. Everything she did was for us.

I remember when I was young I loved pigs. Whenever she saw something to do with pigs, whether it be piggy banks, plush toys, ornaments, you name it, she would get it for me. By the time I was about four I had collected a fair share of pig things.

My brother came into the family in 2005. Not long after, Mum woke in the night with

severe back pain. Many health professionals have tried to diagnose what's wrong but it's complex. I was five at the time and I stepped up to help my mum. I used to surprise my mum and dad by organising the fridge or cleaning the lounge room. I did small things that I thought would help Mum out.

Mum's health was a rollercoaster. Some days she wouldn't be in too much pain and was able to do more and other days the pain was excruciating. In late 2012 my

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# Life as a young carer by Chloe

father left us, which made my mother's health worse. With my mother's health decreasing I needed to help more.

The thing is, I never even thought of not helping my mother because she cared for me and raised me to be the person I am today. If I was sick, my mother would never leave my side, so it stands to reason that I help her when she is sick.

Even though I am a young carer and have a lot of responsibility, it is not all of who I am. I am so much more than a carer; I am a daughter, a sister, a friend, a musician, a student and more.

Young Carers Australia and Alfred Health Carer Services have both helped me to realise that I am not alone. Knowing that there are many other families who have a similar situation has helped me to address mum's illness with maturity. The future looks bright. I will continue to support my mum



Young carers enjoy activities during school holidays which promote wellbeing

and no matter what happens I know I will always have people to help and support me.

Alfred Health Carer Services' Young Carer Program provides one on one support for young carers 18 years of age and under who are currently engaged in, or wanting to re-engage with education. The program also runs events during school holidays. To find out more about Young Carers call **1800 052 222**.

## SUPPORT FOR CARERS

Are you caring for a family member or friend who is an older person, or who has a disability, mental illness or dementia?

Alfred Health Carer Services is a part of Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres nationally, providing a single point of contact for aged, disability, mental health and young carers. We help people to access carer support services (including urgent respite care). All enquiries to:

**1800 052 222\* (24 HOURS)**

\*Freecall except from mobile phones

We assist carers who live in the local council areas of Port Phillip, Stonnington, Glen Eira, Bayside, Kingston, Casey, Cardinia, Greater Dandenong, Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula.

We have offices at Caulfield Hospital and in Frankston and Dandenong.

### This Newsletter

Carer South News is published quarterly by Alfred Health Carer Services.

### How to contribute

Stories, news and photos are welcomed. For submissions, feedback and changes to the mailing list, phone **9076 6439** or email [info@carersouth.org.au](mailto:info@carersouth.org.au).

### Email

[info@carersouth.org.au](mailto:info@carersouth.org.au)

### Website

[www.carersouth.org.au](http://www.carersouth.org.au) for community news, events, workshops, carer support groups and other resources.

### Mail

Carer South News  
Alfred Health Carer Services  
Caulfield Hospital  
Caulfield House  
260 Kooyong Road  
Caulfield Vic 3162

# Building blocks to wellbeing

Have you heard of the PERMA Model? No, it's not about mulching or summer tomatoes. PERMA stands for positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment. According to Dr Martin Seligman, a pioneer of Positive Psychology these are the building blocks upon which we can build a life of resilience and wellbeing.

Seligman was among the first to point out that the study of psychology was unbalanced. Doctors had a million ways to identify what could go wrong with the human psyche but what are the mental habits of people who thrive? What aspects of mental health can we influence? The PERMA Model gives us some clues.

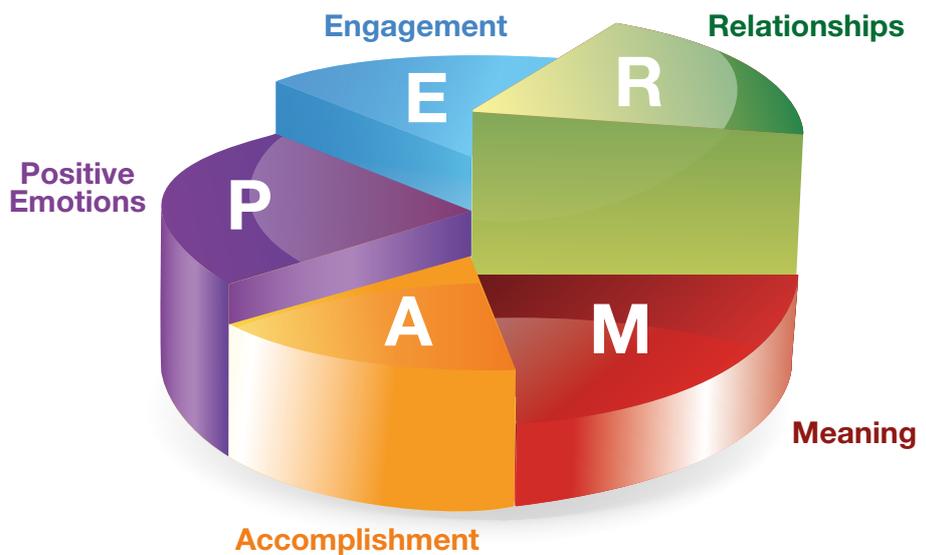
## Positive Emotions

It is generally easier to be positive when things go well. And while we might assume that happiness creates positive emotions, what if the flipside were true? Can we put ourselves in the "driver's seat"? Can positive emotions cause happiness?

Evidence suggests yes. Social isolation is a powerful known psychological risk factor for poor health whilst laughter and smiling are contagious and are credited with boosting immunity. Positive emotion is more than just smiling though. It is about being able to access a feeling of optimism that can be shared with others.

At our recent Carers Week lunch, our host and performer Brian Nankervis had 100 people smiling and laughing in an instant. As a result, guests were good company for each other for the whole day.

Think about what makes you feel good. Being cooped up in the house might be a negative whilst getting out in nature, exercising or seeing friends might be a positive. Practice putting yourself in situations where your positivity is stimulated and then try to do it regularly. The effort you put into positive or negative emotions may well be the same, but the outcome to your health and wellbeing will be entirely different in the long-term.



## Engagement

Have you read a good book lately? Do you play music, paint, build things, go fishing; do you knit or sew? Do you do interesting work that keeps you absorbed? Activities that absorb and engage us are good for us. Research shows that even if it is only every few weeks, having the opportunity to, "take our minds off things" is worthwhile for resilience and wellbeing.

The good news is, even if you don't have a particular hobby or vocation, skills can be learned in order to achieve the same relaxed state. Mindfulness is a skill taught in our workshops (see page 4). Using mindfulness, you can learn to exist in the present moment, relieving some of the stresses associated with day-to-day life.

## Relationships

Imagine a large family. People who wonder how the parents share their love around are missing the point. In reality, with each new child that comes along, the love is increased, not divided. (The household finances may be a different story but you get the point). Sharing joy opens up new joys in our lives and loving another living creature makes us feel loved. This is not news to any pet owners.

The people around us can help us maintain balance and perspective in our lives. When you belong to a community, you gain a network of support. We often say the best tonic for a carer is another carer due to

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# Short courses and workshops 2017

Keen to get together with like-minded people and learn skills to help you cope and improve your wellbeing?

Alfred Health Carer Services presents a wide range of events each year. From learning about services through to mindfulness workshops, carer lunches, movie clubs and more, you can gain support and knowledge by participating in a whole range of activities.

Events are mostly free and held in relaxed settings throughout Melbourne's southern suburbs. Read about some of them below and check our website for specific information, locations and times.

Workshops are regularly added to our website under Who do you care for? [www.carersouth.org.au](http://www.carersouth.org.au)

## Disability

### Grandparent Carer Lunch

Come and enjoy lunch and share with other grandparent carers of a child with a disability.

**Wednesday 9 February in Narre Warren**

**12.00pm – 2.00pm**

**Inquiries: 8781 3410**

### Art for respite classes

Older carers of a person with a disability are invited to join free art classes. Classes will take a short break over summer and will return in early 2017.

**Inquiries: 9076 6359**

### Getting NDIS ready

We are recruiting carers to tell us what they want to know about the NDIS. You'll help guide content for a new video project about the NDIS in 2017.

**Email Hilda for more information,**  
[h.strojil@alfred.org.au](mailto:h.strojil@alfred.org.au)



Carer workshops can provide a helping hand

## Mental Health

### Mindfulness workshop

Undertaking mindfulness practice can assist carers to develop a wiser relationship with the difficult thoughts and feelings associated with caring for someone with mental illness and to reconnect with other parts of their lives.

**Thursday 16 February in Highett**

**9.00am – 1.30pm (lunch included)**

**Inquiries: 9076 6150**

### Effective Communication

These workshops aim to provide carers of a person with mental illness with practical tips and strategies to help you communicate more effectively with friends, family and professionals.

**Wednesday March 1, 8 & 15 in Mornington**

**(Lunches included)**

**Inquiries: 9212 3000**

## Aged and Dementia

### Dementia and Caring

For carers who may be struggling with the changes in their life and relationships since a dementia diagnosis.

**Friday 10, 17 & 24 February in Mornington or**

**Thursday 16, 23 & 30 March in Chelsea**

**(Lunches included)**

**Inquiries: 8781 3400 (Mornington)**

**or 9076 6150 (Chelsea)**

### Learn about Aged Care Supports

For carers, family members and friends who are interested in learning more about the aged care system; costs, eligibility and planning for the future.

**Thursday 9, 16, 23 & 30 March in Rosebud**

**10.00am – 2.00pm (lunches included)**

**Inquiries: 8781 3400**

### Building Inner Strength

Share in some strategies to assist you with daily stress and help you to bounce back from setbacks.

**Monday 27 March in Chelsea**

**9.30am – 1.30pm (lunch included)**

**Inquiries: 9076 6150**

# Awards acknowledgement

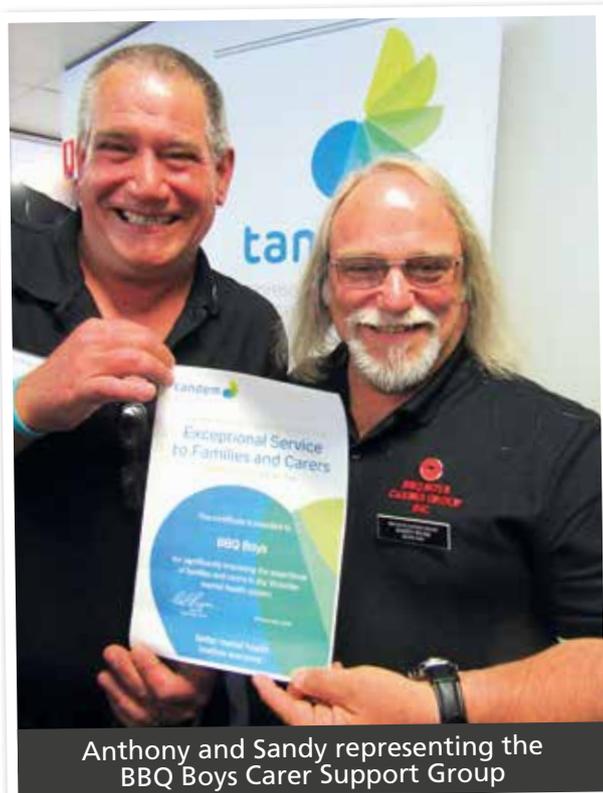
Congratulations and thanks from us to the Southern Region carers and colleagues recently acknowledged at the Tandem Inaugural Awards for Exceptional Service to Families and Carers in Mental Health.

Judith Rafferty (carer and activist from the Inner South Family & Friends Carer Support Group); Violeta Peterson (Carer Consultant, Alfred Psychiatry); Anthony (Vice President) and Sandy

(Secretary) on behalf of the BBQ Boys Carers Group Inc (a male Carer Support Group) as well as Jan Macintire (Alfred Psychiatry) all received the recognition they very much deserve.

Each of them has shown enormous commitment and effort to improve the quality of life for people and their families affected by mental illness. They are active in forging close, supportive bonds with people, providing useful information about aspects of mental illness and the system, offering peer understanding and connection and advocating at various levels of government for much needed improvements, especially regarding the inclusion of families and carers.

Thanks from us to them for their care and dedication. They are true community treasures.



Anthony and Sandy representing the BBQ Boys Carer Support Group



Judith Rafferty and Violeta Peterson

## In brief

### Healthy Families

beyondblue has recently launched their Healthy Families website, focusing on mental health. The site aims to support parents and carers and includes:

- a child mental health checklist,
- a youth mental health quiz,
- the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression scale, and
- a dad stress test.

[www.healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au)

*“Men Aloud rehearsals start in February 2017...”*

### Men Aloud

Dr Jonathon Welch, the founder of the School of Hard Knocks choir is recruiting men to join a new choir program – MEN ALOUD! Welch is also the founder of Social Inclusion Week which aims to help ensure all Australians feel included and valued, giving everyone the opportunity to participate fully in society. He says, “Men Aloud rehearsals start in February 2017 in a supportive and fun environment for men where they can just be, singing and talking – without judgement.”

For more information email [jan.hamilton@schoolofhardknocks.org.au](mailto:jan.hamilton@schoolofhardknocks.org.au)

## Plan for respite

Going to a special event like a birthday party or wedding requires a bit of planning. For carers, this is particularly true.

As a carer you should feel empowered to enjoy aspects of your own life. Looking forward to events is one of life's pleasures and you owe it to yourself to have a break. For the person you care for at home, the key to good quality care is proper planning and communication.

Alfred Health Carer Services usually receives around 800 calls every month. Coordinating respite can be a complex job. Sometimes we are the first people contacted in a serious crisis and it requires all our resources and expertise to assist.

Every situation is different and the safety and wellbeing of the person receiving care is our primary concern. Seasonal periods like summer holidays put an extra load on our staff. In order to deliver the best possible service, we ask you to plan early; and to consider:

- We aim to respond to all calls and requests as quickly as possible
- Calls are responded to according to their urgency
- Try not to worry if you are not called back straight away, you will be responded to
- We aim to provide the level of support that the person being cared for requires; this can take time to coordinate



Successful respite starts with early planning

- Time is needed to assess and understand everyone's needs before respite can be arranged (particularly for families not known to the service).

Gwen of Pakenham cares for her son with cerebral palsy and wrote to us to say, "Thank you for coordinating the weekend respite for my son recently. It was sheer joy to take off to Sydney for the weekend and we all had a ball. My son was relaxed and well cared for and the professionalism of your phone staff was extraordinary. We are already planning a break for Easter".

For your planned respite needs please call us on **1800 052 222**.

## Building blocks to wellbeing (cont. from page 3)

the understanding and compassion that comes with sharing a lived experience. Balance though is the key to all relationships. The old saying, "in order to have friends, you must first be one," acknowledges the give and take required in relationships.

### Meaning

Studies have shown that people who belong to a community and pursue shared goals are happier than people who don't. It is also important to feel that the work we do is consistent with our personal values and beliefs.

Can you identify your personal values? Where can they flourish? Perhaps it is by helping others, learning new skills or protecting the environment.

Once you have identified what matters most to you,

find some like-minded people and begin working together for the things you care about. You can find meaning in your working life as well as your personal one. If your values and pursuits are aligned you are more likely have the clarity to set goals and thus feel a sense of living a meaningful life.

### Accomplishment

Getting things right from time to time helps us to anticipate and build hope for the future. Our successes make us feel more confident and optimistic about future attempts. Our failures can help us to evaluate where we went wrong and to try again.

There is nothing wrong in being proud of your accomplishments. When you feel good about yourself, you are more likely to share your skills and

# Aged Services Program

For nearly 20 years Alfred Health Carer Services has supported families caring for a frail, older person and people with dementia. With more ageing Australians than ever, and many changes to the aged care service system, we hope to continue this important work.

## What sits under Aged Services?

**A 24 hour telephone service** providing initial information, support and once-off respite. Staff will talk with you about your situation and possible support options, meet your immediate needs, and link you to other programs and services.

## The Commonwealth Home Support Program

provides respite care in a variety of settings to suit older people and their carers. Within this program there are almost a dozen different options from in-home and centre-based programs, day outings, movie clubs, carer education and more.

**The Dementia Program** supports families to adjust to the changes associated with dementia, navigate their support options and plan for the future. We also run workshops to give people the skills they will need in the short and long term. We recommend our "Creative Ways to Care" series of seven half day workshops designed to increase your confidence to respond to the changes in behaviour that sometimes

tips for success with others. You may even inspire the people around you to achieve their own goals.

It is important to set yourself tangible goals, and keep them in sight. Our carer support workers are adept at helping carers to identify goals; particularly when life is busy and confusing and the person you care for takes up a lot of your time.

Getting support from others is a great way to keep focused on your long-term goals and acknowledge the little successes along with the big ones. It is vital to cultivate resilience against failure and setbacks. Success doesn't always come easily, but if we stay positive and focused, we don't give up when adversity strikes.

Read more about Positive Psychology  
[www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/learn](http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/learn)



Three Aged Services staff recently celebrated a combined 40 years of support for carers Eileen Hennessy 10 years, Sue Leake 20 years and Anna Poullos 10 years.

occur. The workshops provide strategies to improve the quality of caring relationships day-to-day.

**Aged and Residential Respite Options** provides information and practical assistance to help you to plan for and use respite, link to ongoing services, and look after yourself in the process. We aim to help you to balance your own needs with those of the person you care for.

## How are staff qualified?

They are all qualified health care professionals who have years of experience working in aged and dementia care. Staff work closely with you and the person you care for to determine what would help you best to continue in your caring role. They will visit you in your home, catch up with you over the phone and make sure you get linked to the services that will best assist you.

## How are people put in touch with Aged Services?

We receive referrals to our service in many ways; you can call on **1800 052 222** or your doctor may refer you. Hospitals may refer after an admission or we may hear from various organisations involved in setting up care for you in your own home.

## What is the most common feedback we hear from the carers we encounter?

Carers often comment on how reassuring it is to have someone listen to them and provide them with support and point them in the right direction to get the help they need.

To learn more about support for carers phone **1800 052 222** and see our website  
[www.carersouth.org.au](http://www.carersouth.org.au).

It was great to meet so many carers at events, retreats and workshops this year.

Thank you for sharing your ideas and stories with one another. We look forward to another jam packed calendar in 2017.

## RESPIRE IN CASEY

Carers who are connected with our Disability Program took part in Community Centre activities offered in the City of Casey in October and celebrated the initiative with a group lunch.



## CARERS WEEK

The Royal Botanic Gardens at Cranbourne was a terrific venue for lunch. Thanks go to our art groups for the stunning art exhibition. Congratulations to everyone who made the time to come along.



## FAMILY FUN DAY

Carers from our Aged, Dementia, Disability, Mental Health and Young Carer Programs joined us at IMAX and the Melbourne Museum. It was tremendous to relax and spend time with each other.

