

Caring for my son with mental illness

My son Dan is an adult now but I still care for him at home. There was nothing to indicate mental illness when he was young. He was a good kid. He loved the outdoors. He had nice friends. He played basketball and tennis and trained in martial arts for a while.

We knew Dan was very unwell about six years ago when he was diagnosed with drug induced psychosis. That led to bipolar and schizophrenia, severe anxiety and depression.

He was devastated, angry, confused and in denial that he might have incurred permanent brain damage. For me it was absolutely soul destroying. The person I knew and the person he became were two different people. Accepting the situation at the time was very difficult. It felt like I had lost my son. Whenever I'd see an improvement in Dan's behaviour I'd have a spark of hope, but then he would go backwards again.

This constant roller-coaster was having a serious effect on my own emotional and physical health.



It affected my life in so many ways. It was a struggle to get out and do the things I used to love like dancing and having friends over for dinner.

I am starting to get on an even keel now. One of the staff at Mind referred me to Alfred Health Carer Services and I have a worker, Karen who I can call upon. When things feel out of control, talking to Karen helps me to put things into perspective.

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Alfred Health Carer Services has a Mental Health Program staffed by qualified health professionals dedicated to providing confidential support and assistance for carers of a person with mental illness.

If you care for a person experiencing mental illness and you would like to speak with someone; or if you need some extra support, call us on **1800 052 222**.



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My immediate family is aware of our situation, but only to the bare minimum. They don't really understand, nor are they sympathetic of anybody who has been involved with drugs. In subtle ways they insinuate that what has happened is our own fault.

We've also just tried our best to hide the situation from extended family. This becomes extremely stressful at family gatherings when Dan's behaviour is regarded as abnormal and he's judged as being a loser because he is unemployed.

Overall, this isolates us and I struggle with that. In all honesty, when his behaviour becomes extreme, I am ashamed and heartbroken, and of course this sets off feelings of guilt. It is an endless cycle.

Something that really helped was joining in a carer retreat that was offered. It helped me to recuperate and de-stress. Work is also an escape for me. I realise I need to keep myself separate from all the issues at home. Dan is there most of the time and I am learning to find space for myself away from his issues.

I am passionate about natural therapy and using essential oils for health and fitness. I love educating others on this. I find this relaxing and it is a form of respite for me.

Meeting other carers at support groups such as the lifeAssist's Carer Hub at Hampton Park has helped.

We meet each Tuesday for a lunch get-together and there are activities and occasional workshops too. I enjoy carer gatherings as I feel I am in the company of non-judgemental people where I can speak freely. This is such an amazing feeling because mostly I keep things bottled up.

It can be quite easy to feel powerless when things are chaotic. People with poor mental health can behave in a manipulative and self-centred way sometimes, so assertiveness training is really good for people in my situation. Carer Services has free workshops which can provide carers like me with better coping skills.

Knowing what I know now, I would advise people to seek help. Carer Services is a good place to start. Persevere and keep digging until you get answers. You are not alone.

Most importantly, take care of yourself, make time for yourself and don't give up.

If you care for a person with mental illness and need support, phone Alfred Health Carer Services on **1800 052 222**.

If you live in Casey, Dandenong or Cardinia and are interested in The Carer Hub phone lifeAssist on **1300 277 478**.

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 family 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.

Email

info@carersouth.org.au

Website

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

Quick guide to My Aged Care

The My Aged Care website and call centre is now the main contact for the aged care system Australia-wide. It helps people to find information and access aged care services.

There are two ways to learn more:

- 1) **Phone** My Aged Care on **1800 200 422**, 8.00am–8.00pm weekdays and 10.00am–2.00pm Saturday. Interpreters are available.

OR

- 2) **Website** www.myagedcare.gov.au
You can search for services and facilities near to where you live, investigate costs and get contact details. There is a calculator to estimate aged care packages and permanent residential care costs. Information is in 18 languages.

Accessing an Aged Care Service:

If you want to access aged care services such as cleaning, showering assistance, in home or residential respite, activity groups or aged care packages phone My Aged Care on **1800 200 422**.

Once your details are registered by calling My Aged Care, you will be automatically referred into services in your area.

Who can phone:

Calls can be made by carers, service providers or the person requiring the service. It is often best to make the call together. Calling on someone's behalf will require their consent.

Registration:

A client record will be created and you will be given a Client Record Number. This number will be required if you need to call again or if you want to look up the information on your client record through the Australian Department of Human Services website www.my.gov.au

Screening:

You will be asked some questions to establish the level of care and services required. Allow 45 minutes for your call and write down any questions you have before you call.

Referrals:

Usually you will be referred for an assessment in your home. Assessments are made by either the Regional Assessment Service (currently local council assessors) or the Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) depending on what you might need. They will contact you to make a time to visit. A plan will be made to support you and referrals made to services that can help you.



Frequently asked questions

I already have the aged care services I need – should I register with My Aged Care?

No. If you are happy currently, you do not need to do anything. If your needs change in the future you should contact My Aged Care.

I have already had an ACAT assessment with approvals for residential respite, permanent care and a package. Do I need to go through My Aged Care to access these services?

No. You can contact the facilities and services directly.

Can I use Alfred Health Carer Services without a My Aged Care Referral?

Yes. If you want urgent or short-term respite, information, to attend a workshop or require carer support, just call **1800 052 222**

I still don't understand – what can I do?

- Take time to read the very useful information on My Aged Care www.myagedcare.gov.au
- Phone My Aged Care with your questions on **1800 200 422**
- Talk with Alfred Health Carer Services on **1800 052 222**
- Attend one of our workshops on the aged care system; next one in August 2016. Refer www.carersouth.org.au for Carer Workshops under Who do you care for?

Performing arts support carers in transition

Recently Alfred Health Carer Services held a series of three workshops called Exploring Transitions. The workshop was for mature carers over 50 who care for a person with a disability.



Carers explore transitions in life with Melbourne Playback Theatre Company

Using drama, music and gentle movement, carers were invited to explore the idea of transitions in life, in a creative and safe space.

Facilitated by SCOPE Vic and the Melbourne Playback Theatre Company, performers encouraged carers to discuss stories relating to future change, through a range of games and activities. "I felt heard and understood," said one carer after participating in a listening activity where experiences and hardships were shared.

Carers said that one of the most powerful exercises was a playback improvisation, where a story from the audience was re-told on stage by the performers. "To see your story played back was very emotional; and cathartic and empowering as well. Seeing it on stage, for the first time, I recognised my own struggle, and accepted why I had been so tired the whole time", said a participant.

Transitions, where one has to face and deal with changes in life are normal; although sometimes complex. "The power of these techniques is that we provide a path for the emotions and anxieties to come out, and then shift the energy by changing the dynamic. Through storytelling, even if we feel down, it can bring us back up again," explained one of the performers.

Participants declared that they plan to continue to meet with people from the workshop saying, "There is something really special about sharing an experience like this with others who are like-minded." With such positive feedback Carer Services is planning another session in the second half of 2016.

FREE COMING SOON

Dual Diagnosis workshop in Highett (mental illness)

Tuesday 21 June

Dual diagnosis is when a person has both a diagnosed mental illness and a problem with alcohol or drugs. The workshop will be facilitated by a trainer from Family Drug Help/ Self Help Addiction Resource Centre. You will be provided with information about the complexities of a dual diagnosis, addiction, practical strategies, and setting boundaries.

Contact: Amanda Magrin, Carer Services on 9076 4045

Creative Ways to Care course in Lynbrook (dementia)

Thursday 23 June

The Creative Ways to Care course is a seven session education and training program for family carers of people with dementia. It runs once a week over seven weeks and will provide you with comprehensive strategies for improving the quality of daily life for both you and the person you care for.

Contact: Judy Allen, Carer Services on 9076 6726

Caring Differently – Better Questions workshop (mental illness)

Tuesday 30 August

This workshop is to empower carers to ask "Better Questions" and support the person they are caring for to become more self-sufficient, enabling them to manage their own health, wellbeing and lifestyle choices.

Contact: Hariklia Gritzalis, Carer Services on 8781 3408

Cultural appreciation training

It's no secret that Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have poorer health compared to the rest of the population. Accessing services can be challenging for a whole host of reasons.

Recently Carer Services staff undertook cultural appreciation training to help improve our understanding and sensitivity to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and families. AJ Williams-Tchen, of Wiradjuri/Wotjobulak background and director of Girraway Ganyi Consultancy was our guide for the team workshops.

AJ, an experienced educator and mental health practitioner has a deep understanding of the cultural barriers that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may face in accessing services and supports.

He shared his extensive knowledge and personal experiences to take participants on a journey that was both interactive and informative. It enabled staff to learn about the diversity within culture and the impact of legislative changes and policy on health, education and family. Activities designed to highlight some of the injustices suffered by the stolen generations provided a stark insight into why engagement with services is difficult for some.

With the support of our Aboriginal Access and Support worker, we are continuing to learn about connection to country, community and culture and improve on our service delivery.

It is hoped that with our new found knowledge and skills we will be able to provide a service that is not only culturally sensitive but also is safe and



Carer Services staff gain greater appreciation of health issues

welcoming for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

If you or the person you care for are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, we encourage you to give us a call on **1800 052 222** to discuss your support needs. We will listen to your story, and assist where we can to provide the supports that you need.

Statistics show Aboriginal people are almost five times more likely than non-Aboriginal people to develop dementia.

In 2012, about a quarter of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had a disability. They also had higher rates of disabilities than non-Aboriginal people across all age groups and for both males and females.

Life expectancy is still around 10 years lower in Australia for Aboriginal people.

Mental health and the National Disability Insurance Scheme

How does mental health fit in the National Disability Insurance Scheme?

If you care for a person with mental illness, and you are supporting them to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme, there is a Guide and a Checklist you may find useful. They were developed by Mental Health Australia and Carers Australia and are available on the Mental Health Australia website.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme will be available in the Southern region of Melbourne in mid-2018, through the National Disability Insurance Agency. The Guide provides some eligibility details. "The NDIS is not just for people with physical disability, it will also provide support for people with

psychosocial disability associated with mental illness.

"To be eligible for support, individuals must have an impairment or condition which is likely to be permanent and which substantially reduces their ability to undertake certain activities unless they have assistance, and which also affects their social and economic participation. If the impairment is episodic (on and off), it may still be considered permanent, despite variations in support needs".

You can refer to the Guide and Checklist for information to help you support the person you care for and to prepare for NDIS assessment and planning meetings. They are available online at <https://mhaustralia.org/fact-sheets/mental-health-carers-ndis-guide-and-checklist>

Diversity of care and the rainbow tick



In Australia there are some social factors that lead to evidence of health inequality. Sexual orientation and gender identity are among them. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people have poorer health outcomes than the general population, due in part to the actual or perceived discrimination that they experience. In Victoria, male homosexuality ceased to be a crime as recently as the late '80's. Older LGBTI people accessing aged care services and residential care today are likely to have had some experience of discrimination during most of their lives.



Peninsula group meets monthly

Now new strategies are emerging to try to ensure the LGBTI community is not marginalised in old age, particularly as one of the first casualties of the healthcare system is privacy. Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria says the most frequent request for information is from LGBTI people seeking a list of services that are LGBTI inclusive.

A recent Alzheimer's Australia study has uncovered many issues. Individuals speak about the fear of being outed by a partner who has dementia; the humiliation of having to come out repeatedly to service providers; most share a mistrust of aged care homes where intimacy is frowned upon.

Amira Ziada, Program Coordinator with Brotherhood of St Laurence, Banksia Services in Carrum Downs believes that LGBTI consumers should be involved in the planning of service provision. She was personally motivated by stories she heard at the

first National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Conference, held in a packed Melbourne Town Hall in 2014. "For me it is about providing a safe and trusting environment and to advocate on peoples' behalf in order to gain services," said Amira.

"Initially we surveyed consumers in Carrum Downs, Frankston and Mornington. Some felt uncomfortable talking about LGBTI services and issues and it was difficult to get people to stop and listen. Some people saw it as a phase, perhaps politically motivated, and it would go away.

"Mornington seemed to be more LGBTI aware and the community was more approachable and at ease with the topic. This led me to the Peninsula Health GLBTIQ Community Advisory Group. I was invited to attend one of their meetings to talk about the work we had done at Banksia Services," said Amira.

Ultimately, we organised a get-together called The Coffee Club in order to provide a safe, supportive and accessible venue, principally for LGBTI people over 55 (although anyone over 18 can join in). It also works as a referral point to Banksia Services Carrum Downs for LGBTI people over 55 who express a need for assistance and possibly professional support.

The group is now known as Out on the Peninsula and meets on the fourth Sunday of each month from 11.00am to 3.00pm. Phone **(03) 9782 9322** for details.

"We have undertaken training and have adapted our approach to arrive at this point. The Rainbow Tick standards and accreditation program is a way that health and human service organisations can determine the extent to which the organisation (or a service within the organisation) meets the needs of LGBTI consumers. It applies a systemic, evidence based approach to quality improvement".

For more information, training and resources for LGBTI inclusive practices, see Val's Café website www.valscafe.org.au (inspired by the pioneering work of Val Eastwood who ran Val's coffee lounge, a meeting place for the 'camp' community in early 1950s Melbourne).

The Rainbow Tick (www.glhv.org.au/lgbti-inclusive-practice) involves services seeking external accreditation against a set of six LGBTI-inclusive standards (www.qip.com.au).

If you are a carer and would like to share your experience of LGBTI inclusive services or provide advice on how we can better meet your needs, please email us at info@carersouth.org.au

Aboriginal Access & Support Program

In this issue, we introduce Cyndie Fox, Aboriginal Access and Support Worker.

What is your role at Carer Services?

I am the Aboriginal Access and Support Worker based at our Caulfield and Dandenong offices. The role aims to support our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and the people they care for.

How do you support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers in the community?

We assist with access and support, which means linking people into home and community care services as well as referring them to other relevant services. We also coordinate retreats and events to help with information and carer wellbeing. I also assist any of my team members who may work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers to be more culturally sensitive.

Are retreats worthwhile?

Yes indeed. It is really helpful to step out of the caring environment even for a couple of days. We are about to host our annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carer's retreat at Lancefield near Mount Macedon. Carers will get to take a well-earned break, share stories with one another and be introduced to some ideas to support their own health and wellbeing.

Tell us about a book or movie you have enjoyed

"Is That You Ruthie?" by Ruth Hegarty. This is one of my favourite books as it is a very poignant story



of Ruth Hegarty's life growing up in Cherbourg Mission, Queensland. She was there from age four to her late teens.

How do you relax?

During the warmer weather I like to relax by kayaking or hiking in the bush. On a cold day, there is nothing better than curling up on the couch with a good book in my hands.

Good philosophy to live by?

"Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds you sow".

If you would like to know more about our Aboriginal Access & Support Program, please telephone during business hours on [1800 052 222](tel:1800052222) or read more at www.carersouth.org.au

Corny corner

What is the difference between a Hippo and a Zippo?

A Hippo is really heavy, but a Zippo is a little lighter.

What do you call a singing laptop?

A Dell.

How do you flatten a ghost?

Use a spirit level.

A pancake, a fried egg and a strip of bacon walk into a bar. The barman looks up and says, "Sorry, we don't serve breakfast."

Why do French people eat snails?

Because they don't like fast food.

What do you call a young locomotive?

A Trainee.

The Carer Hub in Hampton Park

The Carer Hub is a special place in Hampton Park for carers of people with a mental illness. For many people, the day-to-day responsibility of caring for someone with a mental illness takes a lot of energy. Providing motivation, supervision, monitoring and support can feel like a fulltime job. How then do you maintain your own energy, health and wellbeing?

A regular, planned catch-up with other carers is recommended as a powerful form of support and recreation. Support groups offer carers a chance to meet others in similar situations; be understood; share ideas and experiences and feel a sense of camaraderie and companionship.

A group "with a difference" has been developed by UnitingCare lifeAssist at The Carer Hub. There is a free lunch each Tuesday and access to the Hampton Park Community Garden facilities. It is a welcoming space for carers to socialise; learn about community supports, enjoy some gardening or take part in creative activities to maintain their own health and wellbeing.

Sometimes carer education courses such as the recent Mental Health: Families, Carers and the System give carers an opportunity to explore specific aspects of their caring role.



The Carer Hub offers calm space

What: UnitingCare lifeAssist – The Carer Hub
When: Tuesdays from 10.00am during school term times
Where: Uniting Place, 1 Coral Drive, Hampton Park
Contact: lifeAssist on **1300 ASSIST (1300 277 478)** or email info@lifeassist.org.au.

Lunch is provided so you'll need to confirm attendance.

Carers are eligible to attend The Carer Hub if they are living in Casey, Dandenong or Cardinia and are providing care to a person who is living with a mental illness.

Dementia forum in Mornington

Come to a community information forum on Memory Loss and Dementia.

This warm and friendly forum is open to the general public and is for anyone with an interest in dementia.



All welcome to local dementia forum

What: Memory Loss & Dementia – What's Next?
When: Thursday 23 June, 1.00pm–3.30pm
Where: Mornington Community Information and Support Centre
320 Main Street, Mornington
Refreshments: Afternoon tea courtesy of Andrew Kerr & 39+
Program: Understanding Dementia education session from Alzheimer's Australia
Lots of information on hand
Chat to local health professionals
Question and answer panel
Contact: Please let us know you are coming, contact Dina on **8781 3400**