

It pays to check

When the relationship with her husband broke down, Jacinta found herself needing financial assistance. Jacinta is mum to 14 year old Ben who has an intellectual disability. She works part time so that she can be available to support Ben as much as possible whilst also contributing to the household budget.

When David was diagnosed with dementia and could no longer drive, the cost of transport and David's other care needs became a concern for his wife, Carol.

Both women experienced emotional turmoil and uncertainty. Both were unaware that some financial support was available to them. Fortunately, they contacted us for advice. We regularly help carers like Jacinta and Carol put things in place to help manage their caring situations.

All carers have their own individual needs, so we recommend that you seek solutions to your specific financial issues if you can. For example, check your eligibility for carer benefits. You may not have thought you'd be eligible for any assistance. Perhaps your caring situation has altered or changes have been reported in the media.



Carers urged to consider finances

The recent federal budget may have an impact on some carers.

Jacinta chose to do her own research. First she checked the Department of Human Services website (www.humanservices.gov.au) and came across a handy tool called Payment Finder. Armed with a list of possible options, she called the number: **132 717** specifically for Disability, Sickness and Carer Payments.

The customer service person took Jacinta through the forms she needed to complete in order to receive the Carer Allowance (which is not income or asset tested). It can take a number of weeks for forms to be processed

but payment can be back-dated to the initial application date.

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Carer Payments

- Check eligibility online www.humanservices.gov.au using Payment Finder 
- For Carer Payments information call **132 717**
- For Budget 2014-15 amendments call **132 468**
- Cross check what you have been told with online information or services like ours if possible.



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"I knew I might be on the phone for a while, so I made sure I had spare time, brewed myself a cuppa and settled down with my list of questions in a calm frame of mind. It took 30 minutes to get all the information I needed, but it was worth it. It pays to check," said Jacinta. "We now receive \$118.20 a fortnight and a Health Care Card. I also found out that I can update my details online if things change in the future."

Jacinta is also eligible for the Child Disability Assistance Payment, a one off payment of up to \$1,000. In order to receive it, she needed to have been paid Carer Allowance for a child under 16 years for a period that included 1 July.

As an older carer of a partner with dementia, Carol's financial considerations have become more of an issue for her than she may otherwise have expected. "David has always paid the bills. He knows our passwords, our account details, our outgoings, everything" said Carol.

For Carol, this means more than just understanding the family finances. It is also about self-confidence, understanding services and forward planning.

To improve carer's financial understanding, we will be hosting two free workshops in coming months. The workshops will help you to address issues such

as how to cope on a reduced income, manage debt, maximise Centrelink entitlements, understand aged care fees, insurance claims, superannuation and financial Power of Attorney. Participants will also learn how to find and access financial advice and resources.

"It is also about self-confidence, understanding services and forward planning."

The workshops are planned for August (Caulfield) and September (Dandenong). Details will be available on our website in the next few weeks, www.carersouth.org.au. For more information, or to register, please contact **Laura Scott on 9212 3005**.

In the meantime, you may benefit from free financial counselling at **Money Help on 1800 007 007** or find useful information and answers to your questions at www.moneysmart.gov.au.

We wish you well for the winter months ahead. As always, we welcome your feedback or suggestions for Carer South News or our service in general. Thanks to the many carers who submitted inspirational thoughts and photos for our Carer Calendar 2015 which will soon be in production!

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?

We are 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)

Calls from mobile phones are charged at applicable rates

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 the Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre Southern Region, a part of Alfred Health.

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
Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre
Alfred Health
Caulfield Hospital
260 Kooyong Road
Caulfield Vic 3162

The new Mental Health Act...a step in the right direction

On 1 July 2014, a new Mental Health Act will come into effect. As the last change occurred in 1986, it is certainly due!

The Act acknowledges for the first time that families/carers have some rights in regard to the treatment and care of their family member or significant other, who is experiencing mental illness.

The intent is to ensure assessment and compulsory treatment are provided in the least restrictive way possible, to focus on supported decision-making for people experiencing a mental illness, and to include their families/carers.

Importantly, it aims to recognise and support the role of families/carers and is expected to change how publically funded mental health services are delivered.

Some of the key features within the Act that promote your engagement and involvement in the ongoing support of the person you care for are:

- You are to be notified and consulted about key decisions about assessment, treatment and recovery planning whenever possible
- You are to be provided with information about your family member/friend's mental illness that you require in order for you to provide ongoing care
- You can support your family member/friend to access their right to a second psychiatric opinion
- You are able to make complaints on behalf of your family member/friend to a newly established, independent body called the Mental Health Complaints Commissioner. It is their role to receive, manage and resolve complaints about public mental health service providers.

So what might this mean to carer Mary, struggling to cope with her 26 year old son Ryan who is in hospital following a third episode of psychosis? Mary has been told that due to confidentiality/privacy issues, she cannot be provided with specific information related to Ryan's condition.

She is concerned that Ryan's illness is closely connected with his regular use of marijuana, but Ryan's treatment so far has failed to address this issue. He has been placed on a Community Treatment Order, but Mary is worried that once he comes home again, his mental health won't improve



Mental Health Act to increase engagement with families

unless he has support for all of his needs.

It is hoped that the new Act will encourage all of the mental health service staff to engage with Mary in seeking her knowledge of Ryan's condition and hopes for his recovery.

It is hoped that Mary would be assisted to fully understand Ryan's mental health condition and the impact this may have on their daily lives when he returns home. Further, if Mary and Ryan were not confident with the psychiatric treatment being offered, they could request a second opinion from another psychiatrist to assist them to decide upon options that would produce the best outcome for Ryan.

Hopefully, Mary would be encouraged to address any concerns about Ryan's treatment directly with his specific mental health service and be provided with an appropriate response. However, if this didn't occur, she would be able to lodge a complaint about Ryan's treatment to the Mental Health Complaints Commissioner.

This scenario aims to provide a snapshot of some of the carer-focussed elements contained in the new Mental Health Act. For more detailed information, please speak with your local mental health service staff or connect via:

Online: www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/mhactreform

Phone: 1300 656 692
(specifically about the new legislation)

Email: mhactreform@health.vic.gov.au

New aged & dementia carer education calendar

Our calendar of events will soon be released for July to December 2014. We are excited to introduce some new information sessions for carers of older people as well as continuing to offer some of the "tried and true" favourites.

New to the calendar

Mindfulness for Carers

Mindfulness can assist carers to develop a wiser relationship with the difficult thoughts and feelings associated with caring for someone and to connect with the other parts of their lives in a way that brings relief and pleasure.

Dementia & Driving

This session provides information to carers to support a person living with dementia, to know when and how to reduce and stop driving, and stay active, mobile and socially connected.

Finance Workshop

The workshop will help carers to address issues such as how to cope on a reduced income, manage debt, maximise Centrelink entitlements, understand aged care fees, insurance claims, superannuation and financial Power of Attorney.

Popular favourites

Creative Ways to Care

A seven session course for carers of people with dementia to hear more about dementia and learn diversional activities and approaches alongside other carers in similar situations. Carers tell us it really does improve relationships and change their lives!

Dementia & Caring

A three session course to help carers/family to better understand the complex and sometimes unpredictable nature of dementia and the challenges it creates.

Surviving Carer Stress

Strategies and activities to help you cope with the stresses that go along with being a carer.

More information, including times and venues will be available at www.carersouth.org.au in the next few weeks or please email us info@carersouth.org.au or call **1800 052 222** if you would like more information about any of the sessions listed.



Carer support workers accompanied a group of carers to Daylesford recently. They walked, talked and enjoyed fine food as well as some of the local attractions like the Hepburn Bathhouse and Spa, Daylesford Lake, Convent Gallery and more! A relaxing retreat was enjoyed by all participants who returned home renewed!

Planned Activity Groups: a win-win for everyone

If caring makes you feel as though your social life is limited, or that there is less opportunity for the person you care for to be active, then a PAG may be for you.

What's a planned activity group (PAG)?

PAGs generally cater for families of people who are frail, aged or with a range of conditions such as dementia, Parkinson's disease, MS or acquired brain injuries, mental illness and other disabilities. They may occur on a monthly or weekly (or occasional) basis and require a small contribution towards cost of activities (though some are free!)

Activities are designed around the interests and abilities of members. These range from art and craft, music, discussions and guest speakers to more active pursuits like walking groups or outings – whilst supporting any unique needs of the individuals in the group.

Who runs PAGs and what do they do?

A PAG may be council run or coordinated by a not-for-profit organisation. Some are staffed by volunteers.

What are the benefits?

PAGs focus on the things that make life interesting for the person needing care like being with other people outside the home, discovering new interests and skills, being active and stimulated. For carers, it can provide time to meet your own needs and pursue your interests, knowing that the person you care for is being well looked after and is enjoying themselves with people they know.

Examples of local groups:

The John Macrae Centre in Toorak supports older people and has engaging activities like armchair travel sessions, guest speakers and their carer support group meets regularly.

The Central Bayside Community Health Service (CBCHS) has a broad range of activities such as art and craft, gentle exercise, hot lunches, quizzes and competitions, outings and walking groups; including programs for people from diverse cultures. Specialist Activity Services (SPAS) at the CBCHS supports people with dementia and/or older people with



Central Bayside's SPAS group on a recent outing to Werribee Zoo

a mental illness to participate in interesting outings.

A new program has begun at the Emerald Community House with activities such as baking, art/storytelling and information sessions. Volunteers are on hand for gentle hand massage which is always popular. The group meets weekly on Tuesdays.

The Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre is piloting a new social support group for people with an ABI who live in the City of Casey. It is meeting on Fridays and will feature regular outings. Cost is \$5.00 including a light lunch.

For people experiencing mental health issues, the Mental Illness Fellowship organises a weekly walking group for their clients in the Rosebud area.

Some groups cater to both the shared interests of carers and the person they care for. Our own BBQ Boys group provides activities for male carers as well as including family members in social events from time to time. Our movie events in Frankston and Moorabbin invite older, frail people or people with dementia and their carers to watch a film and enjoy a light supper in a safe and supported environment.



Painting and storytelling at Emerald Community House

To find out more

Call us on **1800 052 222** or www.carersouth.org.au or www.respitesouth.org.au (disability)

John Macrae Centre: **9829 0320**

Emerald Community House: **5968 3881**

Mental Illness Fellowship: **5986 0800**

Central Bayside Community Health Service: **8587 0200**

Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre: **9791 1449**

Job seeking support

Are you a carer trying to balance your caring role with work? Job Services Australia seeks to provide eligible job seekers, including carers, with flexible and tailored support to assist them obtain sustainable employment.

The service is strongly focused on providing carers with the right skills, training and support to help them get the right job, based on their individual needs and preferences and the job opportunities in their local area.

As a minimum, Job Services Australia providers will assist eligible carers to prepare a resumé, provide

advice on employment opportunities in their local area and information about what training is available to gain skills for those job opportunities through government funded training programs.

To determine your eligibility to receive assistance through Job Services Australia, carers can contact the Department of Human Services on **13 28 50**, visit your local Department of Human Services office or go to their website.

To find a Job Services Australia provider, go to "find a provider".

www.jobsearch.gov.au/jobseekerinfo/carers.aspx

A picture of happiness

Frankston Arts Centre reported that the recent carer art show was their most visited this year, a testament both to the art and to the impact of the carer respite program in the community. Six carers sold artworks.

The collaboration with the Peninsula Arts Society and Frankston City Council provides carers a valuable and on-going opportunity for creative expression and time away from their often significant care responsibilities.



Members of the PAS working group, including Sue McLeod a former carer contributing to supporting current participants



Paintings by Sarah Candy (carer)



Margaret Greenaway (carer) with her daughter Alice in front of one of Margaret's "Spheres" series of paintings



Brenda Pettitt chatting with Ruth Quinn and Maggie Bush of PAS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Respite Development

In this issue, we introduce Tara Frances and Elizabeth Thorpe from our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (A&TSI) respite development team.

What is your role at CRCCSR?

Tara: I am in a new position – a Home and Community Care (HACC) Access and Support Worker for Aboriginal people, with a particular focus on dementia. The role has several elements although largely it is intended to provide direct, short term support to people with diverse needs who have difficulty accessing or using HACC and related support services. This may include advocacy, providing information and resources, helping people negotiate the range of services or accompanying them to appointments.

Liz: As a Respite Development Worker I am coordinating the 2014 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers Retreat. It provides a short break for carers to get away from their daily and often demanding carer roles. Having some stress-free time away is a great way to 'recharge the batteries'. If need be, care recipients can also be provided with respite, or home support, while their carer is away.

What is unique about supporting carers from the A&TSI community?

Tara: Aboriginal people and carers have worse health outcomes and greater barriers to accessing the services they need. As a non-Indigenous person, I have experience working with Aboriginal people in NSW, WA and the NT. I hope to be able to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the southern region to know about available services and link them in a timely way. My experience has also taught me about the strong sense of family in Aboriginal communities; the bonds and responsibilities are extensive and deep, which is something to remember in my work.

Liz: As an Aboriginal woman, and a carer myself (mum has Parkinson's disease), I am aware of the many issues and concerns faced by carers on a daily basis. When I first started looking after my mother I felt isolated, worried for my mum, scared, angry – at times I still do.

Carers need ongoing support including time for themselves, and to be aware of relevant support systems, and as importantly, how to effectively access those carer support services and programs.

What is coming up?

Tara: I have a small role in supporting Liz in organising the retreat and will be attending myself. I plan to use this as an opportunity to let people know about my role. I am keen to make contact with



Tara Frances from the A&TSI Respite Development team

Aboriginal people and their carers to support access to services. I am really happy to hear from anyone who thinks I may be able to assist.

Liz: My focus is on the upcoming retreat in Queenscliff. As a carer, I have attended previous retreats and found them to be a great way to mix with other carers. It's a great opportunity to listen and share our issues and concerns, and to realise that there are many support services out there.

How do you relax?

Tara: I love being outdoors in nature – walking, riding my bike, swimming in the sea, just sitting. I have been interested in Buddhism and meditation for many years and that helps me relax too.

Liz: I love listening to music – all sorts from country rock to hip hop. I also paint and sell Aboriginal artworks – at market stalls with a friend who is also a carer of kids with a disability. It's our way of winding down.

Good philosophy to live by?

Tara: Treat yourself and others with loving-kindness.

Liz: Look after number one! You are no good to anyone else if you aren't right within yourself!! Physical and mental well-being is very important.

Which talent would you most like to have?

Tara: Mmmm? . . . Maybe the ability to always feel contented.

Liz: I would like to have the know-how to balance life/carers/family/relationships in a harmonious way.

If you would like to know more about respite opportunities for the A&TSI community, please call us during business hours on **1800 052 222**.

School holiday ideas

With school holidays just around the corner, you may be looking for suitable activities for people with a disability. Don't forget to log into the Respite South website. Take a look at the "What's On" tab, then sort by School Holidays to see what's available. There are activities for children through to adults.

Scope Southern Recharge runs every school holidays at the Somerville and Berwick leisure centres and is for children and young people aged 6 to 18. Activities vary and might include cooking, craft, magic, reptile displays, etc. Support ratios are usually 1:3 or 1:4. You can also provide your own support worker.

Kingston City Council, Bayside Council and Beyond the School Gates are offering a three day program in the second week of the holidays. Participants need to go to school or live in the Kingston or Bayside Council areas, be 14 to 18 and have an intellectual disability or learning difference (such as autism), to join the program, which will run at Berendale School in Hampton East.

Arts Access Victoria will run a series of arts respite workshops in Pakenham with a maximum of 15 participants. They cater for adults with disability, including those with intellectual, physical, sensory disability or acquired brain injury, providing respite for their family and voluntary carers. It is facilitated by professional visual artists and qualified support workers.

To find out more and for contact details, see www.respitesouth.org.au

SCHOOL
HOLIDAYS
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Join our Newsletter mailing list by sending this back to the address below or email j.sweeney@alfred.org.au with your request and address details. This will add you to our carer mailing list. If you represent an agency or community group, please telephone 9076 6439 to request copies.

Your name:

ph:

Your postal or
email address

p/code:

If undeliverable, return to:

Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre
Alfred Health
Caulfield Hospital
Reply Paid 71758

260 Kooyong Road
Caulfield VIC 3162

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