



Who are our carers?

Carers can be a partner, parent, sibling, child, other relative or friend who has assumed a primary caring role looking after a loved one in their lives who is ageing, has a disability or illness.

These very special people are unpaid and there are 2.6 million people who are carers throughout Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004). Access Economics estimated in 2005 that carers donate 1.2 million hours of unpaid work annually, a figure that is likely to rise given Australia's ageing population.

There is no such thing as a stereotypical carer. People who become carers are a variety of ages and genders and come from different cultural, financial and geographical backgrounds.

The roles carers perform will depend on the needs of the person they are caring for. Activities carers carry out can include daily tasks such as dressing, shopping, feeding and bathing as well as arranging transportation, medication and financial supervision.

Many carers experience social isolation and can feel overwhelmed physically and emotionally by their role. UnitingCare has classed carers as the hidden workforce as their contributions are often unacknowledged by the wider community despite the enormous contributions they make and the toll caring can take on their own well-being.

It is important that we acknowledge and advocate on behalf of Australia's carers. Carers of older people assist their loved ones to retain as much dignity and independence as they are able to throughout the ageing process. Their love, compassion and generosity are commendable and much appreciated by UnitingCare Ageing.

Gwen and Ron's story

Gwen and Ron moved to a UnitingCare Ageing independent living community four years ago when upkeep of their house and garden became too much. Not only are they closer to their children, it's a short walk to public transport, shopping centres and a bowling green. "We couldn't have chosen a better spot - it's so peaceful", says Gwen.

Ron visits Keenagers Day Activity and Respite Centre in Chatswood twice a week. Despite short-term memory loss, he enjoys the social interaction and range of activities including word games and day trips.

Gwen looks forward to catching up with other carers at the Centre's support group which meets monthly. "We usually have a speaker, cake and a 'cuppa', and people can share how things are affecting them. I know that if I went to Keenagers with a problem, they would help."

UnitingCare Ageing's In-Home Respite Service provides flexible services to support carers and individuals at home. On her initial visit, the Respite Coordinator tailored the service to the couple's needs, offering advice on available equipment and furniture layout. A Respite Care Worker now visits Ron weekly to assist with his morning routine before accompanying him to Keenagers. This enables Gwen to continue playing social bowls with the Women's Club.

Ron's deteriorating health has meant Gwen's role as his primary carer is more demanding. The Lower North Shore Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) organises residential respite for Ron at a local aged care service when Gwen needs a break for her own health and well-being.

For more information on services in your local community please email or visit our website:

E unitingcareageing@nsw.uca.org.au **W** www.unitingcareageing.org.au