

# carers

in victoria

winter 2011

A man with a goatee, wearing a blue short-sleeved button-down shirt and a watch, stands with his arms crossed in a workshop. He is looking directly at the camera. The background is filled with various pieces of machinery and equipment, including what appears to be a large blue metal structure, possibly a lift or a piece of industrial equipment. The lighting is bright, highlighting the man's features and the textures of the workshop.

ways to work

Juan is one of 1.3 million working carers across Australia. In this issue we explore how carers can balance work and caring.

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### Carers in Victoria

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## message from Caroline

Welcome to winter!

In this edition, we take a look at a topic that touches more than 1 million working carers across Australia: employment and care.

Balancing work and care is a challenge that can affect the very way in which people live. We hear so many stories from carers whose everyday lives are defined by their ability, or inability, to work. The father who has placed his daughter in supported accommodation but cannot find work to support himself after 30 years out of the workforce; the son who has used every leave entitlement he has to support his ageing parents, and now relies on family and unreliable care services to get by; the mother who wants to work to support her son, but full-time work means tripled rent, a loss of health care benefits and expensive day programs.

These stories are the basis of our work advocating for the changes carers want and need, and they ground our work in Victoria around the reality of caring.

With articles for everyone, working or not, I hope this issue of Carers in Victoria answers some questions, provides some food for thought... or just gives you something good to read on a chilly winter's day!

By the time you read this we will have had our first Mingle event in Melbourne and will be preparing for events across Victoria in the coming months; these are my first Mingles, and I'm looking forward to meeting as many of you as I can and sharing a great day out. See page 3 for more information.

Hope to see you there!

Caroline Mulcahy  
CEO, Carers Victoria

# what's happening at carers victoria

## Come along and enjoy the fun of Mingle 2011!

Mingle 2011 is a festival of feeling good! This year the Mingle All Stars will use games, activities and discussion to explore everything from nutrition to nurturing, sharing tips and tricks, and helping you develop strategies for caring for yourself.

It's not too late to reserve your place at Mingle events in Frankston, Bendigo, Ballarat, Shepparton, Bairnsdale or Melbourne.

RSVP: call 03 9396 9561 or email [events@carersvictoria.org.au](mailto:events@carersvictoria.org.au). We need to know which event you'd like to attend, and any dietary requirements you may have.

## Our mental health resource has been updated.

We know that finding help for someone who is experiencing distress from a mental illness or who is in a mental health crisis can be a challenge. That's why we have updated our user-friendly resource, *Finding help for someone with a mental health problem*. Lots of service providers have already given it the thumbs up - but we think carers could also find it useful.

You can download *Finding help for someone with a mental health problem* from the Publications section of our website ([www.carersvictoria.org.au](http://www.carersvictoria.org.au)).

## Don't forget to apply for your Carer Card

If you haven't already got your Carer Card, now's the time! The card is a government initiative, offering a wide range of discounts and benefits to carers.

You are eligible to receive the card if you are a resident of Victoria and the primary carer of someone with a disability, severe medical condition, mental illness, in need of palliative care, or who is frail-aged. Some Centrelink or Department of Human Services details may need to be verified, and a medical professional must endorse your application.

To find out more, or to apply for a card, call 1800 901 958 or go to [www.carercard.vic.gov.au](http://www.carercard.vic.gov.au).

## Keep up with the latest Carers Victoria news

Sign up for Voice, our regular e-bulletin, by emailing:

[eBulletin@carersvictoria.org.au](mailto:eBulletin@carersvictoria.org.au)

and ask to subscribe in the email subject line.

You can also catch up with us - and other carers - online by checking out our Facebook and Twitter pages. Go to:

[www.facebook.com/carersvictoria](http://www.facebook.com/carersvictoria)

and

[www.twitter.com/carersvictoria](http://www.twitter.com/carersvictoria)

Remember to regularly check [www.carersvictoria.org.au](http://www.carersvictoria.org.au), for news and information on caring.

## what's happening around victoria

### Hurstbridge Wattle Festival

28 August 2011, all day  
Various locations in Hurstbridge

A day of fun and festivities with animal nurseries, steam train rides, music and food.

1300 660 072  
[www.wattlefestival.org.au](http://www.wattlefestival.org.au)

### Walhalla Vinter Ljustest

3 - 28 August 2011, 6.30 pm - 9.30 pm  
Walhalla

See the Walhalla Historic Township transformed into a world of light and sound in the midst of winter darkness.

03 5165 6262  
[www.visitwalhalla.com](http://www.visitwalhalla.com)

### BoxWorld

17 June - 7 August 2011  
9.30 am - 5 pm weekdays  
1 pm - 5 pm weekends

National Wool Museum  
26 Moorabool Street Geelong

BoxWorld is a hand-crafted model city - a playful look at the importance of recycling and demonstration of the materials available in our own homes.

03 5272 4701  
[www.geelongaustralia.com.au/nwm](http://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/nwm)

### The Highland Games

21 August 2011, 10.30 am - 5 pm

Amulet Vineyard  
Wangaratta Road, Beechworth

The 3rd Annual Highland Games will see an influx of kilts to the Amulet Vineyard with some of Australia's best strong men vying for the title of "The Southern Highlander"

03 5727 0420  
[www.amuletwines.com.au](http://www.amuletwines.com.au)

### Winter Wine Weekend

11 June - 13 June 2011, 11 am - 4 pm

Red Hill Showgrounds  
Arthurs Seat Rd, Red Hill

Discover over 50 wineries under one roof at the Winter Wine Festival. Cellar-brate the long weekend!

03 5989 2377  
[www.mpva.com.au](http://www.mpva.com.au)

### Winter Blues

29 - 31 July 2011, Various times  
Various venues around Echuca

These winter blues won't leave you feeling cold - spend the weekend hearing some of the best blues bands going around.

1800 804 446  
[www.winterblues.com.au](http://www.winterblues.com.au)



Balancing your caring responsibilities with the demands of paid work can be a challenge. Sometimes you might need extra support and access to flexible work arrangements, so it's important to know your rights.

Ed works full-time as a production supervisor at Scot Industrial Smoothing; his wife, Emily, is a full-time carer to their son, Daniel. When Emily decided to go back to part-time work, they had to make some changes: Ed now needed to leave work early 3 days a week to pick Daniel up from his day program. Ed wanted to care for his son, but he also had a demanding job - all he could think was, 'There's no way the boss'll say yes...'

Whether it's giving up paid employment, reducing your hours or even taking on a different kind of job, we know that many carers have to change their work situation when they transition into caring. Often these changes also mean a reduction in salary, responsibility and benefits. But there are many reasons that carers want to keep working, including:

- the need for extra income and to build up superannuation for retirement;

- to take advantage of the personal challenges, independence, self esteem and social connections that the workplace provides; or
- for respite from their caring responsibilities and a life outside caring.

One of the barriers to paid work can be the lack of flexibility you need to juggle working with your care responsibilities. The good news is that flexibility for employees is increasingly being seen as a good thing for business, helping to retain skilled and valued staff. What you might not know is that there are laws that can support or protect you to achieve flexible work arrangements.

There are two main pieces of legislation you need to know about; they each offer a different type and level of protection. It's really too early to say which of the two laws is the most effective in improving work conditions for people with care responsibilities; so far there have been very few

test cases in the courts. What they do show is that governments and employers now have to think more actively and creatively about solutions to real people's issues, including caring.

Let's have a look at what these two laws mean for carers!

## **Fair Work Act 2009**

We'll start on the big one. The Fair Work Act 2009 is national legislation, created by the Rudd government, and it applies to most workplaces.

It's an important law because it's clear about what your entitlements are as an employee, and also outlines penalties for employers who break the law. Modern awards and any new workplace enterprise agreements must comply with the Act.

The Act sets out the National Employment Standards (NES) that all employers must maintain. But what do they mean? Standard 5 is a standard protecting carers – it is specific to your entitlements as someone with care responsibilities, giving you the following entitlements to cover sickness or caring responsibilities:

- ten days of paid personal or carer's leave (paid pro rata for part time employees);
- two days unpaid carer's leave as required; and
- two days compassionate leave (unpaid for casuals) as required.

These provisions can be really useful for covering unforeseen emergencies and occasional caring. Many carers, though, will need ongoing flexibility from their workplace.

Now, if you are the parent or carer of a pre-school age child, or a person with a disability who is under 18 years of age, then Standard 2 of the Act is for you! It gives you the right to request flexible working arrangements from your employer.

Flexible working arrangements may include:

- changes to hours of work – like a reduction in hours, or changes to start and finish times;
- changes to patterns of work – such as 'split-shifts' or job sharing arrangements; or
- changes to location of work – for example, the ability to work from home.

To be able to ask for these arrangements, you must have worked for your employer for at least 12 months (full-time, part-time or casually on regular basis) and have a reasonable expectation that your employment will continue.

Your employer must seriously consider a request for flexible working arrangements and they can only refuse it on reasonable business grounds. It's important to note, though, that 'reasonable business grounds' are not clearly defined, and are generally decided on a case-by-case basis.

There are rules governing how your request must be made and how your employer must respond. For example, an employee must make their request in writing. Where discrimination is suspected there are options of investigation, mediation or litigation through the Fair Work Ombudsman.

You will notice that the 'right to request flexible work arrangements' does not apply to those caring for adults, in spite of a strong lobby made at the time of the passing of the legislation. Carers Victoria will continue to advocate with the Carer Associations in other states to have the law expanded. If you are caring for an adult, you might find that the Equal Opportunity Act (Victoria) offers you options and protection in your caring role.

## **Equal Opportunity Amendment (Family Responsibilities) Act 2008 (Victoria)**

This law is specific to Victoria and is different to the Fair Work Act in a few ways. Before we get into it, it's important to know that there is an update to the Act coming into effect on 1 August 2011 – but we expect that the content of the Family Responsibilities provisions (which apply to carers) will remain mostly the same. So let's get to it!

Under the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act (EOA), it is unlawful discrimination for your employer to unreasonably refuse to accommodate your parental or carer responsibilities in your work arrangements. Although employers can refuse requests for flexible work for business reasons, these must be seriously considered by employers and reasons must be given if requests are refused.

An employee who believes their employer has unreasonably refused a request for flexible work arrangements can make a complaint of discrimination to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. This will be followed by an investigation of your complaint and as required, a conciliation process.

The most important difference between this Victorian legislation and the Fair Work Act is that it doesn't matter how old the person you care for is – the EOA applies to all employees with caring responsibilities.

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The Victorian EOA also applies if you have been offered employment, are currently employed (including contract and commission-based workers) or are a partner in a firm. There is no 12-month employment period to qualify, like there is in the Fair Work Act. The ways in which someone can use the law are also different; for example, applications for 'flexible work arrangements' do not have to be in writing.

Fun fact: in 2009-10, the first full year of its implementation, 41 complaints were made under the Family Responsibilities amendment.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission have produced a very useful booklet to explain the Victorian law. Called *Building eQuality in the workplace*, it contains information for both employers and employees and provides case studies and answers to questions you might have. We recommend contacting the Commission to get a copy sent to you.

So, what ever happened to Ed?

Well, Ed sat down with his boss and explained everything; because his workplace agreement allowed Individual Flexibility Agreements (IFAs), they were able to work out a solution that worked for Ed and the company! Now, Ed starts and leaves work an hour earlier on those three days, but forgoes penalty/overtime rates for his first hour of work. One of Ed's most capable team members, whom Ed has agreed to train up, is now going to take on a supervisor role for the final hour of the day. Ed is able to help care for his son, and his boss has kept a valued and experienced employee.

Below are some organisations and resources that can help inform and advise you about your particular situation; you can also contact our Carer Advisory Line (1800 242 636) to find out more.

## some useful resources

### Fair Work Australia

Fair Work Australia provides information and advice about Australia's new national workplace relations system, the fair work ombudsman and the national workplace relations tribunal. Look for their fact sheets and Best Practice guides.

Phone 13 13 94

[www.fairwork.gov.au](http://www.fairwork.gov.au)

### Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

The Commission provides support and education about human rights and responsibilities.

Phone 1300 292 153

[www.humanrightscormission.vic.gov.au](http://www.humanrightscormission.vic.gov.au)

Email [enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au)

### Ways2Work

This Victorian government initiative helps employers and employees manage work and family life. They help parents and carers enter or re-enter the paid workforce, and provide advice to prospective employers about creating a better balance between family and work obligations.

Phone 13 22 15

[ways2work.business.vic.gov.au](http://ways2work.business.vic.gov.au)

### Unions Australia

Unions work to defend and improve workplace conditions and entitlements for all working Australians. Members get specialist advice and support from expert union staff and workplace delegates.

Phone 1300 486 466

[www.unionsaustralia.com.au](http://www.unionsaustralia.com.au)

Email [unionsaustralia@actu.asn.au](mailto:unionsaustralia@actu.asn.au)

### Jobwatch

Jobwatch is an employment rights legal centre which helps Victorian workers to find out about their rights at work. They provide advice and information, community education and targeted case work. They also contribute to law reform.

Phone (03) 9662 1933 or

1800 331 617 for rural callers

[www.jobwatch.org.au](http://www.jobwatch.org.au)

Email [jobwatch@jobwatch.org.au](mailto:jobwatch@jobwatch.org.au)

### Legal disclaimer

*The contents of this article intended to provide general information in summary form, current at the time of publication. It does not constitute legal advice, is not intended to be a substitute for legal advice, and should not be relied upon as such. Please seek legal or other professional advice before making decisions related to you or your caring situation.*

# an intriguing life

a carer story by **Daniel**

"Look, you may have to give up work to become a full-time carer - not just for Megan, but for Megan and the three boys."

With these words from his wife's doctor, Daniel's life changed completely.

"I was shocked," says Daniel. "but no government department was going to fund a carer to come around here seven days a week so I said, 'Right-oh, change of life. I'll become my own boss.'"

Daniel gave up his job. Several financially and emotionally turbulent years followed. The family gave up all their luxuries, sold their house and cut up their credit cards. At one stage, Daniel went back to work but "the family started to fall apart again" so he returned to the carer's role. In the end, Daniel says, 'We went bankrupt just so we could survive'.

Six years earlier when Daniel and Megan married and started their family, they had no idea of the challenges that lay ahead.

Their first son Darian was born in 1995. He suffered a stroke at birth and was then diagnosed with epileptic seizures. A developmental delay was later recognised as Asperger's syndrome.

In 1997, before Darian was diagnosed, Alex was born. He was three when Daniel and Megan recognised that he also had developmental issues. Initially misdiagnosed, it took seven years before he was also diagnosed with Asperger's.

By that time, the couple had had their third son, Mason. His arrival was dramatic. He survived SIDS and surgery at 10 weeks. "He actually had died, but the hospital brought him back to life." Now it appears that Mason also has Asperger's syndrome.

The same year Mason was born and Darian's diagnosis was coming to light, Megan became unwell. Megan was eventually diagnosed with a range of conditions including Asperger's Syndrome and depression.

Now Daniel and Megan share the role of looking after the children. "Even though Megan has a disability she is the most excellent Mum a child with special needs could have."

Living with autism means that there is no room for spontaneity. The day starts a 6.30 am getting the breakfasts organised and boys ready for school. Housework, shopping, gardening, washing, ironing,

cooking and other tasks like doctor's appointments quickly fill each day. Dinner always has to be at 6 pm, even during daylight savings. The working day usually ends around 11 pm, after the boys finally go to bed. Daniel and Megan take it in turns if one of their boys has an 'all-nighter' and doesn't sleep.

Last year, after a six year wait, the family moved to a regional coastal community and into a government house designed specifically for children with autism to minimise the chances of them hurting themselves. The move has been a real turning point.

"It's a different lifestyle down here. It's more of a country town atmosphere. There's more help and people are more open to the situation... they talk to us without a problem and ask how the boys are doing."

Through his experiences as a carer and a parent, Daniel has learnt that patience is a virtue. "Strength, patience and I have a bit of humour in me at times," he says. "I speak to mums and dads and they say, 'Where did that joke come from? Because we know you've been home all day.'"

"I'm also more open minded about what's going on around me. I can stand back and see my children and where they are at and I can open my heart up to others who are going through a similar problem."

Daniel also finds it helpful to talk to a counsellor from time-to-time to "lay all my stresses on a person that's neutral and not part of the family."

Megan describes the family's life as 'intriguing' and says she stays positive for the boys.

Daniel also focuses on the positives to keep going. "I've got to think of something like, it's going to be a sunny day or the boys are going to achieve something different at school today, or we're planning ahead for the weekend and we're all going to the beach.

The main thing is you enjoy your children while you've got them and you appreciate what you've got, not dwell on what you need.

I give it all my best for my boys. They're not very affectionate but they give me a lovely smile back and they let me know they're happy where they are now, with their mum and their dad in this house that we've received."



## superannuation and insurance for carers

by **Paul Watson**, Legal Executive, Maurice Blackburn

People stop work for different reasons and when they do they usually don't know about their rights to superannuation and insurance benefits. These benefits can be large lump sums or pensions which can be very important, particularly for people with disabilities and their carers. It's important to get advice before stopping work because the way that you stop work can affect your entitlements.

### Early access to superannuation for carers and people with a disability

If you have to stop work you may be going through a period of financial difficulty. Most super funds allow you to access some of your super to help you through these times. However, the rules for access can be complicated and can affect your other entitlements.

If you are over the superannuation retirement age (55 -60) you can get access to all your super if you retire from the work force. The same goes for the person you are caring for.

If you under the superannuation retirement age (55 - 60) you can still get some of your super if:

- You have been on Centrelink payments for at least six months and can't pay your living expenses (you can get up to \$10,000.00 per annum).
- You are over the minimum retirement age (55 - 60) and still working (you can take out an annuity or pension).
- You need money to pay for palliative care, funeral expenses, modifications to your home or car, or medical or transport expenses for treatment outside the public health system for you or a dependant (you can get enough to cover the expenses).
- You need money for loan repayments to prevent the sale of your home (up to three months

repayments plus twelve months interest every twelve months).

- You are permanently incapacitated for work (you can get all of your super).
- If you have a terminal illness with less than twelve months to live (you can get all your account balance, tax free).
- You are a temporary resident and permanently leave Australia (you can get all of your super minus tax).

The same applies to the superannuation of the person you are caring for.

Any amount you take out of your super fund will not count towards the income test for Centrelink payments and in most cases will not stop your payments. Any amount you take out of the super fund does count towards the assets test and if it takes you above the Centrelink assets threshold may mean your Centrelink payments will be reduced or stopped for a period of time.

### Insurance benefits

If you are caring for someone who is sick or injured there may also be insurance benefits that they are entitled to claim. Most super funds offer automatic disability and death insurance benefits that can be very valuable, particularly if their illness or injury is long term. It is important to note that accessing superannuation can sometimes mean that insurance cover under the policy will stop. It is extremely important that you obtain advice about this before making a decision about accessing superannuation.

The insurance cover under most super funds comes in three different types - Death (which can sometimes be claimed if you are diagnosed with a terminal illness), Total and Permanent Disability

(TPD) or Total and Temporary Disability (TTD) insurance. Death and TPD benefits are usually paid as lump sums if you die whilst a member of the fund or you are permanently unfit to do your usual job or any other suitable work. TTD benefits are usually monthly payments for two years, five years or maybe up to age 65 if you are unfit to do your usual job.

Other types of insurance can include income protection, trauma insurance, life insurance, mortgage protection insurance or sickness and accident insurance.

### Redundancy

Many people believe that if they are made redundant they are not entitled to claim superannuation or insurance disability benefits. This is not necessarily right. Many people who are sick or injured when they are made redundant are entitled to lodge claims for disability benefits through their super fund or insurance policy.

Only a few insurance policies have rules that prevent you from claiming disability benefits if you

have accepted a redundancy.

If you think that you may be made redundant, you should get advice about your super as the way that you stop work and any agreements that you sign may affect your super or insurance. If you have already been made redundant you should check whether you can still claim your super or insurance.

### Terminal illness

Recent changes to legislation allow someone who has been diagnosed with a terminal illness to access all of their superannuation tax-free. Terminal illness means that the person has less than 12 months to live.

Many funds also allow a terminally ill member to claim the insurance death benefit even though they are still alive. The insurance benefits are also tax free.

### Help

Maurice Blackburn Lawyers have set up a free legal advice service for carers and people with disabilities. If you have any employment, superannuation or insurance questions call 1800 196 050 for help and free advice.

## Scoring a goal: tips and tricks for saving

Achieving your goals can be a fantastic feeling... dealing with money? Not so much! Sometimes it's downright exhausting. Why not combine the two and make dealing with money a rewarding experience for once?

Savings goals are a great way to build good savings habits and can make big purchases a little easier.

### List your savings goals

You might be planning for an improvement or modification to your home, a close friend or relative might be getting married, or you could even just want to buy yourself a treat.

### Be realistic

Setting an achievable and realistic goal is so important; if you feel like you'll never reach it, you're more inclined to ignore it!

### Look at your budget

When you look at your spending, is there anywhere you can cut back? Maybe you could eat less takeaway, or rent movies instead of buying. Even trying to use less energy can save

on your power bill – put those few saved dollars into your new savings account!

### Get started

The sooner you start saving, the more interest you earn. Take advantage of the high interest rates offered by savings accounts like ING and Ubank.

### Try a term deposit

If you have some money aside already that you're not going to need for a while, try a term deposit. You can't withdraw your money for the set term without incurring a fee, but you'll also get a higher interest rate.

**Remember...** if you open a new savings account, make sure you read the Product Disclosure Statement, and take care to note "bonus" interest rates (they may only apply for a short time, or with a minimum deposit), and any extra fees. Never be afraid to ask questions - it pays to be in the know!

*For more information, check out a few of your local banks' deals, or explore online at websites like InfoChoice ([www.infochoice.com.au](http://www.infochoice.com.au))*



# work and care: the barriers

Despite the potential of carer workforce participation to benefit both individuals and the national bottom line, there are still many barriers to employment for family carers. In this article, we look at *Ways to Work: Employment support for carers of adolescents and adults with an intellectual disability*, a Carers Victoria study that identifies and explores employment issues that can affect all carers.

## **Lack of appropriate services**

We know that developing services for carers without reference to the person they care for – and vice versa – will always result in limited, inappropriate supports.

*“Council say that respite hours are not to be used for work. I can’t plan around council carers as they can’t commit until the day before. It is extremely difficult to be in the paid workforce with confidence that it will be a long term arrangement... Work is seen as more of a privilege than a right. I have no super, no career.”*

We’re advocating for an increase in regular, predictable and ongoing respite, and support for extended respite, i.e programs and additional in-home respite for before and after day services (between 8-9 am and between 3-6 pm).

## **Lack of workplace flexibility**

Carers have legal rights to request flexible working arrangements, but a lack of education means that many employers and employees aren’t aware of what is and isn’t an option.

*“I am a part-time university researcher on a short-term contract. I have deliberately chosen this role as it best fits in with my caring role... The availability of such work is limited; therefore I have had considerable periods of unemployment.”*

The government has a role to play in working with employers to develop incentives to modernise the Australian workplace and promote inclusion of people with caring responsibilities. For example, the government could promote this inclusion

by introducing programs similar to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) Employer of Choice Awards.

## **Transitioning from care to work**

Carers are often denied opportunities to maintain or develop work skills while they are caring, which disadvantages them further if a return to work becomes possible.

*“You get in such a rut. You lose other skills being out of the workforce. People are going to ask me: ‘Why haven’t you been working for 20 years?’”*

We have made recommendations that the Federal Government, through the Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations guarantee that Carer Payment recipients have access to training to maintain, develop and increase their skills, to help them get back to work if they choose to do so.

## **Support and tax**

The value of the Carer Payment is quickly reduced when income tax and costs associated with working are deducted... which also quickly reduces the financial benefits of working.

*“Getting an income means I get cut off the Carer Payment and lose the Health Care Card. I live in Ministry housing so I will be paying market rent ... Would working be worth it if I have to pay someone else to look after Jill full-time?”*

The government needs to remove the barriers that deter carers from returning to work; particular attention should be given to examining the impact that tax rates, the 25-hour rule, and eligibility for the Health Care Card have on the workforce participation of carers.

To read more of *Ways to Work: Employment support for carers of adolescents and adults with an intellectual disability*, check out the Carers Victoria website.

# for young carers

How do you balance caring with everything else in your life? Here are some tips for study, sleep and work – so instead of running around like a chicken with its head cut off, you can be a Zen hen.

## Study

### Talk to your teachers

Tell your teachers that you're a young carer. It can be a sensitive subject, and you never have to say more than you want to – but it's good for them to know because they can help. They can make your school life easier, and educate themselves about caring so they can keep an eye out for services and opportunities for you and any other young carers they identify.

### Colour-code

Use different coloured folders and highlighters for each subject at school. This might be nerdy, but it's effective for staying organised. You can differentiate your study material quickly, keep all of your notes together (very handy for exams), and colourful and interesting notes can also be easier to remember.

### Study in different ways.

Ditch the desk and chair... try studying in some odd places. Stick spelling words up on the back of the toilet door; use a whiteboard marker to do your maths working out on windows (get someone's permission, first); and learn geography at the beach!

### Treat yourself.

After a test or at the end of a tough week do something for you. It doesn't have to be a big deal - it can be as

simple as sitting and listening to your favourite music, or going for a run... but make sure it's just for you.

## Sleep

### Create a routine

It will let your brain know that it's quitting time, so it can start to slow down for the night. A classic routine is to wash your face, brush your teeth, change into some PJs, hop into bed and read for a set amount of time. Plus reading is good for your brainbox!

### Be imaginative

If you have a shower before bed, imagine that you're scrubbing off all of the stress of the day. If you have a cup of tea or warm milk before bed, imagine it's a potion to help you sleep (we don't advise using actual sleeping potions without a doctor's recommendation). Use your imagination.

### Get enough of it

The most important part of sleep isn't how you get to it or do it. It's getting enough of it! Try to have a scheduled bed time (bedtimes aren't just for babies); not only does it mean you're more likely to get the amount of sleep you need, it will also create a routine that makes it easier for you to get up in the morning.

## Work

### Know your rights

If you've got a job, you have workplace rights. Read your work contract or agreement and see if there's anything in there about family/carer leave; if not, speak to

your union representative, explore the Business Victoria, the FairWork Resource, and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission websites to find out what you are and aren't entitled to.

### Volunteer

If your caring duties mean you can't spare the time for a job, consider volunteering at a local charity or school. You can get the benefits of work (independence, self-esteem boosts, socialisation) without the time commitment of a job... plus your help will probably be hugely appreciated!

### Home ground advantage

If you're dying for a job but can't be out of the house too much, think about what kinds of jobs can be done in the house. 100% on maths? Offer accounting services to local businesses. Know how to avoid an apostrophe catastrophe? Become an English tutor. If creativity is your bag, create some art at home and set up a weekend market stall with a friend (so you're not going it alone). Be wary of online jobs. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

## Our #1 tip

Talk! Talk to Carers Victoria, your parents, teachers, friends, friends' parents, coaches, nurses, doctors... you never know who might be able to help you out when you need it. If you aren't a talker, try writing... you can show people, or not - the important thing is for you to take the time to express how you're feeling.



## can I have a show of hands?

Are you the person who tries to shrink into invisibility when someone asks for a volunteer? Shrink no longer! Not only is volunteering a meaningful, positive thing to do for your community, it can benefit you, too. Whether you volunteer for a once-off project, for 8 hours a month, or for 16 hours a week, volunteering is great for your health and your happiness.

For many carers, trying to balance paid employment and care is just too difficult. But, if you have a little spare time, you can get many of the benefits of work from somewhere else... like volunteering.

### **Volunteering connects you.**

Being a volunteer gives your opportunities to create connections. If your position allows you to be out and about, you can even meet new people in your community. If your chosen organisation matches your interests, chances are other people who work or volunteer there will share your interests, too. These social interactions can be amazing mood boosters, and can turn into lasting friendships.

### **It benefits mind, body and soul.**

Studies have found that volunteering can help you cope with stress better and lower depression levels; some research also indicates that people who volunteer report their 'wellbeing' to be at higher levels, no matter where or when they volunteer. If you want to include a fitness boost into your volunteer regime, why not join a conservation group? You can get some exercise and clean up your local area. On a more personal level, volunteering can leave you feeling spiritually

satisfied – you're giving back to the community... and that makes you an (even more) important part of it.

### **It can grow or maintain your skills.**

If you are thinking about returning to work, or just want to keep your skills sharp, volunteering can do the trick. A UK study showed that more than 90% of employers believed that volunteering added to skills, and more than 70% were more likely to recruit someone who had volunteer experience over someone who didn't.

Volunteering is a great way to brush up on some skills, or learn new ones. Find something that challenges you... plan an event, crunch some accounting numbers, make a video, do anything! Even the simplest projects involve all sorts of skills – creating an art group needs interpersonal skills, budgeting, goal-setting, time management and delegation. Why not try it out?

### **It can be fun!**

Volunteering can offer a change from your day-to-day life, open up new opportunities, and provide a sense of balance... but above all, it offers a chance to have fun. You can find new interests, new friends and new experiences. Let yourself be excited about it. We all need a place that recharges our batteries – when you're caring 24/7, sometimes a work environment is what's going to energise you. Maybe volunteering isn't for you, but it might be... and there's only one way to find out.

*For more information, check out [www.govolunteer.com.au](http://www.govolunteer.com.au)*

# taking your time



One of the biggest shifts a person faces as they transition into caring is the time restrictions it can place on their life – especially if they’re balancing work and care. Many carers feel they have little or no time to themselves. And that’s where time management strategies can relieve stress and make way for vital ‘me’ time. Here are our top 4 time management strategies.

## 1. To-do-list

Taking a few minutes in the morning to write a to-do-list can end up saving you valuable time later in the day. Start with writing the top priorities for the day, and leave the less important things till last. Shopping lists can also be an effective time saving tool – they can mean the difference between one supermarket trip a week and time-consuming daily shops. The most important thing to remember with a to-do-list is to accept that you may not have time to accomplish everything you wanted to... but be proud of what you do achieve. Try highlighting two or three important things to get done, and anything else on the list you achieve will be a bonus.

## 2. Allocate your time

Setting an allocated time and deadline for a task can save you a lot of personal stress. For example; rather than spending the whole day cleaning, you could choose to allocate an hour on Monday to clean the bathroom, an hour Tuesday to do the washing and ironing, and so on. This can make larger tasks seem more manageable.

This approach can also be used by children who are old enough to do chores. If they’re able, try setting a timer and challenge them to get dressed

and ready as quickly as they can in the morning. Every day they’ve got a record to beat! It might not work for all kids, but if it does, you can expand the challenge to things like tidying their room or helping with the dishes. This encourages them help around the house and add time to your day.

## 3. Delegate

Write a list of regular tasks you do throughout the week (cooking dinner, getting the kids dressed, etc) – try to make it as detailed as possible. Now read the list back and try to think about who you can delegate some jobs to... and be creative! Can the person you care for help with cooking or cleaning? Maybe a neighbour is a keen gardener, and they can help you with the pruning? The kids might be able to make school lunches the night before. People might surprise you with their willingness to help; don’t be afraid to delegate... you are worth it.

## 4. Reward yourself

Giving yourself time just for you is essential to your health and wellbeing. Often carers find it hard to take extended ‘breaks’ – if you can, try taking several five-minute breaks throughout the day to enjoy ‘me’ time. Alternatively, it might be easier to take 15-20 minutes at the start or end of the day when everyone’s asleep. It takes getting used to, but it’s important to acknowledge how hard you work and take time out to reward yourself.

If your carer support group would like to organise a free workshop on Caring For Yourself, please contact our Education and Training team on 03 9396 9500.

## your will to care

Join our growing band of bequest supporters and help build stronger caring communities.

To find out more, please contact Kate on 9396 9500 or [support@carersvictoria.org.au](mailto:support@carersvictoria.org.au) to receive a copy of our bequest booklet.

All enquiries are confidential and obligation free.



# dancing the blues away

a carer story by **Anne H**

I take a bow and the crowd erupts with applause. I've just finished my first solo belly dancing floorshow at a local restaurant and can't wipe the smile from my face.

My mind wanders back two years. A friend calls, "I've just started belly dancing classes. It's so much fun. You must come along and give it a try."

I feel depressed, no energy, believing that caring full time for my daughter is all I have to look forward to. It's so long since I've done anything more energetic than lift my daughter or push her around the lake in her wheelchair. However, she's just started school so I have some time to myself.

"Okay, I need some exercise."

At first, the coordination is difficult, trying to follow the teacher who is moving her hips and her arms at the same time. Soon, it becomes easier but as soon as the teacher says, "It's free time, move your body how it wants to the music," I freeze. What if I make a fool of myself? Why am I so self-conscious?

More than a year goes by and I can dance three times as long without puffing. New moves come easily. I seem to have a natural talent, but "free time" is still torture. We are preparing for a Christmas performance in which each class is doing a group piece but the teacher asks if anyone is willing to do a solo as well. Maybe this will push me through my inhibitions. I volunteer.

The teacher gives me extra time after each class. My routine comes together and with her encouragement, I feel myself expanding. I buy a sewing machine so I can make a costume.

My daughter becomes very ill and is hospitalised for two weeks. Feeling slightly guilty, I decide not to sleep over in the hospital each night as in the past during her numerous stays. She's older now, six, and the ward isn't too busy. The nurses know her well and will call me if there is a problem. I leave the Base Hospital each day around 6 pm and drive 45 kilometres home to sew and rehearse. Arriving back at the hospital by around

8.30 am, sometimes I bring in the costume to hand-sew the trimmings. During my lunch breaks I prowl the aisles at Spotlight looking for more fancy materials and trims. Our little town doesn't have a Spotlight!

The big night arrives. The belly dancers have hired out the whole restaurant. My daughter is discharged the previous day so she comes along, my mum volunteering to sit with her while I'm dancing. Rather than nerves diminishing my performance, the presence of the crowd pushes me to new heights! The owner of the restaurant is surprised. He's only seen me in dowdy clothes pushing around the wheelchair.

"Would you be interested in doing a whole performance here on a Saturday night, say about 40 minutes worth?"

I've worn myself out doing a 4 minute solo! It just pops out, "Yes, but I'll need lots of time to prepare." He's willing to wait until I feel ready.

It's time to get really fit. I sneak out of the house before my daughter wakes up in the morning and jog around the block. Surely she'll be all right alone for 15 minutes. I do yoga stretches while she is having her tube feed for breakfast, stopping to mop up vomit from time to time. I shift her therapy equipment out of the way in the lounge every chance I get and dance and dance. I'm careful not to swish the veil in her face as I fling it around or bump into her chair as I practise my spins.

The weight is falling off. I haven't been able to wear these jeans for a few years! As my muscles strengthen, lifting my daughter becomes easier. My lower back pain is now gone. During one of my monthly appointments, the chiropractor says, "Your back has improved dramatically!"

I'm still tired after the broken sleep when my daughter needs to be turned or vomits in the middle of the night and I have to strip the bed, but mostly I feel optimistic. There is more than just caring.

Five months later, I'm ready. The restaurant is packed and I perform the dance of my life.

# working and caring in the veteran community

Meet Carol, Lesley and Margaret, all partners of veterans, who give us a glimpse into living with a veteran and managing work in their own lives.

Despite the long hours, Carol loved her job in her local hairdressing salon. She hung on her clients' every word, absolutely chuffed at the trust they displayed in her. She enjoyed doing their hair too – especially dabbling in the different colour combinations... until Carol realised that her husband Bob's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and his anxiety about being alone were taking a stronger hold.

Recognising that her long hours were no longer possible, Carol decided to continue working, but to limit herself to three days and give up the night hours. Carol was pleased with the compromise... but she wasn't prepared for her manager's response. While the three days was acceptable, she would have to work night hours. Devastated at first, Carol took a deep breath, considered her options and decided to find a more flexible workplace.

Lesley enjoyed her work, much as Carol had. A legal administrator in a small firm of criminal lawyers, she was always busy and no two days were the same. The cases were complex and exciting, and she relished the stimulation. It gave her so much to think about that she would still be pondering cases on the way home... until Lesley's husband's illness became an issue.

Doug been diagnosed with a generalised anxiety disorder a few years earlier and it prevented him from working fulltime. Even though he was capable of doing some work, few workplaces were willing to employ him due to the episodic nature of his illness. He began to volunteer, which made him feel useful; eventually he had taken on too much

work and it caused him to burnout. Lesley didn't know when she'd be able to return to work, so in the meantime she attended a number of sessions held by National Carer Support Services. They helped her to explore her options, restore her self-esteem and recognise the importance of developing other interests and maintaining social contacts.

Margaret also shared similarities with Carol and Lesley. She worked in a hospital as a pathologist. When she looked into the microscope, she felt like a detective, wondering what she was going to find and trying to solve the mystery with her colleagues. Margaret's identity was tied to her work; she felt her colleagues were her only meaningful path to social connection, which she valued so much. Work offered her many different rewards, until she had to deal with the ramifications of her husband Richard's attempted suicide. He had just returned from the rehabilitation ward and required a lot of care. He couldn't be left on his own, and she was too frightened to do so anyway... how could she return to work? Slowly, Margaret realised that she needed to trust in Richard's recovery and build a plan to return to work without feeling trapped by guilt. She also recognised that while Richard was very dependent on her now, this would lessen as his medication and counselling took effect.

Carol, Lesley and Margaret have confronted the immense loss and grief associated with balancing work and care. However, their stories show that they are resilient, resourceful women, as are most carers. They have recognised that successfully adapting to changes in illness and wellness states can help enable carers to feel a better sense of control over their life circumstances and their emotional reactions to the challenges that will inevitably surface from time to time.



*National Carer Support Services is a program of Carers Victoria funded by the Department of Veterans' Affairs.*

*For more information about the services we offer including our extensive range of educational workshops and programs, you can contact us on 03 9396 9500 or [ncss@carersvictoria.org.au](mailto:ncss@carersvictoria.org.au).*

# 10

## ways to stay safe and healthy in your workplace (even if it's your house)

Working comes with certain benefits and conditions that keep you safe and healthy. As a carer, you deserve those benefits and conditions, too.

### Breaks

Working non-stop can lead to physical exhaustion, chronic headaches, poor concentration, and poor sleep. That's why it's important to take breaks during the day. For an 8-hour workday, you'd be entitled to two 10 minute breaks and a lunch break. Even if you can't take that long, make sure you take a break. It's a necessity, not a luxury.

### Leave

It's daunting to plan for, but the consequences of not taking a holiday can be significantly detrimental to your health and wellbeing. A few weeks might be out of the question, but take what you can. Explore your respite options, or ask a friend or family member to help you arrange a break.

### Training

At work we get to learn new things and develop ourselves. This has benefits, not only for our brains, but also for our spirits... and it can take many forms. Read a how-to book, take a class, join a carer support group, or have your group host a Carers Victoria workshop.

### Occupational health and safety (OH&S)

OH&S is crucial in maintaining a safe environment and keeping you out of danger. Common hazards include: heavy lifting, repetitive handling, slips, trips and falls. Learn how to lift correctly, remember to wipe up spills quickly, and be safe around chemicals and electrical equipment!

### First aid

Even the safest workplace (or home) can have emergencies and they come in all shapes and sizes, so it's important to have a first-aid kit and fire blanket or extinguisher within easy reach. You can also take a first-aid class for your own piece of mind.

### Rights

Everyone has the right to live free of discrimination, harassment or bullying, all of which can cause significant psychological damage. If you have any issues like these in your care situation, have a chat to our advisory line on 1800 242 636.

### Pay

Many people are motivated to work for money, but being a carer is far from a money-making venture. Speak to our advisory line (1800 242 636) to make sure you're receiving your entitlements. Join Carers Victoria in working to improve compensation for carers and the people they look after by supporting the campaign for a National Disability Insurance Scheme ([www.everyaustraliancounts.com.au](http://www.everyaustraliancounts.com.au)).

### Socialisation

One of the benefits of working is being able to socialise, but caring can sometimes be isolating. Luckily, there are lots of ways to meet new people - you could join or create a carer support group, or even take up a new hobby! Carers Victoria Mingles are on now - call us on 03 9396 9562 to find out more about a Mingle near you.

### Recognition

When you're feeling motivated and positive, you feel better and work better. Being recognised for the work you do can be a huge boost to your spirit and energy levels. We hope you get lots of recognition from family and friends... and if you don't? Ask for it. We know sometimes appreciation doesn't come often enough so we want to say, 'thank you for caring'.

### Self esteem

We all work for different reasons and get different things from our work. Being good at a job can be a great self esteem builder. While getting external recognition from others is great, recognising yourself for the good work you do can be even more important to your mental health and wellbeing. Go ahead - don't be shy - tell yourself how good you are!

# my future my choice: an update

The Summer Foundation has been engaged by Department of Human Services (DHS) to evaluate the quality of life outcomes for *my future my choice* participants.

This will involve interviewing people who are receiving *my future my choice* supports and/or their families members or significant others. The interviews will explore how *my future my choice* supports have impacted on the person's quality of life.

The evaluation aims to interview a total of 90 people to provide a broad range of experiences. So far 56 people have indicated their desire to participate. We are now hoping to engage a further 34 people before the end of August 2011.

The outcomes of interviews will be analysed, and a report on the findings will be provided to the Department of Human Services.

## Who can participate?

Anyone who currently receives *my future my choice* funded supports is invited to participate in the evaluation. This may include:

- people who live in residential aged care (RAC) and receive supports through *my future my choice*.
- people who have moved out of RAC into the community into either shared supported accommodation or other independent housing options.
- people who have been diverted from entering RAC by receiving *my future my choice* supports.

## Interviews

The interviews generally take one hour and are conducted by an experienced health professional. Everyone's opinions are valued and are confidential.

The Summer Foundation will modify interviews to best suit the person's communication and cognitive abilities. The time and location of the interview will be arranged to suit the person and/or family member.

Participants can nominate a family member to participate in the interview on their behalf, or they might like to have a support person assist them in the interview.

If a person is moving into a new *my future my choice* service, we may ask to do a before and after move interview.

## Emerging themes

Thirty interviews have been conducted to date. Of these, 60% of the people interviewed were male. 53% of people were living in RAC while 47% were living elsewhere in the community. 47% of people had a neurological condition, 37% an acquired brain injury and 9% a physical disability.

Initial analysis has shown that the first 30 participants had higher levels of social participation than the group who had not received *my future my choice* supports. However, caution should be used in interpreting outcomes as the sample size at this stage is too small to draw any firm conclusions.

The following are quotes collected during the interviews:

"Right now, you know, I love it. I can play my music loudly and I can play my own music and I don't have to listen to anything." ~ *Participant who has moved from RAC to the community*

"His independence has increased phenomenally. The quality of his life is heaps better because he's more relaxed. I think also that's impacted on his health, he's much more- not so much his physical health but his emotional health, because he's so much more relaxed I think he's happy." ~ *Spouse of participant who moved from RAC to the community*

## Being involved

If you would like to participate in the evaluation and share your experiences since receiving *my future my choice* supports, please contact Nadine Holgate or Di Winkler at the Summer Foundation on (03) 9894 7006 or email [nadine.holgate@summerfoundation.org.au](mailto:nadine.holgate@summerfoundation.org.au).

# take a break

## just for laughs

Grandma and Grandpa were sitting in their porch rockers watching the beautiful sunset and reminiscing about "the good old days," when Grandma turned to Grandpa and said, "Honey, do you remember when we first started dating and you used to just casually reach over and take my hand?" Grandpa looked over at her, smiled and took her hand in his.

With a wry little smile Grandma pressed a little further, "Honey, do you remember how after we were engaged you'd sometimes lean over and suddenly kiss me on the cheek?" Grandpa leaned slowly toward Grandma and gave her a lingering kiss on her cheek.

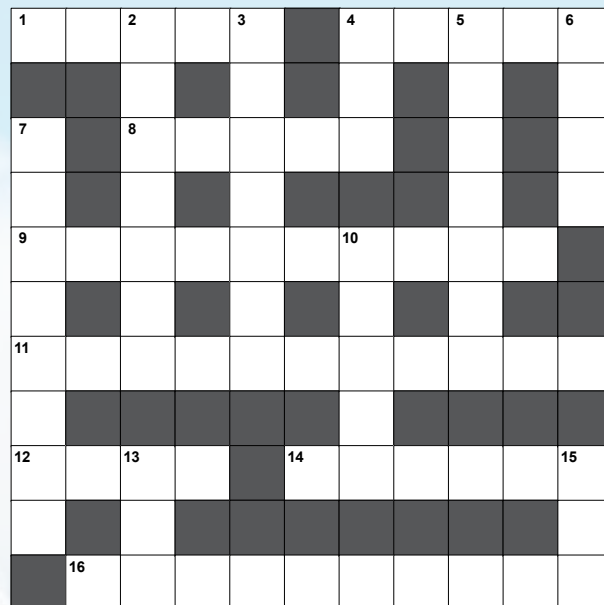
Growing bolder still, Grandma said, "Honey, do you remember how, after we were first married, you'd kind of nibble on my ear?" Grandpa slowly got up from his rocker and headed into the house. Alarmed, Grandma said, "Honey, where are you going?" Grandpa replied, "To get my teeth!"



## Put on your thinking cap!

1. What is the highest grossing Australian movie?
2. In rhyming slang, if someone said "I'll have a dog's eye and dead horse", what will they be having?
3. Which band has won more ARIA awards, Crowded House or Midnight Oil?
4. Which author composed the Louis the Fly jingle?
5. Who was Australia's first Prime Minister?
6. What is Australia's floral emblem?
7. What do the letters of the television network SBS stand for?
8. What song finished second to 'Advance Australia Fair' in the 1977 referendum to choose a national song?
9. Which former prime minister once managed a rock band called The Ramrods?
10. What was the first album to sell more than one million copies in Australia?

## crossword



### Across Clues

1. Go into
4. Funny bone
8. Wrath or ire
9. Work
11. Not reliant on something/someone else
12. A den or resting place
14. Gets rid of a mistake
16. First prize (4,6)

### Down Clues

2. Caught
3. To put back into order, reorganise
4. Organ of hearing
5. Equilibrium
6. Productive activity
7. Easily bent
10. Works in a mine
13. Not well
15. Male child



## pear and yogurt muffins

- 270g self-raising flour
- 50g caster sugar
- 50g brown sugar
- Pinch of cinnamon
- 2 medium pears, peeled, cored and diced into cubes
- 1 cup natural yogurt
- 1 egg
- 3 tbsp melted butter
- 125ml milk

Preheat oven to 190°C and grease a 12 hole muffin tin  
 Mix flour, sugars, cinnamon and pears.  
 In a separate bowl, mix yogurt, egg, butter and milk. Add wet ingredients to dry, mixing until just combined  
 Pour into muffin tins and bake for 20-25 mins

## from the library

### After the diagnosis : how patients react and how to help them cope (2011)

Help people harness the emotional and rational strength they need to cope with a new diagnosis of serious illness.

### The Ball (2010) DVD

Documentary following the joys and tribulations of four students with special needs as they prepare for their school's debutante ball.

### Depressed older adults : education and screening (2011)

A guide to help aging and social service programs establish a mental health education and screening program focused on late-life depression.

### Living with stroke : a guide for families (2010)

Advice covering topics from physical rehabilitation to emotional issues, providing help and hope for those whose lives are touched by stroke.

### The lost art of sleep : a wise and funny exploration of quite possibly the best third of your life (2009)

Musings on the art of a good night's rest.

Members of Carers Victoria can check out these resources and much more at the Carers Victoria library. Call 9396 9500 for more information.



## sudoku

			3					
8	5		2				4	
4					5			
			5			1		
					7			9
	4			9	6	5	2	
9					3			6
	3		9					
		8		6			7	

## solutions

E	N	T	E	R	E	L	B	O	W	
F	A	N	G	E	R	L	R			
L	P	L	O	Y	M	E	N	T		
X										
I	N	D	E	P	E	N	D	E	N	T
B										
L	A	I	R	E	R	A	S	E	S	
E	L	L	E	R	I	B	O	N		
O										
B	L	U	E	R	I	B	O	N		

1. Crocodile Dundee 2. A meat pie and tomato sauce 3. Crowded House (11 to 10) 4. Bryce Courteney 5. Edmund Barton 6. Golden Wattle 7. Special Broadcasting Service 8. Waltzing Matilda 9. Paul Keating 10. Whispering Jack

by John Farnham



# Become a member of Carers Victoria

Join us, keep updated and have your say about carer issues.

## Cost of membership

- FREE for carers or former carers
- FREE for carer support groups
- \$20 per year for interested persons
- 100 per year for organisations

## Membership benefits

- Carers in Victoria magazine (4 issues a year)
- Use of our library (with free mail out service)
- Voting rights at Board elections
- Invitations to Carers Victoria events (including our General Meetings)

## Strong membership gives carers a strong voice!

Contact our membership team on 03 9396 9561 to find out more or visit [www.carersvictoria.org.au](http://www.carersvictoria.org.au).

**next issue...** The spring edition of Carers in Victoria is all about practical pampering. Often carers put their own wellbeing last, but you need care, too! Join us to explore the many ways carers can take care of themselves, mind, body and soul.

