

Setting up a  
**Carer  
Support  
Group**

**INFORMATION  
RESOURCE**



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Carers NSW thanks Carers Victoria for permission to use information from their 2001 publication *A guide to setting up and maintaining Carer Support Groups*.

ISBN 1 876637 62 5

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*Carers NSW is funded by NSW and Australian Governments*

# contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>ABOUT THIS RESOURCE</b> .....	5
	• How to use this resource .....	5
<b>II.</b>	<b>BACKGROUND</b>	
	<i>Carer Support Groups... Some questions and answers</i>	
	• Carers, who are they? .....	5
	• What is a carer support group?.....	6
	• Why are carer support groups important?.....	6
	• Who joins a carer support group?.....	6
	• Benefits of a carer support group.....	7
	• How to generate interest in a carer support group .....	8
<b>III.</b>	<b>SETTING UP A CARER SUPPORT GROUP</b>	
	• Working together .....	8
	• Terms of Reference.....	9
	• Committee roles .....	9
	• Qualities of a coordinator.....	10
	• Accounting issues.....	10
	• Insurance .....	11
	• Where and when to hold a carer support group.....	11
	• Talk-Link: telephone group counselling for carers.....	12
	• Respite services .....	12
<b>IV.</b>	<b>RUNNING A CARER SUPPORT GROUP</b>	
	<i>So we are in a carer support group...What can we do? .....</i>	12
	• Guest speakers .....	13
	• Group exchange.....	15
	• Accidental counselling .....	15
	• Social activities .....	16
	• Former carers.....	17
	• Carers from culturally diverse backgrounds.....	17
	• Aboriginal carers .....	18
	• Advocacy.....	18
	• Publicity.....	18

- Fundraising..... 19
- Sponsorship by local business..... 19
- Review / evaluation of the carer support group..... 19
- Ending the carer support group ..... 20

**V. RESOURCES ..... 20**

**VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..... 21**

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**APPENDIX A - MEDIA TEMPLATES ..... 23**

## I. ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Benefits of carer support groups for carers are starting to gain ground from recent research in Australia. The Carers NSW Survey 2008 found that carers ranked carer support groups highly as a support for their caring role, second to respite.<sup>1</sup> And, research published in *Family Matters* from an Australian and international academic and practice literature review, and a concurrent analysis of policy and practice in Australia, indicated that there is emerging evidence that support groups may be appropriate for carers of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, carers of children with disabilities and carers of people with mental illness.<sup>2</sup> Further, the *Who Cares...? report on the inquiry into Better Support for Carers* released in May 2009 included evidence from peer and carer support groups, and the report stated:

*There is no doubt of the value of peer support groups for providing carers with information, support, social contact and, at times, advocacy. The Committee believes that there is further potential for government to encourage the development and geographical coverage of such groups.*

Carers NSW compiled this resource for the use of new and established carer support groups. It is designed to provide information and ideas to support group coordinators from the initial set-up of a group to ideas on activities and suggestions on how to organise them.

### How to use this resource

This resource is a brief guide to setting up and maintaining a carer support group. It will be useful if you are starting a new group, and you might find it helpful if you are involved in an established group and want to review the way you do things.

Please note that this guide covers many types of carer support groups and not all the information or ideas may apply to your particular group. For more specific information call Carers NSW on **1800 242 636\*** or refer to the list of Carers NSW resources on page 19. (\*free local call, mobile calls charged at mobile rates.)

## II. BACKGROUND

### Carer support groups...Some questions and answers

#### Carers, who are they?

- Carers are family members or friends who provide support to children or adults who have a disability, mental illness, drug and alcohol dependencies, chronic condition, terminal illness or who are frail.
- Carers can be parents, partners, brothers, sisters, friends or children of any age.
- Carers come from all walks of life, cultural backgrounds and age groups.
- Carers may care for a few hours a week or all day every day.
- Australia is home to approximately 2.6 million carers. About 748,000 carers live in New South Wales.

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<sup>1</sup> Carers NSW Survey 2008. *Survey of results*, published, August 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Williams K and Owens A, *A contribution to research and development in the carer support sector: Lessons on effective caring*, Family Matters 2009 No. 82 pp 38-46.

## What is a carer support group?

A carer support group is a group of carers who come together – either in person, on the phone or through the internet – to discuss their caring situation, socialise, share information and offer each other support.

Carer support groups give people the opportunity to talk about their feelings with others who are in similar situations and understand how they're feeling.

A carer support group can be anything the group wants it to be. Groups can be specific or mixed, depending on resources and the number of people in them. Groups can be formal, informal or a mixture of both. Some groups meet at a community centre or even in someone's home, while other groups may meet in a café. A group is what you make it.

## Why are carer support groups important?

Research by Carers NSW<sup>3</sup> has shown that carers consider carer support groups to be a good source of emotional support and information. Carers value the opinions of other carers about the quality of services available to them. These groups can also reduce the social isolation of carers, who often feel they are the only person in that situation. It is often a relief for a carer to realise that they are not alone.

Sometimes carers are reluctant to take the first step in attending a carer support group, so encourage them to come along.

## Who joins a carer support group?

Anyone can join a carer support group. Usually a group aims to attract a particular type of carer. However some people like to bring a friend or relative with them. Its members determine the nature of the carer support group.

Some issues you may wish to consider are:

- Will the carer support group be open only to women or men, or both?
- Will the support group be open to any carers or only those caring for people with a particular disability or condition? For example, someone who cares for a frail elderly person may not feel they have much in common with a parent who looks after a child with disabilities.
- Mixing carers and people cared for. The mixing of carers and care recipients also needs to be considered. A carer support group member may feel restricted in what they can say when the person they care for is present.

Some examples of *specific* carer support groups:

- Men who are carers
- 'Life after placement' – for people who have or are thinking of placing the person they care for in supported accommodation
- 'Daughters in demand' – for daughters who are caring for a parent/s with a disability or illness
- Former carers

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<sup>3</sup>Carers NSW Survey of Support Group Co-ordinators Final Results, May 2006, and Carers NSW Survey 2008 Report, 2009

- Carers writing group
- Aboriginal carers
- Carers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- Parents of children with a disability
- Carers of people who are aged or who have a disability
- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transsexual, Intersex (GLBTI) carers
- Carers of someone with a specific illness or disability, eg. stroke, chronic fatigue, brain injury, multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's, Autism, Asperger's etc

Specific carer support groups may not work in some areas as there may not be enough people to form a support group. Many groups are either 'general carer support groups' which are open to all carers; or are simply divided into 'carers of people who are aged and have a disability', and 'parents of children and young adults with disabilities'.

Some carer support groups are coordinated by a paid carer support worker while others are run by the carers themselves. (A carer support worker is employed predominantly by Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres, Area Health Services or Home and Community Care services. They assist carers with information, referrals, support and resources on a range of carer-related topics.)

Carer support workers can also attend carer support groups, occasionally or regularly, to give information and/or help facilitate the group. It is important to note that the support group should decide the degree of worker involvement. Keep in mind, though, workers have access to information and community resources that can help your group, as well as providing services to help those caring for others.

### **Benefits of a carer support group**

Carers don't spend much time on themselves!
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By attending a carer support group carers are giving themselves a well-deserved break from caring. It can be hard to find people who appreciate the demands and sacrifices that a carer makes every day, and it is even more difficult when there seems to be no-one around to share their feelings with.

A support group can reduce this sense of isolation by providing an opportunity to meet other carers, who understand what it is like to be a carer, and can offer support and reassurance.

Carers often receive little thanks or recognition for their efforts. Carer support groups can acknowledge the value of providing care.

For carers, belonging to a carer support group can offer the opportunity to:

- Learn practical aspects of care
- Gain support through sharing experiences and feelings with others in a similar role
- Discover ways of alleviating stress and relaxing
- Learn about community services and how to use them

- Understand more about the condition and needs of the person being cared for
- Have social contact away from the continual demands of caring

### **How to generate interest in a carer support group**

Some ideas to generate interest in the setting up of a carer support group include:

- Learn about existing carer support groups in your area. Your support group should complement, not duplicate, what is already available. (Contact Carers NSW for a list of carer support groups in your area or visit the carer support groups webpage at [www.carersnsw.asn.au/infosupport/csg.htm](http://www.carersnsw.asn.au/infosupport/csg.htm))
- Meet with local aged or community care workers, who can help you reach potential members, eg. Neighbour Aid Home Care.
- Using these networks, send out a questionnaire to establish the level of interest in a carer support group.
- Get together for an information session to learn more about services for carers.
- Hold a public meeting or ask for a guest speaker from an existing carer support group to attend.

#### **How Carers NSW can help your carer support group**

- Carers NSW can provide resources, fact sheets and activity ideas, eg. Carer health and wellbeing, Loss and grief
- A range of fact sheets are available to read or download from our website [www.carersnsw.asn.au](http://www.carersnsw.asn.au)
- The Tom Fink Library at Carers NSW is available for your carer support group to borrow books and publications about caring and other issues
- *Carers News* can be provided to your carer support group free
- A Talk-Link telephone counselling program can be established for your carer support group
- Membership of Carers NSW is free for carer support groups

### **III. SETTING UP A CARER SUPPORT GROUP**

#### **Working together**

The first and most important rule in starting a support group is not to do it by yourself. There are many tasks in starting a carer support group, and even the most efficient and dedicated person can burn out if they work alone.

Try to form a committee of between 4-6 people to help share the organising; bring together skills and ideas; and ensure that decisions reflect the views of a range of people.

You may already know people who would like to help, or you may want to recruit committee members by putting a flyer on community noticeboards in churches, clubs, schools, libraries and shopping centres.

## Terms of Reference

A “Terms of Reference” (TOR) is simply a description of the aims and structure of your carer support group. The aims and structure of the carer support group will depend on what the people in the carer support group want to get out of it. What are the expectations of the group? Do members want an informal group that meets indefinitely for a cup of tea and a chat? Or do they want something more formal with structured discussions and regular guest speakers?

It is a good idea to discuss everyone’s ideas and expectations at the first meeting. You may like to brainstorm, using a white board or go around the circle asking what everybody would like to get out of the carer support group.

Your TOR should address:

- Vision and objectives of the carer support group (ie. what you want to achieve)
- Members, roles and responsibilities (ie. who will take part in it)
- Resources, financial plan (ie. how it will be financed)

At the end of your discussion it is important to agree upon the TOR and document it. Each member of the carer support group should be given a copy.

## Committee roles

Some carer support groups prefer to keep their roles and committees very informal, while other carer support groups like to be more formal and assign roles or committees for the group.

At your first meeting you should discuss each role and decide who is the best person for these roles. Some roles may be shared if this is more suitable for members. It’s ideal to have more than one facilitator or coordinator, for example, to share the task and to help the group dynamics.

Below is a list of possible roles:

### *Facilitator or Coordinator:*

- Runs and leads the meeting
- Is the contact person for the carer support group for telephone enquiries and mail
- Informs relevant organisations of the aims of the carer support group and asks for their support

### *Secretary:*

- Looks after paperwork, types up minutes, sends out meeting reminders etc.

### *Treasurer:*

- Pays the bills, receives incoming money, keeps accurate financial records

## Qualities of a coordinator

Some useful skills for a coordinator:

- Good active listener
- Engages people
- Encourages and supports
- Aware of different personalities
- Positive in their role
- Encourages communication
- Not overbearing
- Non-judgemental
- Sensitive to each member's needs
- Ensures confidentiality within the carer support group
- Resolves conflict
- Knows their limitations and is able to refer on

The facilitator may also need to send reminders to carers about when the carer support group meets, and make follow-up phone calls to some carers to encourage them to attend.

## Accounting issues

### *Australian Business Number and GST*

Your carer support group may wish to apply for an Australian Business Number (ABN). You don't have to, but it may make it easier to apply for and receive funding if you have an ABN as some organisations only fund groups that have an ABN. It may also help when you open a bank account.

To apply for an ABN you visit the Australian Business Register website ([www.abr.gov.au](http://www.abr.gov.au)) or call **13 28 66**. Application is free and only takes a few minutes.

Most carer support groups don't have to register for Goods and Services Tax (GST) because non-profit organisations that have an annual turnover of less than \$150,000 are not required to register for GST.

For more information about an ABN, GST registration and taxation issues talk to an accountant or call the Australian Taxation Office on **13 28 66**.

### *Charitable fundraising and taxation*

To be able to raise money for your carer support group through fundraising activities such as cake stalls, raffles etc. your group must have an 'authority to fundraise'. There is no cost to apply for this authority and you can download the form from the NSW Office of Charities by visiting their website [www.olgr.nsw.gov.au](http://www.olgr.nsw.gov.au) or ring **02 9995 0666** and ask for a form to be mailed to you.

Some businesses or individuals may wish to make a donation to your carer support group. They may also request a tax deductible receipt for their donation. To be able to provide them with such a receipt your carer support group will have to become a registered 'deductible gift recipient' with the Australian Taxation Office. However, this can be complicated without advice from the taxation office or qualified accountant or solicitor.

For all financial and legal matters please talk to an accountant or solicitor. The information contained in this document is a general guide only.

## **Insurance**

Your carer support group's insurance requirements depend on how your carer support group is structured, where you meet and if you are affiliated with any other organisations.

Below is an explanation of three main types of insurance:

### *Public liability insurance*

This type of insurance protects your carer support group against paying compensation to a third party who suffers loss or damage as a result of a mistake by your group or by one of your members.

### *Personal accident insurance*

This type of insurance covers the carer support group against costs that may arise from a person being injured through an accident that occurred as a result of, or while, attending your meeting.

### *Directors and officers insurance or association's liability:*

This policy covers the personal liability of carer support group members if they make an organisational decision that causes financial loss to another person or to the group.

This is a basic guide only and your carer support group should seek advice from a qualified insurance broker as to the types and amounts of insurance it requires.

## **Where and when to hold a carer support group**

It should be easy to get to the meeting place, especially if the carer support group has carers who are older or who have a disability.

Consider these when finding a place to meet:

- Wheelchair and stroller access
- Central location
- Proximity to public transport
- Parking facilities
- Respite care facilities
- Child care facilities
- Tea/coffee making facilities
- Warmth and friendliness of the venue

Some councils, government services, service clubs, churches, and libraries may offer their rooms free of charge, especially centres where there are Home and Community Care Services such as Home Care, community transport etc.

Try to make your meeting space as inviting and non-intimidating as possible. Comfortable chairs arranged in a circle can work well.

When setting up a carer support group, consider what time of the day you'll meet. Depending on the needs of people in the carer support group it may be suitable to meet in the evenings, eg. if people work. Alternatively it may be convenient to meet during the day when respite care is more available.

Because it can be difficult for many carers to get away from home, most carer support groups only meet once a month for a few hours. If more support is needed, you could set up a telephone network for support between meetings.

Some carer support groups may decide to set up or join a social networking group such as Cancer Connections or Livewire. It is important to consider privacy issues with social networking sites. Ensure all members understand the issues around privacy and agree to privacy guidelines.

### **Talk-Link: telephone group counselling for carers**

Members of your carer support group may be interested in receiving counselling or emotional support in their role as carers. **Talk-Link** is a free Carers NSW program that uses teleconferencing to bring a group of up to six carers and two trained facilitators together. They meet at the same time each week over the telephone to help carers explore issues around caring, especially its emotional impact and the isolation it can cause.

The program runs for eight consecutive weeks with each weekly session lasting for one hour.

It can be of great benefit to carers living in remote locations.

To use this service or for information about other carer counselling services contact the Carers NSW **Carer Line** on **1800 242 636** (free local call, mobile calls charged at mobile rates).

### **Respite services**

Some members of the carer support group may need respite. When your carer support group starts, contact your local respite service and ask them if they can provide respite care. Information about respite services is also available from your regional Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre on **1800 052 222**, local council or Home Care service.

## **IV. RUNNING A CARER SUPPORT GROUP**

*So we are in a carer support group...What can we do?*

The first thing you should tell members of the carer support group is that everything discussed is CONFIDENTIAL. Ask all members of the group to respect each other's right to privacy. This means that no one should discuss another carer's issues outside the group. This is especially important in smaller communities, where carers may be reluctant

to attend a carer support group for fear of people divulging personal information about them outside the group. It is worth repeating this at every meeting.

The development and operation of your carer support group depends largely on the interest and agreements made by participants during the first few meetings. Discussion and planning are crucial. Most carers are busy and want to make the most of their time spent in the group.

Housekeeping issues and other agreements will need to be made early in the stage. Practical questions include:

- Where are the toilets?
- How long will the meetings last?
- Will there be a break?
- Will there be refreshments? If so who will provide them, and who will clean up?
- How often will the group meet and at what time?
- Will transport or respite be provided?
- How will the carer support group keep a list of members' telephone numbers and addresses?
- How will the carer support group be facilitated or coordinated?
- What are the procedures if members are not happy with the carer support group?

Some people may not know how your carer support group meetings are run, so briefly explain this at the start of the meeting. Ask that members agree to listen to others in a non-judgemental way without interrupting. It is important to allow everyone plenty of time for introductions, talking and listening.

The following tips/suggestions are for new and established carer support groups who want to know what activities the group can do.

### **Guest speakers**

As a carer support group you may decide you would like more information on a specific topic, or regular information, to assist you in your caring role. Inviting a guest speaker to your group is a way of obtaining information in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere that is different to the exchange that occurs between a worker and a client in a one-to-one exchange.

Some carer support groups aim to have three speakers per year, others have less, and some have more. This is up to the group and the availability of guest speakers.

A good way to start a carer support group is to introduce the Carer Support Kit, which is available in 16 community languages. This is a free resource for topical ideas. You can order by phone on **1800 242 636\*** or online from the Carers NSW website at **[www.carersnsw.asn.au](http://www.carersnsw.asn.au)**

\* free local call, mobile calls charged at mobile rates.

Examples of possible guest speakers are:

- A community health worker to talk about strategies for carers in looking after their own health

- A local council or Home and Community Care (HACC) worker to explain relevant services and programs
- A dietician to discuss food and nutrition
- A representative from Carers NSW to talk about what the association does and the Carer Support Kit
- A doctor or pharmacist to discuss different illnesses and medications
- A geriatrician to discuss the ageing process and healthy ageing
- Local service providers, including Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres, Home Care Branch Managers, respite workers, other carer support group coordinators, Meals on Wheels coordinators, and community options coordinators
- The Fire Brigade to talk about fire safety and awareness
- A representative from relevant organisations eg. Alzheimer's Australia NSW, Arthritis Foundation of NSW, Schizophrenia Fellowship, Multiple Sclerosis Society NSW, etc.
- A Centrelink worker to explain financial entitlements for carers
- Your local Member of Parliament to discuss the need for services for carers and how to lobby for them
- A Minister of Religion may be applicable to some carer support groups
- An Aged Care Assessment Team to talk about their role in helping older people stay at home
- A neurologist for information regarding traumatic head injury and other brain disorders
- An occupational therapist to discuss the general activities of daily living, eg. toileting, dressing, leisure, preventing falls, etc.
- People of interest to talk on leisure topics, time out, fun
- A physiotherapist to talk about mobility, transfer or lifting techniques and back care
- A podiatrist to talk about foot care
- A psychologist for information on behavioural problems
- A social worker to discuss stress management and relaxation, relationships etc
- A solicitor for information on legal issues
- An aromatherapist to talk about relaxation
- A naturopath to discuss natural health methods
- A representative from a computer users group, such as Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association

For contacts and phone numbers of many of the above, call the Carer Line on **1800 242 636\*** or check out your local area directory at the library or on the internet.

\* free local call, mobile calls charged at mobile rates.

## **Group exchange**

Sometimes the best information is gained through experience. By sharing the experiences of others you can get valuable information that makes it easier to access services.

The carer support group may decide, at the time of the meeting, to discuss a topic, or plan a topic for discussion at the next meeting. By giving notice, people can prepare for the meeting, eg. bring the contact numbers, books, and other resources they find useful, to share with others.

Some ideas for carer support group discussion:

- The services, doctors, legal practitioners in your area, etc. that have been the most helpful
- Ways to relieve stress and relax
- Ways to deal with crisis situations
- The Carer Support Kit – information in the kit is useful for discussion topics
- The *Carer's Handbook* – information in this book is useful for discussion topics
- Resources or devices which have been found useful, eg. videos, books, etc.
- Lobbying on issues which affect the caring role
- Any other information that might be useful to others

You can be as inventive as you like...and don't be afraid to ask other carer support groups for ideas.

Maintain a balance in the tone of the meeting. It can be off-putting to new people if discussions are completely negative. Encourage members of the carer support group to also share something positive which has happened between meetings.

## **Accidental counselling**

Carer support group facilitators or leaders may find themselves in a position of a counselling role even though they do not have formal counselling skills or experience. This is sometimes called "accidental counselling" and can easily come about because issues or requests occur within the carer support group setting. The facilitator or coordinator may feel they can't refuse to help, but are not sure how to respond.

### *Dealing with disruptive people who need extra help*

Sometimes a member of a carer support group can be disruptive, excessively angry or negative during a meeting. You may need to address the issue by taking the person aside, during a tea break or after the meeting, and gently expressing your concern for that person or their behaviour. It may be that their problems are beyond the group setting and they may need professional help.

It is handy to keep a list of counselling contacts and other helpful phone numbers to refer people to if you think they may need them. Carers NSW has in-house carer counsellors, or they can refer people to counsellors in their own area. For a referral for this service call Carers NSW on **1800 242 636\***.

If there are incidents or behaviours that trouble you, or you don't know how to deal with them, it may be appropriate for you to talk to a health professional to gain advice on how to best handle the situation. You can contact Carers NSW Carer Line on **1800 242 636\*** for information about services in your area.

\* free local call, mobile calls charged at mobile rates.

### *When people cry*

Talking about caring and the person cared for is an emotional experience and people will cry from time to time. Tears are a normal expression of emotion and they should be allowed.

It is important to acknowledge the importance of expressing emotion without singling out the person. Give them room to cry and provide them with a tissue if they need one. Talk with the person quietly at the time or during a tea break and ask what he or she would like to happen.

### **Some tips on dealing with emotions in a carer support group**

- Acknowledge people's experience
- Be aware of confidentiality
- Don't feel you need to always need to have an answer
- Share the task with a co-facilitator
- Be reasonable in your expectations of carer support group members
- Be prepared to examine your own behaviour
- If people need more help, have a list of services from which you can refer them

### **Social activities**

The leisure time of a carer is usually limited. Social or leisure activities can strengthen bonds between members and encourage sharing in a less structured environment.

The carer support group may decide to meet on a leisure basis during the regular meeting time or, if manageable, at times outside the carer support group meeting days. This is up to everyone in the group to decide.

The carer support group may decide to allocate a particular meeting day/evening (depending on when your group meets) as a special leisure time. Planning the event can also be fun and adds variety to your meetings.

You may want to decide, as a carer support group, whether you wish to invite partners, friends, or the people they care for, to some occasional outings.

Some ideas to get you started...

- Plan outings to places of interest to the carer support group. It may be a coffee shop or a movie. It may only be for a few hours or the whole day. Check with your local community transport service (if available) for assistance.
- Picnics and barbeques may be planned.
- People could arrange to bring in a plate of fruit or cheese and biscuits for morning/evening tea break.
- Meet with another carer support group in your area for an outing or morning tea.
- Plan a special event for National Carers Week. You may be able to apply for a special Carers Week activity grant. Carer NSW has been funded in recent years by Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Human Services NSW to provide Carers Week grants. It sends application kits to support groups on the Carers NSW Carer Support Group database in July.
- Some carer support groups may enjoy a reading section. Set time each meeting for a member to speak about a book they are reading.
- Encourage each carer support group to write in their caring journal. Writing can be therapeutic. Carers NSW has low-cost carer journals.

### **Former carers**

Members who no longer care for their loved one may continue to attend the carer support group for a while. The carer support group may be able to help them through their loss or grief, or transition. They, in turn, can contribute their own experience to other members of the group.

### **Carers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**

Carers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are at particular risk of increased isolation. They may have difficulty accessing information services due to language and cultural barriers, and because culturally responsive services may not be readily available. Stigma given to people with a disability or mental illness is common in many CALD communities and it may inhibit carers from identifying as carers or recognising the benefits of accessing services and support.

One way to address these barriers is to facilitate a carer support group in a specific community language. Carers NSW can assist by providing the following:

- Fact sheets with information on caring and residential care available in 16 community languages.
- Providing interpreters and translators to assist in communication with carers. It is possible to simultaneously interpret in several languages at one time if carers in a support group speak several different languages.
- Carers NSW can also assist with guest speaking through its carer support officers who speak community languages.
- Carers NSW can also provide further information and referrals to CALD carers who experience difficulties or have specific caring needs.

## Aboriginal carers

As Aboriginal carers prefer to receive information in groups, carer support groups are likely to be seen as a very positive and supportive mechanism.

Aboriginal carers are also at risk of increased isolation and may have difficulty accessing culturally appropriate information and services. Carers NSW Aboriginal Carer Program has a range of resources including:

- Aboriginal carer support guide
- Aboriginal carer relaxation CD
- Guest speaking by its carer support officers or other staff
- Aboriginal carer information and statistics

For more information visit the Carers NSW Aboriginal Carer Program webpage at: [www.carersnsw.asn.au](http://www.carersnsw.asn.au)

## Advocacy

Some carers work as a group to lobby and advocate. Advocacy can be defined as the process of standing up for the rights of people who are treated unfairly or standing alongside an individual who is disadvantaged and speaking out on their behalf in a way that represents the best interests of that person.

All forms of advocacy require knowledge of your rights and responsibilities, and putting this knowledge, along with your other skills and experience, to use in making decisions which affect your life.

There are a number of different types of advocacy. Contact Carers NSW or visit the Carers NSW website to download the *Advocacy fact sheet* and the *How to make a complaint fact sheet*.

There are advocacy groups located in various areas throughout NSW and you can find out about these by calling the Carers NSW **Carer Line** on **1800 242 636\*** or by asking other organisations, eg. your local council or members of carer support groups.

\* free local call, mobile calls charged at mobile rates.

## Publicity

Some carer support groups are involved in raising community awareness. The group may decide to advertise support meetings to attract more members or to establish a community 'presence'.

Here are a few suggestions how your carer support group may go about publicising meetings and raising community awareness:

- As a carer support group, or on your own, write a letter to the local newspapers about the role of a carer in the community or about your own circumstances as a carer, and include information about the carer support group. The paper may decide to write a story or place the information in the community information column. See Appendix A for media templates.
- Most local radio and television stations have announcements about community events and you might wish to place a notice about your carer support group on a

local radio or television station's website, or send it direct to the station. See Appendix A for media templates.

- If your carer support group has access to a photocopier and paper, you might wish to create a poster or information sheet to place on community notice boards, in libraries, at neighbourhood centres, doctors surgeries, and community health centres etc.
- Carers NSW publishes a newsletter every two months which lists different carer support groups in each issue.
- Carers NSW website lists carer support group details and their locations.
- Word-of-mouth is also a great way to advertise.
- Local church groups can also promote your carer support group.
- Let your local services know about your carer support group, eg. community nurses, Home Care workers, Respite Centres etc.
- Local council community directories may include details of carer support groups. Sometimes these are published on the internet.

You need to publicise regularly and use different methods. Different people get their information from different places, so use print media as well as radio, community announcements, and other service providers.

### **Fundraising**

There may be times when your carer support group needs (more) money to pay for the costs of running the group. Consider these ideas for fundraising:

- Raffles (approach local shops for prizes)
- Carer support group kitty (eg. Carer support group members contribute gold coin each meeting)

### **Sponsorship by a local business**

Some organisations may be prepared to raise money for your carer support group, eg. Apex, Rotary, Lions, Jaycees, The Country Women's Association, Australian Red Cross, or the RSL Club.

Sometimes organisations have grants for specific activities that your carer support group could apply for, eg. Carers Week Grants through Carers NSW.

See sub heading '*Charitable fundraising and taxation*' on page 10 to find out about applying for an authority to fundraise.

### **Review or evaluation of the carer support group**

Regular review of the carer support group is useful to maintain interest and to see if you are on the right track. Every six months should be sufficient. A good way to start would be to examine the carer support group's aims and objectives. Has the carer support group met the expectations of carers? If not, brainstorm how those expectations can be met. Review, with the carer support group, what has been done and what parts they like and dislike. Remember, as a facilitator/coordinator, the carer support group is there for carers,

so even if you feel the group is not progressing as it should, you may need to accept that other carers may think otherwise.

### **Ending the carer support group**

Some carer support groups continue to meet indefinitely even after participants are no longer caring. Many others come to a natural end after months or years. Ending a support group is usually not a sign of failure but an indicator that people are ready to move on to something else. If some participants are still meeting, it is often good to think about closing the carer support group, discuss the high and low points in the carer support group's history, and celebrate the closure of the group with an activity of some sort, for example, lunch or morning tea.

## **V. RESOURCES**

- **Welcome kit**

For newly established carer support groups.

- **Carers NSW Carer Support Kit**

This kit provides practical information about caring at home, an emergency care plan, a relaxation tape or CD and information about legal issues, medication management, taking a break and other topics. It comes in English, 16 community languages and an Aboriginal version.

- **Carers NSW Fact Sheets**

Carers NSW produces several fact sheets on a wide range of issues, including information about support for carers, financial assistance and legal issues. See [www.carersnsw.asn.au](http://www.carersnsw.asn.au)

- **Carers NSW Carer Action Pack**

The pack includes information on how carers can raise their concerns with politicians, the media and services. The information may be of use if you are promoting an event, want to complain about a service or want to write a letter to a politician.

- **Carers NSW Advocacy Kit**

The kit includes information on what advocacy is and how carers can access help with advocacy.

- **Carers NSW Carer Journal**

This journal has been produced for carers to write about their caring experiences or other things. It is a way to record daily events or the story of their life.

- **Carer's Handbook**

The *Carer's Handbook* is a fully illustrated practical guide to caring for people who are sick, elderly or have a disability. It contains comprehensive advice on all aspects of caring. It is an authorised manual of the Carers Australia, St John's Ambulance Australia and the Australian Red Cross. It is available to carers at a reduced cost.

- **Media templates**

Three sample media templates can be found at Appendix A (pages 23-26).

- **Other resources**

The Carers NSW website lists other resources and information sources. Please refer to the website for more information: [www.carersnsw.asn.au](http://www.carersnsw.asn.au)

To order any of these resources contact Carers NSW **Carer Line** on **1800 242 636\*** or visit the Carers NSW website at [www.carersnsw.asn.au](http://www.carersnsw.asn.au)

\* free local call, mobile calls charged at mobile rates.

## **VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

- Alzheimer's Association of NSW (1994) "Resource Manual for Carer Support Groups"
- Cancer Council NSW (2009) "Cancer Support Groups: A guide to setting up and maintaining a group"
- Carers Victoria (2001) "A guide to setting up and maintaining Carer Support Groups"
- Rona Goold, Diana Howell (1992) "How to set up a Carers Support Service" South Penrith Neighbourhood Centre Inc
- Kerri Hamer "Leading a group: a practical and comprehensive handbook". 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1997, K. Hamer, Maroubra NSW
- David W Johnson, Frank P Johnson (1987) "Joining Together: Group Work Theory and Group Skills" Merrill Publishing Company



## **APPENDIX A      MEDIA TEMPLATES**

On the following three pages you will find media templates:

1. Media Release template
2. New Group Community Event Notice template
3. Community Event Notice template



## 1. MEDIA RELEASE TEMPLATE

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### **Support group caring for the carer**

The <CARER SUPPORT GROUP NAME> has been formed to give carers <OF CONDITION OPTIONAL> the chance to meet others in a similar situation, talk, listen, support others and be supported.

Meeting every <DATE / TIME> at <LOCATION>, the group is providing a social outlet for carers in the <INSERT REGION>.

Support Groups have been shown to be an important activity to increase the social and emotional wellbeing of people going through similar experiences. The group dynamic helps members share their experiences whilst learning from others and the sense of relief that comes with this sharing is immense.

<QUOTE FROM GROUP COORDINATOR>

<LIST ANY ADDITIONAL FEATURES/ ACTIVITIES OF GROUP >

For more information or if you're interested in joining the group, contact <COORDINATOR NAME AND NUMBER>.



## 2. NEW GROUP COMMUNITY EVENT NOTICE TEMPLATE

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### **Do you care for someone <WITH CONDITION OPTIONAL>?**

<INSERT NAME OF PERSON OF ORGANISATION> is looking to start up a support group for carers <OF CONDITION OPTIONAL> in the <INSERT REGION / AREA>.

Meeting times and locations will be announced once interest is known. <OR IF ANY OF THESE ARE DEFINED, INSERT>

Support groups give carers the chance to meet others in a similar situation, talk, listen, support others and be supported.

For more information or if you're interested in this group, contact <COORDINATOR NAME AND NUMBER>.



### 3. COMMUNITY EVENT NOTICE TEMPLATE

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**Do you care for someone <WITH CONDITION OPTIONAL>?**

<CARER SUPPORT GROUP NAME> meets <DATE / TIME> at <LOCATION>.

The group gives carers the chance to meet others in a similar situation, talk, listen, support others and be supported.

<LIST ANY ADDITIONAL FEATURES/ ACTIVITIES OF GROUP >

For more information or if you're interested in joining the group, contact <COORDINATOR NAME AND NUMBER>.