

Media Release

9 October 2023

Bendigo carer urges others to reach out during National Carer's Week

Nicole finds it hard to recall what life was like before she became a carer. Like 2.65 million others across Australia who care for a loved one, Nicole doesn't get much time to herself. And while the role is rewarding, it's one that consumes her every waking hour.

October 15-21 is National Carer's Week, aimed to recognise, celebrate and raise awareness of people like Nicole who care for a family member or friend.

The Bendigo resident, aged 52, and her husband Paul, aged 69, are full-time carers for their daughters Izzie, 13, and Abby, 12, who live with additional needs. Nicole also provides occasional support to her ageing parents, and two grandchildren who live with autism.

"It's hard to articulate what being a carer is like – I'm so used to doing things now, it's my norm," Nicole says.

"The biggest challenge is sleep. I have a lot of trouble trying to shut down at night because I know all the things I've got to do the next day. You just have to be on your toes all the time for whatever may happen."

Particularly challenging for Nicole is the juxtaposition of catering to her daughters' separate needs.

"Izzie has sensory issues and likes to play with messy things like play doh and slime, while Abby has a germ phobia, so I have to try to keep everything in order and clean. Abby also has bad anxiety and has trouble leaving the house. So, for example, if she needs a new pair of shoes, I'll have to buy a few pairs, bring them home for her to try on, then take the others back."

Thankfully, both girls enjoy school, and her youngest, Abby, also drops into her grandparents' place to help with gardening and housework.

Abby's efforts with her grandparents were acknowledged earlier this year under the 2023 Young Carers Scholarship Program, which supports secondary school students who have caring responsibilities. Nicole is understandably proud of her daughter, who she describes as "extremely selfless and caring" towards others, despite her own challenges.

Another huge support for Nicole comes from social outings offered by non-profit aged and disability services organisation, VMCH. Nicole is one of 3,000 carers from across Victoria, and 130 from Bendigo, who receive support from VMCH, such as home care, flexible respite, education and information, to help them continue in their role.

Outings such as movie nights and luncheons have been a "godsend" for Nicole.

"It's such a good break. I can go and not think about all the jobs and housework I have to do at home and just enjoy myself. It's also interesting to hear other carers' stories and know you're not alone out there – we're all facing similar battles."

VMCH Carer Services Manager Fredricka Gonsalves says having a break looks different to all carers, so her team tries to provide meaningful experiences to suit individuals.

"Having a break helps carers deal with common challenges including social isolation, carer burnout, finding time for self and getting the right support when they need it," Fredricka says.

“The work carers do often goes unnoticed, but it is essential in maintaining their loved one’s independence and connection to their community.”

Nicole says she hopes sharing her story inspires someone in her position to seek support.

“I was lucky that I was referred to VMCH by Claire from Lively, who was amazing. But others out there may not know where to go.

“Reaching out and asking for help can be hard, but don’t be embarrassed,” Nicole says. “There is help out there, and if getting support makes your life easier, you should do it.”

To learn more about VMCH Carer Support, please call 1300 698 624.

Media enquiries

Cassie Zlonzak

Communications Manager

M: 0402 422 852

E: cassie.zlonzak@vmch.com.au

About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic, for-purpose organisation, compassion, respect and inclusion aren’t just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we’ve been around for over a century, we’re always moving forward. Always staying true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives; providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and compassionate teams are with you on your life journey; helping you with a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.

