



Better together: Robyn and Jo have forged a strong friendship through the Weavers program.

Weavers: a revolutionary support program easing the strain on carers

Most Australians will become a carer at some stage in their life. Carers often deal with social isolation, grief, and prolonged stress, and they can find it difficult to access the right support services.

To support long-term carer wellbeing, the Australian Centre for Social Innovation created a peer-to-peer mentor program which is being rolled out nationally.

Three organisations in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region are being funded by COORDINARE – South Eastern NSW PHN to set up the program. These include the Illawarra Women's Health Centre and the Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra and Mission Australia.

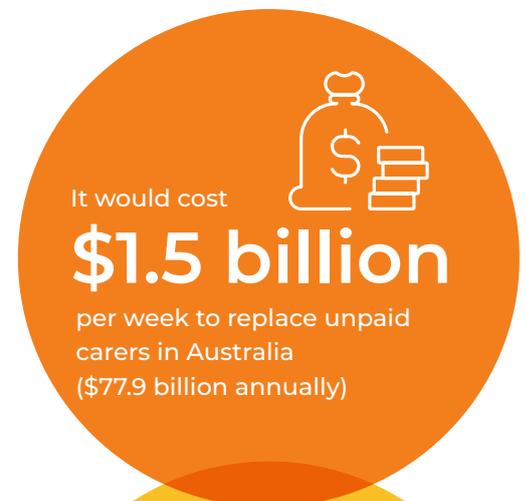
The program connects carers with either current or former carers who have walked a similar path, referred to as 'Weavers'. Weavers support carers to see what can be done to reduce their stress and improve their quality of life, while continuing their carer role.



Over one-third (33%)
of primary carers have a disability
(twice the rate of non-carers)



There are 2.65 million
unpaid carers in Australia



“Caring for a loved one can be a rewarding experience though it can also be very isolating. It can cut you off from family and friends. It is often hard to get your own needs met,” said Kim Sattler who is the ‘local connector’ for the Weavers program at the Illawarra Women’s Health Centre, and is a carer herself.

“It’s been great to see the level of connection between the eight Weavers and the carers we’ve matched up,” said Kim.

She said the Weavers normalise common emotions such as anger and grief and empower carers to set goals and use respite services.

“They’re able to get the opportunity to plan for their own health and wellbeing. This can include getting to appointments or getting outside for some exercise.”

The free program is based on extensive research and consultation with people who have lived experience of the caring role. Feedback from carers has shown that they feel less anxious, more motivated and more resilient thanks to the peer support program.

“Being able to ring Robyn and talk to her when I’m going through an emotional or stressful situation is fantastic. It’s something that I’m no longer having to burden my daughter or my friends with,” said carer Jo Murphy. Her partner has developed dementia in recent years.

Jo is not alone. Roughly 1.6 million people in Australia are involved in the care of someone living with dementia. Roughly 65 per cent of people with dementia live at home, so much of this care is provided by family and friends.

“It means my family don’t just see me as a carer because I can talk to them about other things.”

Jo says she enjoys her Weaver Robyn’s company and finds their chats helpful.

“Robyn’s had experience with caring and she’s a smart, compassionate woman. This makes her great to chat with. She keeps up-to-date on what’s been happening so we can always pick up where we left off”.

Robyn, who cared for her father for four years when he suffered from dementia, meets Jo on a regular basis. They catch-up for walks, cuppas and chats. She says the Weavers program was the perfect opportunity for her to volunteer in her retirement.

“I really enjoy being a support person for Jo and just talking to each other as friends. I guess it’s a non-judgemental situation,” said Robyn.

“Jo can say whatever she likes about the challenges she is facing. By the end of our chats, we both feel better.”

“I completely understand all of the feelings you can have looking after someone suffering from this disease,” said Robyn.

Find out more about the Weavers programs in your local area here: <https://bit.ly/3FH8kzU>

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- Jo Murphy, carer