

CARERS' CORNER



By nature, Kiwis are pretty stoical. We pride ourselves on being able to "get on with it" and not having to ask for help. But sometimes you have to. Seeking help isn't an admission of failure or weakness; sometimes it's the most courageous thing you can do. Fortunately, carers have plenty of places to turn to when they need help and support.

Friends and family and neighbours are a good place to start. That's what they are for. But unless they are living through the same thing, with the best will in the world, their empathy and understanding can only go so far. And this is what makes carers' support groups so valuable.

At a carers' support meeting you will be surrounded by people who are having the similar experience. You will have a bond of understanding up front. You will speak the same language; you will be able to speak directly and not be misunderstood. This was very evident at the UPBEAT Weekend held in Auckland earlier this year; where, in the first of the carers' sessions a solid rapport was established within minutes as people realised others faced similar challenges to them. Support meetings are a great opportunity to lighten your load with camaraderie, humour, and understanding. They will give you not only a good release but also a lighter perspective on things and the chance to hear how other people have resolved similar challenges.

Even if you're not comfortable in groups, make yourself go along anyway and with a bit of luck you'll click with someone there and you can organise an informal mutual support group of two. Anecdotal evidence suggests there are more than a few such groups around the country where carers meet weekly over a glass of wine or a meal and chat.

Your field officer can tell you how to go about contacting a group. Field officers typically have a wealth of experience that makes them easy to talk to; you won't have to say much for them to pick up your signals. They are there to look after you just as much as the person you care for. They will listen.

They may refer you to any of a number of more formal support mechanisms, including your GP, a counselling service, which they respect and personally recommend, or to the Needs Assessment and Service Coordination (NASC) agency.

NASC is the first step for a person to get Government-funded disability support services. Services may include help with personal support, meals, household management, carer support, day programmes, and respite support provided by rest homes and private hospitals. They are also a good source of information about other support agencies.

Another good source of information and support is the internet. A good place to start is by downloading a copy of A Guide for Carers, published by the Ministry of Social Development. This has a lot of practical information about getting help.

The Carers NZ site has a wealth of information as well: carers.net.nz

A search of the internet will also quickly reveal there are a lot of people out there having the same or a similar experience. Some of them are writing about it in blogs. Have a look and you'll quickly realise that you aren't alone.

Caring for somebody with Parkinson's isn't easy but there's no need to make it any tougher by battling on alone. Reach out to others. You may be surprised how good it feels.

THANK YOU

IRIS & ERIC NANKIVELL
CHARITABLE TRUST

