



Government of South Australia
Department for Communities
and Social Inclusion



Caring in the Aboriginal Community: A Guide for Community Agencies

PRODUCED BY CARER SUPPORT AND THE
STATE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA



This guide is part of a learning package that has been developed by Carer Support with funding provided by South Australia's Department for Communities and Social Inclusion. The package consists of this guide and an interactive slide show which features video interviews with carers, academics and people working with carers.

OBJECTIVES

- Raise awareness of the role of Aboriginal carers, with a focus on:
 - historical and cultural factors and their impact on the caring role
 - family structures and values and their impact on the caring role
 - approaches to working effectively with carers in the Aboriginal community.
- Give Aboriginal carers an opportunity to share their view on what community workers should know.
- Inform workers in mainstream services how best they can support Aboriginal carers.
- Promote workers as champions in the carers sector.

This guide, the accompanying slide show and video can be downloaded as a package and viewed by individual workers as part of their own learning. Or it can be viewed by teams of workers as a stimulus to further discussion about positive engagement with the Aboriginal communities.

The front cover features the print of an original painting by Daphne Rickett, Aboriginal Support Coordinator at Carer Support.

The background colour featured in the artwork represents Mother Earth, the place from which we come, and the white dots symbolise our journey alongside the hands of caring and healing in the community. The blue dots represent Carer Support, the people who care for our community.

©2016 Daphne Rickett, oil on paper

ABOUT CARER SUPPORT

Carer Support is a not-for-profit, government funded agency which has been creating social impact in South Australia since 1990, by helping people deal with the unique challenges of their unpaid and often unrecognised caring roles – usually when caring for a family member through accident, illness or disability.

Carer Support provides the following services to approximately 7,000 carers living in the South and East metropolitan regions of Adelaide:

- Social connection through events and support groups;
- Respite services to allow carers time to do the normal things others take for granted;

- A range of information services; and
- Financial management and coordination of support services for people with funded packages.

One facet of Carer Support's vital role in supporting carers is the Aboriginal Support Program, which is managed by two Aboriginal support coordinators, who are based at Carer Support Morphett Vale Centre. Both of them are

working carers and both are members of the local Aboriginal community. The Aboriginal Support Program (previously known as the ATSI Carer Program) was established in late 2012 and it now supports over 90 registered Aboriginal carers.

PROFILES



PETER SPARROW

Chief Executive Officer

Peter has been the CEO of Carer Support for 19 years. He has worked in disability, carer and community services for the past 44 years. He has been the Chair of the Aboriginal Elders Village and SA Community Services. He is currently a South Australian Member on the Federal Ministerial Carer Gateway Advisory Group and Member of the Federal Subject Matter Expert Working Group.

Peter is a carer for his daughter Jess.



MANDY TOCZEK MCPEAKE

Carer Support Executive Manager, Consumer Services

Mandy manages the services and staff at Carer Support's three carer centres – Morphett Vale, Campbelltown and Glandore. She is also responsible for the quality of services to carers and their families; for Carer Support's clients in the Home Support program for older people and for participants in Carer Support's Life, Your Way program for families with National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) packages.



MARGARET POTTS

Carer Support Regional Manager, Carer Support Morphett Vale Centre

Margaret has been working for Carer Support since August 2007. She has held various positions within the organisation and spent four years working as a coordinator in the Commonwealth Respite & Carelink Centre. With the opening of the Morphett Vale Centre in February 2013, Margaret took on the role of Regional Manager and has worked with the team to establish the centre in the outer southern suburbs.

INTERVIEWEE PROFILES



DAPHNE RICKETT

Carer Support Aboriginal Support Program Coordinator and carer

Daphne works at Carer Support to support Aboriginal carers in their roles and to facilitate greater engagement between the organisation and the local Aboriginal community. Her previous roles with the Department of Education and Children's Services (now Department for Education and Child Development) mean that she has been actively involved in the Aboriginal community for many years. She is also currently caring for her son, who suffers from mental health issues, and she has previously been a carer for her mother who suffered from dementia.



IRENE WATSON

Research Professor of Law, School of Law, University of South Australia

Irene Watson works for the University of South Australia as a Research Professor of Law. She belongs to the Tjanekald and Meintangk First Nations Peoples. She has worked as a legal practitioner and been a member of the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement SA from 1973-2005. As an academic, she has taught in all three South Australian universities since 1989. She continues to work as an advocate for First Nations Peoples in international law. Irene was awarded an ARC Indigenous Discovery Award commencing in 2013. This enables her work on the project titled: Indigenous Knowledge: Law, Society and the State.



THERESA FRANCIS

Regional Manager, Aboriginal Health Services Southern Adelaide Local Health Network, Noarlunga & Clovelly Park "Minunthi Tapa Inparritiya" (creating Pathways to meet one another) and Aboriginal Liaison Unit - Karpa Ngarrattendi Flinders Medical Centre

Theresa has been working for the Southern Adelaide Local Health Network for 14 years and her role initially was to develop and establish a culturally appropriate primary health service. She moved to Adelaide from interstate and worked hard to establish relationships with the local Aboriginal community in order to identify the existing concerns and challenges in order to develop a more effective health service in the south.



CLAUDINE BUCKSKIN

Carer Support Aboriginal Support Program Coordinator and carer

At the time of the interview, Claudine was working with Carer Support as one of their two Aboriginal Support Program Coordinators. Claudine was also a carer herself, having cared for her daughter for many years and then her mother, Thelma, who suffered from dementia, Meniere's disease and depression. Thelma relied on Claudine for the provision of emotional support to help her deal with anxiety, as well as assistance with personal care. After having had to navigate the system when caring for her daughter, she was in a better position to take advantage of available services when she started caring for her mother.



WENDY CASEY

Carer Support Aboriginal Support Program Coordinator and carer

Wendy began caring for her grandson, Tyrone, on a full-time basis when he was just four years old. Tyrone, who is now in Year 5 at primary school, has an intellectual disability which was diagnosed at the age of seven and a speech impairment with challenging behaviour. Wendy works at Carer Support supporting other Aboriginal carers in their roles and is a single parent of three adult daughters and a proud grandparent of seven grandchildren.



DAVE GORDON

Carer

Dave Gordon cares for his partner, Alice, who has dementia.

Dave has been registered with Carer Support since January 2015. Dave cares for Alice in numerous ways, assisting and providing her with personal care, finance management, meal preparation, emotional support, agency liaison assistance, transport and shopping, on a daily basis.



JOY SANSBURY

Carer

Joy is a mother of five adult children and a grandmother of eighteen. She cares for her husband, Russell, who is 55 years old and has chronic health issues. Russell has type 1 diabetes and suffers from renal failure, as well as from a lower lumbar spinal fracture and sleep apnoea. As well as caring for Russell, Joy also provides ongoing support to her adult children and grandchildren.



ROSEMARY KARTINYERI

Carer

Rosemary lives in West Park, Goolwa, and has cared for her father for the past three years. Her father's health has progressively declined and the task of caring for him can be very demanding at times.

Over the past three years, Rosemary has also been able to benefit from the support of her aunt and nephews as well as various Aboriginal health services, which have been of great assistance to both her parents.



CHRISTINA KARTINYERI

Carer

Christina is a stay-at-home mother of five, who also cares for her sister, Nancy, and her niece, Nikita. She has been caring for her sister and niece for years now, since her sister's partner passed away.

Christina cares for Nancy by taking her shopping, providing transport to medical appointments, managing her finances and ensuring that her niece, Nikita, attends school. She has been able to cope with her caring role with the extra support of her family and her partner.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF HISTORY AND CULTURE ON THE CARING ROLE?

Historical factors may help explain why many Aboriginal carers are reluctant to access mainstream supports:

- Past experiences impact on the way the caring role is viewed by carers, persons receiving care, their families and communities
- Pressure to assimilate into Western culture – loss of cultural identity
- Prevalent racism and social exclusion
- Lack of awareness of the diversity of Aboriginal cultures and communities
- Past experience with agencies such as police or welfare

Cultural factors may help explain why many mainstream services do not adequately identify and support Aboriginal carers:

- Caring for family, including extended family, is a common occurrence and is rarely questioned by those taking on the caring responsibilities
- Caring arrangements can be complex; for example:
 - Carers may care for several persons
 - Persons receiving care may have several carers
 - Caring arrangements may be reciprocal
 - Carers may undertake a range of caring roles.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF FAMILY STRUCTURES AND VALUES ON THE CARING ROLE?

- Caring is part of what families do, and people who provide care rarely label themselves “carers”
- The complexity of family relationships is reflected in the complexity of caring roles
- It is common that a large number of people, i.e. extended family and multiple generations, lives in the same house
- Extended family can be a valuable source of support for carers

- Carers may be reluctant to agree to home visits out of fear of being judged for the way they live
- Caring roles can be complicated when families are involved with police or welfare agencies
- Reluctance to seek assistance with medical issues can result in caring situations remaining undetected
- Where a person who requires care has children, it is common for the carer to take on parenting on top of caring responsibilities.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PEOPLE WHO WORK WITH ABORIGINAL CARERS?

All people are different, and no two carer's needs, preferences and circumstances are the same. So the following comments should not be viewed as rules; they reflect the perspectives of carers and other people we have consulted during the development of this package.

Communication

- Don't assume people can read and write
- Use plain English
- Avoiding eye contact is polite in some communities, particularly in cross-gender interactions
- Be mindful that your body language will be sending a message
- If you need the person's correct name, ask for the surname, as you might otherwise get a nickname
- Interact not just with the carer, but also with the person cared for and other people who might be present
- If a carer appears shy & uncomfortable asking questions or asserting themselves, encourage them to bring a family member or friend for support.

General Conduct

- Don't turn up at people's houses unannounced
- Take self-referrals seriously; avoid asking people to come back later because they will probably not do so
- If something needs to be done, avoid being too prescriptive; instead, ask the carer how they think it could be accomplished.

Organisational Culture

- Where possible, get Aboriginal staff to introduce non-Aboriginal staff
- Before meeting a carer for the first time, get some background information on their situation and that of their family member who requires care
- Make your offices welcoming for Aboriginal people, for example by displaying Aboriginal flags and artwork, employing Aboriginal front desk staff, and making reception/waiting areas appear open and casual
- Employ Aboriginal staff.

Cultural Sensitivity

- Keep an open mind – don't judge what you see at people's houses
- Accept that you may need to earn people's trust – they may have had bad past experiences with service providers
- Be aware that some families may be afraid of children being removed
- If you are having difficulty obtaining personal information, be aware that you may be facing a gender-related barrier
- Don't be offended if families expect business to be done outside the house
- Personal, family or community matters may take precedence over other arrangements.

Awareness of Family/Social Structures

- Make an effort to understand the carer's family and social networks
- Extended family can create expectations and obligations, but can also be a valuable source of social, emotional and practical support for carers.
- Where appropriate, encourage the carer to tap into their informal networks for support.

WHAT ARE THE KEY MESSAGES?

- Due to historical and cultural factors, Aboriginal carers are less likely to identify or be identified as carers, or to access supports from mainstream services.
- Complex family structures and traditional values influence how family members care for each other, how “caring” is viewed, and how community organisations need to approach and support carers.
- Whilst Aboriginal groups and cultures are diverse, there are things that can be done to better support carers in Aboriginal communities. These include:
 - Respecting their privacy, culture and right not to be judged for how they live
 - Communicating in a culturally sensitive manner
 - Investing in Aboriginal staff, a culturally aware workforce and meeting spaces that are welcoming for Aboriginal people
 - Responding to the complexity of caring roles by offering multi-faceted and flexible supports
 - Supporting carers in the context of their family and social networks.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND SERVICES

SA Directory of Community Services:

www.sacommunity.org

SACommunity is South Australia's community information directory. Its purpose is to enable you to find out about help available from government, non-government and community services in SA, and find out how you can connect with and get involved in your community.

Carer Support:

www.carersupport.org.au

Phone: (08) 8379 5777

Carer Support provides services to carers in the East and South Metropolitan areas of Adelaide from offices located in Glandore, Campbelltown and Morphett Vale.

Carer Support Network SA website:

www.carersupportsa.org.au

CSN SA consists of the key organisations that provide carer support services to unpaid family carers living in South Australia.

State Government Carers website:

www.sa.gov.au/carers

Information for carers on a range of topics including services, financial assistance, employment, rights and legislation.

National Carer Gateway:

www.carergateway.gov.au

Phone: 1800 422 737 (free call)

The Carer Gateway is a national online and phone service that provides practical information and resources to support carers. The interactive service finder helps carers connect to local support services.

CREDITS

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Thank you

