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| Victorian Carer Forum 2022 |
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# Transcript

**Anthony Plummer:** Good morning. Victoria's carers I welcome you to 2022 Victorian carer forum. Our MC for today is one of Australia a favourite comedians she's appeared on the predominant, winners and losers have you been paying attention and live shows have toured mother earth one the Melbourne comedy festival award and international comedy festival welcome to the stage Denise Scott.

**MC:** Thank you.

(APPLAUSE).

Can you hear me okay. In case you missed any of the introduction, I'm just fabulous. I think that's what you have to know I'm looking around, I don't know why for a phone book or something to stand on. Or maybe if I just ‑ I'm not a visual act, I don't know why I'm concerned and in fact this saves me having to hold my stomach in, welcome to especially all the carers here today good on you give yourselves a big round of applause. Of course it's the Victorian carer forum 2022 and I should introduce myself, Denise Scott and I'm going to MC this event. It's a great privilege for me to MC this event and we are going to celebrate with some amazing carers and going to acknowledge you, and hopefully have a really great, great morning. Being out, sort of incredible isn't it still that we are out. I would like now to introduce Uncle Tony Garvey to welcome us to Country thanks Uncle Tony.

**Uncle Tony Garvey – Aboriginal Elder, Wurundjeri Council:** Sorry Denise I'm taking over your job. First of all I would like to thank Denise for the warm welcome, welcome us all here today and I would like to recognise the work that you guys do it's really important work. Working with disabled people and disadvantaged people and you got the world against yous and I know what that's like being indigenous. So in our own country. Great job and keep the good work up and I vote one for me if you want a pay rise. Sorry I'm a bit of a comedian myself but I'm not recognised. I'll start off with the welcome to country, I'm Tony Garvey I'm here from the Wurundjeri tribe land which is my people. We have a mission at hills on the Yarra where I live today. My, great grandfather of the mission, in the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung language means the last tribesmen after king Barrack my, last to die on the mission two days prior to the mission being closed due to colonisation, she was getting forced off the homelands in the mission so she decided to die there, two days prior to being dragged off the mission basically. The Wurundjeri people were also a part of the Kulin nation, Kulin means man, in the Kulin nation the five language groups, to the west, the Coorong to the west neighbours, Boonarong to the southwest and of the Wurundjeri territory that we stand on here today. The Wurundjeri lies in the inner city of Melbourne from the mountains of the great dividing range south to the Yarra and east to mount, the Wurundjeri people a social totem, it's the eagle, represents spiritual powers in many parts of Australia taught about life behaviour and ceremonies to make sure our culture would continue for all walks of life throughout Australia. So referred to as the creator of mankind, Bundjool created, the mother of creation, never can the land be taken away. Land will always belong to the indigenous people, we are part of the land and the lands is part of us, our story is similar to yours. Yours is by your chosen faith, ours is by the dream time. We both have creators and beliefs and ours is bundjool, it's custom for people to enter the lands, my spirits of my ancestors, past present emerging who nurtured the land for over 80,000 years and we as the traditional owners of the lands welcome to the lands and hope together as citizens of this beautiful country we can build develop and you night stronger nations for all people I will close off in my language, speaking language, you are welcome to the lands of the Wurundjeri people, couple of things I'll touch on quickly then I'll jump down I promise you. This is the flag recognition of our flag in this country should be the first recognised flag. It is our people have been here for 80,000 years plus we are the oldest living culture in the world and our flag, they're starting to fly it a bit around the lounge room now but I say about that recognition is what it's all about and if you are going to be fair dinkum our flag needs to fly front and centre. (APPLAUSE).

Because it's a big difference between 80,000 years and 235. So it's a massive difference, touching on the changing the date is very important and very offensive for indigenous people. This is why we fight so hard to change the date. It's all about walking the line together respecting each other we are a multi‑cultural society at this minute and it's not going to change. We are three percent of our own country, 3 percent. 30 percent of our 3 percent are in custody white man law. I know we all have to abide by the law but the law was brought here we didn't have the law same as alcohol and everything else that caused the trouble it was brought here and blamed on to the Aboriginal people. So just changing the date, I want to touch on it really quickly because I want you to get a feel of what the Anzac is and what changing the date, because Anzac day don't get me wrong I don't blame anyone in this room my grandfather fought in world war one was indigenous man but had to lie to fight for his own country that's a total disgrace to me and my grandfather and my family on top of that that we lost. So just I said to my mate rang me on Anzac day and he said Tony, I'm in Healesville at the dawn service that's a total disgrace, I don't go I haven't been for four years he said why not I said because there's no recognition for Aboriginal people that fought in the war we lost life and fought and they got no respect for our people that fought for their country and so I said they've got it all wrong, world war one and World War II for the Anzac, I call that world war three, simple, when they came to our shores they killed over 500 thousand indigenous people, 90 percent of our population was wiped out but they don't call that a war, isn't that a war, they don't want to recognise they're fighting our war isn't that a war wouldn't you call that you lost 500 thousand people I call that a war especially when you come to other people's shores and they have nothing to protect themselves, if that's not a war, I don't know what is. I'm sick of Melbourne I think they're a tick the box process I'm going to change that because we need to change that we need to tell the truth and respect and indigenous people are the royal family of Melbourne not the king and queen, forget them they're not from here we are from here we have been here for 80,000 years my family is the royal family of Melbourne not the king and queen that's all I've got to say thank you very much (APPLAUSE).

**MC:** Thank you to Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Tony, thank you so much. Uncle Tony if you have to go because I've believed you've parked illegally you might get a parking ticket if you've got to go to get your car, I'm sharing with everyone your dilemma. My pleasure we don't want anyone having their car ‑ okay you're on, in the next comedy festival Uncle Tony. As I said I'm very, very pleased to be here and I want to extend a very warm welcome to you all and I also welcome the minister for aging disabilities and carers, - another round of applause for Tony thank you. The minister for disability aging and carers, I welcome the Honourable Colin Brooks MP - not now I love the way, you are ready to go. You hear your name you are up you are here. That's fantastic. Also the parliamentary secretary for volunteers and carers, Josh Bull MP who are the special guests today and you are right you will be speaking. Sorry I gave you a heart start there that you probably didn't need - in fact I was talking to Josh - I hope this is alright to share this information Josh I was talking to Josh before and he did the - not judging, not the full, the half marathon on Sunday, this is amazing I didn't know this was part of it. Who here runs? Of course you're carers as if you have time to go out running. But he was saying that what's it called a taper and carbs what's that he said you don't run for the week before a marathon and you have to lie on a couch and eat carbs and I thought I have been in training for this event for years, just because we are in this beautiful room and I notice Tony, I want to check if I go off mic can you hear me what about up the back, isn't that fantastic. It's so easy for me to talk like that too.

Because I'm a mother. How many mothers do we have here today? See you never read this in a how to give birth book, it's a fact as soon as you give birth you discover the guttural depths your vocal chords can go to, until you have a baby, off for God's sake will you go to sleep! Then when they're adolescents it's for God's sake will you wake up. Then when they're in their 20s and still living at home it's for God's sake will you move out. Then when they have moved out like my kids and they're living overseas it's for God's sake come back. Mummy has got nothing left to live for. Yes thank you. I'm sure as many of us know having a baby really opens you up. On fire, it's only early in the morning. Now of course the other thing we have many people watching us from zoom land, so if you would like to turn to the camera up the back give a wave to the camera and just a warning for all of the you watching on zoom, I actually did, it was a carer's gig on zoom when we were in full lockdown, and this is a disturbing story, I don't know I should be sharing it. Because you may lose confidence in me. But I was sitting at my kitchen table doing the zoom from there, I was meant to do 15 minutes to carers all over Australia, 15 minutes, right, and I got took my timing, from the kitchen clock and which was a big clock, and I started at 1 o'clock and you wouldn't believe this, absolutely true my clock stopped at 1.01 p.m. but because I was in that brain fog fade of lockdown, time no longer meant anything, I just kept looking at it thinking it's still only one minute past one and I have been through most of my material, I kept going, for an hour and all the carers at home, you can see them in the gallery screen on the computer and they're muted because what better thing for a comedian than not hearing laughter and they started to wave and the person running the performance unmuted someone and she said Denise sorry love but I have to go I have to take my husband to the doctors and everyone goes we really have things to do. So if anyone wants to yell at me to get off they've got a life to get on with feel free and for those watching on zoom I should point out because it can be a bit of an illusion yes I'm 67 and no I've not had any work done. All natural. Alright. So we are ready to move on now.

And of course it is great to be part of this, I was going to say post COVID of course it's not at least we are allowed out and it's great and coming together and this beautiful venue, the carers and a lot of people here from fantastic organisations that work and support carers here today, supporting you here today. So fantastic. And it's today is all about celebrating Victoria's unpaid carers unless you are getting uncle Tony he will get you a pay rise and very sincerely, selflessly I miss read, the word, you selfishly but you selflessly give time to care for loved ones, especially in Victoria, the lockdown situation I cannot imagine the impact that's had on your lives in particular and it's wonderful that contribution that you make to not only your loved ones but to our whole community and the only I guess experience I've had with caring for someone was for my mum, as she was on her Alzheimer's journey before we went to the dementia unit I spent time caring for her and a lot of rewards come from it I was lucky because my mum was a happy person, in her life, and I thought, share with you my favourite quote from the many years I spent with mum. When she was you know, on her journey. I went to see her in the dementia unit one day and I said how are you going mum and she went, I'm as good as gold. There was a pause and she went what about your mother? How is she going? And I was completely thrown, like, then I said well I've heard she's as good as gold. And it was just one for me, anyway, so enough of me. It is now my pleasure look out Colin look out. It is now my pleasure to introduce the minister for disability aging and carers the honourable Colin Brooks MP thank you Colin.

(APPLAUSE).

**Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Collin Brooks:** Thanks very much Denise. This opportunity to come here today a wonderful gathering of the people I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we meet on today and even though uncle Tony to had to run off and save himself from a parking fine acknowledge his welcome to country today. Welcome Denise to Madeleine Buchner from little dreamers, Judith Abbott, Bronwyn Parsons from Bendigo health, Patricia and Margie Josh Bull MP who I vouch Denise does a lot of tape erring. Ladies and gentlemen, share something with you for those of you at the carers Vic event apologise for repeating myself this is about everyone here today and the carers doing wonderful work I think politicians are seen as somewhat disconnected from everyday life and people's real struggles I want to share that in about 2005 my mum dad who lived in inner west Sydney dad retired and he had a spinal stroke he became a quadriplegic overnight was at the races one day and went to hospital and had months of ICU and rehab and became a quadriplegic, couldn't move from the neck down, could move his hands and got food in his mouth with a long fork he had. So mum overnight went from running a small business a little shop in the local shopping centre to becoming a full‑time carer and advocate and the first stage when dad was in care in hospital and rehab, it was really that advocacy role, mum was having to work out how to sell the business, she had to sell the house in inner city Sydney was suitable for dad to come out to when he got out find a new place to live that was accessible, modifications and stressors I'm sure you are well aware of about and about 15 years of being a 24 hour around the clock carer for dad and mum was incredible.

The up side was it was an exposure to us for the pure love between mum and dad. So that was the good part about it. The difficult time for her and extremely difficult for dad as well. But the care she gave was unbelievable. On a daily basis so when I talk to carers and met a few today, when you talk to carers and you know the challenges they had, different sorts, some people have been carers all through their lives some are young older carers, care for a partner, child parent, some people live in rural Victoria not in the city where there's more services I get all of that.

The key point is I understand the challenge that carers face, the isolation you sometimes feel, the sense of complete exhaustion at different times and you feel you can't go on, the need sometimes to get angry with someone you blow steam off at someone else and I understand the wonderful thing you do in my speech notes there's figures here around in Victoria the economic value of caring being $19 billion. 7 hundred thousand people providing unpaid care it's more than the economic value you can't put a price on this it's important for politicians to put on so Josh and I can argue for more funding and resources, more respite. Better services to provide health and wellbeing outcomes for carers, care for the carers not just talk about it because we know that's good for everybody. It's not about the 19 billion it's about what all of you do, all of the carers do for the people that they love and that they care for.

So I just wanted to make sure you understood from a politician's perspective we manage the system the policies, the programs and those sorts of things but we have a real sense of what you do and I know that Josh does as the parliamentary secretary as well so we've got the carers strategy which has been from 2018 to 2022 and of course COVID put a delay in the next carers strategy underway but Josh and I are keen to get this and get important work done and see how we can deliver the things I just talked about, providing better care for carers and that will be a process where we engage with carers and ask you for your feedback. That fed in to the last strategy the one we have now and there's been many things implemented in that but we can do more and I'm absolutely passionate about making sure that we do that. This is a great event. It's great to see people coming together and having the chance to catch up and share experiences and to have a laugh to do that. So we are really pleased to be supporting today's event, the key take out for all of you and everyone else you talk to in carers groups when you catch up with other people and you have those discussions I'm really committed to and I think we should all have a think about the things we can do as part of the next carers strategy, election on the way may mean I'm not sure but what we can do to provide better care for carers have a wonderful morning and thank you very much Denise.

(APPLAUSE).

>>: I'm introduce my colleague Josh Bull who is a good mate marathon runner and a really committed supporter of carers in Victoria, Josh.

(APPLAUSE).

**Parliamentary Secretary for Carers and Volunteers Josh Bull MP:** Good morning and thanks so much what a difficult job it is to follow on from somebody who is as smart funny as Denise. And somebody who well around the place likes to think they're maybe funnier than Denise my good friend the minister can I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that we meet on and pay respect to elders past present and emerging and uncle Tony has his name on his jumper as you may have seen this morning he's someone who I don't think needs that because he's well‑known and respected across the community, how wonderful and terrific it is to be in this incredible venue back together we know we couldn't be together in 2020 and 2021 and great to see so many people here and connecting and share in what I think is a really important part of the community.

Minister mentioned 700,000 unpaid carers; can I acknowledge Colin not just your friendship but contribution in government and I think the comments you made certainly spoke to your priorities, your values and we know now important it is we share the values today. Can I give a shout out to everyone online I'm told it need to look at the camera there thank you for being with us today and for your passion and commitment to carers and the carers strategy.

We know of course that as the minister mentioned you being with us all here today is an opportunity for government for community, and for all of us to say thank you for your dedication, passion and commitment to being carers we know how important this work is every day. Supporting needs of carers is a priority for your government we know whilst being a carer can be incredibly rewarding it's also incredibly challenging and we know the challenges have been exacerbated in the pandemic as Denise said we are not quite there yet but we are as a state and as a nation in a much better position and I acknowledge everyone's contribution in a challenging time we know there are a range of programs that we are focussed on delivering in the carer strategy and programs and initiatives as apart of government it's a really long list, I want to mention a few because they're incredibly important there's nearly 50 million that supports additional respite grants and transport concessions for carers over four years continuing to2023 we know and understand there's complexities with the Commonwealth government and the state and Commonwealth partnership is really important. What the minister and I and the government think is now we've got someone in Canberra who is willing to partner with the Victorian government to do this really important work.

Of course we know through annual funding through carers Victoria, the peak body Victorian carers and providing that advice and referral support for Victorian carers is critically important in the space one thing we know and understand, employments rates are lower among carers meaning many carers feel financially disadvantaged and cost of living pressures in addition many carers leave employment and have to provide care for a loved one we have invested $7 million to help carers re-enter the workforce to assist carers in finding employment and to help them achieve those goals and we know that it's really important. Another area that's really important of course is taking a break and of course the last couple of years have not enabled many to do that in the community but taking a break is really important. It's why there's nearly $40 million in additional respite for carers providing important hours and important opportunity for people to get the break they desperately need and of course are entitled to a recent survey by carers Victoria show that carers spend more time in caring roles in the pandemic and experienced isolation and loneliness, invested more than $5 million in supporting carers locally state wide partnership is there and available providing opportunities for you and the we know more than 7 hundred thousand carers to better connect with carers in local community close to the home more support for the support for carers program that provides flexible tailored support for all, it's really a long list and I don't intend to go through all of those it's just a snap shot of the investment that we are making and I think it's critical investment within the community finally, I wanted to touch on acknowledging our carer organisations.

An opportunity I think to come together today to say thank you but also we wouldn't be able to connect with carers without the dedicated support and efforts of our sector partners. I would acknowledge the significant efforts made by all of you and partners in the pandemic many of you having the opportunity to stay connected and continue to support carers whether that's telephone welfare checks, virtual education, online social activities co‑ordinating urgent accommodation and support and many, many more across so many different facets of life they've made a tangible and considerable difference to our community on behalf of the minister and I as the parliamentary secretary thank you for all being here today it is a mazing to be back Denise and amazing to be one with someone as funny as you many people wish we were as funny as you it's terrific to be here I hope the day goes very, very well. I will be around for some time afterwards and opportunity to share, collaborate, listen and have a fantastic morning thank you so much.

(APPLAUSE).

**MC:** Big round of applause for Josh thank you Josh and Colin, wonderful speeches thank you. And especially thank you Colin for sharing your beautiful personal story. It was great. Now it's fun because we have our special panel for you. It's a chance to hear more from some of the leaders in the care sector so I would like to introduce to the stage Anthony Plummer, where are you Anthony, big beaming smile, Anthony Plummer has or maybe he was faking it when he met me, Anthony will be facilitating a panel discussion with our panellists, Judith do you come up now you are going to bring them up, I'm stepping on your feet, I'm going to say Colin's name see if he runs up again. So Judith Madeleine and Bronwyn, from organisations that support carers in a variety of ways and after that so you know, there's going to be a fire side chat, I don't know really what that means. About the visuals but I suspect, in your imagination you see a fireside and a chat between two wonderful carers, who have volunteered to shared their experiences, Patricia and Margie very much looking forward to your chat and I didn't give your title your little bio, little background you rock and roll star you, Anthony, I truly you look so happy. I don't know you go and do some corporate events and people look a bit grim not Anthony, he's the executive director of seniors carers and veterans at the department of families fairness and housing, Anthony I'm now going to hand over to you.

>>: Thank you Denise. (APPLAUSE).

**Anthony Plummer:** I'm actually glad that Denise did my title because you need a full breath to get it out there terrific to be here today and terrific to see other smiling faces around the room with me and I'm sure there are smiling faces around Victoria joining us online today welcome to you all. I wonder whether I can take a quick moment to do housekeeping, I'm conscious, once I do that, where they go this is the emergency exits here and here, if people need to know, where to go when the alarm hopefully doesn't go off that's where to go. The minister needs to rush off now he's got other appointments he will be leaving in a minute, other housekeeping is that the bath rooms in case you haven't discovered are out the door to the right now that's out of the way I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the traditional Wurundjeri owners of the lands we are on and elders past present and he emerging and I recognise their continuous and enduring connection to the land skies and waters and acknowledge any Aboriginal people joining us today. I have been introduced, I'll skip that section and we are fortunate to be joined by representatives from three of the partners today who deliver a variety of services to support Victorian carers, firstly Judith Abbott, Judith ‑ why don't you come now and I can to the spiel as you are coming up. Come on down Judith. Judith is the CEO of carers Victoria the peak body for Victorian carers. Judith is an experienced senior leader and brings a combination of sector knowledge strategic focus and energy to her work to support Victorian carers Judith enthusiasm and good humour which I can a test, there have been many meetings and laughs with the meaningful differences and improving the lives of Victorian carers welcome Judith. Also joining us is Madeleine Buchner, founder and CEO of little dreamers has an extraordinary life history at nine years of age with her own experience caring, identified a gap in people caring for family members and through her energy and drive and raised funds for people in the community to establishing little dreamers, the peak body for young carers she leads today Maddy has been recognised through multiple awards, and order of Australia medal inspiration to Australia, all welcome Maddy. Also delighted to welcome to the stage Bronwyn par sons the manager of carer support at Bendigo health, Bronwyn has a deep understanding of the vital role that carers play particularly in regional and rural communities, in allied health experience award and continues to champion service development to support carers and ensure care such a pleasure to have you with us today Bronwyn welcome.

(APPLAUSE).

>>: Terrific to see many of you here today the process that we are going to go through is to draw on the advice and the suggestions that many of you provided through your registration where you provided some particular topics that you are interested in hearing more about. And this has helped us prepare some of the questions I'll now ask questions to the panel and ask them to elaborate on some questions we won't have time for in the period we have today but we will take them on notice and provide advice to everybody on the website in a couple of weeks. The top three themes we are going to cover today were supporting the health and wellbeing of carers, making respite more accessible for carers and supporting carers from diverse backgrounds, multi‑cultural, LGBTIQA+, regional, rural carers, younger carers. So to work through the top three questions we've got the panellists here, and now I need to turn the page pardon me.

**Judith Abbott:** It's quite disconcerting about the clock we've got a clock in front of us has the time counting down so we have no Denise experience for running over which is very disconcerting.

>>: Thank you wonderful fill in, let's start with the first question for you. Supporting carers' health and wellbeing is one of the topics people are interested in can you take us through recent insights that Carers Victoria has gleaned on carers' health and wellbeing.

>>: I absolutely can I wanted to start by acknowledging traditional owners Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, pay respect to elders past present and emerging and particularly welcome every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person here today and acknowledge that sovereignty was never seeded so it's a privilege to be on the lands of the Wurundjeri people, disappointed Maddy hasn't got a tiara on, sounds fabulous. There's quite a bit of data that tells the story about the health and wellbeing of carers it's a bit depressing when you look at the national health and wellbeing survey for 2020 it told a story about carers experiencing loneliness and isolation at two to two and a half times the rate of other Australians of carers often experiencing psychological distress at higher rates than other Australians particularly young carers at significant risk there and Maddy will speak to that a bit more, range of others things, carers often have chronic health conditions at something like 40 percent of all carers have chronic health conditions much higher rates than the rest the Australian population, similar statistics for disability, that's not really surprising when you think about what the life of a carer can be it's pretty touch there are moments of joy but many moments of challenge and I don't share this with you to be the misery guts in the room that's a technical term.

I share it to acknowledge that there is a real impact that caring has on the people who care. But to also say that, various people have spoken about what's been the impact of the pandemic in Victoria in particular in Melbourne we saw those statistics rise, something like 50 percent of carers saying they were now providing complex care that previously would have been done by paid workers and 80 percent of respondents to a survey last year saying carers felt their mental health deteriorated in the pandemic that was significantly higher than the general population so we are in a place where the numbers tell part of the story of what it is to be a carer but they tell us there's a range of practical things that we can do if we can work with government work with community work with employers that can tip the scale for carers, and that's certainly something that at carers Vic we are keen to do with all of you, the clock is shouting at me telling me I'm 30 seconds over and I think I have to wait until further in the fire side chat to talk to you about some of things that we can do to turn the numbers around, and make it different for carers and carers lives better.

**Anthony Plummer:** Thank you Judith we will give you another bite of the cherry later I promise, useful insights and I'm sure people in this room can a test to some of the comments that Judith made it's not something people are facing alone and I think it's important to acknowledge that it has been hard. So I now come to you, Maddy I'm keen to get a better understanding of how we can support young carers and perhaps some of work that little dreamers is doing.

**Madeleine Buchner:** First of all I also want to start off by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands we are on the Wurundjeri people of Kulin nation and sovereignty was never seeded and we are lucky to live work play love and do the things on the land that's and still belong to the traditional owners of the land. I want to acknowledge the lived experience in the room now it's phenomenal to have a room of people who take caring roles in their lives not necessarily by choice but by necessity and acknowledge how much lived and expertise we have in this room I'm lucky, I grew up as a young carer of my mum and brother and now my dad and Nanna as well and I've got the real full spectrum of caring that's happened in my life I'm not technically a young carer anymore but we can be young at heart and little dreamers was founded off the back of there not being enough dedicated support for young people in Australia so we were founded 13 years ago we exist to support young people who provide care for anyone in their family who might have a chronic illness, mental illness, disability substance use frail age we kind of care for young people as young at four right through to 25 and we've programs across the spectrum and there are a range of things to need to think about with young carers, the fact these are young people growing up going through puberty and all of the things that young people go through alongside their caring role and still struggling to figure out who they are and what life looks like for them so little dreamers focuses on a sense of identity who are we outside of the care role for a lot of young people myself included I don't remember my life being a carer I was two and a half when my brother was born and I knew how to pour his medicine from the age of six, I don't know what it's like without caring and it's so inter twined with the caring responsibility and that brings challenges when you think about education, employment, quality of life all the things inter twined with who am I, outside of the caring role what does my life look like not being a carer and there will probably be a time in our life when we are not a carer and that can be difficult in itself, social connectedness, the importance of young people finding peers and finding people who they have things in common with besides going to school with them, things like caring roles I didn't find my young carer peers until I was at uni and it happened to be a girl I sat next to in class happened to be a young carer and it wasn't until I started little dreamers where I was able to surround myself with young people with caring roles and found the thing I felt like I was missing in my life little dreamers deliver social connectedness programs, deliver a job readiness program through the carers employment support program that helps to get young carers the skills they need to get jobs and realise they have a lot of skills in their caring roles to get jobs some of the other programs funded by the supports that Josh spoke about before are things like our mentoring programs, tutoring, online, peer support platform peer support groups that have been designed by and for young carers and that's something we are really proud of.

(APPLAUSE).

**Anthony Plummer:** Thank you so much Maddy I think it's incredibly important we recognise that carers can be young people old people, anybody basically anybody is a carer and everybody's experience is different and everybody's needs and requirements are different in terms of going through the journey it's terrific you have built such a solid support base for young carers to help them through the journey, thank you. I would like to welcome Bronwyn Parsons, thank you for travelling from Bendigo to be with us today. Working in visual Victoria will give you insights in to the challenges that people in rural and regional parts of the state have in terms of assessing care and I wonder if you can take us through the work you do through Bendigo health.

**Bronwyn Parsons:** Thanks and hello everybody great to be here I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the Wurundjeri land we meet on and pay respects to elders past present and emerging. So I guess for a little bit of context Bendigo health carer support services support people across the lower Mallee region in the Macedon ranges you up to Mildura about a quarter of the size of Victoria, across the region, I guess distance is a big factor. A lot of carers have to take loved ones to medical appointment that's far away not just the travel and the logistics of getting to the appointment the time they may need to take off work or from other duties to take the person to the appointment and the cost that's a huge challenge that regularly comes up, for our carers. In some of the smaller towns and districts, access to formal supports, particularly with the workforce shortages that we are experiencing at the moment sometimes providers just don't have staff to deliver the services that we would like. Or there just isn't a provider we can use to support those people on the flip side, some of these communities bring great opportunity for us to support and work with so particularly when we are trying to understand what carers need and want in those communities they're often well connected they're close knit there's community groups and organisations that we can tap in to do build capacity and to find carers, so Bendigo health has been operating for over 25 years as a new comer to the role I'm grateful we have strong relationships across the Mallee region and contacts that we can use to regularly check in and help find carers and support carers in the best way that we can.

I guess some of the examples of how we are doing and this and done it in the past in Mildura for example helping an organisation to support carers with advocacy interacting with the NDIS helping them navigate the system and get better supports. In Bendigo we are supporting the ever growing refugee population and identifying carers in that cohort and providing culturally sensitive supports that can sometimes be the service navigation and getting linked in with the right places, football and netball clubs and partnering with organisations to identify and support carers in the LGBTIQA+ community as well. I guess our state funding has always been very supportive and advocative of being creative and flexible with how to support carers in these regions and I think there's really great opportunity and I look forward to using that opportunity to keep going and support carers in the most creative and flexible way that we can.

**Anthony Plummer:** Thanks so much Bronwyn (APPLAUSE). I think it's really important that we recognise that there is no one size fits all in terms of the supports that people might need at a particular time and that's why it's great that we have partner organisations particularly as Bronwyn outlined with basketball and netball it's great not always easy to find the people that need the support. Now we come to the part of the discussion where we grill the panellists on the questions from the registrations, the one topic at the top was supporting carers health and wellbeing I'm going to ask you Judith perhaps in the first instance to give some thought to how best we can support carers health and wellbeing.

**Judith Abbott:** So I think it really is the combination of things it's about opportunities to connect, opportunities to take time out, being better understood, and having the supports that can help you with sustaining yourself in a caring role. Events like today and a range of the things that all of our organisations do and many your people represented in this room that are about allowing carers to connect on their terms in the ways that matter for them are really important and it's been delightful this year, to be able to start to connect with carers across the state, turns out for those of that made it to the Elvis impersonators are helpful, I think there's great work we can do in mental health and wellbeing space. Carers Vic has done a trial of a group program called in touch about how can we best equip carers to be able to hold themselves in role and know how to manage the impacts of caring upon them there's a range of things we are fortunate to have Victorian government support and there is by partisan support in government for carers and care relationships, but at the risk of being a tiny bit cheeky I'd say there's always more good work that can be done and we've launched a carers two campaign in the pre-election process to get more respite for carers that works for them, more services we think there will be over 1 million unpaid carers in the state by 2025 we want to see support for carers health and wellbeing, dedicated care if you are having a tough time you can talk to someone who understands what it's like to be a carer and can help you find solutions and support you in those processes. So there's a whole range of things we can do but I don't think we should under estimate the joy of getting time out to connect with old friends, make new ones, and be entertained by funny people because the chance to have a laugh sometimes makes a huge difference.

**Anthony Plummer:** I can open the question to the floor perhaps and see if others may like to respond noting that we have a couple of other questions that have come from the audience. One of which was around accessible respite. I guess the question for me is, why is helping carers take a break an important thing to do.

**Bronwyn Parsons:** I think it's important because what would happen if you all weren't there if we didn't have carers where would we be, I don't think we want to think about the alternative so it's vitally important because carers do so much. For so many people. We know it's a huge commitment to be a carer we know that at times it can be a large load to carry so I think it's just really important for us to look after you as best we can so that you can in turn look after the person that you love and want to care for. So I think when it's well done I think the carer can perhaps feel like they can have time out from their role they feel like they've been supported through a challenging time they've been heard and understood from having the right support at the right time.

**Anthony Plummer:** Thanks Bronwyn. Maddy looked like you wanted to say something.

**Madeleine Buchner:** I have many things to say, when we look at health and wellbeing from a young carer perspective that are dedicated young carer supports and there are services designed for them that take in to consideration all of the nuances of being a young person with a caring role and one of the things that people don't self-identify as a young carer I didn't speaking on behalf of them neither of them identified as a young carer when they were younger a lot of our young people a couple of other young carers in the room and it's something that comes up and lot and important to know if you are a young person you take on caring responsibilities in your family irrespective whether you call yourself a young carer you can access health and respite through little dreamers and I think that's really important.

**Anthony Plummer:** I might do a supplementary question if that's alright and say how can it be done well and open that to anybody who wants to jump in.

>>: How can carer support be done well, I have so many things.

>>: Respite we've only got six hours.

>>: I will be quick I think respite needs to support both the young person in their caring role but the young person as a young person providing them with respite opportunities that empower them build resilience, coping skills and give them the space to be a young person without constantly talking and discussing and thinking about your caring role whilst giving them the opportunity to talk and think about their caring role as well. One more thing only if there's time.

>>: Can I add something really quickly which is so obvious but often gets lost that one of the fundamental reasons why respite is so important is when you are carer you often lose yourself because your focus is so much on getting the person what your caring for needs and we often find when we talk with carers the first part of the conversation is about what the carer recipient needs and we say we want to recognise you and Maddy has spoken about that often you lose yourself in the caring role and that's not a negative reflection but, respite gives you the focus for you.

>>: That gives you the energy for the caring role and thank you for your contributions. So we've got now there's a big sign that says please wrap up now so I'm going.

>>: It's really big and red.

>>: With the last question which is supporting carers from diverse background whether they're young, LGBTIQA+, rural and regional carers or older carers, a quick 30 second spiel choose one of those cohorts and think about how we can better support the individual needs perhaps of carers from those particular backgrounds, who wants to put their hand up first I think Bronwyn does.

**Bronwyn:** I do. So I guess I want to start with first and foremost the listening ear I think that's critical in the start of any interaction with the carer that we really take the time to listen and walk with you as we try and understand what you are going through and what you need. So I guess the other needs perhaps for the aging carer, being able to listen being able to identify what that carer wants at the time helping them to identify what they need sometimes it's really hard to, like you were just saying reflect and say what's good for me what can help me that guidance a lot of the feedback that's been positive for our service talks about the patience, the kindness, the fact that carers felt listened to, heard, supported through a challenging time, I think it all starts back at the fundamentals.

**Anthony:** Perfect thanks.

**Madeleine:** I'd say exactly the same when it comes to young carers and little dreamers has a light blue slip of paper at the back if you want support you can tick a box and say I want support and little dreamers, you can give it to the three wonderful little dreamers team members here if you want to talk about the support that you need that's what we, I think all about individualised support.

**Anthony:** Thanks, Judith.

**Judith Abbott:** I want to lift it up to a system level and say I reckon our aspiration and collective goal five years from now is that none of you have to explain what a carer is that none of you have to negotiate just to get the stuff you need whether it's participating in a care planning meeting getting support when it's really hard working with an employer to find something flexible that works and to do that we have to get to a place where this is just part of everyone's lives all of us are going to be or need a carer and we just have to find a way of making everyone's business so five years from now, we are not still having the same conversation about how do we do XY and Z and that's a challenge because everyone is different, and the absolute thing that unites us so I'm finishing with a challenge and something that says let's go for a different future for carers in this state, and let's have Victoria lead the way.

(APPLAUSE).

>>: How is that for cheeky.

**Anthony Plummer:** Thank you so much to all of our panellists I particularly love the vision that Judith left us with reminds me of Josh getting to the finish line of his half marathon I think a terrific aspiration join me in thanking the panellists for coming here today and sharing their insights and thank you all.

(APPLAUSE).

>>: Thank you again to the panellists. If I can now please welcome Patricia and Margie to the stage I think somebody is going to set up a fire on the stage here for me so we can have the fireside chat and hopefully we don't set off the smoke alarms. Let me introduce you to Patricia and Margie I'll get them to tell you about themselves once they're seated.

 Lovely to have you here today, Margie cares for her father and mother and two grandchildren and Margie is an integral member of the Victorian Albanian community and support for carers programs so Margie can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your caring journey?

**Margie:** Thank you Anthony, and everyone in the room. Yes my caring responsibilities started about four five years ago. My father became very unwell due to his health and my mother was getting a bit old so I took on the responsibility of being their carer, it's had its challenges, having to give up work there was a bit of an adjustment I had to do but it's also had its rewards and wonderful to be here today to share your stories and hear about everyone else's stories. So I feel like I belong to a community.

**Anthony Plummer:** Thanks very much Margie, lovely to have you here today.

(APPLAUSE).

>>: I wonder, Margie whether you can briefly take us through some of the support that you received through the Australian multi‑cultural service?

**Margie:** Yes. I was fortunate enough over two years ago to bump in to a co‑ordinator from the Australian multi‑cultural community services. Had a bit of a chat as to what they offer what they can do for carers and I had no knowledge that there was any support or financial help out there. So it's been a big learning curve and they've benefit wonderful given me a lot of opportunity to take a break, from my responsibilities, and also recently my father was keen to go to Shepparton to the Albanian festival, I asked whether they would provide any funding or assistance and which they did and he had a wonderful time meeting up with people from the community, and sharing their stories and where they were at in life he was absolutely chuffed and it gave me a break to get away and enjoy the day with him so we were both really grateful for the opportunity and can't thank them enough for the support they've given us.

**Anthony Plummer:** Thank you for sharing that Patricia if I can come to you thank you for joining us today. I understand that you are caring for two young children.

**Patricia:** Yes.

**Anthony Plummer:** And that you have been working with the community civic centre and getting some support from there, perhaps you can tell us a little bit about what has been provided.

**Patricia:** I did receive some counselling for the fact that I care for my child is very challenging. A lot of pressure. A lot of workshop as well. Lunch and gift cards as well, lunch where I had the opportunity to meet up with different carers.

**Anthony Plummer:** When you were meeting up with different carers was that useful for you, what impact did that make?

**Patricia:** It was such a good experience for me because you meet up with different persons different story, different testimony and it was helpful for me to find out I was not the only one and that I had such a big family as well.

Anthony Plummer: It's very nice to know that you are not alone in these situations isn't it.

**Patricia:** Yes.

**Anthony:** Patricia have you made any friends?

**Patricia:** Yes. After those lunches we catch up sometimes having a coffee, going for a walk, and that was good for me because you always at home, good to go for a walk with other people like you, make me feel fresh.

**Anthony:** Because I imagine sometimes quite difficult to find the time to otherwise connect with people and make friends and have that break.

**Patricia:** Yep.

**Anthony:** So I wonder perhaps if either of you can, I Margie I might come to you and you talked about your father and you visiting the harvest festival why was that important.

**Margie:** Well because being elderly and not being able to get out and about, I guess has its issues with I guess wellbeing, their mental health they feel isolated and also less connected to the community so for him, it was a wonderful opportunity to be able to rely on someone to drive him there and also the accommodation was arranged for him and he was able to go there and meet up with old friends that he hadn't seen for years. And he's just turned actually 90 yesterday so we all got together and celebrated his 90th birth day but I'm pretty proud of my father, the fact that he's still very proud of his community and he likes to keep in touch and he's interested in what's going on in the world so he hasn't given up on that I'm pretty proud of him.

**Anthony:** Great to hear and happy birthday to your dad, (APPLAUSE).

**Margie:** I'll pass that on.

**Anthony:** Patricia I wonder do you feel like it's made a difference for your children as well?

**Patricia:** Yes because through those meetings chatting with others carers, listen to their story, give me perspective in a better way to support my kids to find, it's happened to everybody to be stressed, but it's just an amazing journey when you are connected to the right people.

**Anthony Plummer:** That's fantastic I'm really grateful to you both for coming up here I know it's not an easy task to sit up in a big room in front of people and on zoom and you've done a great job telling your story and difference that the intervention made so thank you for being open and sharing thoughts with us today we've got a couple of tokens of our appreciation coming up now thank you and please join me in thanking Patricia and Margie.

(APPLAUSE).

>>: Thank you again to the carers and panellists who shared their experiences today I welcome Denise back to the stage and thank you all.

**MC:** Thank you. Anthony and all the wonderful speakers Patricia and Margaret and Bronwyn, and Judith, and Madeleine, really, really wonderful. Fantastic. And now this is a bit weird because I'm doing my comedy skit so I'm moving here and it's just a weird thing, it's humbling when you follow people with stories like that and I want you to relax because I'm about to just crap, let it go. Let go because what I did want to talk about was that lockdowns because how many people here are actually from Melbourne? A lot in the room.

And so I don't have to tell you that we have spent an enormous amount of time in the last two and a half years in lockdown and there was the big sort of kahuna lockdown, shutdown for months, you could only leave the house for an hour a day to exercise, Josh, who exercises for an hour a day. That's what we were given the permission to do and the thing that got me and this was like very much the ladies, it was a ladies situation, was that during the facial hair dramas, did anyone else, I was constantly having conversations with other women about what to do because it was months, you couldn't visit a beautician so true story, I ended up getting the flawless lady face shaver, has anyone tried this I feel like we know each other enough, Anthony, you are grinning, well you used it on your head. But it's a thing Anthony, it is a thing and you get it at chemist warehouse, it's small, discreet, very low buzzing sound. So no one needs to know you are doing it and this is true, the first time I actually ever shaved my face was during the lockdown and I was actually sitting at the table having dinner with my partner John, and I thought I'll give it a go, he did not notice a thing. Maybe that's because we have been together 42 years he really doesn't care what I do at this point. But no, I really did do that, and I went to bed that night I was quite taken with the whole thing I thought my face feels smoother, than it has in years, the next morning, oh my God, stubble so much I looked like one of the river boys from home and away. So sadly I had to give the face shaving up and I did the only thing a middle aged woman could do under the circumstances. I grew a goatee and I gave daily thanks for mandatory mask wearing I couldn't have been more thrilled, the other thing that happened and I'm not proud especially after hearing your stories today but during the really, really long, strict lockdowns with the curfew all that, I lost the plot I will be honest and in an attempt to rein myself in, get myself back together I started journaling, the old fashioned, pen, note paper and this is no word of a lie the first thing I wrote was note to self. I must not drink. How stupid. But that is a good sentiment but the whole sentence was I must not drink during the day, or after I go to bed. I'm not kidding that was my only rule and the sad part was I broke the rule often because, you get up at 4 a.m., go to the toilet, on my way back to bed I think God I feel like a gin and tonic, fucking going to have one why not it's not as if I have anywhere to go, I will confess, that during lockdown, I did go and have an X ray. I know we've got some government people in but I didn't need to. You know the only reason to leave the house was medical appointment, anyone else here have arthritis, I'm feeling at home where is yours in your hands what does it stop you doing, Caroline?

Lots of things can we get specific, gripping things, tricky, it is tricky, have you tried anything for it? Alcohol, sister we could have a time after this we should meet in the bar it will be midday by then or it is now, have you tried rapid gel, has anyone tried that who said yes, hand up what's your name, Bernice can you explain what it is? To take away pain but for who? Look the room is going off, for horses. For horses. This is absolutely true Bernice has wiped that from part of her brain, you get, and can't get it off the shelf you have to go to the counter and go I will have some of that you like a big drug deal and they bring it out. It does work though doesn't it? Yes I had a carrot and a Bale of hay for dinner last night, I had an X ray and this was during lockdown so I wore a mask of course we had to and the young radiologist at the clinic was wearing and mask and I had under pants on I want to give you the full visual I'm lying on the slab you think the facial hair was a problem, down there, and let's put it this way these days I have to have a bikini wax not so I can wear bathers so I can wear knee length shorts. So I'm lying on the slab thing having X ray and the radiologist looked and me and he said you have the same name as one of my favourite comedians I know and he said it's not you is it and I can't lie and I said yes it is me on the way out, I said thank you, and he went, it has been my absolute pleasure Ms Drysdale. I think the people from the little dreamers are going to have to Google who Denise Drysdale, when uncle Tony went, I saw Denise, I don't think it's Denise Scott it's Denise Drysdale, no so it was life imitating art.

But the other thing, look who else here is in their 60s? We've, over gosh that was an aware and yet sort of proud, what's your name? Cheryl how old are you, 72 you look hot as Cheryl. People are clapping for just being alive good on us. Cheryl I don't know, when I got 65, you will have experienced this did you have parties? Was that a joke? Fair enough. Did you have parties? When you turned 70 say? Excellent. What did you do there, dance? Drugs, I don't know. So you were before the lockdown, Cheryl what a woman with good timing. I'm not one for parties and in fact so I'm 67 now but as I mentioned before, but for my 65th I could have had a party there wasn't lockdown then but I went no I don't want a party and I don't want gifts, I meant it, would the Australian government listen no they sent me the poo kit, how much have you had in your lifetime, for those of you, little dreamers, perhaps unfamiliar, what happens when you turn 50 and if you are still alive in five years, the Government thank you very much Josh, they send you a jar and then you poo in to it, and then you send it back to the government. Which God knows, sometimes we feel like doing. But this is true, so my last poo kit I actually got to keep one, I've got the jar here, no. In my cleavage, this is the jar, can you see that? That is the jar I was sent Cheryl, I was horrified. I thought am I the only person in Australia whose poo has a wider diameter than a string of spaghetti. I said, I don't know where else to put it but back in, hope I'm not sexually arousing anyone.

When I said no presents, I really did mean it, got enough stuff happening my partner John who I have been with for 42 years, he took heed of that and he gave me a novel, the luminaries anyone read it, get out of here, what's your name, sorry? Yes, CC ‑ that name. It's a big book, 800 pages long, so I open up this present, I look at it, and I said, John, you've given me this. He said yeah, I heard someone raving about it, and I said well gee John I think that someone might have been me, because I have been lying in bed beside you for the last six months reading it. It's an interesting thing because Patricia isn't it, no you are Patricia and you are Margaret talking about your dad being 90 and it's really humbling but my whole body is screaming I can't be stuffed, some days the only reason I sit up is because of my acid reflux.

But the thing is that I do want to keep working and I'm quite grateful that I do get work, and this is three years ago now but I was on dancing with the stars, I thought there might have been a little applause, no, it was dreadful, what happened was, people say they go on those shows often they say for their children, for their children to prove, bullshit I'll tell you no one goes on those shows for their children my children who were both living overseas at the time in America couldn't have been happier to be out of the country when their mother was doing the Salsa on live TV people say why did you do it, the money please on that show, and look, I was hopeless, but the third week on, what happens is you have a celebrity and you are partnered with a professional dancer and each week you get a dance together you perform it on live TV and each of the three judges gives you a score out of ten. And as I said I was hopeless but the third week on that show I gave that dance everything I had and actually managed to score a nine. In total. In total I was mortified and Craig, the he's not awful, he gave me a one and called me a hunch back why would he do that, and then the beautiful judge said Denise Scott you go girl.

You go girl, weird because she isn't American she's Australian as and she said Denise Scott you are so living your best life which I think we all know means your dancing is shit house and if I were you I'd go kill myself good times everyone good times but the thing I'm going to finish in 30 seconds, but the thing was, just a little bit of gossip, I had to share a dressing room with Michelle Bridges. Do you know, yes, Goddess she's actually a great terrific person but the body of a Goddess, you couldn't get a stronger more incredible body, and we had to nude up together, to get in to this you have to take everything off as you said to Michelle I said do you mind if we turn the lights off. So she was standing there in a G string and she was about to put on this little mini strapless dress, and she said would you mind zipping me up was it wrong of me to pretend I couldn't, I'm going to leave it, it's an odd place to finish but I know it's time for you to talk and enjoy yourselves I've got a bit of housekeeping, should why don't we just applaud all the speakers and everything that's happened today, and then ‑ relax. Talk, and I will just read out some more housekeeping stuff, that's worked well everybody is just like what do we do now. Really truly get stuck in to the food, come on. Get fat. But so we've got feedback, short surveys that will be appreciated if you fill them out. Please don't say anything negative about me, you know, come on. I got a one on dancing with the stars, keep that in mind. I'm sure it will all be positive for everyone there's email, that will include links to a recording of this event for anyone who missed it. Online we've got to say good‑bye to all the people watching on zoom, bye, and so I've got to say thank you and it's been a really, really wonderful morning and I feel very privileged to have been part of it and from the bottom of my heart you do an extraordinary job and keep reminding us of what love is so have a great day, thank you to the organisers.

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