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Carer support keeps retired couple together

Roseanne Boyle, 62, tries not to dwell on what she and her husband Steve have lost since his stroke in 2008.

The pair, from Wodonga, had taken early retirement and were caravanning around Australia when Steve suffered the stroke, which has left him paralysed down one side of his body and reliant on an electric wheelchair.

Life changed quickly and Roseanne became Steve's full-time carer. It's a role she's fulfilled with determination and dignity for nine years, despite physical limitations of her own.

Roseanne is one of around 2,500 unpaid carers supported by not-for-profit organisation Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH) across Hume who care for people who are frail aged, have a disability, mental illness, dementia, chronic illness or are going through palliative care.

She is sharing her story as part of Carer's Week (October 15-21); celebrating the often un-sung role of carers in our community.

Under a VMCH Consumer Directed Respite Care (CDRC) Package, Roseanne receives therapy to help keep symptoms of her chronic back issues and arthritis at bay, including carer support several days a week to help Steve get in and out of bed. Flexible respite options and emotional support have helped to ensure Roseanne can continue to care for Steve, while also allowing Roseanne to visit her parents in Tasmania, who sadly passed away within four months of each other.

Despite Roseanne's positive outlook on life and "dealing with each day as it comes", she admits she'd be in a "truckload" of trouble without support from VMCH.

Married for 43 years, Roseanne believes ultimately, carer support is responsible for keeping the couple together.

"I couldn't do it alone," she said. "Physically I just wouldn't be able to do it. Steve spent over five months in hospital after his stroke, which was really hard, so I also know emotionally I couldn't cope with visiting him in a nursing home – my mental state would not be good."

Roseanne says having a routine, trying to pursue their own interests, and regular counselling help to keep the couple strong and happy.

"I would tell other carers out there that it's so important to get time for themselves. I also can't stress enough how important it is to have their own counsellor if they need someone to talk to – someone that's there just for them."

VMCH Home Support and Carer Services Operations Manager, Kellie King, said carers like Roseanne came from all walks-of-life, but what many had in common was a reluctance to seek help or recognition.

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She said their contribution to the community was “enormous”.

Carers Australia report carer roles are valued at \$60.3 billion annually – more than \$1 billion per week.

“The caring role supports people to continue to live in their community and to be able to do that in a safe and happy way without having to rely on health services,” Kellie said.

“It’s really important we get the message out that we recognise their role as carers and the contribution they make, not just to the person they care for, but also to the community by doing so.”

VMCH invites local carers to a Carer’s Week luncheon on Friday, October 20 at Upper Murray Family Care, 29 Stanley St, Wodonga, 11.30am to 3pm. RSVP: 1800 052 222.

VMCH Carer Support Services operates the Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre in the Hume region, which provides carer support, information, advice, and funding for respite needs, carer support living in the Western and Hume region. Information: 1800 052 222 (Hume region only) or 1300 971 720 (State wide).

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About Villa Maria Catholic Homes

Villa Maria Catholic Homes is committed to working in partnership with people of all ages and abilities to help them achieve their individual goals and dreams, remain connected to their communities and enjoy their independence.

As an agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, our values including respect, compassion and inclusion guide us to deliver the highest quality services to individuals of all faiths and backgrounds.

We are a Catholic, not-for-profit organisation providing residential aged care, affordable housing options, retirement living, senior support, disability, carer and education services to more than 6,500 people across Victoria and southern New South Wales.

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