

Age Old Problems: New Aged Care



A podcast by Helping Hand



Episode Two

Respite for Carers

 13 minutes

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Helping Hand

00:00:00 Kate

Welcome to *Age Old Problems: New Aged Care*, a podcast by Helping Hand that offers information and advice to help you find and access the right aged care services. This podcast was recorded on Kaurna land.

00:00:22 Kate

Hello, I'm your host Kate Holland. Welcome to another episode of *Age Old Problems: New Aged Care*. Today we're talking respite, and I have two wonderful guests joining me to discuss why you might seek out respite services, and how to go about it. Lisa Brewer, who works in Admissions and Customer Service for Helping Hand, and Kerry Carlson, who is Resident Liaison Coordinator in North Adelaide, and also Lifestyle Assistant. Thanks to both of you for joining me.

00:00:42 Kerry

Thank you

00:00:42 Lisa

Thank you

00:00:43 Kate

I was just thinking, in case people have not even heard of respite before, the word's definition gives a little bit of clue really: it's a short period of rest or relief from something difficult. Do you think that sums it up?

00:00:55 Lisa

Yes, that would be exactly right. We classify respite as more for the carer than the actual customer that comes in, so that's a pretty good summation of it.

00:01:00 Kate

I thought too – and I know it has the potential to sound a bit like an ad – but we've got a testimonial which is sort of the perfect way to highlight the benefits of respite. So, I thought I'd read that out to you both. So, it comes from Ali, who is a carer who has accessed respite care for her mother.

00:01:20 Kate

'I have been my mum's main carer over the last five years. Throughout these years, I've had some challenging medical conditions requiring a few surgeries and recoveries. Helping Hand has been an absolute lifesaver, not only for myself, but also for my mum. Knowing mum would be well cared for, in a safe, happy environment, meant the world to me. If considering options for alternative care arrangements for a loved one's care – whether it's to give yourself a well-deserved break or holiday, or requiring care for your own wellbeing – I would absolutely recommend Helping Hand respite. Mum has spent time in four of Helping Hand's respite facilities over the last five years, with all of the locations being excellent experiences for mum and myself. The staff are caring, compassionate, and helped mum settle in quickly. Mum always felt safe and well looked after. When there was a need of medical assistance she was given appropriate treatment.'

00:02:06 Kate

It must make you feel pretty proud of your services hearing that.

00:02:10 Kerry

Yes definitely. It is also wonderful way for families to try out aged care when that transition from respite to permanent for example – if you're going in on respite, you get a chance to meet the staff, find out if you

like the facility, so it's a wonderful opportunity. And as Lisa said, it's good for carers and the families to have that break as well.

00:02:33 Kate

So, Lisa, you deal with pre-admissions, so perhaps we can start with you as we delve into some of the nuts and bolts of getting respite. You assist with the applications and the questions ahead of someone checking in, is that right?

00:02:44 Lisa

Yes, that's correct. So, the first initial inquiry, whether it be an online submission – so you can actually go onto our website and make an inquiry about respite, and I'll then pick it up from there (or my work colleague) and we'll make contact with the person who made the inquiry, and explain the whole process from there.

00:03:04 Kate

And can you describe what exactly is residential respite care?

00:03:10 Lisa

So residential respite care is having respite within a nursing home or a care facility. There is some processes that have to be done first, and you need to have My Aged Care approval for residential respite in order to come in and receive that service.

00:03:23 Kate

And how long could a respite placement be?

00:03:25 Lisa

At Helping Hand, we take a minimum booking of two weeks, we don't have anyone coming any shorter than that stay, but can be longer. A person is actually eligible under their My Aged Care plan for up to 63 days of respite in a financial year.

00:03:40 Kate

And do all Helping Hand residential care homes have respite rooms?

00:03:42 Lisa

Yes, we do, except for two of our country facilities, but we are able to receive respite in all of them. But we have dedicated rooms in all of our metropolitan and also at Whyalla and Port Pirie, and those rooms are booked in advance. We kind of describe it a bit like a motel system, where you make a booking. We're running it off a calendar, so we can look up when the next vacancy is and book the person in from that time on.

00:04:00 Kate

Now you mentioned My Aged Care, so who can be eligible for residential respite, and is the process that they start with My Aged Care and take it from there?

00:04:11 Lisa

Yes, it is. So, anybody who's over the age of 65 – I think there is some criteria that you can be under that age but it's a medical -based thing – and once you've been approved by My Aged Care, and it's a process of getting the Home Care Package and residential respite, also permanent care approval. Anybody I think, just makes an application through their website, or discussing it with their doctor.

00:04:39 Kate

Sometimes there could be confusion around why people might access respite, can you explain some of the different reasons that people might apply for a respite break?

00:04:35 Lisa

Yes certainly. We get referrals from all different areas: hospital-based referrals where somebody's in hospital, there care has come to the point where they ready for discharge but maybe not well enough to return home, respite is suitable for that sort of thing; families going on holidays, where they're wanting to make sure their mum, dad or loved one is safe – they may have been living independently in their own home with some support, but the family's a little bit worried that, you know, if something happens in the night, you know, what will happen to mum or dad, so respite is good for that sort of thing; and also as Kerry has explained some families like to trial the respite – it's a good 'try before you buy', where you can find out what happens in a care facility, but not staying there permanently – you can return home.

00:05:34 Kate

So, when people are coming in, accessing respite for the first time, are there some common questions that they like to ask you to get their heads around how it might work?

00:05:40 Lisa

Yes, the first things are 'is mum going to be in a room by themselves?' or 'can they join in all the activities?', 'will they be getting medical care, is there a nurse available?'. Cost comes into it, because there is a cost involved in respite care – it is government partially supported, but there is a cost involved. And yeah, 'what can they bring, can they bring, you know, things from home?'. All of those sort of things.

00:06:00 Kate

And no question's a silly question is it, you're happy to answer all those questions for people.

00:06:05 Lisa

Absolutely yes, you know, and we try to put people at ease by saying that. And look, feel free to ring back, because it's a very daunting process and a lot of people feel very guilty about putting somebody in respite, especially if it's a partner that they've always said "I'm never going to put you in a home" and then suddenly the circumstances change, or they're having care burnout, and doctor's recommended you have a break, those sort of things. So yeah, we try and put people at ease with all those.

00:06:33 Kate

I guess given people feel quite guilty at times, part of your role is to help put them at ease about that decision, and comfort them that this is an important thing for them to do both for themselves and for their partners or their family.

00:06:45 Lisa

Yes, that is the key factor I think, is encouraging the person who's making the inquiry, whether it be the husband, the wife, the family member, to not feel guilty about it, and remember that their health and wellbeing is the most important. Because without them being well, and be that physically or mentally, they can't continue that carer role.

00:07:00 Kate

So, this is an opportune time also for you to maybe share some feedback that you get, because, you know, at one end people are feeling guilty about putting people in, but you've told me already that you also get some wonderful feedback about people's experiences once they have been using respite.

00:07:15 Lisa

Yes, we do, which is the great part about it. We often get what we call the frequent flyers, who keep coming back, booking it again and again, because, you know, mum or dad's had such a wonderful experience. But I can remember one vivid conversation I had with somebody, and she could not believe the change in her mother. Her mother had been at home, very withdrawn, not wanting to participate in anything, not eating much, all that. She was terribly worried, but she wanted to go to Melbourne to look after her grandchild. And she put her mum in, and she rang when she got back and said 'I cannot believe the change of my mum! She eats food I've never been able to get her to eat, she's smiling all the time.' So they are the things that I think help encourage families to know, that it's not that scary or bad experience that they perceive it may be.

00:08:06 Kate

Kerry is Resident Liaison Coordinator. You come to the floor from the point of admissions, so helping to welcome and settle in all the guests for the duration of their stay, is that right?

00:08:14 Kerry

That's right, yep.

00:08:15 Kate

So, tell me a little bit about your role.

00:08:16 Kerry

So, I will be the first person that they meet in reception, and depending on if they've come from hospital, or home – sometimes if the resident's been in hospital, they don't do the initial tour – so I'll ask them if they're feeling up to it. I'll take them for a little brief tour, and show them the facility on the way through: show them where the café is, the salon, and then take them up to the room to settle in. I get them a tea or coffee, get them all settled, and then I sort of go through with the family, and we work out things like laundry, and we go through just a little bit of that information. And then I have a bit of a chat, a little brief sort of information about what they like, if they want to come to activities, if they would like to be invited to church, and I'll just take a little brief summary to put in our assessments. And then hand over to the clinical team, and then they'll come up and do all the medical side of things.

00:09:06 Kate

Providing information but also establishing a bit of a connection.

00:09:07 Kerry

A connection, absolutely. And it's good I've got the both roles, I do Lifestyle Assistant as well. So, I get to see them through the activities as well, and encourage them to come along.

00:09:19 Kate

Do respite residents have access to all of the facilities and activities that are in the home?

00:09:22 Kerry

Absolutely. So on day two, they'll get a welcome pack from our Lifestyle Team, and that includes the monthly program showing them all the activities that we have on, and so yes, they are invited, encouraged, to come to all of our activities. And they can access the café, the salon, everything that the permanent residents receive.

00:09:38 Kate

Now I know Lisa obviously deals with some of the concerns and questions before people come in, but do you find that there are still some common concerns that come up when you're dealing with them on that day of arrival?

00:09:55 Kerry

Some of them when they're in the room they might be worried – they'll look at the bed and say 'I'm worried about, you know, my mom or dad falling out', so I'll just say, you know, that's something you can speak to the nurse to – any concerns that you've got, speak with the clinical nurse. They ask about food, what sort of food they're going to get, but as Lisa said there's no sort of question that's not, you know we can answer and point them in the right direction if they've got any queries or concerns.

00:10:07 Kate

So, the family sometimes have questions and concerns, but what about the resident – are they usually OK or do they have some?

00:10:23 Kerry

The residents are usually OK – I mean, sometimes there might be some that don't want to be there 'cause they wanna be home – but I sort of try and draw on my personal experience with my mum. When she went into care and we did the respite, and say 'just go in have a bit of a holiday, and see what you like, see what you think of the place'. And so I sort of bring that up sometimes. And so, you know, she liked she didn't have to cook, she didn't have to do any washing, and I sort of try and put that sort of, you know, treat it like a bit of a holiday. As Lisa said we do have one particular frequent flyer who's here at the moment, and he's been here since 2021 several times, and he just loves being here. His family go on holidays, and he comes in and has, yeah, his time with us. And he loves having the support, and people to look after him.

00:11:08 Kate

And you get positive feedback from the families as well.

00:11:10 Kerry

Absolutely and they're very happy with their stay. We had a gentleman leaving today, they said 'wish we could live here'.

00:11:22 Kate

Before we finish, Lisa, if there was somebody out there that was going to listen to this episode, what do you think would be the key piece of information about respite that you'd like them to hear, what would you like them to take away?

00:11:28 Lisa

Not to be scared about it – to make that initial inquiry. You're not bound to anything; you just give us a call. We're happy to help you with information, we can post things out to you. You can also have general tours of the facility which we sort of advocate for a lot of people who are a little apprehensive. Bring mum, put her in the car, say we're going out, we're going to have a coffee in the café, we're going to have a general tour – show them the facility. And that really helps a lot of the time to ease their fears, that it's not, you know, six beds lined up. They've got lovely rooms, TV, ensuites, able to go and have coffee in the café, have their hair done, all sorts of things that I don't think they quite realise until they get there.

00:12:09 Kate

That's a great suggestion. What about you Kerry?

00:12:11 Kerry

The same. I think seeing the room gives them that visual, that they know that there's lots of room and lots of activities to do, and the fact that they're being looked after while you're away, it just takes that ease of mind I suppose you would say, ease of mind that your family member is being well looked after while you're away and you don't worry as much. Especially the 24 hour care because it's overnight as well so that takes the pressure off.

00:12:38 Kate

Absolutely. Well, sounds like you're both doing a wonderful job, thank you so much for describing it for us.

00:12:44 Lisa

You're welcome, thank you.

00:12:44 Kerry

Thank you for having us.

00:12:49 Kate

For more information on Helping Hand and their services please head to www.helpinghand.org.au or call Helping Hand directly on 1300 653 600. Please remember – you understand your needs better than anyone. Take the time to contact one of our friendly team to find out how we can help.