

TRANSCRIPT

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Carer Evanette speaking with ABC Radio Melbourne about Carer Gateway

- [Ali] This week, you may not know this, but this week is Carers Week, and given COVID, there's no better time to celebrate the work that carers do across the community. I wonder whether you are a carer? Who do you care for? And how challenging, but also rewarding is it. Of course, carers need people to support them as well. So this morning we're talking to a client of Carer Gateway. Evanette is a Melbourne carer, she cares for her 19-year-old son. Evanette, welcome to the program.

- [Evanette] Hello, hello, Ali.

- [Ali] Tell us a little bit about your son. What's his name?

- Well, I'm not going to disclose name--

- [Ali] Okay, tell us bit about it, absolutely, of course.

- [Evanette] So my son was diagnosed with the title of PDD, not otherwise specified, and he also is quite violent, he's self-harmed and it was like, I sit through psychosis episodes. And so we've been through quite a journey with the maze of the system, with the ups and downs, and of course on a personal note it's been quite a journey from being a mum to a carer. It's been quite a struggle in that aspect.

- [Ali] And I understand that one of the issues with your son was he almost fell between two different systems, particularly when it came to schools and ways he could go to school.

- [Evanette] Exactly yes, because of his awareness, he didn't really fit into the autism although he's under the autism bracket, he didn't really fit into say the special needs group nor did he fit into mainstream school. So there's a big gap in that area because you had the kids that actually can fit into society but don't fit into society. So where does the norm, how to speak, comes into that, so mainstream schools just go with what's classified as the norm. And then you've got the special needs schools, which is more for

the kids that have the mental health issues but it's more of a I don't even know how to explain it actually .

- [Allie] Well, I guess it's a more challenging. [Evanette] Yeah, more challenging. So my son didn't fit into either and both schools actually rejected placing him. So it was a huge challenge during those school years to actually find a place for him. And as a mother is a struggle to find that support as well and direction. And you tend to go into a series of doubting yourself in every decision because you see the signs where he doesn't fit into mainstream and then he doesn't fit into special needs. So you start doubting yourself because of all sorts of information you get from the outside world.

- [Ali] It also remain of course a huge responsibility on you and you mentioned at the outset, the journey of going from mum to carer. How do you juggle I mean as a carer, you had a job, you have set a goal career, friends, relationships, how do you juggle all of that?

- [Evanette] It's been extremely difficult because you grieve as a mother because you put on the mother's heart and you can't be the mother that you had thought that you envisaged, and you also look around and you see other mothers and you sort of think "Oh, how come I can't do this things and I can sort of access that and da, da, da." And seeing you have to put on the carer's heart and it's very difficult to have that fine line, because the carers heart is different to the mothers, as mothers, being a mother you want to fix things, you wanna nurture and you want to guide the way, whereas a carer you actually have to fulfill the native that well, in my case the child to manage every day life on a social and emotional and physical level. And for me I struggled badly in shifting those hearts.

- [Ali] And I guess not just shifting those hearts but when you did put your carer heart on how easy was it to become completely subservient to the caring imperative, to forget about you?

- [Evanette] That's where you become lost and isolated inside yourself. So you basically had to have... In my personal experience, I tried separating in my mind but then you constantly are struggling inside because you lose yourself, You lose who you are as a person, and you just become those two hearts. And every focus becomes around being a carer or being flipping to a mother both sides. And on a mental health issue basis, I struggled badly especially, you watch everything around you and you tend to give up yourself in doing so, but then you yearn for yourself as well. So you yearn for who you were, and who you was and who you want to be. And it was a huge struggle.

- [Ali] And so I mentioned the Carer Gateway which I understand you didn't know about for a long time. How did you find them? And what difference have they made?

- [Evanette] Oh my goodness, they have absolutely... They've been my anchor. I never thought because you tend to get into a little bubble in your own world, and although I reached out to other groups and counsellors, and you know I've been through all the different trying to reach out, but the focus was more on the child and you being the mother, not the carer. And when I was actually referred to get the Gateway through one of my son's support workers and I just mentioned the name and I thought of what I'm looking to these, because I've never heard of it. There's not anything being... they were saying that they focus for the carers. So once I called them up, my goodness my whole world, I had never heard you're on the phone that first phone call I will never forget because they made me feel as though I mattered. I mattered as a person, and they also went through a series of holistic things where they weren't just focusing on the physical side of things but also my emotional side and the struggles that I was going through, and they didn't rely to fix it, like helping fix my son it was helping me as a person.

- [Ali] And of course you can't help your son if you're in not a good place yourself.

- [Evanette] Exactly, and you know what I think that's the part that you don't understand as a carer or for me, personally, that's what I constantly battled through I felt as though that, well, this was just my role, this is what I have to do, this is what is presented to me, but then once I got in contact with Gateway, they actually spoke to me even if not mum, not carer. They spoke to me as Evanette and said, "Okay, this is your role, but we can help you through the journey. And they reached out and I have never looked back, they opened my experience like they even gave me, in my head they gave me the permission to say to myself, "You know what Eve, you actually met up, you mattering this whole care as business and you can actually have a life as well as being a carer."

- [Ali] And even for people out there who don't know about the Gateway how do they find it?

- [Evanette] I actually got referred through one of my son, but you can you can actually look them up online and I'm sure that there's their phone numbers there and just call them up. I would not hesitate calling them up one bit if you're a carer and you really are stuck in that bubble, because I had never known about it.

- [Ali] Now, Look it sounds like an amazing resource Evanette and we wish you well, and I'm very glad that you found such support for service and it's good to let other people know about it. Thank you for talking to us.

- [Evanette] Thank you Ali and I really, really hope that other carers do reach out. It's really important for them.

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About Carer Gateway: [Carer Gateway](#) is an initiative of the Federal Government that delivers new, improved and expanded services to carers. In Victoria, the Carer Gateway is provided by a consortia led by Merri Health. Consortia partners include Alfred Health, Ballarat Health Services, Barwon Health, Bendigo Health Care Group, Family Care, Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Ltd.

About Merri Health: [Merri Health](#) is a not-for-profit community health provider committed to creating and supporting healthy and connected communities in Victoria.