



6  
**carers'**  
PERSPECTIVE

Welcome and understanding

*Family and carers can feel overwhelmed, tired,  
lonely and depleted. They also need to experience  
a community of support!*

**“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.”**

Proverbs 3: 27, Holy Bible (ESV)<sup>7</sup>



**“For many carers, it is normal to feel overwhelmed and lonely at times.**

“Many of us instinctively refuse offers of help, often not quite understanding why we do so, but knowing we really could do with some assistance. It's important to stay connected to people and draw upon social support networks. Make use of the support you are offered and be willing to accept help from people around you.”<sup>8</sup>

**“Every day, one in six South Australians look after loved ones with a disability, a serious physical or mental illness, or the frail aged.”<sup>1</sup>**

There have been many changes in the disability sector recently and some families receive less assistance than they did before. Some carers have little time off from their caring role and they can experience exhaustion. Going out as a family can be a challenge. Even attending a church service can be difficult due to the pressures of getting the family ready in time. Consequently, carers and families of people living with disability may become isolated which impacts on their mental, social and spiritual health. So how can churches effectively support the carers and the family, as well as the person living with a disability?

## **CARER INCLUSION**

We asked carers and they said the best support they receive from people at church is a genuine welcome and empathic understanding for them and the person with a disability. We've include their top tips below.

# TOP TIPS FROM CARERS<sup>2,3,4</sup>

- **Please ask me questions:** Every person's experience is personal. Initiate a conversation with me and ask, 'What is life like for your family?' 'Can you tell us how we can best support you and your family to participate in our church?'
- **Make us feel welcome:** Have a person from the church follow-up after our initial contact. They can organise a time and place to meet with us and our family during the week to get to know us.
- **Develop awareness:** Provide regular training to your church to raise awareness and understanding about disability that is specific to the needs of our family member - with our consent. You can run an NDIS workshop or a CBM Luke 14 seminar (see resources).
- **Keep us connected:** Stay in touch at regular intervals with our family via phone, text, email, and cards that provide a word of encouragement. Check with us and our family member about the most helpful ways of connecting and avoid those identified as unhelpful.
- **Check in before you visit:** If you are intending to visit our family please check first with us to see if the visit is timely, suitable and wanted. Respect our family's choice, because sometimes we just can't do it.
- **Help us be part of a home group:** If our family wants to join a home fellowship group, ask if we would like to host it, as it may be easier for us.
- **Life changes quickly:** Sometimes getting to things is a challenge because life changes quickly. We may say we are coming to a church event and then we don't turn up. Don't be upset with us. Just celebrate with us when we do manage to get there! It is helpful to find out if things are OK via a text or email. It shows us we have been missed which is in itself encouraging.
- **Have an 'Inclusion Champion'<sup>5</sup> in your church:** This person can keep a disability friendly focus before the church so people know how to make a difference in our life and in our family member's life. The champion can provide awareness, ideas, resources and advocate for persons with disability and the family (see guide 2).<sup>6</sup>

- **Be understanding:** We may not have the time or capacity to engage with people at church. Don't take it personally when we can't engage with you about your recent holiday!

On the other hand, our life is always disability-focused but that doesn't mean we always want to talk about the condition or about our child. We do enjoy sharing on other topics. Be guided by us and let us direct the conversation a little.

- **Nothing about disability support is a 'one size fits all':** Just as every person is different, every disability is different, and our family's way of living may be different. Not everyone will appreciate, want or need the same support as us, so ask at regular intervals how you can best provide support to the family and the carers.

Each Sunday Jana, who is 31 with Down Syndrome, helps to serve morning tea at church. Her mother says "My daughter is welcomed and included in the life of our church. This makes our whole family feel like we belong." Jana's warmth and radiance is valued by so many in the church. "When Jana serves me, her happiness just rubs off." says one church member. Jana's family love that their daughter is seen as an asset in their church.

- **Be practical:** Ask if there is any practical support you can provide. E.g. transport, a meal, occasional respite, recreational activities, including other siblings in community activities, etc. Providing a personal treat to a carer is a lovely surprise. E.g. a voucher for a paid massage, a movie ticket, some respite care for our child, use of your accessible holiday house. If you say you will provide something, please follow through. We have enough disappointment to deal with.

- **Pray for the family:** Keep our whole family in prayer. Offer to pray with us, but please ask us how you can pray for us first. We may not be looking for our child to be cured or healed.
- **Care for the church carers:** Pastoral care volunteers support our family and many others. They need good training, opportunity for debriefing, regular genuine words of encouragement and recognition, and possibly an occasional incentive to keep them volunteering. They help us in so many ways it's important to us that they are also supported.
- **Share the role:** Sharing and rotating tasks stops volunteer burnout and it also shares the blessing. We attend a large church that has eight Sunday school leaders working with thirty children including our child and two others with special needs. Sharing the work throughout the team prevents burnout and ensures everyone understands our children's needs and the gifts they bring our church.

## RESOURCES FOR CARER SUPPORT

**Carer Gateway:** hints, tips and resources about caring and self-care. Great local service finder that links to your area, <https://www.carergateway.gov.au/>

**Carers SA:** provide publications, factsheets about the caring role and other issues relating to caring, call 1800 242 636, <https://www.carers-sa.asn.au/resources/publications/>

**Carer Support Programs from Department of Social Services:** List of government services available to carers, <https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/carers>

There are more useful carer resources at [www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections](http://www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections) with live links to the websites.

One church has buddies for people living with severe mental health disorders and these volunteers keep the person connected to community. These friendships are worthwhile, but they can be challenging in the early days. Due to the medications and the illness it may not always be a reciprocal relationship.

As a church it is important to care for your carers and this includes your volunteers. Make sure they are well prepared, supported with regular debrief, and provided with a regular word of encouragement via text, phone, or mail. Perhaps a small reward like a meal, movie ticket or a book for committed service is another nice gesture and an incentive.

**Baptist Care SA's 'Church Support Team':** We can provide your church and your volunteers with specific training on how to be an 'informed friend' to a person living with a chronic condition/disability. Additionally, we have specific training to prepare your church and your informed friends to effectively include and support a person living with mental health disorders. You can find out more at our website [www.baptistcaresa.org.au](http://www.baptistcaresa.org.au) or email us at [churchsupport-team@baptistcaresa.org.au](mailto:churchsupport-team@baptistcaresa.org.au) to discuss your specific training needs.

<sup>1</sup> Carer Support, viewed 4 March 2019, <https://carersupport.org.au/carers-and-families/>

<sup>2</sup> Clemence, R 2018, 'Caring with intent: 8 ways you and your church can make a difference to disabled people and their carers.' Christianity Today. Fri 19 Oct 2018, <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/caring-with-intent-8-ways-you-and-your-church-can-make-a-difference-to-disabled-people-and-their-carers/130730.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Jacqui Goff 2017, 'A carer's perspective – Ten ways churches can offer more support to carers', UK: Livability

<sup>4</sup> Verity Smith 2011, 'Caring for carers', UK: Living Leadership, <http://www.livingleadership.org/pastoral/caring-for-carers.html>

<sup>5</sup> Mark Arnold blog 'How inclusion champions are transforming the church', 9th June 2017, updated 9th November 2018, accessed 5/2/2019, <https://theadditionalneedsblogfather.com/>

<sup>6</sup> Video about what Inclusion Champions do, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VxFmim5ySY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VxFmim5ySY)

<sup>7</sup> The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. Text Edition: 2016, by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers

<sup>8</sup> Home Care Network Support Plan, 'Healthy End of Life Project', Melbourne: La Trobe University, p.1



130 Rose Terrace  
Wayville SA 5034

08 8273 7100  
[baptistcaresa.org.au](http://baptistcaresa.org.au)

