

## Rethinking resilience

Sometimes starting a new year can be daunting as we face all that lies ahead. The known and the unknown! That's when we need resilience.

Building personal resilience gives us strength to deal with all that life throws at us. Looking at how we managed and survived past events can help us become more resilient when managing future events.

Every time we face a crisis, deal with a disappointment, lose someone or something we love, we use our resilience to help us recover and move on with and find meaning in our lives.

What does resilience mean, especially for carers? Tim Costello said of Anne Deveson's book, *Resilience*, in which Anne talks of the loss of people she loved, that it is "compellingly full of the power of hope in the face of life's vicissitudes". Resilience will mean different things to each of us but could include:

- The ability to bounce back from stressful situations
- The ability to take on difficult challenges, and still find meaning in life
- Being able to respond positively to difficult situations
- Learning and growing through various experiences in life
- Rising above adversities
- Transforming unfavourable situations into wisdom, insight and compassion
- Endurance
- To be able to cope when things look bleak
- Being able to tap into hope
- Being able to forgive others.

Carers will recognise how hard it is to achieve all or any of these! Building supportive relationships in a carer support group helps, so does making sure you eat well, exercise and learn to relax. Believing in, and maintaining, hope is essential. Accepting what we can't change is a challenge but until we do wellbeing will be elusive.

However, in talking about resilience in this edition of *Carers News* I want to send a clear message to everyone, not just carers.

### **Let's not make encouraging resilience in others an excuse for indifference in ourselves.**

Why do I say this?

Some carers will respond to those telling them how important it is for carers to be resilient by feeling resentful and even angry. "I don't want to have to be more resilient so I can keep caring for longer!" a carer said to me. "I just need more help and the knowledge that supported accommodation is available for my daughter if I choose it. Telling me to be more resilient is like telling me the community wants me to keep struggling on my own. That they don't care. It's as if it's better for the community if I'm resilient, not better for me!"

Not all carers feel like this. But I suspect many do. So let's be careful when we talk about the importance of personal resilience so that we don't leave carers feeling that encouraging their resilience is just another form of exploitation.

At Carers NSW we know the importance of personal resilience for everyone. We also know that our society has shifted much of the responsibility for caring for people with chronic illnesses and disabilities onto families and carers. We see resilience as being essential for carers, yes, but essential for their own physical and mental wellbeing, not so they can do more and care longer! Let's make sure that when someone says "Oh, but they're resilient" it doesn't become an excuse for indifference.



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