



Carers NSW is very privileged to have an enthusiastic and talented group of people as Friends of Carers NSW. Two of our Friends, Miriam Margolyes and Julie McCrossin, gave freely and generously of their time and extraordinary professional talents to present *'What the Dickens is a Carer?'* at a lunch held by Carers NSW recently at the beautiful Queen Victoria Building Tea Room.

And what a success it was!

Miriam and Julie were marvellous, funny and moving as they explored what it meant to be a carer both in Miriam's own life and in the lives of some of Dickens' special characters. Guests included people from the

corporate world who learned what a difference flexible work practices would mean in the lives of carers; government representatives who heard first hand about the lives of carers and why policy and services are so important; people from the world of the theatre, community organisations, churches all heard what being a carer actually means and why all sectors of the community need to share the caring responsibility.

In addition to Julie and Miriam we heard from a number of carers who told their own stories. They were all moving and courageous. One young mother of two sons on the Autism Spectrum made a great impact on me (and others too I'm sure). She spoke of herself as a 'warrior mother' as she fights to get access to education for her sons. I loved that image! For years now I have spoken and written about how I dislike it when carers are called 'saints'. Why? When we sentimentalise carers we make it easy to exploit them. It's just too easy for others to say, 'I couldn't do what you do, you are very special', then leaving, with a clear conscience, the carer to get on with the job of caring.

By sentimentalising carers we make it OK to let them keep on doing what they are doing. Alone. They are portrayed as saints, or unsung heroes, rather than ordinary

people who are doing extraordinary things at huge personal cost.

But the warrior carer! They don't stay in the background showing meek acceptance, they are not going to make it easy for others to leave them unheard and unsupported. They are out there fighting. They are sharing their stories like the young father at our lunch whose 19 year old son, just a few months ago, had a life changing accident. He highlighted the 'anyone, anytime' fact of becoming a carer. And the other young mum whose son was born with a serious disability but who tells her story to raise awareness of rare genetic disorders and the needs of the families who care for these children. Warrior parents all.

Warrior carers come from all age groups, all demographics. Some are leading the fight, others join in when they can, others shout encouragement from the sidelines. Most, like me, would be surprised to think of themselves as warriors. I hope they change their minds!

Of course many carers are exhausted from the fight, many are overwhelmed with despair that the fight never seems to end, most worry about what will happen when they are gone. We support each other as we take that fight into government departments, corporations, doctors, community services – anywhere there are carers seeking support for themselves and the people they care for.

I want to thank that warrior mother for sharing her story and for giving us that strong image. We can't all be warriors all of the time but we can let everyone know we certainly are not saints to be left to get on with the job of caring while others shrug their shoulders and look the other way.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laraine".

Laraine Toms
PRESIDENT



As featured on our cover: from left: Julie McCrossin, Laraine Toms - President, Carers NSW Elena Katrakis - CEO, Carers NSW and Miriam Margolyes at the lunch held by Carers NSW at the Queen Victoria Building Tea Room.