



In this edition of Carers News we focus, as always, on carers.

This time we focus particularly on the Carers Survey and Carers Week. The Survey will inform us about what carers are needing, thinking and feeling, and Carers Week is our opportunity to celebrate carers, support carer groups, and assure carers around the state that they are uppermost in our minds as we work to bring greater recognition of carers into our communities and greater understanding of what carers contribute to our society.

Reflecting on these two important elements of our work has led me to

reflect on how we describe carers. This was brought home to me this past week when I delivered a lecture to nursing students about carers; who they are, what they do and the impact of caring on their own health. Actually, I was asked to talk about informal carers. Of course, the nursing school meant for me to talk about family and friend carers but their use of the word 'informal' really got me thinking.

I opened my lecture by asking the students what they thought of when they heard the word 'informal'. We tossed around concepts like 'not serious'; 'not hard'; 'not professional'; 'just for fun'; 'doesn't really count'; 'you don't have to try as hard as if it were something formal'; 'if something is informal it usually doesn't last long'; 'if something is informal it doesn't affect you much'.

I informed the students that none of these definitions applies to carers.

Caring is serious business. Caring really matters. Caring is a matter of life and death. Caring is tough. Caring is often 24/7. Caring can last for many years. Carers care for people they love, so they try very hard indeed to get everything right. And research has proven caring has profound impacts on carers' own health and well being. Nothing informal about that.

The word informal comes, I think, from the fact that carers don't get paid for their work unlike care workers who work in aged care facilities, deliver home care and so on. In our society only paid work seems to really matter. Only paid work gives status, recognition, opportunities. Carers aren't paid.

That means they are not entitled to superannuation, annual holidays with leave loading, bonuses or education and training opportunities. Their contribution, worth over \$40 billion dollars annually in Australia, seems not to be valued.

What other worker is denied the benefits accepted as what is right for paid, formal, workers? What other worker is denied workers' compensation for work related injuries? Carers suffer from physical injuries (all that lifting, wrangling wheel chairs and standing lifters, bending, little sleep), depression, anxiety, stress.

I know many carers never think of themselves as workers. They think of themselves as mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, wives, husbands. Many never think of or describe themselves as carers. The fact is that people can be mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, wives, husbands, and workers as they look after their cared for person, and carers. All roles are important. No one role diminishes the importance of the others. And none of these roles is informal!

Language is powerful. The choice of words we use can have a profound influence. When it comes to being, or describing, a family carer the word 'informal' is never appropriate.

My very best wishes for Carers Week.

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

Laraine Toms
President