

FROM HERE ... TO HERE

Hi there fellow clients,

I'm writing to tell you of my near 16 year association with Liberty Community Connect, which way back when I first joined was, some may recall, Nerang Community Respite Care.

Arriving on the coast, for my husband's work, we knew nobody. I set up a business making designer gowns and wedding dresses. Business grew and my clothes travelled the world, getting on social pages etc. Always busy, I met very few people outside of work. Wherever I'd lived, from Sydney to Stanthorpe, I'd always volunteered and knew I needed something else in my life besides work. At this stage I was fed up with clients who have mastered the art of looking down their noses at "those who work". One actually said that once!

It was at this time, in 2000, that I noticed a little bus, full of smiling, chatting people, emblazoned with the logo "Nerang Community Respite Care", phone 5578 1668. The seed was sown. I rang, got an interview and in no time was a volunteer. I found the service provided, not only catered for frail aged but also younger clients with a disability.

The frail aged service operated five days a week. The disability service operated on Mondays and Tuesdays only and needed volunteers. I ended up with the dubious distinction of being the first volunteer in the disability section. My nursing experience came in very handy. I had wonderful experiences and made many friends.

We went out on excursions – to clubs, the movies, fishing trips, Movie World and Sea World (they may look flat but when you are pushing a wheelchair the slight inclines were like small mountains) and even the casino to see a show or two. We got to know every park on the coast, rain, wind and shine! We also went on hosts of picnics and BBQ's. At Hinze Dam one very blustery day, a sudden huge gust of wind sent our plastic plates full of salad, awaiting BBQ snags & onion, into orbit! What a sight, all the able bodied in attendance racing around trying to intercept plates, lettuce, beetroot etc. Our lunch was a bit short that day but what a laugh!

I progressed to a paid job, one day a week, cooking for the clients with disabilities one day whilst still going out as a volunteer on another day.

The clients with disabilities rarely went on holidays due to the lack of facilities. Centre management found a holiday resort at Byron Bay which catered for clients with disabilities and the next thing we were off to Byron Bay. What a time we had. We went to the Crystal Castle - think gentle massages and crystal readings; Macadamia Castle; Ballina Club; lovely lunches; dinner at the Byron Golf Club; sightseeing and a trip to the Byron Bay Lighthouse. I did the quadriplegic care – bringing back memories of my nursing days. However pushing a wheelchair up to the lighthouse made me realise I was not as young as I used to be, nor my health as good.

On a few occasions I filled in for a Diversional Therapist with the Frail Aged, usually for one or two weeks which I really enjoyed. At this stage I started to cook 2 days a week for the Frail Aged while doing one day cooking for the Disability Clients and one day as a volunteer. I had been squeezing in my sewing business but realizing it was much more fun working at Respite, I gradually closed down except for a few favourite clients and some small jobs from respite clients and staff.

About this time we had our first Carer's Pamper Day with all types of goodies and information for carers. We catered morning tea and lunch for, from memory, around 105 carers and official guests. We have now progressed to regular carer's outings.

Soon after I took on full time cooking for the Frail Aged, which was a most enjoyable job. I have fond memories of dozens of cheesecakes, black forest cakes, apricot mango cakes, pumpkin pie, muffins and scones, (both savoury and sweet), baked dinners galore, stroganoff, goulash, schnitzel, rissoles and bolognaise. Now I have trouble deciding on what to make for dinner for two of us!

In 2005 I was diagnosed with Breast Cancer. I had an operation, 7 weeks of therapy, then a 10 day holiday in Tassie before returning to work. In 2006 I discovered the cancer therapy had done more damage to my heart and after one heart attack too many I admitted I could no longer carry on working so in June, very sadly, I retired. I had a multiple bypass operation in September 2006, which didn't improve things much. It was discovered that a large part of the apex of my heart was dead.

After some debating with myself I became a client of Respite's marvellous "In-Home" service – realising I couldn't manage without them. Needing more company, I also started to attend the frail aged service at the centre. Here we are kept informed, learn new skills, are entertained – we have some great concerts, play board games, keep our brains alive, discuss the past, the future and dissect the present. Don't forget picnics, trips to clubs, and shopping trips which are especially appreciated during Christmas shopping times.

In 2015 Nerang Community Respite Care upgraded and became Liberty Community Connect. The name has changed, the service hasn't. We still benefit from getting out and about, seeing more and different people, joining with others in community projects (our knitted rugs), and above all having lots of laughs.

I started "here" at Nerang Community Respite Care nearly 16 years ago and I'm still "here" at Liberty Community Connect.

That's from "Here to Here". I guess I've graduated from volunteer to client.

Many Thanks
Kay Groom