



FAMILY AND CARER MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM

Presented by Mydie Keegan, Carer Advocate in Taree Office

WHO WE ARE

One Door Family and Carer Mental Health Program is funded by NSW Health and provide **emotional support, information, advocacy and education to people who are supporting a family member or close friend experiencing mental illness**

Hunter New England area consists of **8 family and carer staff members in mostly solo person offices**, in part time roles covering large geographic areas

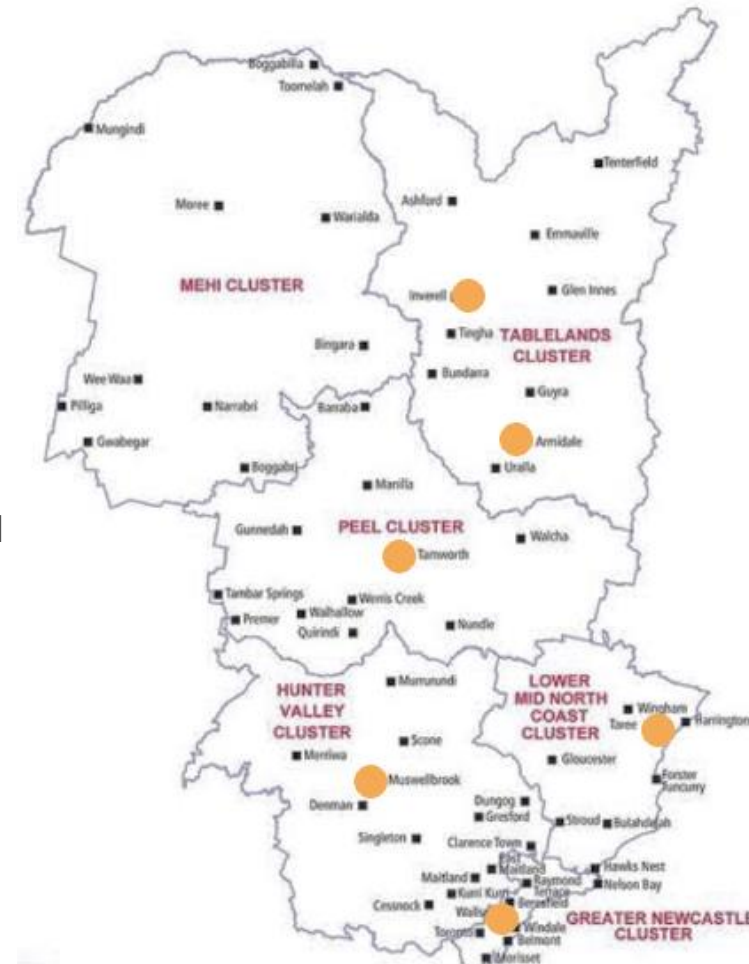
Referrals come from **mental health inpatient units and community mental health clinicians and the general community**

When Covid-19 and lockdown came, we knew that the **carers we support would face unique challenges**

Their family members would **require access to psychologists, psychiatrists and general social support due to their health conditions** and the carers would require additional assistance and support

Many of our carer were not comfortable and did not know where to get the information, hardware and apps required for **online video communication**, which many organisations were moving to during lockdown

All staff in the team **spent time supporting and training interested carers** on Zoom, Skype and other platforms in order to continue our one-to-one support as well as practice attending a Zoom group session until they were confident.



WHAT WE DID

Our team members set up **online support groups** to provide social connection, information, emotional support to isolated carers who were used to attending face to face support groups over years.

Some of the people we support do not have digital devices and these needs were met by repurposing unused tablets, phones from One Door and giving a data plan for 6 months at least

A large part of what we offer to carers across the HNE are **face-to-face educational workshops** in small groups within their town or area. We knew that it was important to continue this in some way.

Three staff members from our program were given additional hours to work on **adapting our face-to-face workshops into high quality, online versions**

During trials it was found that online workshops required a completely different kind of visual presentation so that **we continued to deliver education and information in a caring environment during a sensitive time.**

Caring for Yourself, While Caring for Others, Developing Communication Skills and Mindfulness were the first three topics to come online, to help families cope with additional pressures.

Three months later, we had the next three modules ready: **Understanding Mental Illness, Understanding Depression and Understanding Anxiety.**

Each online workshop comes with a **resource guide and printable workbook with additional exercises and information** that participants could print for themselves or ask us to print out and post to them.

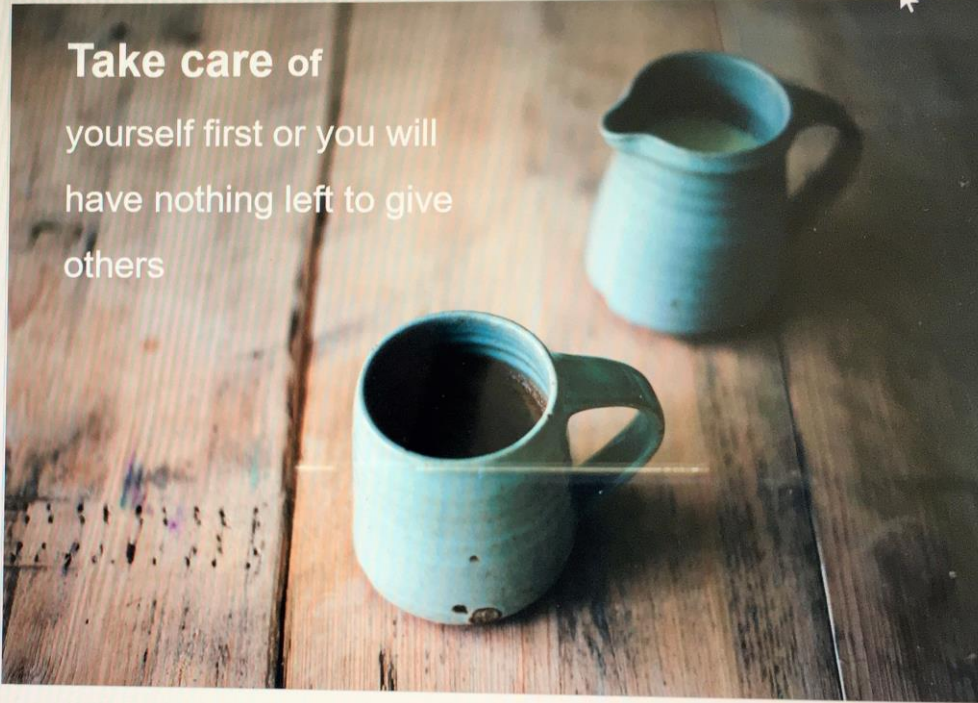
Online workshops were offered **morning, afternoon and after work in the evening with maximum of 12 participants** to be as flexible to carers' needs



SCREENSHOT OF ONLINE WORKSHOP CONTENT

Personal Stress Triggers	Helpful Activities or Thoughts
Lack of sleep	Raising earlier with relaxing activities
Large and complex challenges	I can break this down into smaller tasks
Family member is very irritable	It may be the illness. They may not be angry with me. It could be something else

Take care of yourself first or you will have nothing left to give others



Default Text

This image is a reminder, to me, to you, to everyone, to keep our cup filled with something that recharges us, so that we do have energy to give to others. In order to fill our own cup, one of the things we can do is to reach out to others for support.

As carers we can feel quite isolated in our role, but we may not be as alone as we

9 of 22 English (Australia)

OUTCOMES

One story of a rural carer:

A carer I have worked with for more than a year lived alone in a small rural town while caring for her adult son who lived down the street in a small unit, Hazel (not her real name) was greatly affected by the lockdown. She is a very active volunteer in her local community and relied on these social activities to balance her caring role at home. She would also travel by bus with a group to visit nearby towns and events.

With lockdown, Hazel found that she was becoming depressed and unmotivated about life. Due to her age and her son's disability she needed to be quite careful about any possible exposure to the virus. She reluctantly agreed accept my help in setting up Zoom on her tablet.

After about 30 minutes while talking over her landline, we were able to get it all installed and working and we were see each other and had a lovely time catching up.

She then joined our online support group and attended a few of the workshops. She enjoyed this so much that she helped train a few of her friends on Zoom and they then met weekly for cheese and bikkies online. Her ability to negotiate new technology at age 76 was very helpful in her being able to assist and support her son be able to meet his psychiatrist by video. Both Hazel and her son found there were positives along with the challenges last year and that they now felt they have learned so much. They continue to use video meetings when face to face is not possible.

Our online workshops went live in June 2020 and we have **connected to 164 workshop participants** that year.

We have been so pleased and happy with the positive feedback that we continue to receive for our online workshops, with 95% of participants saying they would recommend to others.

We have been delivering online education in 2021, with **a additional 84 participants to date, making it a total of 248 participating carers so far.**

We will continue to offer online workshops as an excellent addition to our face-to-face versions in order to continue to be flexible in meeting the needs of carers.

-new **workshop topics continue to be developed (Understanding Bipolar Disorder, Challenging Conversations and Setting Boundaries** among others) in order to meet the needs of the people we are working to support.

