



CARING FOR CARERS OF PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA PROJECT

A NEW WAY TO SUPPORT ISOLATED CARERS

The main objective of this project was to trial a new model for improving the care and support received by people with dementia, evaluate the model, and communicate the findings with the community.

The mission was to connect carers with carers. Participants were isolated carers of people with dementia. The main project activity was six interactive, facilitated videoconference sessions, co-designed with carers of people with dementia. The evaluation included online surveys looking at participant self-efficacy, quality of life, psychological distress, social isolation, and beliefs about telehealth, and videoconference interviews of perceptions about the program and technology.

Interviews with participants found the program connected carers of people with dementia with other carers of people with dementia. Many carers

conveyed connecting with others having similar care journeys, and connection and communication were often spoken about. The program also met some informational needs. Many carers felt empowered to act upon information from group interactions to contact services such as helplines, peak organisations and government agencies, and to undertake online courses. While the program showed real benefits of increased connection and meeting informational needs, it did not increase carer self-efficacy, quality of life, or mental health.



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BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

One of the visions of the project was that groups would continue to meet once the formal program sessions were complete. Nine of the 16 groups (56%) continued to meet after the conclusion of the program. This is evidence of a compelling need for social support for carers of people with dementia, the acceptability and feasibility of this technology, and the success of the program in connecting carers to meet that need.

The outcome of this project is another 'tool in the toolbox' for providers of support and information for people with dementia and their carers. The leadership and championing of strong provider organisations is needed to ensure wider adoption.

The program was co-designed with carers of people with dementia for carers of people with dementia, so the content and format are acceptable to the target group. Software for videoconferencing is readily accessible and gaining in popularity. The 'bring your own device' approach means people can continue to meet once the initial program is concluded, using their own computer, laptop, tablet or phone. Wider adoption is supported by the grounded and accessible content and technology approach.



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