About this story

This case study highlights a timely and flexible service response when circumstances change suddenly. This resulted in both the client and the carer identifying goals, building capacity and re-establishing community connections, which provided meaningful social opportunities and ongoing support.

It highlights the power of setting achievable short-term goals.

An idyllic retirement

Following retirement Bob and Heather moved to live on a one-acre block in a small rural hamlet about 30 kilometres from a larger town. They both loved gardening, and set about establishing a very productive vegetable patch. They planted native trees and shrubs to attract the birds and indulged in another favourite past time, fishing for trout in the stream that ran at the bottom of their garden.

They both joined the local golf club, walking group and a band of volunteers to maintain a local playground. Bob became an avid bushwalker and Heather discovered patchwork and craft. Both settled into the community with a feeling of belonging.

A turn for the worst

But then Heather suffered a massive stroke. Their idyllic lifestyle was turned upside down. Her speech and ability to express herself were affected, as was her ability to swallow. Her mobility was severely compromised as a result of right-sided partial paralysis. Independence became a thing of the past.

Initial response

Following a period of rehabilitation and a return home, a HACC assessment officer introduced Heather to the range of HACC services available. The expected referrals to myriad allied health specialists were made. A reassessment was scheduled for three months because a case meeting of all health professionals felt any further planning or change would place undue stress on the household.

Home and personal care were in place, with some respite so Bob could do the shopping. He was delivered meals to help ease the burden.

Allied health staff visited the house regularly – speech pathology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy – as well as district nursing, dietetics, counselling services and an access worker to assist with Centrelink applications.

A timely review

As time progressed and a routine became established the assessment officer returned to introduce Bob and Heather to ASM. Both were ready to accept some changes and embrace some positive planning for the future. Smaller, achievable goals were set up, with longer term goals positioned firmly on the horizon.
Heather’s goals

For Heather, she wanted, in the short term, to gain some strength and mobility to be able to walk to sit on the front porch. Next was being able to walk down the front steps to get in the car. Longer term, she wanted to return to her craft group to participate socially with her friends (she realised that patchwork was not a realistic goal at his time, but the benefits to her emotional wellbeing would be huge).

To help Heather achieve these goals, HACC community care staff accessed some extra training from a physiotherapist. Staff also received some direction from the speech pathologist regarding vocal exercises. They followed these newly learned programs during in-home respite sessions.

Within six months Heather had achieved both her short-term goals. Two craft group members were invited to her home to chat about Heather’s needs when returning to the group. A community care worker accompanied Heather to her craft group as part of the respite program to assist with any communication issues and to help ease Heather back into the social scene.

After some weeks other group members chose to be responsible for transporting Heather so she was able to participate as independently as possible. This was beneficial for the physical and emotional wellbeing of both Heather and Bob.

Bob’s goals

For Bob, he wanted to improve his meal preparation skills. He accepted a referral to a dietitian and took part in a ‘cooking for one’ presentation run by a HACC dietitian. Community care staff initially assisted with some planning and meal preparation, while Bob continued to have delivered meals twice per week for a time. Soon he began to feel more confident in the kitchen and started to take pride in and enjoy preparing meals.

Bob also wanted to be able to get back to playing golf weekly and bushwalking monthly. To help achieve this Heather's respite sessions were planned to coincide with golfing and bushwalking group days. The craft group Heather attended actually changed their meeting day to accommodate Bob’s need for some relaxation time. He played golf on craft day. The National Respite for Carers program funded additional respite so Bob could join a monthly bushwalking group; it also funded another four hours of respite so a community care worker could take Heather out for lunch or spend time inside with her, allowing Bob to work in his garden without needing to continually return to the house to check on Heather.

For Bob and Heather, ASM helped them regain some independence and both have continued to set more personal goals for themselves.

Reflection

When working with a couple with different needs and goals how does a service match up the response to support the couple?

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