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A daughter's remarkable fight to care for mother with Parkinson's

Lourdes Antenor · Nov 9, 2020



Merrin Ayton is a powerhouse of a woman with a lot more on her plate than most.

Based in Mount Evelyn, she is a wife, mother of two, a full-time high school teacher and primary carer to her elderly mother.

On a daily basis, she provides incredible care not only to her husband, sons and students but also looks out for mum Elaine who suffers from Parkinson's disease.

Currently 82 years old, Elaine was diagnosed over six years ago and requires daily assistance with everyday tasks, such as taking medication, travel and booking doctors' appointments. In conjunction with Parkinson's, Elaine has several other conditions which are heart and tendon-related. Staying on top of her fitness is imperative for Elaine's wellbeing, but also challenging with those conditions.

As an unpaid carer, Merrin's daily routine starts around 5:30 am. She gets up early to complete housework tasks before she leaves for her teaching job so that mum Elaine can have an easier day in her absence. As a maths and science teacher Merrin is required to spend a lot of time preparing classes

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and travelling, which can make scheduling challenging, especially when Elaine needs to attend doctor's appointments.

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However, increased restrictions over the past few months have had a big impact to Merrin's usual routine with added pressure from her role as a teacher after the implementation of remote learning, resulting in her providing extra support for her students. At the same time, taking Elaine to the doctors has proved to be a challenge with the 5km radius restrictions however some of Elaine's appointments changed to online video calls rather than in person.

Elaine also landed in the hospital for a period of time during lockdown which added extra stress on top of Merrin's already busy schedule.

Since assuming the role of primary carer for her mother, there have been some significant financial impacts on Merrin. For instance, she's had to modify her family home to cater to Elaine's special needs, including adding in extra handles in the shower and ramps around the house to ensure she stays safe and won't fall. Travel also plays a large part in this – if Merrin can't take Elaine to the doctors herself, she has to arrange a service for someone else to take her.

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Thankfully, Merrin found out about support available from the Carers Victoria that provides help and advice for carers like her. She's been connected with their network for several years. Having recognised the integral role Carers Victoria has played in her situation, Merrin now advocates for Victorian carers at a government level, as a unified representative body.

Merrin says "Carers Victoria has helped deepen the understanding of what the unpaid carer role looks like. It has been able to give us a voice, because individually we don't have the chance to make our voice heard. Having more registered members is critical because the more carers we have, the louder our voice will be.

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Despite this, Merrin insists she is more than happy to have the parent-child roles reversed and is glad to have the opportunity to care for her mother.

Merrin comments, "She's my mum and it's been really nice to repay her for all the years when she cared for us. She's always been really supportive and

wonderful with my boys over the years. She's been the taxi service for all of us and has done many pick-ups and drop-offs. My boys and mum have an amazing relationship and will talk about anything. Their close connection is something that a lot of grandparents could only wish for. It's very special."



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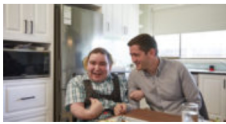
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