

## **Selection of the Project**

Dementia has no cure, is degenerative and gradually renders people incapable of tending to their own needs. Dementia is known for placing a great burden on carers, often a spouse or close relative. Pressures can be wide-ranging, involving social, psychological, physical, and economic aspects of the carer's life.

### **Purpose of the Carers' Retreat Weekend Project was to:**

- engage members in an active service project
- provide a 'time out' weekend to give respite to men caring for a partner or relative with dementia
- provide for membership participation through preparation activities, catering support and social support
- promote community awareness of Altrusa and its activities

### **Why the Club Chose this Project**

There is an Alzheimers support group, however this project provided a weekend where the focus was to be solely 'Care of the Caregiver'. Caregivers have very little time for themselves.

Previously the Club had provided respite weekends for women caring for a partner with dementia.

When members were setting goals for the 2016-2017 Altrusa year and considering what they would like to achieve, the suggestion was made that the Club provide a respite weekend for men caring for a partner or relative with dementia. Men are not seen traditionally as the nurturing person and often do not receive a lot of support or recognition.

## **Development and Implementation of the Project**

The Projects Committee discussed the feasibility of a weekend for men caregivers and what would be involved working with men. They proposed at a Business Meeting that the weekend go ahead. Members unanimously agreed.

The Projects Committee Chair liaised with the Manager of Dementia Waikato to invite up to 10 men to participate in the weekend.

The Committee planned a programme which needed to be different from what had previously been organised for women attendees.

Club members took on various tasks.

The President of the Hamilton- St Andrews Lions Club was approached to assist on the Saturday and their members generously volunteered.

A Budget was drawn up by the committee and submitted to the Board to enable sound financial planning of the weekend. Financial records from previous respite weekends provided good guidelines.

Regular email communication kept Dementia Waikato, the Lions Club and Altrusa members up to date with planning and Altrusa monthly Business Meetings allowed all members to be kept informed about the project.

## **What resources and fundraising were needed for the project?**

The costs to be covered included 2 nights accommodation, drinks on Friday night, Saturday lunch at a café, ten pin bowling, a meal at a restaurant on Saturday evening and taxi fares back to the motel. Catering costs included providing the Friday night meal and the Saturday and Sunday breakfasts.

Club members donated nibbles for the Friday night and baking in the motel over the weekend and for the goody bags to be taken home. This enabled costs to be managed.

A total amount of \$2400 was required to cover costs for the weekend. Funds were raised through a Movie Night and a Sausage Sizzle.

## **Members Participation**

17 out of 22 members (two were unwell) were involved in the project. On Friday evening husbands of four Altrusa members joined the men for drinks and nibbles. On the Saturday evening three Club members were also involved in a Club Fundraising event at Waikato Rugby.

Three members visited the motel to check out suitability and discuss arrangements with the owners. A sub-committee with catering experience and skills planned the menus for two breakfasts and an evening meal.

Members contributed approximately 110 hours through shopping, food preparation, cooking meals, baking, organizing activities, managing finances, approaching businesses, attending Friday evening, Saturday morning tea and Sunday breakfast, driving the men to the Saturday evening meal and putting together goody bags for them to take away.

18 members attended and/or sold tickets for the Movie Fundraiser Night.

**How was the Project supported by individuals and /or organizations in the community?**

The project was positively and generously supported by individuals, groups and businesses.

Knowing the purpose of the weekend and who was benefitting

- Anglesea Court Motel gave the Club a reduction on the room rate
- Classic Car Museum did not charge an entry fee
- Metropolis Restaurant gave a special rate for the Saturday evening meal
- Volare, a local café, donated \$10 vouchers for the goody bags
- Members of Hamilton - St Andrews Lions Club 'entertained' the men on Saturday
- 100 people supported the Movie Fundraiser

Dementia Waikato arranged for the men to attend the weekend and the Manager attended on the Friday evening and participated in the Saturday morning activity.

## Evaluation of the Project

The **Project Objectives** were successfully achieved.

Nine carers attended and, on their return home, nine partners were looked after by a caregiver ready to take on the challenge again; this would have also have helped the wider family.

The men were re-energised but they had also been able to discuss and share with others in similar situations and as a result did not feel so isolated.

Comments in the emails included in Appendix A reveal the depth of the men's appreciation at being given time to be themselves and to switch off from their 24 hour responsibility.

Another positive outcome of the weekend has been that some of the men have continued to meet for support. They have shared a lunch where they also took their partners.

**Community awareness of the work of Altrusa** was achieved with Hamilton-St Andrews Lions and the extended networks of Dementia Waikato. Businesses gave their support when they became aware of the Altrusa project and who was supported.

This project allowed for **Member Participation** - approximately 88% of the Club gave of their skills and time and across the weekend.

Seeing the value and benefit of the weekend for the men was hugely satisfying for members and this weekend is being held again for men in 2018.

## **Appendix A - Emails received from the men following the weekend**

*Dear Lorraine and all of you amazing women!*

*How do we say enough thanks for all you have given to the gents who came for the retreat weekend? You will all know that look when a man is at the point of tears, but doesn't let it flow - well I saw that more than once in the hours I spent with the guys on Friday over afternoon tea and dinner. Your food was delicious and the nutrition from it certainly fed bodies, but I think even more especially, it fed souls. You have made a huge contribution to these men in creating time and context for them to chew over their stories and experiences, to have companionship over meals and activities, and to have a break from the constant attention life at home requires. It is powerful nurturing that you have given.*

*Two men in particular seemed to overcome a hurdle of feeling isolated and uncertain in how to keep going; their stoicism diminished as they realised that there are more avenues of support and awiii than they had realised. One had been soldiering on trying to cling to a normality that was ever-changing and no longer anything like normal. He's keen to know more now, and take up support for his role. The care sector is typically a feminised space so for these gents the retreat was a rare opportunity to have a bit of 'bloke time' with others who know what life is like while supporting a person with dementia.*

*You have dropped a pebble in a pond here, and the ripples will keep having a quiet influence through the lives of all these men and the women with dementia whom they support. I give our thanks on behalf of all our staff and our Trustees, for the genuine kindness that Altrusa Hamilton embodies.*

*In humble respect, Howard*

*Manager, Dementia Waikato.*

*Good afternoon Madam President*

*I would like to express my and the other eight participants sincere thanks to everyone at Altrusa for a most enjoyable and memorable weekend you hosted for the male carers of Dementia Waikato.*

*For many of us it would have been the first time where we have been totally pampered - not having the responsibility of a loved one (although missed), meals to prepare and chores to do. We were literally waited upon hand and mouth.*

*Also many thanks to the St. Andrews chapter of the Lions Club for taking such good care of us on the Saturday.*

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*I was one of the attendees at the Retreat that Altrusa Hamilton sponsored and organised last weekend in Hamilton.*

*I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to your organisation and especially the team of wonderful ladies who planned and delivered this very enjoyable weekend for the 9 attendees.*

*As I am sure you will understand none of us often have the opportunity of having a break such as this. I think all the attendees are dedicated carers for their respective wives/partners etc and it wasn't until we all reflected at the weekend that we had never had such a break like this since we took up the carer role.*

*It is humbling to think that a group like yours has seen the opportunity to provide this and it will be a pleasant time to reflect on in time to come.*

*The weekend gave us all the very important time to share experiences and advice and we plan to meet up again from time to time in the future.*

*I haven't got all the names and contact details of the team of ladies who looked after us so well (right down to the 'goody bags' of home baking they sent us home with) so I would appreciate you passing on to them my heartfelt thanks.*

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