Ready and Able this spring

Welcome to Ready and Able.

Ready and Able is here to celebrate the determination and abilities of people with disability. We believe that everyone deserves a chance to reach their potential and to get on enjoying the things they love doing most. We also see that for many people with disability, their carers play a huge role in helping them to achieve their goals. Ready and Able is here to support them also. Our feature story is about how Elaine did not let her stroke and rare Foreign Accent Syndrome define who she is and where she wants to be. Elaine’s story is so unique, it was recently featured on the Channel 7 Sunday Night Report. We place the spotlight on the Carrington Cafe, a get together for people with Younger Onset Dementia. We’ve also highlighted some of our Groups and Programs available to help people harness their abilities, just like Elaine.

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  ‘Most people don’t survive what I did’

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Elaine’s Story:
‘Most people don’t survive what I did’
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“My stroke took everything from me, but it didn’t take away my determination”

Elaine, a specialist adviser in dementia care, was 59 when she fell to her bathroom floor and lay unable to move. Being a brain and health expert, Elaine immediately knew that she was having a stroke. She lay for eight excruciating hours on the cold tiles, until her husband Bill returned from work. For Elaine, this was only the beginning of her journey. “At that moment I lost everything... I lost all movement, my voice and my independence. I could no longer read, write or count.”

As it turned out, Elaine had suffered a heart attack that day followed by a double stroke. The trauma left Elaine unable to walk and speak. She was told she had Aphasia, a condition causing a person to have a limited ability to communicate, often following a head injury or stroke.
When she eventually started talking, Elaine was then diagnosed with a rare condition known as Foreign Accent Syndrome. Elaine not only had to learn how to find her words again as a result of the Aphasia, but when she did, she found herself speaking in a thick European accent despite being a sixth generation Australian. Elaine’s physical limitations coupled with her communication difficulties meant she had a long road ahead if she wanted to regain her sense of self again.

“The stroke took everything from me, but it didn’t take away my determination,” she exclaims.

This phenomenal determination together with her prior knowledge of the brain’s ability to repair, allowed Elaine to rebuild her physical, emotional and social health. Since her stroke, Elaine has been in numerous hospitals, in a wheelchair for four years and has suffered periods of depression. She also participated in a rehabilitation program for two years.

It can be said that she has since overcome the impossible.

Elaine has worked tirelessly on her rehabilitation, with some support from the team at Carrington Health. She visits weekly to attend our Physio Intro to Balance and Strength class, as well as receiving individual Physiotherapy. She attends Speech Therapy sessions and is a regular at our Speech Therapy group program. When asked how she would describe the team she sees at Carrington Health, Elaine exclaims, “Oh, I love them.”

“They are more than just clinicians, they are my friends. They care about me and I always leave feeling better about myself.”

Elaine now spends every day determined to retrain her voice, brain and body. Her commitment to get moving again combined with her sessions with Physiotherapist Elizabeth, mean that today Elaine walks with the assistance of a walking frame or stick. She has also gained around 70% of her mobility back in her arms.

Learning to communicate again has been a gradual process and involved a lot of hard work with Janette, her Speech Therapist. Elaine still forms each word with great concentration and effort. Her voice box is permanently damaged and while she can now complete entire sentences, it is not with a voice that she remembers. “All I want is to have my own voice back, to sound like I once did.”

Despite facing the loss of her independence and identity, Elaine believes she has a lot to live for. The only time she seems visibly upset about her situation, is when she considers her grandchildren and great grandchildren. With tears in her eyes she explains how her rehabilitation efforts have mainly been for them.

“I’m doing it for them,” she says of her grandchildren. “I want to see them grow up.”

Elaine’s unique condition and commitment to recovery are not her only defining features. First of all, there is that pink hair of hers.
When asked she says, ‘Oh, I love to be colourful with my clothes and hair, to bring some brightness into life’.

Interestingly, Elaine has always been a huge advocate for the elderly and people with disability. For 25 years Elaine dedicated her life to people living with dementia, after completing a degree in diversional therapy. She also was one of the first to introduce Tai Chi as a mode of therapy for people with dementia and mental health conditions.

“I taught people the right way to care for those who might be vulnerable,” says Elaine. “I’d say, treat them like your aunty or your grandmother.”

Elaine returns to the subject of her grandchildren and her great grandchildren.

“I tell my grandchildren now, when you see someone with a disability, smile and wave” says Elaine. “They are people like you and don’t need to be treated differently”.

Her eyes light up as she explains this and it is evident that her passion for others is as strong as ever, despite her own adversity. With everything she has been through, she’s grateful she can be present for her family.

“Most people don’t survive what I did, it is my determination that has got me through”.

We are here for people to enjoy better and longer lives. Find out more about our NDIS services and other health and well being programs by getting in touch with us today on 9890 2220 or info@carringtonhealth.org.au
A cuppa and a chat at the Carrington Café

‘Since I’ve started going to the café, it has been really good meeting other people and hearing their stories... hearing their life stories I mean’, states Arthur, who has been a café regular since 2016 and is pictured above with his wife.

It’s a Tuesday morning and a group of people are sharing morning tea at a local community venue. They are talking about how freezing Melbourne winter has been this year. An energetic couple arrive with Molly, their black guide dog in training, sparking up lots of conversation and laughter amongst the group. A younger woman eagerly shares about her recent overseas adventures, while another couple join the group with a huge container of fresh baked scones.

What makes this catch up so unique is that the people who attend either have younger onset dementia, or are here to support their family member, partner or friend. The term younger onset dementia is used to describe any form of dementia diagnosed in people under the age of 65. What makes younger onset dementia so unique is that people with the condition can be fit, healthy, working full time and/or raising a family at the time.
they are diagnosed. This makes for a complex time for individuals, their families and carers. Everyone is suddenly faced with some big changes as to how they do life together, as well as a sense of loss or grief for how things used to be.

The Carrington Café is not a café in the literal sense. It is a social get together for people living with younger onset dementia and their family or friends.

The café runs on the third Tuesday of every month, includes hot drinks, morning tea and sometimes members bring in a plate to share. Although the people who attend have booked in advance, the café does not run any structured activities. Instead, it is a chance to get out into the community and have a cuppa and a chat with some people who may be in a similar situation to yours.

‘Sometimes we talk about the day to day, sometimes people share what they have been going through. We just let conversations run naturally’, says Diedre, who has been running the Carrington Café for 3 years now.

‘We are here for them when they need us, often that means connecting people to other support services to help them live well with younger onset dementia’.

There are an estimated 27,247 Australians with younger onset dementia, with that figure expected to rise. It can be an unexpected diagnosis for people living with the condition as the word ‘dementia’ is normally associated with the elderly.

The Carrington Café acknowledges that people with younger onset dementia may be facing different circumstances or challenges. The café allows for people living with this unique condition to find a group of peers. It also provides an opportunity to break up the weekly routine and relax in an atmosphere with no expectation. As the demands on carers and people with younger onset dementia would at times mount up, the Carrington Café is here to provide a space simply for them.

_The Carrington Café is held on the third Tuesday of every month, with a contribution of $5 per person._

_Bookings are essential and can be made by contacting Diedre on 03 8843 2215 or devans@carringtonhealth.org.au_
Groups and Programs

Good Life

A supported exercise program led by our Physio team, designed to help people build strength and keep active.

9am & 10am
Monday, Wednesday & Friday

Men’s Shed

A social get together where participants work on projects in a supportive, workshop environment.

10am to 3pm –
Monday, Thursday & Friday

Balance and Strength Intro

A program especially designed for those needing a little extra support. The Physio Intro to Balance & Strength class is here to help people build their strength, balance and mobility.

1pm - Monday
Groups and Programs

For bookings and enquiries
T(03) 9890 2220
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