

Access vital services now

SMITHTON woman Kathryn is encouraging the state's palliative carers to seek help after receiving a new lease on life after finding support during the most challenging year of her life.

The 56-year-old has been the primary carer of her husband Micheal for the past four years while silently battling her own health issues.

"Nine years ago we moved to Tasmania from NSW due to my health complications. We lived in Zeehan in a disability unit until the housing unit fell through," Kathryn said.

"We then relocated to Smithton about three years ago."

"We are both struggling, but especially Micheal. We left all our friends and families in NSW hoping for a more comfortable life, but that hasn't happened," Kathryn said.

"My husband was born with a hole in his heart and, as he has aged, his heart function has slowly decreased," she said.

"He is dying of heart failure and his organs and brain are slowly shutting down."

Because of Micheal's health complications, Kathryn cannot leave him alone for more than an hour.

"I feel isolated from the outside world and I was on the brink of just giving up," she said.

Kathryn struggled to navigate all the services and found they were falling through the gaps.

"Because we are young, we can't access the aged care help and, due to other reasons, we don't qualify for services like NDIS," Kathryn said.

"I had no idea where to turn until I eventually found Care2Serve."

Care2Serve, the service arm of Carers Tasmania, is the local Tasmanian provider of carer support services through Carer Gateway, an Australian Government initiative developed to provide carers with advice and information and a range of tailored support packages.

Since finding Carer Gateway, Kathryn has been using in-home respite, helping her regain some much-needed downtime for herself.

"Care2Serve organises a



CARE: Kathryn has been the primary carer of her husband Micheal for the past four years, while also dealing with her own health issues. **PHOTO: Supplied**

person to come fortnightly to care for Micheal so that I can do the shopping without having to rush around," she said.

"It has given me a completely new lease on life."

"Having the care support worker at home with Micheal while I shop means I can relax and just breathe, and I can't thank Carer Gateway enough for that," she said.

Through Carer Gateway, carers can now access vital services, including coordinated support in residential aged care facilities, connection with other carers, advice

and information on planning for the future, tailored support packages, and free access to counselling.

Kathryn is also using Carer Gateway's free coaching program to help her process the situation.

"I talk to Jo, and she is absolutely brilliant," Kathryn said.

"She has helped me to break down all my barriers and face up to everything that is happening in my life."

"Carer Gateway has been excellent in understanding our individual circumstances and my role as a carer."

"The first time I spoke with them, I broke down because I did not think they would recognise me as a carer because I am also on the disability pension."

"But they understood everything we were going through."

"Before contacting Carer Gateway, I never classed myself as a carer; I just classed myself as a wife that loves her husband. I realise I am both."

Carer Gateway has since connected Kathryn with the not-for-profit organisation Hospice, and they are in the process of discussing the

end-of-life arrangements for Micheal.

Kathryn urges other palliative carers to reach out to Carer Gateway for support and not face challenging times alone.

Care2Serve CEO David Brennan said he was well versed in the challenges that came with taking on a carer role.

"It is a huge shock to get the news that someone you love is dying, and suddenly you find yourself wearing the carer's hat too."

"I know this first hand [from] when my mum was diagnosed with cancer," he said.

"Accessing support as early as possible in the journey helps to navigate the maze of health and financial supports and to build resilience and maintain wellbeing."

"The Carer Gateway is the best starting point. You can access information and advice, counselling, connection with other carers and much-needed respite and in-home support."

Find help at carergateway.gov.au or call 1800 422 737 (and press 1 at the menu).

When your heart is full of grief there's not a lot of room in your head for the demands of being a carer.



We're here to support you.

When caring for someone there is much to think about and do. A carer often looks after everything for a loved one such as personal care, medications, finances and appointments, as well as dealing with the normal demands of everyday life. It can be overwhelming.

But you're not alone and there is assistance available to help you manage.

Find out how we can support you.

carergateway.gov.au Phone 1800 422 737 (press 1)

