

KINSHIP CARERS WEEK VICTORIA 2020

221 VOUCHERS AWARDED TO KINSHIP CARERS

Quotes from carers:

'What a big surprise, I honestly did not expect it. I never won anything in my life.'

'My gift card prize has arrived. It enabled us to gather a few little treats, much to the girls' delight, that are not usually included in the budget.'

'Thank you once again, it was truly appreciated.'

'Thank you so much for the generous gift voucher. I am looking forward to some shopping.'

1. A record number of personal contacts were made

During Kinship Carers Week extraordinary efforts were made to establish personal contact with as many kinship carers as possible using telecommunications and email connections.

Records were kept of the responses of the 310 carers who were telephoned by Kinship Carers Victoria. When asked about their overall wellbeing and if they were experiencing any particular stresses related to COVID-19, the overwhelming majority of carers (97% or 303 out of 310) said that they were coping well enough.

2. The overall attitude of the kinship carers was stoical

Overall, the kinship carers contacted were in remarkably good spirits. This is not to downplay the difficulties of coping with COVID-19 restrictions but merely to say that carers were putting a brave face on the circumstances in which we all find ourselves. There were, however, a few exceptions, with several carers experiencing financial difficulties.

3. Problems mentioned

Carers mentioned problems, categorised under four themes:

- Coping with home schooling was a cause of some stress for 1.6 % (5 out of 310) of the carers.
- Financial difficulties were reported by 3.5% (11 out of 310).
- A few (5 out of 310) mentioned that teenage children in their care were restless.
- The difficulty of working from home with children in the background was mentioned by 2.2% (7 out of 310).

KCV believes that the kinship carers exercised restraint when asked to talk about how they were coping and to list the problems they were facing. A good many of them refused to complain, saying that it was inappropriate to do so in the face of such widespread community distress.

4. Coping strategies

Whilst KCV expected to uncover an overall story of kinship carers coping, their general attitudes were more positive than expected. The carers showed resilience in the way they approached the COVID-19 crisis. They drew on their own childhood habits to keep children entertained and undertook new hobbies in order to keep themselves well balanced. The strategies they used to cope were practical and cost effective. A total of 260 coping strategies were identified.

4.1. Relying on a philosophical approach

Whilst a number of carers declined to answer the question about the strategies they used for coping, 23 carers preferred to offer general sage advice that had worked for them, rather than offering specific strategies. Most popular was the advice of having a mindset of acceptance of situations that cannot be changed, taking each day as it comes and focusing on the greater good.

4.2. Making the best of indoors

Of the 260 coping strategies employed by carers, 171 were indoor activities. These encapsulated a wide variety of activities, ranging from intellectually stimulating ones such as reading, writing, working or studying, and doing puzzles, through to relaxation activities such as meditation, breathing exercises and yoga. A significant number of indoor strategies involved maintaining connections with friends or family through whatever means were available.

4.3. Making the most of the great outdoors

Time spent outdoors has been limited due to lockdown restrictions. Nevertheless, 89 out of 260 (34.2%) responses related to carers being engaged in activities outdoors, with the most popular activities being walking and gardening.

4.4. Arts crafts/games

Another important group of coping strategies employed was that of engaging in activities which provided mental stimulation. These activities accounted for 35.8% (93 of 260) of responses. These activities could be further divided into those which provided a creative outlet, such as arts and crafts, cooking, and gardening, and those which encouraged critical thinking, such as reading, writing and doing puzzles.

4.5. Work/study-related activities

These essential activities were undertaken by respondents, but were not employed solely as coping strategies. Nevertheless, these activities provided a focal point to add structure to carers' days. It is interesting that so many carers listed study as a coping strategy. For one respondent, this equated to further education for themselves, but for the majority it was involvement in home schooling for the children.

5. Vouchers distributed

KCV distributed vouchers to carers. A total of 221 vouchers were distributed with a total value of \$18,000.

400 complementary copies of the wellbeing magazine were surface mailed to carer households
190 \$20 vouchers were distributed via the wellbeing magazine
33 \$20 vouchers were awarded to those carers who also participated in a local support group zoom meeting
5 copies of the book <i>The Two Most Important Days</i> valued at \$30 were distributed via the wellbeing magazine
12 carers were awarded \$20 vouchers according to the order in which they registered for KCW (every 25th registrant)
56 vouchers of varying value from \$150 to \$50 were awarded to carers whose names were drawn in statewide draw
13 carers were awarded vouchers of \$50 each because KCV thought they needed extra support