



On Your Side

By David Shilovsky

Tracey Spicer, multiple Walkley Award-winning journalist, author, broadcaster and North Curl Curl local, reveals why she jumped at the chance to be Your Side's newest ambassador.

Tracey Spicer is no stranger to taking care of loved ones. Together with family, she cared for her mother, who battled pancreatic cancer. When her grandfather required more care in his final few years, Tracey was there too.

Now, with her father turning 80 this year, he will require more support in the home.

"I know from personal experience how complex the aged care system is in Australia," Tracey tells *North Shore Living*.

Her many years working in the media showed her she can have a real effect on people's lives thanks to the platform she has.

"One of the many privileges of working in the media is the ability to talk, write and advocate about social justice issues," she says.

"So many people – particularly the elderly – feel they don't have a voice. As journalists, it's incumbent upon us to use our platforms to showcase the voices of others."

The responsibility of caring for those

in need often falls on unpaid carers, who Tracey refers to as "Australia's unsung heroes".

"We need to give carers as much support as we can," she continues.

"Navigating the aged care system in this country is extremely complex.

"If I can do anything to help simplify this process – through information, education and conversation – that would be a privilege."

Having had some not-so-great experiences when looking for the right care for her father and grandfather, she knows all about the struggles family members – often adult children – have when their loved ones begin to need a little more help.

Tracey is glad there are so many care providers in Australia, but having missed out on quality time with her grandfather while stuck on the phone, believes the system could do with some streamlining at the same time.

"I remember that around half the time I spent with grandad in those last years was on hold on the phone!" Tracey laments.

"Then there's the complexity of the websites, with little connection between the organisations. And I haven't even started on the hoops you have to jump through to increase the level of care as your loved one ages.

"It's quite a maze."

It can be quite difficult to make the decision on whether a family member begins to receive care at home or enters a care facility.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but Tracey believes there are many benefits to staying in your own home as long as possible – a sense of retaining one's independence, as well as not having any restrictions on who can visit and when being key.

"There are so many advantages, including independence, the comfort of familiar surroundings, individualised care, and – crucially – ease of visitation by family," she insists.

"When we get older, sometimes we feel like our independence is being eroded.

"For example, when we're no longer able to drive. Being able to make choices about where we live and what we do is so good for our mental health, because it's empowering."

Asked what it is about Your Side that made her want to become an ambassador, Tracey speaks about how the organisation is providing quality care for a range of people in the community.

"There's also a wonderful array of social support, which is incredibly important for people who would otherwise feel isolated.

"My darling dad lives with depression and – while he's managing it well – he can become agoraphobic.

"There's everything from exercise classes to book clubs, movie days and trivia nights." **NL**

For more information on Your Side phone 1300 134 332, email customercare@yourside.org.au or visit yourside.org.au.