60 is the new 40: Career change at 62 years young

Aged care worker, Karen Gerrard is set to make a difference in the Cairns community after a mid-life career change led her to doing what she loves.

After holidaying in Cairns, and visiting for conferences and forums over the last 20 years, the Community Business Partner at Envigor Home Care made a permanent move to the region in August 2016 as it ‘always felt like home’ and ‘a great community to work in’.

“Once I had completed my Aged Care and Disability Care Certificates, I made the move to Cairns to settle down in what I felt was the perfect retirement spot, before stumbling upon the opportunity to work at Envigor,” said Karen.

“I’m 63 years old and probably living proof that 60 is the new 40. We’re living longer and with better health, nutrition and treatments so retirement for me doesn’t mean giving up paid work but continuing to move forward, looking for opportunities along the way that may lead me on yet another road or two before my body tells me to stop!”

Karen lived and worked in Alice Springs for 17 years prior to making the sea change move to Queensland, firstly to the central region, and now the far north.

Previously living and working in Rockhampton for the last 10 years as a care co-ordinator for a local church organisation, Karen became disheartened, and frustrated, with the work overload and poor organisational structure.

Karen soon realised that aged care was the direction she wanted to pursue, following her prior experience with cancer support, disability services, child care and her own personal experience with her late mother.

“My mother received home care for the last 10 years of her life, so I had first-hand experience of the benefits to client and family of this type of aged care support,” said Karen.

Karen gained her Diploma of Education in 1973, and then spent two years teaching in country South Australia in an Area School (Years 1 to 12 on the same site), and two years as a secondary school teacher.

“When my then husband was transferred back to the country, I became involved in child care, way back in 1978, and was instrumental in gaining federal funding for a purpose-built centre adjacent to a kindergarten, becoming the first community-based child care centre manager for the town,” said Karen.

Reflecting on her new career, Karen feels there is no such thing as an average day in aged care. Her day may consist of making phone calls to book pop-up stall venues, co-ordinating volunteers, visiting prospective clients and their families, working on the next edition of the Envigor newsletter or even delivering a presentation at a services club.

“I love the variety of the workload, the clients and families that I meet, and the sense of accomplishment when I’m thanked for the support we put in place,” said Karen.

With Envigor’s low case management and administration fees, Karen is particularly interested in talking to people across the Cairns region who feel they need more from their Home Care Package.

“Many people just aren’t getting the care they deserve and with hitting 45% of the value of a person’s Home Care Package, I’m on a mission to make sure consumers have a choice,” said Karen.

For those considering a career change, Karen believes aged care offers a whole new range of opportunities at all levels from domestic
assistance, nursing, allied health, transport right through to management levels.

“I’m happy with my career change as it gives me the opportunity to ensure our elders are well, safe and supported to remain active in their own homes,” said Karen.

“We will all be elders one day so having appropriate flexible, transparent services available in local communities will benefit everyone.”

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