



CatholicCare NT

Embodying our Mission and Values through Aged Care Advocacy

One Person Can Make A Difference

by Sr Leone Wittmack rsc

Recently, I watched the movie **The Power of One** based on Bryce Courtenay's book of the same name. I am sure that we all know the story which tells of the cost of one young white English boy, who from an early age as an orphan was bullied because he was not white South African or from a German background, but who grew to believe in and fight for the cause against apartheid in South Africa. By being determined to continue the fight no matter the cost to himself, and in some cases his friends who walked with him, he finally became the victor and was rewarded by the acceptance and love of the black South African people and the beginnings of the breakdown of apartheid. It shows the power of just one person to make a difference.

Below is the story of one of our staff. If there is a story that will demonstrate what it means to walk with people who have no voice, to go the extra mile and not to count the cost- **this is it!** It is an example of true Advocacy - standing up for people who are vulnerable and marginalised.

One of the programs that we at CatholicCare NT are very proud of is our Aged Care Advocacy Program, which operates out of Alice Springs. It is not very well known and it operates with minimal fuss, however it does an extraordinary work. We have only one worker for the program, Belinda Staniforth. Sadly, Belinda is the only Aged Care Advocate in Central Australia. She is strongly supported by Jim Wright, our Regional Manager for our Alice Spring region.

We have only to listen to the radio, watch the television or be aware of the current Royal Commission into Aged Care to know that the spotlight has been on Aged Care Services for some time now. It has highlighted the facts about the inadequate and poor care that our older and vulnerable Australians are experiencing, not to mention those who might come to live in this country from overseas.

The following story related by **Craig Gear, the CEO of OPAN** in his praise of the work of CatholicCare NT through Belinda and supported by Jim, reflects the tenacity, strength, endurance, commitment and courage that is required to stand in solidarity with people who have no voice and is a modern day version of the Power of One.

Craig relates:

"I wanted to take a minute to acknowledge the amazing work of our Aged Care Advocates. In particular, I want to recognise Belinda from CatholicCare NT. Her tenacity, endurance and commitment to older people...

Belinda called me back in August, flagging that Mrs S had been in hospital waiting discharge since May - at that time I think close to 100 days ready for discharge. The family were distraught and their health was declining too. They were worried that she may be deported and asked what options, if any, might be available. She was here from a pacific island. Her family who were effectively now homeless, on a pension, but as Mrs S was not an Aussie she didn't have Medicare. All involved had been told she wasn't able to receive aged care.

Belinda worked with OPAN, behind the scenes, to safely work out options. She didn't have to.... Belinda could have said it was out of scope. As the sole Aged Care Advocate in Central Australia she had every right to say so much more was on her plate.

We kept going and used the relationships established with senior departmental stakeholders through the Navigators project, to work out what was myth, and what was possible for Mrs S (and how she could remain with family in Australia).



Despite issues with the acute care system, aged care beds, no GP and no Medicare... On Friday, Belinda successfully got Mrs S into residential care - where she desperately wanted to be. The photos (shared with permission) show Belinda, the happy family and a very happy Mrs S.

That's 221 days post her discharge ready date. Unacceptable, but finally with free access to aged care. Without Belinda it would never have occurred."

A smiling Belinda with Mrs S

In the words of her Daughter:

“Thankyou very much Belinda and to everyone involved in trying to help my mother...

It has been a long, long, arduous and rocky road for all the family, and we thank God for all the involvement of everybody.

My sister and I, we cannot thank you enough for everything that has been done for our mother in understanding our situations, health, emotional stress and financial situation . Mother and us wish you all a happy blessed and a prosperous New year - God bless 🙏❤️.”



Mrs S with her daughter

Mary Anne Hunt who is the Chairperson of OPAN wrote to Judy Davis and commended Belinda, Jim and CatholicCare NT, for the extraordinary work we are doing for older people in the NT. She writes:

“This is an awesome example of how our advocates and our advocacy services can make an extraordinary difference for older people accessing aged and community care services. I found myself overwhelmed with joy and gratitude whilst reading the email below, which is a great reminder to me why we do what we do at Board level. Please pass on my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to Belinda and your team. Thank you with much gratitude and appreciation.”

The work of Belinda as an Aged Care Advocate mirrors our values of Respect, Honesty, Courage, Connection and Fairness. It shows that by having respect for someone who is marginalised and vulnerable, someone who is not acceptable by the social systems of our country, because of who they are and where they come from, that it takes courage to stand and walk side by side with that person and in this case her family, going the extra mile, even though it might interfere with the plans set out for the day, so that justice and fairness is finally achieved. This could only happen by showing integrity and connecting with a number of agencies over a long period of time, so that justice and equity is finally achieved.

A point of reflection for us at CatholicCare NT might be that if we wanted to examine how we can contribute more in the Aged Care space, we may be able to

push Governments for further funding to support more Aged Care Advocates like Belinda. This would be a way of providing more care and hope to people at the end stages of their lives as well advocating for the Advocates.

In the words of Bryce Courtenay, *The Power of One*:

“I learned that in each of us there burns a flame of independence that must never be allowed to go out. That as long as it exists within us we cannot be destroyed.”

and

“The power of one was the courage to remain separate, to think through the truth and not be beguiled by convention or the plausible arguments of those who expect to maintain power, whatever the cost.”

Thanks Belinda and may you continue to exercise **The Power of One** as you walk side by side with the vulnerable people of our country.

Leone Wittmack rsc
General Manager Mission & Culture
CatholicCare NT