



Daddy's Day Care; Respite at Anam Cara House Geelong.

### **Simon's Story...**

Rachelle gave up work to care for her husband, Simon Smith, who has a life threatening heart condition. Support from Anam Cara Geelong makes a huge difference.

"The stress for me started after Simon's first heart operation. He was only forty three. My best mate had gone down and I had a household to run. I couldn't leave the house without fear that something would happen to Simon,' said Rachelle.

"Our son, Elijah, was just three at the time. Thankfully there's a cartoon with Florence the Ambulance as a hero and I could explain to him why ambulance officers were often here to take Daddy to hospital."

Simon has a defibrillator and pacemaker in his chest. "If that goes off I can't be touched, as there could be residual shocks. I can't have a transplant, as this disease would affect it.

"I went from being an active husband to doing nothing. You can imagine the extra activity and responsibility that Rachelle had to take on," Simon said.

"We've been to hell and back," said Rachelle.

"The grief and loss kicked in for me. I missed the old Simon, the active man in the house. I missed the happy, uplifting communication because our discussions became focused on his heart.

"After a while it started to bring me down, and I started to get sick. I'm his wife, but also his carer, and I couldn't do this alone. So our household needed help," she said.



*Welcome respite;*

"Anam Cara Geelong - 'Daddy's day care', as Elijah calls it - has made all the difference to us," said Rachelle.

Erika Pickering, Diane Wright and others started Anam Cara Geelong in 2007. Along with a small staff, they provide day and overnight respite, and end of life care for their guests who have a life limiting illness. The presence of a registered nurse means Simon is in good hands.

“Once Simon started coming here a couple of days a week, things settled down. I had a day that I could get my hair done, see girlfriends, or even catch up on a bit of sleep,” said Rachelle.

Late last year Simon stayed at Anam Cara for 10 days while Rachelle and Elijah went home to Perth.

*Focus on enjoying today;*

“The focus here is not on what’s wrong with you, but on how to enjoy today,” said Simon. “It has brought the cheekiness back for me. There’s a lot of banter and fun.

“I enjoy gardening and craft activities with Erika and other volunteers. I make things here for Elijah and he does the same for me at kindy. We get more of that quality father-son time, which is hard to get normally. I also help out with new activities using modern technologies, and that gives me a sense of purpose.

“I felt honoured when they asked if I would like them to make a print of my hand. This is something all guests can do, and the handprints are displayed in our activities room. Each handprint honours the diverse lives we’ve lived and I enjoyed recalling my many interests while creating my handprint with Erika.”

“It’s the little things here. They give us so much love. Anam Cara means ‘soul friends’, and you couldn’t get a more appropriate name for what happens here,” Simon said.



“I don’t feel like I’m in palliative care. I used to think it was just for the end of life but now I know it is helpful much earlier in a life-limiting illness. I don’t

intend to go to heaven any time soon. But I know that as long as I’m still breathing, there are opportunities to be doing things and enjoying the life that I’ve got,” said Simon.

**“The focus here is not on what’s wrong with you, but on how to enjoy today,”**

*Story Courtesy of Palliative Care Vic  
<https://www.pallcarevic.asn.au/>*