

# Corina Macpherson

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## Overview

I enrolled in CHC33015 Certificate III in Individual Support, with FSG Australia as the RTO.

I commenced my course on 24.4.2017 and completed my qualification on 8.12.2017.

I am employed with Aquamarine Personalised In Home Care as a Care Worker.

My main reason for choosing this industry was my life experience with my daughter Livvy, who I cared for, until she passed away on her 24th birthday.

Livvy was diagnosed with Unmanageable Epilepsy, and as her mum, and sole carer, I did my best to keep her happy and safe.

I never contemplated returning to school, as an adult, as I never thought that Livvy would pass away, and that studying would be an option.

Gaining my qualification, has meant that I am able to use my experience with my daughter, to help other families and carers.

I understand the impact of being a carer- the loneliness, the isolation, the feeling of being lost, and the need for support. So I can relate to the carers I see everyday at work.

I also understand the physical and emotional needs of the clients I walk alongside.

My work enables me to continue the love I have for my daughter, Livvy.

## Criterion 1: Challenges and barriers to accessing and participating in vocational education and training

I'm the mum of 3 beautiful daughters, one of whom passed away in 2015, on her 24th birthday. Livvy was diagnosed with epilepsy at 18 months. Livvy's epilepsy was unmanageable, which means that it could not be controlled by medication. Despite seeing many doctors and specialists, in Australia, as well as in the USA, Livvy's epilepsy "knew no routine", and I was constantly watching, listening and waiting for her next seizure, some of which were so violent that the injuries she suffered, meant staying in the intensive care unit at hospital.

Caring for Livvy was a full time job in itself. When in Primary School, some days I would visit her 4 times, to help shower and change her- as she often wet herself during a seizure. Livvy was "medically released from school in grades 11 and 12, which meant she no longer needed to attend school, and was with me instead.

Livvy could not be left alone. Although there were times when Livvy moved in with a friend, and later on with her boyfriend, she returned home often.

The nature of Livvy's epilepsy, meant that she could fall and have a seizure at any time. On one occasion, Livvy had a seizure while in the bath. The force of her seizure meant that she knocked the built in soap shelf out of the wall. Another time, Livvy became stuck between the toilet and the wall, causing severe injuries to her face.

While Livvy's seizures were always unpredictable and distressing, during the 5 years before she passed away, they became particularly ferocious. I was constantly on edge. Livvy's seizures would start with the "epilepsy cry" a horrible scream, then Livvy's body would catapult across the room, and she would suffer a grand mal seizure. I was constantly living on the edge, worrying that Livvy would burn herself, or drown, or suffer painful injuries.

I was 51 when Livvy passed away, and for the first time ever I sought help and support for myself. I had never thought about asking for help before. I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. I felt lost. I was grieving for my daughter, and I did not know what to do with myself, or my time.

I had never thought about studying before. It wasn't an option that I had ever contemplated, as I thought I would always be caring for Livvy.

## **Criterion 2: What or who helped you to overcome these barriers?**

I completed my qualification with FSG Australia.

FSG Australia supported me from the time I came along to an information session about the course, right through to our graduation ceremony.

I remember when I first started my course- I wasn't frightened, but I was anxious and nervous. Being in a learning environment and studying was new to me. It had been quite a few years since I had left school. I wasn't sure if I could do it, if I could cope, if I would be able to answer the questions, if I would get the answers right. But before long, the classroom became familiar and comfortable, and I got to know the other students, as well as our trainers.

During the placement part of my course, I met many staff and customers.

I completed my course by attending workshops, completing assessment books during these classes, and completing a skills and knowledge workbooks at home.

I attended Study Days with FSG, along with other students. During these study days, a trainer was always available to discuss any questions or concerns we had about our "homework books".

I was also required to complete a 200hr placement at various locations, both with FSG as well as with an organisation providing in home support.

I felt comfortable approaching my trainers about any worries and concerns I had along the way.

There was a time, during my course, that I thought about leaving. It was during my placement, when I was walking alongside a customer who had epilepsy. And she reminded me so much of Livvy and what Livvy went through during her life. I talked to my trainers, and it was decided that, if I wanted to continue on with my studies, it may be better to complete my placement elsewhere.

I made the decision to continue on with my course, and I am so glad that I did.

## **Criterion 3: How has vocational education and training benefited you?**

I could have, very easily, fallen in a heap after Livvy passed away. My life was turned upside down, and everything I had known for the past 24 years changed. I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, and for the first time ever, sought help and support for myself. Up until then, I had coped on my own.

In essence, VET gave me the opportunity to gain a qualification in an industry that I had already been a part of for many many years, as a mother and carer.

My life with Livvy, gave me an understanding and appreciation of the impact that caring has on the carer- the isolation, loneliness, sleepless nights, searching for answers that often aren't there, endless visits to doctors and specialists, the desperate need for support, and the fact that many carers are unaware of what help is available. VET training gave me the qualification and skills I needed, to help carers that are in the same position as I was. I already understand and relate to what they are going through, and the support they need, because of my own experience with Livvy. And I can use this, together with my qualification, to help the people I walk alongside each and every day at work.

I currently work as a Care Worker for elderly people and people with disabilities. Each day is different and I love the variety in my work. Some of the support I provide at work is social support, shopping, cooking and light housework. At the end of each day, I go home feeling worthy and appreciated, and know that I have made a positive difference in the lives of the clients I support.

The job I now have, as a result of my training and qualification, has enabled me to continue the love I had for Livvy, in my work.

I am so lucky to work in an industry that I am so passionate about.

For me, working isn't just about getting paid. It's about so much more than money. It is about being able to confidently and passionately support other carers and the people they care for.

My self-esteem, confidence and belief in myself has improved so much since I first started studying.

I am truly proud of myself, and what I have achieved. And I know how proud my family and friends are of me.

#### Criterion 4: Goals for the future and contribution to your community

I am extremely happy and passionate about the contribution I make to my community each and every day, as a Care Worker with people who are elderly, and people who have disabilities.

I believe that my life with my daughter Livvy, as her mum and carer, has given me the insight and compassion I need to relate to the clients and carers I work with now.

I understand and appreciate the impact that caring has on the carer- the isolation, loneliness, sleepless nights, searching for answers that often aren't there, endless visits to doctors and specialists, the desperate need for support, and the fact that many carers are unaware of what help is available.

This experience, in conjunction with my qualification, means that I can be an excellent support and advocate for others, who are now in the role that I used to be in, with Livvy.

Without my qualification, I would not be working in an industry that I feel so passionate about.

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