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Opening the doors on the hidden life of carers

A new book highlighting the work, dedication, challenges and joys faced by carers was launched today by Rev Dorothy McRae-McMahon. Produced by Holdsworth Community Centre & Services in Woollahra, ***Opening the doors: the hidden life of carers*** is a touching and inspiring book which we hope will be a valuable resource to other carers and increase community recognition of the importance of the carers' role.

"Being a carer is far more than the usual 'motherly' or 'fatherly' responsibilities we expect to assume for our children. This one for whom we care will sometimes never grow up and gradually assume responsibilities or sometimes is going to deteriorate before our eyes as we watch over her or him each day." said Rev McRae-McMahon. *"These stories remind us of who we could be if we really cherish the vulnerable among us. This is about the very nature of our society. Neglecting those who struggle to survive in our midst does not only damage those concerned. It also determines who we become as a people – those who go on as though the suffering of others is of no concern to us, or those who are really live in the land of 'the fair go'."*

As part of its work with carers Holdsworth has been running writing workshops in which each person has been writing the story of his or her personal experiences as a carer. The group includes many who are the parents of children with a wide range of intellectual disabilities, including very new carers with young babies, as well as the spouses and children of people living with memory loss. The writing has been a source of great joy and catharsis for many of our people as they have so much to tell and share with others. Tapping into their creative sides and working with professional writers has helped participants to acknowledge the journey they have taken as carers and to confront with enthusiasm the wide range of emotions every carer has to deal with.

Excerpts from some of the stories

Your today code has been cracked; "aahh" means spectacles, "curtain" means fruit juice. This sunny day is off to a good start with signs that we might get out for a needed change of scenery. Despite your ethereal agreeable smile I will wait, Mum, until you have eaten your third slice of toast before I slowly reveal my intention. . . . I'll give you a hair style and do your face up just for fun " This triggers your long term happy memories of getting "dolloed up" in the 1920s when you would model in the old Mark Foy's store window by day and at night, with their ballroom dance band, you would sing a song or two. Now you are "dolloed up" your smile broadens, motivated by a touch of make up on your natural pale skin, lipstick applied evenly, a little hair spray that have all lifted your good spirits. (Coleen)

Over the following months we came to see our boy as himself rather than as a diagnosis or a proscribed future. As we have come to know him he has brought limitless joy to our hearts. At times we have to remind ourselves that he has a disability. Certainly the joys of parenthood cannot have been less than for any other couple. We have watched him grow, develop and blossom into the very centre of our universe. (Paul)

One day, the colour drained out of my life altogether. Six years ago my aquamarine son was diagnosed with Autism and became black and white. The prognosis was bleak, grey, lifeless Quite by accident at the age of 4, my son discovered Rainbows. This was a beautiful discovery in so many ways. Firstly, the colours of the rainbow are always in the same format: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet He painted rainbow after rainbow, we read stories about rainbows, ate rainbow food and immersed ourselves in the colours. For me it seemed he was giving me back the colours one by one. (Sarah)

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Review copies of the book are available to the media on request
On public sale for \$15 (inc postage) by contacting info@holdsworth.org.au or by calling (02) 9302 3600
Also available for \$12 if collected from the Centre or from Gleebooks

