

ARGENT, MS R.

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (17:38): In my first opportunity to address this house I bring to the house's attention the story of a woman in my electorate who has devoted her life to family and community service. It is also the story of a community group that has provided the opportunity for friendship, recreation, support and information to the frail aged and younger disabled in the greater Gawler community. This woman is Ms Rita Argent. The community group is the Gawler Care and Share Group Inc.

The Gawler Care and Share Group is the life work of Rita, who has been the coordinator of the group since it was first established 33 years ago in March 1977. Rita will retire from the position shortly, aged 78 years. Rita, with some other volunteers, established the group as they saw a need for elderly in the area who lived in their own homes (many widowed) to have a place where they could meet with other people to have fun, fellowship and support. A former member for Light (Hon. Bruce Eastick) was also instrumental in establishing the group alongside Rita. Many other volunteers also assisted, namely, Rita Summerton, Mrs Higgins, Audrey Ahrens, Joy Connors, Josie Shinkel, Monica Brown, Betty Alison and Mary Harnett.

For the first nine years, the group was run solely by volunteers and later gained some government assistance through a range of programs. The group's success is also due to the wonderful support given by service clubs, church groups, local doctors, the Meals on Wheels Association, the health service, council officers and a number of other volunteers. The group has been assisted through the kind and generous support of the Catholic Women's League and the Red Cross, which has provided many meals for the group.

On the first day the group met in March 1977, they charged 30 cents per session; 33 years later they only charge \$3 per session. The funds generated from the memberships help provide support for the various programs they run. The group had 30 members at its first meeting, growing to over 100 over the years, but with the advent of more in-home care the membership has stabilised at about 50 to 60.

The group meets in the Gawler Elderly Centre, which was just a tin shed in the early days, without the modern conveniences now available. The centre underwent a major upgrade in the early eighties when Gil Harnett was mayor. Over the years the group has provided over 120,000 meals and opportunities for friendship for hundreds of local people.

While the group provides a great service to its members, the real story behind its success is the commitment and devotion of Rita to serve others. It is no accident that Rita came to this role. Prior to establishing the group, Rita was caring for her parents and, in particular, her mother, who passed away prior to her setting up the group.

It was this experience as a carer for her parents that motivated Rita to establish the group. Trained as a nurse and midwife, Rita gave up her career to help support and care for her parents. It has been a life of caring and sharing with and for others. She spent some of her working life employed at the local Hutchinson Hospital, the place where she entered the world 22 years earlier.

Her service to the community was acknowledged by the town of Gawler when she was awarded the 1985 Australia Day Citizen of the Year Award for Gawler. To understand this commitment you need to have a better understanding of Rita's life. Born on 6 August 1931 at the Hutchinson Hospital, Gawler, to her commission agent father, Walter, and housewife mum, Vera, Rita grew up in Wasleys (north of Gawler). She has a younger brother, Cedric, who became a detective and worked alongside the well known King O'Malley.

Born at the height of the Depression, the farming community was hit hard and, as a consequence, commissions dried up and her father sought work in other areas. Rita attended Wasleys Primary School and Riverton for her high school education. The trips to Riverton were by train.

While the family lived in Wasleys they spent a great deal of time in Gawler, the nearest major centre. The family would go to Gawler for shopping, the annual show, doctors, etc. More importantly, as Rita would put it, 'Wasleys didn't have a frock shop.' The family's experience in Wasleys has been documented in the recently published book by Nancy Wood, *Wasleys As It Was*.

In 1956, the family moved to Gawler where her dad commenced work with the E&WS. In 1974, Rita interrupted her nursing career to provide care for her parents, and in 1977 she delivered her labour of love, the Gawler Care and Share Group. When asked about her work with the group she humbly

responds, 'I have been cared for by them' and that she 'wouldn't change anything' had she had her life over again. She states that she is 'very grateful for family and friends'. I wish to pay tribute to the life and work of Rita Argent.