



MUM (Mother's Day 2025)

The value of 'mum'.

On the scrabble board an 'm' is worth three points and a 'u' – one, which gives the word mum a value of seven. Such a small word and such a small value.

Recently I had the opportunity to read a colleagues master's thesis. Her research centered on the question:

What are the learning and support needs of Aotearoa/New Zealand family carers managing Flexible Funding on behalf of an adult family-member with a learning (intellectual) disability?

Underneath all of the important findings and recommendations stand four women - four mums. As I read through the analysis, findings, and recommendations I was left with an overwhelming sense that one of the deepest truths of the research was the breadth and depth of the role that these women hold in the lives of their sons. And I would like to state for the record that it is an unquantifiable number, despite what the scrabble board says.

Is it even possible to quantify mum?

As a male working with individuals and families, it is no great revelation that the vast majority of the support requirements of individuals are met by women in general and by mothers specifically. This appears to be true across time, culture and geography and remains true today in Aotearoa New Zealand (this is not a statement of whether this is right, simply an observation).

In addition to the unquantifiable aspects of life mothers juggle on the daily, the research shines a spotlight on the lives of women who, in this instance, parent sons with learning (intellectual) disability. These mothers have also taken on a role we understand to be an 'IF Agent' on behalf of their sons. Anyone who has or holds the role of *an Agent* in the life of another will know that this is a significant undertaking.

Even being very close to many families who manage a flexible budget on behalf of their son or daughter it is easy to underestimate the additional time, energy, and capacity this requires. Anita's research provides an opportunity for those interested to look inside, as it were, to some of the complexities. I often share an analogy in training workshops for direct support staff around the idea of being close but still not fully being able to comprehend what one is a participant in. It goes like this:

I have been privileged to be at the birth of our three children. At each birth I was as close to the action as humanly possible. I could see, hear, touch and interact in the birth which culminated in my hands being the first to hold our new child..... but, if for a moment, I was to suggest to my beloved that I knew what she went through.....well, let's just say, I'm not that unaware!

Another aspect that is not often explicitly acknowledged is when a son or daughter, for whatever reason, is unable to provide us with snippets of thanks, of acknowledgement, of gratitude. Of course, mothers do not do what they do for acknowledgment, but a little thanks is sometimes nice ha. So, on



this Mother's Day, on this day where we recognise and acknowledge our mothers (or mother figures) in our community, please accept these few words as some tiny form of thanks.

Your son or daughter may never be able to articulate their appreciation for all you do and who you are, but if they could I imagine they would say something like.....

Dear Mum

Where to begin? Mum it is simply impossible for me to put my gratitude into words. Not only for all that you have and continue to do for me, but more importantly for who you are. I have no idea how you do it all. I have no idea how you juggle everything. I have no idea how you keep on going, but you just do.

Mum I seldom (if ever) ask how you are or how things are for you. I am sorry.

What do you think about in the wee small hours of the night? What do you think about when the pressures of life really set in and stay set in for a long time? I can't imagine the tsunami of emotions and feelings that flood through you. It really is impossible for me to know how life is for you Mum.

There must be times when you feel so lonely, so exhausted, so worried that you are not sure what to do next. There must be times when you have fought so hard for what I need and been beaten black and blue by the systems that are meant to be there to help us. There must be times when the heaviness of all of this is overwhelming. How do you do it all Mum?

It is likely that I'll never have the words or ability to convey to you how much you mean to me and there are likely times when through my actions I may even be actively causing you pain and distress. You are like a warrior who has battled long and hard and even though others may not see your wounds, I know they are there.

Mum, all I can really say is thank you. Thank you for never giving up on me. Thank you for always doing your best for me. Thank you for loving me and always being there. Thank you

Mum, I love you.

Read the full research findings.

Follow this link to find Anita Nicholls full research | <https://hdl.handle.net/10092/108279>

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