



**CONNECTORS:** Carolyn Jones from Leschenault, Paul Edwards from Australind and Heather Wade from Bunbury. **Picture:** Supplied.

# Reducing the social isolation for families

THE Compassionate Community Connector program is a pilot project which sees volunteers supporting people living with advanced life limiting illnesses/palliative care needs.

The pilot has seen 23 people across the South West trained and helping families feel less socially isolated.

But more people are needed to put their hand up to do something positive in the community.

Perron Institute Research Chair in Palliative Care UWA and South West Compassionate Communities Network Chair Samr Aoun

said their research found 50 percent of families that were referred to the program were living alone.

She said some of the benefits seen included improvement in social connectedness between families and their social networks, reduction in social isolation, better coping with daily activities.

"It fills the gaps in social and practical support that formal services cannot, particularly for people who live alone, and those who are socially isolated in more rural communities," Professor Aoun said.

Connectors have said the

focus on mutual support and community development was what made the program important.

Professor Aoun said connectors felt there were clear benefits observed for people who were dying and their families.

"Connectors also encouraged people to become involved in the program because of the social benefits," she said.

"The connectors themselves have also benefited from the program talking positively about the impact it has had on them and how rewarding it was for them."

Feedback from families have included how the positive relationship formed with the Connector turned into ongoing friendship.

"Many families talked about the positive impact in terms of reducing social isolation which was apparent for both patients and their family carers," Professor Aoun said.

"Family carers talked about the positives for their family member (the patient) of having someone regularly for a chat as well as the benefit to themselves when these caring helpers enabled them to have some time off.

"One of the biggest initial hurdles for families was feeling comfortable asking for help and receiving help from neighbours and community members who they didn't know well."

To find out more and to express your interest, you are welcome to attend the presentation by Professor Aoun 'Improving soical connect-edness in our community - we are all in this together'. The presentation will be on August 7 from 11.30 at the City of Bunbury function room. To RSVP, visit [swcom-comnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:swcom-comnetwork@gmail.com) or phone 0483 802 915