

Cornerstone

VMCH

Dementia
support
a speciality

A place to
call home

Navigating
the NDIS

Edition Four

“
Hope opens new
horizons, making us
capable of dreaming
what is not even
imaginable.”

- Pope Francis

Publishing Details

Cornerstone magazine features articles, commentary and information about the services provided by to our clients, community and partners.

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Front Page:

Wayne is a client with our Disability Services support team.

VMCH

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A note from VMCH Chairman, Julien....



Welcome to the fourth edition of Cornerstone. Much has changed since we last connected. We've found ourselves in the grip of an unrelenting pandemic which has turned our lives upside down and tested us in ways we might not have imagined.

But as I write today, I am hopeful these challenging months are nearing their end, and we can move into a brighter phase of life, where hugging those dear to us and moving about our lives more freely will again become commonplace.

As you'll read in this edition, we are such a diverse organisation and we face many challenges in supporting marginalised people across various areas, whether it's through affordable housing, dementia care, or supporting young people with acquired brain injuries. Our great work continues to expand but it only does so because of the high calibre of people we have working within the organisation, or as volunteers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested our ability to provide the best of care in difficult circumstances. However, we have risen to the challenge. It has been amazing to see our Board, staff and volunteers, particularly those at the coalface, go above and beyond for the people we support. You'll read some inspiring stories about how they've accomplished this within these pages. I would also like to acknowledge the support and encouragement we have received from Archbishop Peter A. Comensoli and the Archdiocese executive through prayers, personal contact and letters.

Our first feature story focusses on the vital need to offer secure and appropriate homes to older people who are at risk of homelessness, including our plans to build 40 new affordable homes in Ivanhoe in 2021.

The second feature highlights just how much our organisation has adapted to ensure that our residents, clients and their families can remain connected during this time. Our In-Touch Program is going from strength to strength and we are already seeing some wonderful outcomes from creating and maintaining those vital connections.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Cornerstone – it is a true reflection of the compassion and expertise our incredible organisation is known for, and how we are making such a positive difference to the lives of so many, in a time that is filled with uncertainty.

Christmas may look a little different to all of us this year. But it is my hope and prayer that you are able to spend it in a way that is meaningful to you, and with those you love.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julien', written in a cursive style.

Julien O'Connell AO
VMCH Chairman

**Have a question
for us? Email:**
cornerstone@
vmch.com.au

A place to call home



Resident Ita Holland feels independent and comfortable thanks to her home

“Who knows, tomorrow it could be any one of us that may need a lifeline. We all deserve a place to call home.”

The need for secure, affordable housing has never been more important. VMCH has provided Affordable Homes for people aged 55 and over who are at risk of homelessness for decades.

We've found homes for pensioners who were forced to choose between buying medication or paying private rent, those who've suffered elder abuse at the hands of a relative, and people who've languished for more than 10 years on public housing waiting lists.

Offering affordable housing aligns with VMCH's steadfast commitment to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, particularly the belief that every human being should live a dignified life.

During Homelessness Week in August, we joined the Everybody's Home campaign to help shine a light on the desperate need for more affordable and social housing, particularly for older people.

Without access to subsidised rent through our affordable housing, resident Ita Holland (pictured) fears where she'd be. "I wouldn't have been able to afford living in a private house on a pension," Ita said.

“Rents are exorbitant if you're a widow like me. I'd probably be living in public housing, which is very hard to get. VMCH is excellent. Here, I'm independent and I'm comfortable.”

We currently supply affordable homes to more than 400 older people, and offer practical and emotional support to around 100 Victorians through our Assistance with Care and Housing program.

“While helpful, we realise this is just a drop in the ocean for what is needed,” VMCH Board Chairman Julien O'Connell AO said.

“We are proud to be a campaign partner of Everybody's Home; calling for the implementation of a National Housing Strategy to build another 500,000 social and affordable homes by 2026.”

Julien added as an agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, VMCH was grateful to have the support of Archbishop Peter A. Comensoli, who said:

“For those times when life's circumstances are beyond our control; when we feel unsafe where we live; when there is instability with rental choices; when we need growing daily support; or when our families and livelihoods fall apart – we are vulnerable and in need. Being able to offer ways for a safe and dignified life is a critical factor in meeting those needs, and to respecting and recognising our personhood in Jesus Christ.”

VMCH invests in housing project

During Homelessness Week, we announced the green light for 40 new affordable homes in Ivanhoe.

“We are conscious that, on some occasions, older people who have found themselves in difficult circumstances are the forgotten members of our society. As such, we are pleased to be able to support, care and recognise these people as valuable individuals who deserve to be treated with the utmost dignity and provided with a safe and secure place to call home,” said VMCH Board Chairman Julien O’Connell AO.

Project work is expected to begin early next year.



Congratulations to VMCH Board Chairman Julien O’Connell AO (pictured above) who was in June awarded an Officer of the Order (AO) for service to community health in the aged care sector and to higher education. Julien described the award as a great honour and recognition of the extraordinary work of VMCH, an organisation he is proud to be a part of. It compliments his Order of Australia (AM) in 2013.

Worrying statistics



Pensioners and people with disability have been left behind with no increase to their JobKeeper payments

*Anglicare Australia’s Rental Affordability Snapshot 2020

0.3% of rentals

(192 out of 76,962) are affordable for a person on the Disability Support Pension.

0.8% of rentals

(625 out of 76,962) are affordable for a person on the Age Pension.

It's vital to remain in touch

Currently, due to the need to ensure the health and wellbeing of those in our care, all of our aged care residences throughout Victoria are under restricted visitation requirements.

“Our residents living with dementia have good and bad days with technology. The picture of their loved one on a screen, is an oddity to them. They look around and behind the phone to try and see the back of their loved one!”

Now more than ever, the opportunity to stay connected is extremely important to those feeling isolated, wanting to see their families, and wanting to socialise.

We are very proud of our new **In-Touch program**, which we have fast-tracked in response to COVID-19. In collaboration with YourLink, an organisation focussed on the digital inclusion of Australian seniors, we provided our residences with a number of smart devices and training for our Lifestyle and Pastoral Care staff, to help them use technology with residents

We developed the In-Touch program to help all residents keep connected to their family and friends, and our generous donors helped us to achieve our goal of bringing technology to the fingertips of our residents – many of whom have never used a device before.

Pastoral Care Practitioner, Sr Kate Mannes says despite the challenges, residents are using technology to distract themselves and keep their minds active.

“One of the great things has been the video calls to link residents with their loved ones. Many residents have a mobile phone, or a fixed phone in their room. This has been a wonderful way to connect with family. It might not replace the physical presence, but it helps greatly. Technology, while confusing for the older generation, has been so useful in helping them to cope,” Sr. Kate said.





“The husband of one of our residents told me his greatest fears were that he’d never see his wife again, and that she, due to her dementia, wouldn’t remember him because he wasn’t regularly there to see her. For this couple, I have encouraged the video calls”.

As the In-Touch program continues to be rolled out, our residents will learn how to:

- Create and share photo albums
- Share messages with family and friends
- Access and use email and social media
- Use programs supporting memory function and dexterity
- Access fun games, videos and music.

After seeing the success of the program, and the health and wellbeing benefits for our residents, we have implemented a second initiative, for at-home aged care clients who need extra support during the pandemic.

Our Technology at Home program involves providing clients with a Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) with a device through their funding. YourLink then facilitates ‘tea and technology’ online group training sessions, catered towards the participants age and skill level.

One of our CHSP clients, Antoinetta (pictured above), has been receiving care in her home from VMCH for the last couple of years. She was identified as a suitable candidate for the new program, due to her dementia and lack of social interaction.

Antoinetta’s daughter, and carer, Anna says her mum uses her iPad regularly, whether its listening to Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin, watching Italian movies, or receiving emails from her children and grandchildren – she is embracing all that technology has to offer.

“Mum is always asking for her iPad now. She is a real doer, and she will physically involve herself. She is able to see people, and listen to music every day, it gives her something to do. She is excited whenever she has an email, and while I don’t know how much the concept clicks, she loves to receive them. Her grandson sent a video of him playing some music and that was wonderful, she got to see him play.

“She is really, really happy and so very proud. It is amazing. There’s nothing like the personal touch, but this means she is not alone, it’s wonderful.”

Comforting care

Death and dying. It's a subject that nobody wants to talk about, and we often avoid discussing it, but it is a necessary conversation to have.

Dying well, on your terms, and good palliative care is a major focus of our organisation. We are looking forward to providing a sanctuary for those who are dying, and their families, at our new comfort care centre, O'Neill House, in Prahran.

Construction has commenced on our unique 22-bed home-like centre for people to experience the best available support at their end of life. We are in the process of repurposing our non-operational O'Neill Aged Care Residence, which we expect to open in early 2021.

VMCH CEO Sonya Smart, says the concept of 'comfort care' is important to the organisation, as it will deliver excellence in end of life care.

"O'Neill House will provide palliative support for people in their last months of life, and we will be working with Cabrini Health and the community.

"A comfort care centre offers people options and ensures that at this important time of their life, they can be supported in a homelike environment. We can then care for their physical and spiritual wellbeing, as well as ensuring their family and loved ones can spend valuable, quality time together.

"Our aim is to ease the burden for our people and their families. We also want to reduce the need for emergency department presentations and deaths during transfers to and from services."

Sonya says the physical environment of O'Neill House will be developed in order to have a profound and positive effect on the quality of life.

"The importance of the surrounds and feelings of comfort has an enormous bearing on the person dying as well as on their family, friends and carers," she says.

"All spaces will be designed to be homely, relaxed and welcoming. It will be well lit, especially through natural light. The bedrooms will be designed to enable families and friends to stay overnight, either within the resident's room or in a dedicated family apartment.

"The environment will provide for privacy as well as areas to support intimate family interactions, larger gatherings and the sharing of meals.

"This building will be a sanctuary for the person dying and their family and friends."



Monthly care packs make a difference

While our social support and respite programs have had to close due to COVID, we have ensured we are still providing valuable services to our clients.

We created a Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) Flexible Response Team, to ensure we could continue to support those who were identified as being vulnerable due to social isolation and health concerns.

This team has been making phone calls to our domestic assistance, personal care and flexible respite clients, as well as our affordable homes clients to check in and see how they are doing.

We developed a COVID emergency response tool which outlined how they are feeling and what action they would like to take if they were to become unwell. So far over 1,000 calls have been made.

We have received great feedback about these from our clients!

"Just wanted to say thank you for the delivery of a care package to us, the thought is very much appreciated. Keep up the good work, as it surely helps for all those in home-iso to know that someone is thinking of us."

"I just wanted to drop you a line to say thank you for the two gift packs that have been delivered to my wife recently. They have been a lovely surprise and very much appreciated."

To ensure our clients are also being kept busy while in isolation, our team has been sharing the love by delivering monthly hampers including items such as puzzles, arts and crafts and a mix of edible goodies.



VMCH Celebration Week

In early August we celebrated the fantastic work of our staff and volunteers, significant years of service milestones, and our five-year anniversary as VMCH, following the merge of Villa Maria and Catholic Homes. During Celebration Week 2020, we shared personal stories from staff and volunteers across all of our services and joined together (albeit virtually) to reflect on the amazing things that have been achieved over the past five years. During Celebration Week we also introduced the VMCH prayer, reflecting our organisational values and the aspirations we have for the work we do.



Happy birthday Margaret!

“Age is just a number” might sound cliché, but it’s a way of life for Margaret Prowse.

VMCH’s oldest donor turned 100 on July 13 and attributes a healthy diet, exercise and completing puzzles to her enviable milestone. July was also a special month for Margaret, with the birth of her first great-grandchild.

“I don’t feel old,” Margaret says. “I certainly might not be running around the block anymore but I keep well with plenty of veggies and fruit.” Margaret took up jogging at 84 and was still playing tennis at 94.

Margaret, who lives independently at home, has been supporting VMCH as a regular donor for over 30 years, and was involved with our specialist school, St Paul’s College, 50 years ago. “The organisation has grown so much over the years and people don’t realise how much you do; helping people in all age brackets.”

Margaret served for four years in the Australian Army and enjoyed a career as a Comptometrist (a person trained to operate a comptometer, which was a key-driven mechanical calculator), before settling down to raise her four children with late husband George.

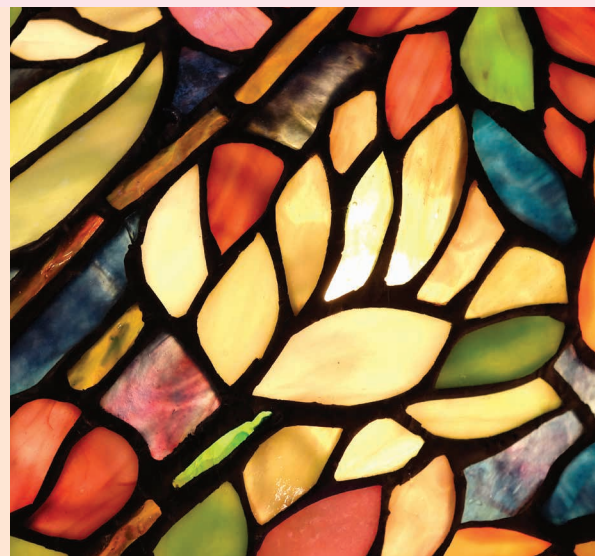
Although, disappointingly, COVID-19 restrictions spoiled planned birthday celebrations, Margaret put things into perspective. “It breaks your heart what some people are going through. If you can just enjoy each day as it comes with the people you love, that’s the main thing.”

The VMCH Prayer

God of infinite compassion and hospitality, we ask a blessing on our collaboration and on all those within our care. May the spaces we create be genuinely welcoming and places of authentic belonging, so that those in need, especially the marginalised and disadvantaged, find a home among us.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.



Interesting statistics

7 in 10 Australians aged 65 years and over considered they had good, very good or excellent health.



AIHW, Older Australia at a glance, 2018

164,000

Australians had autism in 2015.

AIHW, Older Australia at a glance, 2018

More than 13%

773,400

of Victorians are carers.

They include 217,800 Victorians who are identified as primary carers. They play the **key role** in caring and assist with communication, mobility and self-care.

www.carersvictoria.org.au



Austin Street turns 10

In August, our Austin Street residence celebrated its 10-year anniversary! When it opened back in August 2010, Austin Street was the only home of its kind in Victoria; represented a new model of support that blended nursing care with rehabilitation and community inclusion for ten young people with acquired brain injuries.

A decade later, Austin Street is a beautiful home which continues to provide intensive support to each resident via dedicated staff with care and compassion. Residents and staff celebrated 'iso style' with a delicious lunch, cupcakes, speeches, bright decorations and certificates for residents.



Get to know us....



Craig Quilliam loves supporting local children and teenagers with woodwork projects

Craig Quilliam was a cabinet maker for seven years before embarking on a career in disability services. Now, he provides one-on-one support to mostly male VMCH clients in the Wangaratta region and coordinates several life skills programs for local children and teenagers.

We spoke to Craig during Men's Health Week in June. He said he felt lucky to have "terrific male role models" in his own life who shaped who he is today. "This is one of the reasons I am so passionate about providing that positive experience and connection with the young men in our programs," he said.

"So much of the difficulty that men face, particularly in terms of mental health, is the sense of isolation and lack of healthy, positive connection with other men and this can slowly eat away at our mind. In order for us to be contributors to the community around us, we need that sense of inclusion, that our presence is valued.

"Woodwork isn't for everyone but I have discovered that there are a few people that love to work with their hands. We all love looking at something we've created and finding a sense of pride in our handiwork."

Repairing equipment, creating go-carts and constructing garden beds are some of Craig and his clients' recent works.

Craig says moving into disability services was a positive change for him personally. "From being in the workshop alone with no real social interaction to the sense of belonging and pride I feel when we (clients) are together is great. I honestly find that I learn more from my clients than I could ever teach and the beauty of this is that I get to do it every day."

Volunteering in a changed landscape

Social isolation and teenage kindness have been the catalyst for some unlikely new friendships. Nine students from Aquinas College began writing to new 'pen pals' at our Corpus Christi Aged Care Residence in May. Their letters lifted the spirits of residents during physical distancing and kept the students busy during isolation too.

Our TeleFriend program – manned by volunteers – took on even more importance during social isolation. The free VMCH service sees trained volunteers make weekly calls to more vulnerable or socially isolated people who access our services.

Volunteer Sheila Blanchfield is 'TeleFriends' with an older resident at one of our affordable homes. "A lot of people have trouble with technology so in today's world they're really left behind. TeleFriend is a simple, old-fashioned and easy way of communicating with someone," she said.

Thank you so much to all of our incredible volunteers for their patience, understanding, compassion and innovation shown throughout these past few months!

Important family ties

Diane Taylor is one of VMCH's most technology-savvy residents. She loves making video calls and using social media to stay connected with friends and family. You will regularly see Diane commenting on our Facebook posts.

The Bundoora Aged Care resident is one of many who have been isolated from their families and friends.

Diane says the activities and talking to other residents and staff has been part of how she takes care of her mental, emotional and physical health. She has her own laptop, so she also spends her days playing games online and listening to music. However, it has been a challenge not seeing her friends and family in person, or to go out for a coffee.

"I talk with my family on the telephone and Facebook regularly, and have FaceTime on Sundays. I enjoy it very much as I have family and friends from all over the world."

Diane's son, Aaron echoes her wishes to spend more time with family, but is understanding of the need to remain apart.

"For me, there is no hug that has ever existed in this world, that is better than the one from my mother. We are all in this together though, so it's hard to complain."



"Although difficult, the restrictions are so very necessary.

"Truly and genuinely, I can't thank the staff at Bundoora enough. I wish there were more ways I could show my appreciation.

"My mother is not one to mix her words, she will be very open and honest with me about the level of care she receives. She always has positive things to say, previously, and now during this pandemic.

"It's been a tough time. As far as coping goes, contact is key.

"I'm so fortunate that I'm able to speak with her most nights. Utilising technology in this crisis has been such an important, useful and reassuring tool."

Dementia support a speciality



We are taking a new approach to supporting those living with dementia. St Bernadette's Aged Care Residence in Sunshine North has recently completed works on Lady Lourdes House, as part of the Australian Government Department of Health's Specialist Dementia Care Program (SDCP).

Eight residents in Lady Lourdes House will be living in a home specifically designed for people with severe dementia and staffed by an expert team that will provide a highly personalised approach.

Our focus will be on employing strategies to re-engage with the resident by providing a home-like environment with more freedom and activities tailored to the individual. Coupled with a clinical team assessing medication levels, it's hoped the residents' symptoms will stabilise within one year, enabling them to return to mainstream care.

"The future of exceptional aged care relies on providing services that are tailored to the individual," says VMCH CEO Sonya Smart.

"We believe this is a great opportunity to provide specialised care for those with dementia, where we can provide care and support, and empower our residents to live happy, fulfilled lives despite their disease.

"Lady Lourdes House will provide our residents with 12 months of intensive, supportive care, to help them manage their symptoms, so that they can then transition into a mainstream aged care residence of their choice."

The home has been refurbished and architecturally designed with guidance from Professor Richard Fleming and the Dementia Enabling Environmental Principles which recognise that people with severe dementia can exhibit behaviours such as aggression, hallucinations and wandering. Lady Lourdes House has been designed to provide a home-like environment, including an open plan layout with automatic doors so residents can wander freely inside and to a secure garden whenever they want.

Residents will be able to engage in the hobbies and activities of their choice – such as jewellery making or painting. They will also be encouraged to take part in household tasks like cooking and cleaning, and can help themselves to food whenever they want. It will all be done under the watchful eye of a more intensive, specially trained team.



Lady Lourdes House's light-filled dining space

Elizabeth Baxter, VMCH Dementia Services Specialist says many people with severe dementia are often not supported properly.

“They are often highly medicated to the point of sedation in some homes. But these medications come with range of side effects that can cause behavioural issues like aggression. A big focus here will be on managing the medication side of their treatment and reducing it in a very managed way.

“We do really hope and expect that after a year of living at this unit they will be able to return to a mainstream dementia setting.”

Lady Lourdes House is assisted by Dementia Support Australia and the North West Mental Health Service to ensure all support is specific to the needs of people living with dementia.

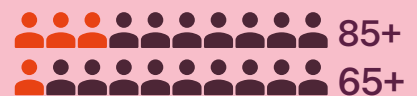
Elizabeth says it’s enlightening to see people with severe dementia being treated with respect and dignity but says there is a lot of stigma in society that needs to be overcome.

“We have an ageing population in Australia and dementia is likely to touch us all. We could be more patient of those with dementia in the community – but right now they are hidden away and out of sight. We need education and awareness to take away the shame associated with dementia and for dementia to be normalised and not something we are fearful of.”



The newly refurbished kitchen

Three in 10 people over the age of 85 and almost one in 10 people over 65 have dementia



The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling NATSEM (2016) Economic Cost of Dementia in Australia 2016–2056

Like to learn more about our dementia support? Call our Customer Service Team on 1800 698 624

Are you a carer in need of a break?

Being a carer of a loved one while rewarding, is challenging on a daily basis. It can impact your physical and emotional wellbeing.

We offer a wide range of supports for carers, including personal and home care, education, wellbeing activities, and social groups and special events.

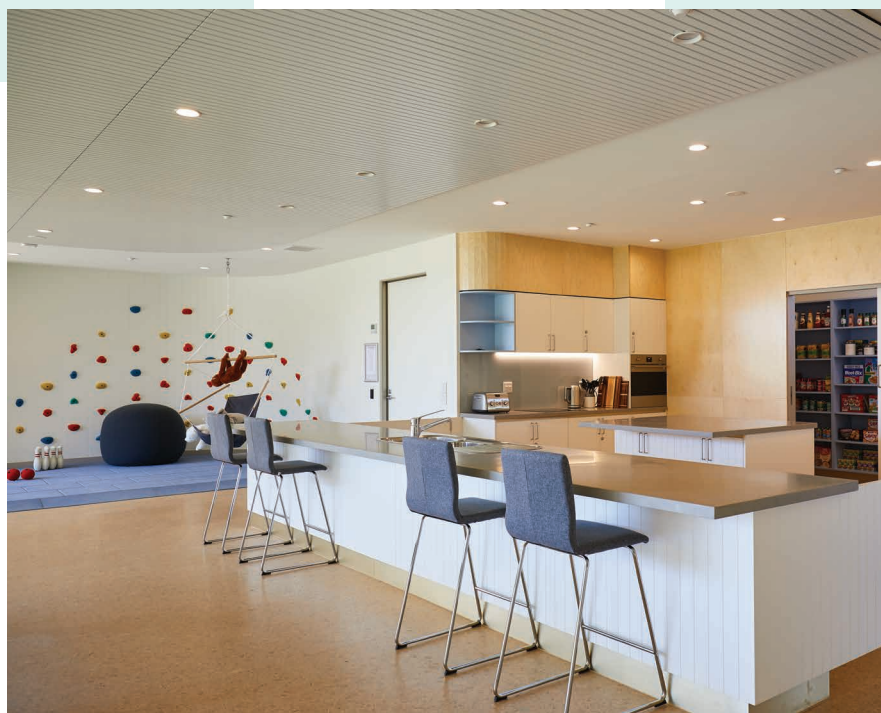
But did you know we also offer flexible respite for those with a disability or who have age related health concerns?

Get a taste of residential aged care living

Often, when we think of aged care, we think of something permanent. But there is another option. Respite is when you join us for a short stay.

Once approved, the government allocates 63 days' respite to individuals every year. Respite within aged care offers a great opportunity for your loved one to receive care without the accommodation cost for the entire respite stay.

There are many reasons people choose respite. Perhaps you want to 'test the waters' and see if we're the right aged care option for you. Or maybe it's the first step in discussing permanent care with your mum and dad, helping them to feel more comfortable with the decision to move to aged care. Occasionally your loved one may need a little extra care, perhaps after a fall or sometimes carers simply need to take a small break.



A true Oasis

With its indoor climbing wall, fish tank, specially designed outdoor play equipment and landscaped garden, our newest short-term accommodation for children with disability in Ivanhoe is an oasis for short term respite.

Oasis caters for children with a range of physical support needs. The five-bedroom house provides overnight respite, short-term accommodation for children and teenagers, between the ages of 10 to 15 years old with sensory processing support needs and Autism.

We carefully look at the core needs of each child; specifically in the areas of their developmental delay and healthcare needs. We then do our best to ensure that the children receive amazing care and have fun at the same time. The carers love what they do and understand each child's individual preferences and what brings them joy.

Our flexible respite options ensure that a child experiences enjoyable, healthy, holistic breaks away, while parents can have peace of mind that everything is taken care of.

The first step is to get in contact with us on 1300 698 624, and our friendly team can guide you through the process.

Keeping older carers connected

We all love a good emoji. Billie Kempton, aged 80, is discovering the joys of the expressive icons thanks to a new program helping to keep older carers connected.

“I’m like a kid in a candy shop with these emoji’s,” Billie said. Play aside, the use of a new iPad and online training has been a lifeline for Billie and her husband Laurie who has Lewy Body Dementia.

Billie has been supported by VMCH’s Carer Support Program as Laurie’s full-time carer for four years. She is one of 10 older people who care for a child or a spouse with a disability participating in the program, jointly-run by VMCH and YourLink – an organisation focussed on the digital inclusion of Australian seniors.

“This program is the most wonderful thing,” Billie says. “You feel a bit left out these days... I don’t understand a lot of the modern things that are going on and I think this is going to open up so many different avenues for us. It’s an incredible program and I’m so grateful, I can’t tell you.”

Weekly training sessions with YourLink have helped Billie to connect with family interstate and with fellow carers.

For Laurie, aged 80, communication is vital. “The first time we were locked down he was cut off



from everything and he really aged dreadfully” Billie said. “But he’s been joining in the iPad training sessions and it really inspires him. He actually picked the iPad and was having a go himself, playing some dementia games, which is a huge step for him.”

“People reaching out to each other at this time is a really important thing to do.”

This program was made possible thanks to a \$5,000 Be Connected grant from the Federal Government, aimed to help older Australians stay digitally connected.

R U OK? Day

Our community was proud to take part in R U OK? Day on September 10, catching up (remotely or onsite if possible) to check-in on each other and have a cuppa. Mental health is such an important topic, especially right now, and it’s vital we all keep connected and asking that all important question; Are you ok?



Mission in action

From Inclusion to Belonging

By Dr Zachariah Duke, Formation and Ethics Advisor, VMCH

Including people is important, but creating genuine and authentic communities of belonging for vulnerable people and people living on the peripheries of our society is “mission critical” for VMCH.

As a starting point, I invite you to reflect on what it is that makes you feel as if you belong to a community in your own life – whether it’s a faith community, a sporting community, a learning community, a family community, a volunteering community. What are the markers of belonging for you in these communities?

One just needs to flick through VMCH’s social media channels to get a sense of the many transformative narratives of VMCH staff and volunteers creating communities of belonging for the people they are caring alongside, as well

as their valued families and friends, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Professor John Swinton, a practical theologian from the University of Aberdeen, famously once said: “in order for someone to belong to a community, they need to be missed when they aren’t there”. So it’s not just getting the person into the room, it’s about longing for their presence when they aren’t there. Belonging is cultivated through relationships.

At VMCH we create communities of belonging because at the heart of our Mission is the prioritising of the standing in solidarity with the vulnerable women and men in our care. We are called to embody the witness of Jesus Christ – a life devoted to being a presence in the life of others – and only then can we truly understand what it means to belong.

The Plenary Council 2020 Journey

The Catholic Church in Australia is currently on a journey to discern its future. This process is known nationally as the Plenary Council 2020. Under Canon Law (the official law of the Church) a plenary council is the highest formal assembly of all local churches in a country. There are a number of phases built into this process – some of which have already been completed and some are yet to get underway, including Assembly 1 in Adelaide (2-10 October 2021) and Assembly 2 in Sydney (4-9 July 2022). For more information on the Plenary Council 2020 and how you might like to contribute, please see www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au





The benefits of movement

Did you know a sedentary lifestyle can contribute to obesity, diabetes, and some types of cancer?

These days we've all probably been moving a little less than we should. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant we are stuck in our homes more, restricted with outside exercise, and working from home for many has seen the time we are sitting down increase.

But sitting down all day is not what our bodies are built for – we are built to move. From your brain to your joints, moving every day has the power to improve every part of your body.

Here are a few of the many benefits of movement:

1. Increase the functionality of joints - Using your joints in active and quality forms of exercise allows your body to reach its full potential. If you enjoy fast paced exercise, that is great! However, gentler exercises options such as swimming or yoga are also great for the functionality of joints.
2. Can assist in better sleep - Movement, depending on the quality and intensity, will expend energy, meaning your body will require a good rest to recover.
3. Increasing independence - If you have been wanting to ditch the crutches, walker or improve your exercise tolerance, controlled movement is the treatment for you!
4. Improving your mental health - Controlled movement and exercise increases the release of endorphins, AKA the happy hormone. This means you can go about your day with a smile on your face.

Like some tips for sitting less and moving more?*

- Limit your time on social media, TV, and phone – there are apps available to help, such as Offtime and Moment.
- When watching TV, take some breaks during commercials to walk around the house or do some housework.
- Replace watching TV in the evening with taking a walk (within social restrictions).
- Try standing while you read a newspaper or check messages on your mobile phone.
- Take a break every 30 minutes to stand and stretch – set an alarm on your phone or watch to remind you.

*The Heart Foundation

We encourage everyone within our services to move every day! We have teams of physiotherapists and occupational therapists who support around 800 people of all ages and abilities to get moving in a way that's meaningful to them.

Navigating the NDIS

The whole idea around the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) – when it was introduced back in 2013 – was to give people with disability more choice and control.

Each NDIS participant has what's known as a plan, containing funding that can be spent on various pre-approved activities like speech therapy, domestic assistance with meal preparation, or access to support workers. Helping people achieve their life goals such as living independently, finding a job or accessing education, is key to the NDIS.

While VMCH provides services and programs for people with disability, we also have an important group of people known as Support Coordinators (SCs) who help around 200 clients get the most out of their plans.

Fredricka Gonsalves oversees our team of eight SCs. Fredricka said,

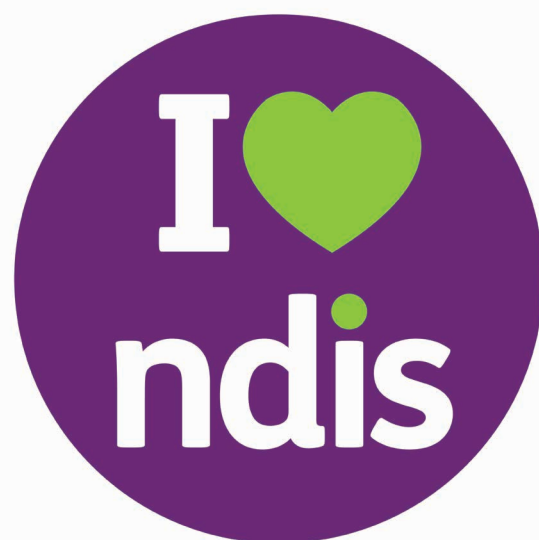
“The NDIS is an ever-changing world and support coordination is important as we help provide people with options that meet their needs, regardless of which organisation will be delivering that support,”

“I feel that COVID has been challenging for all of us, but even more so for people with disabilities,” Fredricka said. “We are fortunate to be able to continue to support a variety of clients who have different needs. Some live in aged care and supported accommodation and have been living in lockdown, without access to their usual supports. Some live with family/friends or on their own and haven't been



The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the way people with disability access their supports. With this in mind, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) – which administers the NDIS – recently made some changes so people could be more flexible with their funds and plans, including:

- NDIS plans to be extended by up to 24 months
- Face-to-face planning shifted to phone meetings
- Temporarily broadened the flexible approach for low cost Assistive Technology items such as smart devices and physio equipment.



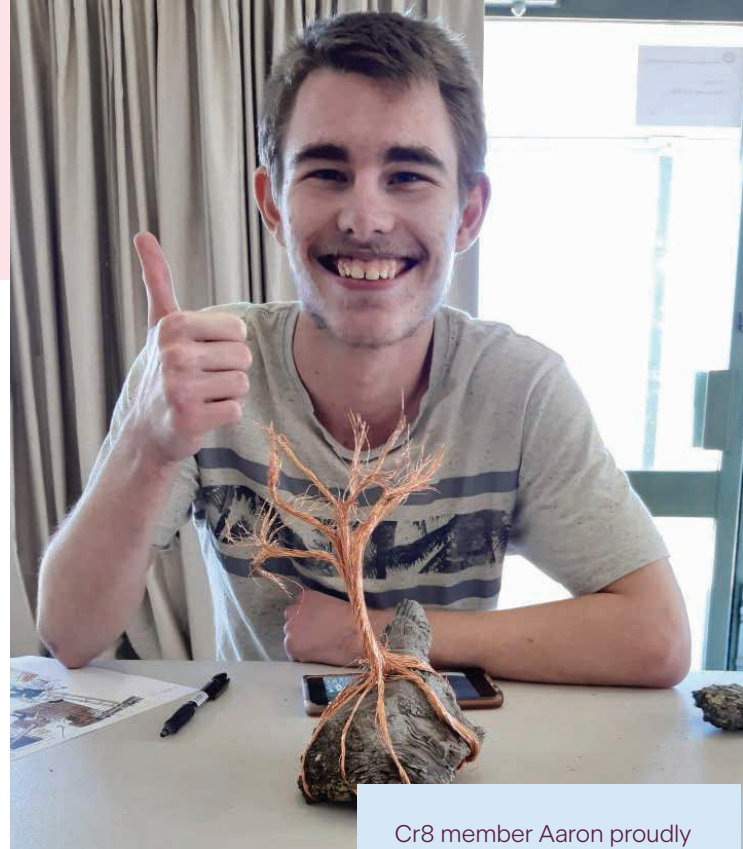
able to go to their day programs or places of employment. Others have chosen to stop their supports, in fear of contracting COVID. We've seen an increase in the decline of participants' mental health too as they struggle with the situation."

Matching clients with the right SCs was vital to ensuring their needs were met in the best way possible, Fredricka said.

VMCH SC Mary agreed. "I think the most important thing is to build a relationship with the client and family and get to know them and how they would like their supports to look, but also to give them new ideas or opportunities to increase their independence or capacity. I get beside the person and support them where they are and give encouragement whenever possible. I'm tenacious, which means if I think something is right – I will pursue until we get an outcome."

The mother of one of our young clients described her SC Max as "extremely helpful, kind and polite". "He was always willing to help explain any doubts or questions I had (regarding the NDIS).

Typing this message doesn't fulfil the justice of how much he has helped me and the character he has shown towards me. I really appreciate his efforts."



Cr8 member Aaron proudly displays his tree sculpture

Cre8 Program

TFixing a lawnmower and learning how to check a gas bottle for leaks are some of the practical skills young people are learning at our Cre8 Program in Wangaratta.

Each week, around 12 young people can be found in the local workshop, gaining confidence in using tools to create various pieces such as furniture from pallets, repairing bike punctures, and artwork from recycled products.

The Cre8 group is popular and its members look forward to their weekly sessions, guided by VMCH support workers Craig (also a qualified cabinet maker) and John (a professional artist). Group members' participation forms part of their individual NDIS plans.

The group hopes to hold a market day soon where they can showcase their art and furniture to the local community.

If you would like to know more about our Disability Services, call 1300 698 624.



James with his vibrant painting

A lasting legacy

This is the late Margaret Raw. She passed away on February 22 this year – though her legacy will live on thanks to her decision to leave a gift to VMCH in her Will.

We weren't the only organisation Margaret left a bequest to. Seventeen friends and family members and 14 other charities were the recipients of her generosity.

Margaret's relationship with VMCH began when she first started paid employment. Each day she would walk past our former Villa Maria School for the Blind in Kew and decided to donate some of her pay to the school. From there her interest grew.

Margaret led a full and independent life before she passed away at age 88. She was a well-respected teacher and member of her community and church in Werribee.

Born in the Great Depression, Margaret was a child of seven at the start of WWII, and just a teenager at the end of the war. She was a remarkable woman with an incredible sense of humour who led a humble and meaningful life. Having no children nor ever married, Margaret's life and legacy is one of giving.

Before she passed, Margaret said: "For over 50 years I have followed Villa Maria Catholic Homes' tremendous expansion and diversification into the fields of multiple disability and care of the frail aged, and I felt I would like to help in that work when I am no longer here. It was a very simple process to have a bequest inserted in my Will and it gave me great satisfaction to do so. I strongly urge everyone who is in a position to do so, to do likewise."



You may be surprised to know that over the past five years, more than \$3.5million has been given to VMCH in bequests to help fund our programs for older people, children and adults with disabilities, carers, and people at risk of homelessness.

We were one of 100 organisations to join Include a Charity Week in September, aimed to encourage more people to think about leaving a gift in their Will to a cause that is important to them.

"Many people do not have means to give to charities during their lifetime," said Grants and Bequest Officer Sandra Rosano. "A gift in your Will is a way of saying thank you to an organisation that meant something to you in your lifetime."

If you would like to learn more about leaving a gift to VMCH in your Will, please call Sandra Rosano on (03) 9926 2407 or email sandra.rosano@vmch.com.au



An exciting seachange

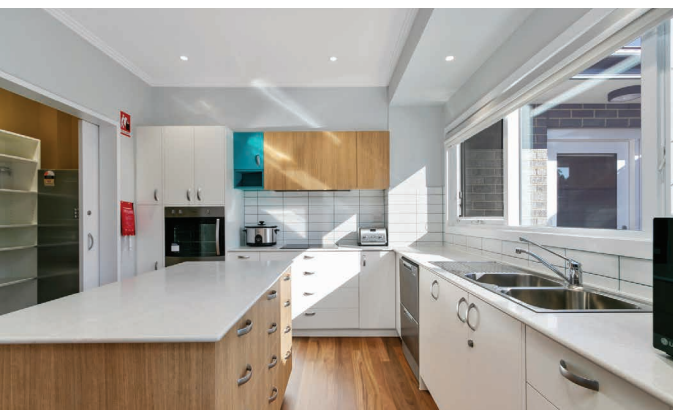
Recent times have shown us the importance of having a safe and comfortable home. We were proud to unveil our newest Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) in Carrum in July.

The houses – designed under new SDA standards (Improved Liveability category) – provide six residents with the opportunity to improve their independent living skills with modern and accessible spaces and equipment, ensuite bathrooms, built-in barbeques and raised vegetable patches.

VMCH CEO Sonya Smart said the \$2.4 development – one of 14 VMCH-owned SDAs – helped to meet demand for a “huge lack of appropriate housing options” for people with disabilities across Victoria.

“Holding community consultations in the lead-up to this development to hear what people with disability actually want and need informed many of our choices at Carrum,” Sonya said. “We will continue to listen to feedback as we build homes that support people’s complex needs so they can live

“I’m planning to go buy new furniture for my room with the help of my key worker and team leader. I’m very excited about it.”



The development, by BowdenCorp, was made possible largely thanks to the kindness of our supporters including through appeals, trusts and bequests. We thank these individuals for their generosity, time and interest in this life-changing project.

confidently and as independently as possible within the community.”

Resident Jennifer (pictured) said was “very happy” to move into the house and had chosen the colour pink for her bedroom’s feature wall.

Roommate Steven looks forward to displaying his model car and truck collections, and is happy to have a room with a street view and a lovely backyard to relax and enjoy a BBQ in.

COVID-19 innovations



A community effort

The VMCH community continues to think outside the square and go above and beyond to support our residents and clients during COVID-19 restrictions. Volunteers sewed more than 100 face masks and our Mission team prepared fun craft kits for residents at our 15 group and short-term accommodation homes recently. The masks were not only gorgeous but a practical help, while the craft activities including sun catchers, paper mosaic pots and felt ball coasters kept 'iso boredom' at bay.

TelePractice

Our Early Childhood Intervention team ensured no child went without vital therapy during social distancing. TelePractice saw therapies, development assessments and specialised services delivered via Zoom and Skype. Children embraced the virtual approach and parents said it made them feel connected and supported.



Virtual learning

St Paul's College remained fully operational throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with the switch to remote learning during Term 2 and 3 managed brilliantly by staff. While nothing can replace face-to-face learning and the experience of being in the school environment, no effort was spared in keeping our students connected to school and learning as optimally as possible in what were very new and unexpected circumstances. Students enjoyed a brief return to school at the end of Term 2 before heading back to remote learning in Term 3.



#LIVE in regional Victoria

Our CEO Sonya Smart, along with Mission General Manager Bridget O'Shannassy and Quality and Clinical Manager Funda Ozenc, hit the road on June 16, taking our 14th #LIVE Smart Cast event to VMCH Ararat! In an effort to keep our staff connected, we began holding these weekly, online events – in which Sonya is joined by various staff to discuss COVID-related topics – back in April when the majority of our staff began working from home. Sonya said it was fantastic to visit the Ararat office for the 14th LIVE and see colleagues face-to-face. Afterwards, she travelled to the Ballarat office to connect with staff there.





Celebrating moments

Lockdowns and visitation restrictions have made recent times difficult for many. However, our residential aged care teams have been working hard to ensure that all our residents are engaged, entertained and importantly - celebrated.

We have had a number of very special birthdays, including Florence (Floss)'s exceptional milestone of reaching 100 years old!

To celebrate the day, Floss was given roses and a card from the team to add to her card collection, and everyone sang 'Happy Birthday' to her, with a very special cake.

Floss said she had a lovely day, even becoming teary while commenting that "all the staff are so lovely for making a fuss".

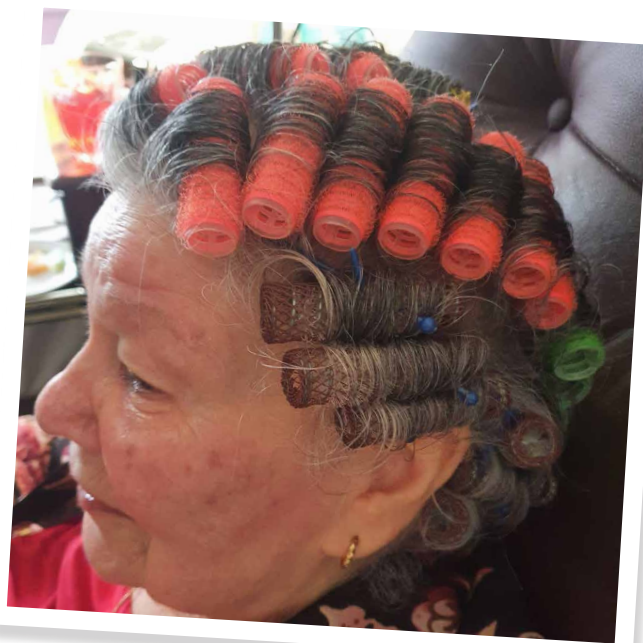
She also had non-stop phone calls from friends and family and received a box of handmade cookies from her grandchildren with "100th birthday" and "we love you, nanna", written on them.

Zoom connections

Despite challenges around remaining in isolation at home, our teams continue to think of new ways to provide services to our clients.

Our Carer Support Program group members normally participate in programs outside of the home, however these have moved to an online format, which have proven to be equally as popular. Our carers have produced some phenomenal works of art and craft, and have been so appreciative of the commitment to keep resources available for carers.

One carer said: "I have really appreciated the online sessions that you have provided during this pandemic. Some of the sessions I wouldn't usually be able access, because I have the drive. It's so easy via Zoom; it's been thoroughly enjoyable and has made a difference to my mental health."



Skills for a lifetime

With our visitor restrictions currently in place across our residences, it means we have had to ask our lovely hairdressers not to come in for a short while.

Our Wantirna Lifestyle Coordinator, Sarah hasn't done hairdressing since 2012, but we think she has done an amazing job on Mae's hair. And apparently our residents have been lining up for their turn!

"Mae was so glad to be able to have her hair done, because (like many of us) she always feels better when her hair looks good!"

Heartfelt gifts

As our Multicultural Wellness Centre (MWC) is currently closed, our team sent some gifts to clients who might need some extra activities during the current stay-at-home restrictions.

Rani, MWC Coordinator, said "Our clients are socially isolated at the moment, and we hope the gifts can cheer them up a bit, and let them know that VMCH is thinking of them."





Visit this hidden gem!

If you're interested in McAuley or any other of our retirement communities contact us on **1800 036 377**

If you ask McAuley Retirement Village's newest resident, Paul, about the area of Trentham, you will likely be told that it is a hidden gem.

"Nobody really knows about it, especially if you're from the Melbourne area. But it really is lovely, and you don't realise what a great place it is until you walk around."

Paul and his wife Helen moved into their unit at McAuley in October 2019, and they are very happy they made the move.

Paul and Helen were living in nearby Kyneton for 15 years, in a two-story three-bedroom home, which was becoming difficult to manage as they neared 80 years old.

"We had to think of our future, and now we're very glad we moved. The layout of the unit is very good. We have built three houses from scratch, and while this might not be what we would design ourselves, the design is very good."

"We now have a lot of open space, and tree views. We go for a walk each day, sometimes twice a day, and we see kangaroos and wallabies. We do see other people out walking, but it is very quiet and peaceful."



Volunteer opportunities

The gift of time is one of the most precious things we can give.

Our 600 volunteers spread so much joy to thousands of people we support including residents in aged care, socially isolated people living in our affordable homes, children with disabilities, and carers who look after a loved one full time.

Our volunteers are a diverse group of people of all ages, cultural and spiritual backgrounds who provide their own special skills. Whether it's social visits, arts and crafts, music, education, transport, administration, op shop customer service or support with one-off events – the possibilities are endless.

We would love to have you join us and help make a positive difference to the lives of others.



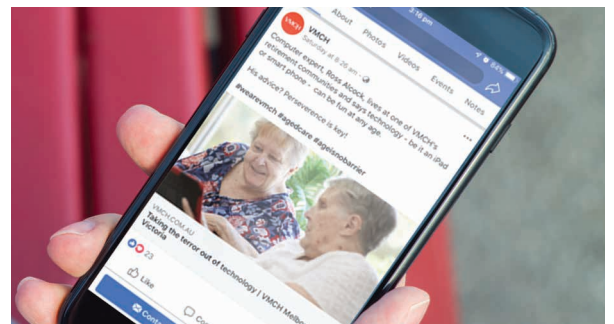
Gail and Michael are volunteers at Shanagolden Aged Care

Interested in becoming a volunteer?

Contact the team at volunteers@vmch.com.au or call 1800 036 377, we'd love to hear from you.

Get Social

Come and connect with us! Stay in the loop with lots of information and stories about our services, clients, residents and staff, there's something for everyone.



@VMCHVic



@VMCHVic



@vmchvic



@VMCHVic



@VMCHDisabilityServices

Friendship and fun

Did you know around one in four Australian men lack social connections? A lack of social connections is known to be bad for our physical and mental health. Conversely, having a good social support network is linked to better mental health.

Lenny, who accesses one of our day programs, and VMCH volunteer John, aged 83, have become good mates over the past ten years. They've bonded over a love of the gym (John's run seven marathons!) and barrack for the same AFL team – go Tigers!

“We get on famously,” says John. “We go to the gym, have coffee and sometimes I take him to the footy. I can relate to him, he's a lovely guy.” Lenny said he's been missing John while in iso and can't wait to catch up again. “He's a grouse man. I like chatting to him.”

Meanwhile in regional Victoria, members of our Ararat Fishing Group are enjoying their social outlet again after a few months away due to COVID-19 restrictions. While new restrictions mean fishing is enjoyed one-on-one for now, Rodney said he's thrilled to be back.



Aside from getting out in nature and enjoying the fresh air, the most important part of the group is what it does for his wellbeing. “It's good for my mental health. I like the interaction with others; getting to have a chat and a cup of tea.”

For many members, it's their only social outlet.

“No one has caught a fish yet, but it doesn't really matter. It's more about getting out and having other people to talk to instead of the four walls at home,” Rodney said.



Footy fan John loves volunteering and connecting with his friend Lenny (pictured top right)



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