

Cornerstone

VMCH

Memories
of war and
service

Housing dream
realised for young
people with
disability

It's time to talk
about dying



Edition Five

“Find happiness in making others happy.”

- St Mary MacKillop

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Cornerstone magazine features articles, commentary and information about our residents, clients, community, partners and services.

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Kevin is a resident at our St Joseph's Mews Retirement Apartments.



Contact the editorial team at marketing@vmch.com.au.

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A note from our Chairman



Welcome to the fifth edition of Cornerstone.

What a relief it is to connect with you in a time where we are again able to enjoy our freedom and each other's company face-to-face. And while we still live with a little apprehension as to what the future holds, I'm sure, like me, you are feeling much more hopeful and positive.

A big part of the reason for this shift has been the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine. As Chairman of an organisation which supports so many vulnerable people, it's been comforting to witness the rollout for our community. I'd like to congratulate and thank our dedicated staff for overseeing the smooth running of this unprecedented program, which is still ongoing. I'm also appreciative of their willingness, along with our volunteers, to receive the vaccine themselves in an effort to protect our residents, clients and their colleagues.

This February, after two and half years, we finally had the opportunity to read the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. The 2,000-plus-page report 'Care, Dignity and Respect' is designed to "assist older people to live an active, self-determined and meaningful life in a safe and caring environment that allows for dignified living in old age".

Not all of the 148 recommendations will be implemented, however, the Government's 2021-22 Budget response to the Final Report exceeded most people's expectations, and indicates we are on the path to improving the current aged care system.

While I believe we provide excellent care and support for our ageing residents, there is always room for improvement. It is imperative that we all, as a community, continue to fight for the better care of those who are vulnerable.

We have some interesting features for you, covering a huge cross-section of generations, in this edition of Cornerstone. Our first focusses on Palliative Care Week and the importance of planning for and communicating your end-of-life-wishes.

And on page seven, we meet four friends and residents from our Glen Waverley Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) who recently celebrated 12 months of living together after years of campaigning from their respective families.

On pages 15 and 16 we meet Kevin Holland and John Maynard from St Joseph's Mews. Their incredible stories of hope and hardship through war, told just prior to Anzac Day, are inspiring to read. We have so many courageous individuals across our ageing communities who sacrificed so much so that we can enjoy the freedoms we do. I hope you enjoy Kevin and John's stories.

One story which really stands out for me was a heartfelt letter written by one of our St Paul's College prep mothers, asking for compassion and understanding from fellow parents during Autism Acceptance Month. I'm sure it will touch your heart also, so please have a read on page 10.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of Cornerstone as much as I have.

Please take care and God bless.

Julien O'Connell AO
VMCH Board Chairman

Palliative Care Week 2021

The phrase 'dying a good death', can be quite jarring to hear. However, death is one of the certainties in life and something that we should all discuss openly.

National Palliative Care Week 2021 was Sunday 23 May – Saturday 29 May, and raises awareness about the benefits of quality palliative care. This is for both the person who is actively dying, and their family.

Talking about dying is hard. And it is sad. However, preparing for our death can relieve the decision-making burden on those closest to us.

Terry was an adoring grandfather, and it was for this reason that he made several decisions about what he wanted to happen after he died.

Terry passed away in March 2021, while living at Providence Aged Care Residence, Bacchus Marsh. He was living with Lewy Body Dementia, which was progressively becoming worse.

"In hindsight, I kept him at home for too long," says Linda, Terry's wife. "Then it got to the stage that he was falling over, and it just became too dangerous at home."

Terry had an Advance Care Directive in place. Linda said his wishes were known, should he not be able to communicate them.

As Terry's health declined, he was supported by palliative care services and the VMCH care team. Whilst it was a difficult time for Linda and her daughters, they couldn't fault the care that they all received from the staff.

"We felt so supported. They made us food, we had plenty to drink, they couldn't do enough. They went above and beyond. I know it's their job, but it was the compassion they showed us."

It was during the arranging of funeral details for Terry's parents that he and Linda talked about what they wanted after they had died.



Terry and his wife Linda

"When his mum died, he found it upsetting to see the coffin at her funeral. He didn't want to let his grandchildren see that; how would they feel? So, we both said, if anything happened, there would be no visible coffin, it would be a memorial with things that belonged to us."

Terry's other wishes included having memory trees instead of flowers, and they asked those attending the funeral to donate to the CFA instead of giving flowers.

"That was what he wanted. It's not something you want to discuss, but after his parents died, we sat down to do their funerals, and we had a conversation about it. It's so important to have that casual conversation. Don't wait until they're ill."

"Terry was the love of my life; we were married for 48 years. We had a wonderful marriage. He was a very good man, and he adored his grandchildren."

"I was his queen. If I was happy, he was happy. We did everything together. The last three years he was not the Terry I married. Now I can think of him as the Terry I knew."



Palliative care is not limited to those who are ageing. Our VMCH community has experienced the heartbreak of losing students from our specialist school, and adults who access our disability services. So how do you explain to someone with an intellectual disability they will die? How do you support the parents of a child who may die as a result of their disability?

Maree Gilbert is one of our pastoral care practitioners and supports individuals, their families and the VMCH community through the end-of-life journey. Maree spends much of her time at St Paul's College, our specialist school in Balwyn.

"The support I provide to a family will depend on their wishes: it could be emails and phone calls of support, visiting hospitals or hospice settings, visiting homes, prayer, grief and loss support," Maree says.

"I have sat with a student in hospital while their parent catches a few minutes of sleep or has a shower. I have read stories to students, arranged for priests to visit if that is what the family wanted. I also provide emotional and spiritual support to staff, and students. And when a student has died, I have helped with prayer services for staff and the community and arranged rituals such as a candle and photo to help other students grieve and understand what has happened."

Maree says the death of a young person is something people find hard to understand or accept.

"We feel that a young person has missed out on more. But they have loved and been loved just as much as an older person. All of us leave our mark on the world."

Maree says it's important we talk about death, grief and loss. And acknowledging that palliative care is looking at it as a privilege not everyone gets.

"Sudden and unexpected death does not give us the opportunity to say our goodbyes. I hope that as a pastoral care practitioner I can support the dying and their families through this time with a sense of not being alone."

Caring for yourself when supporting others

When you are caring for someone with a life-limiting illness it can be difficult to remember to take some time out for yourself. However, it is very important to take care of yourself during these times.

Here are some self-care tips from our Mission team.

- Take time to do something for you. Don't feel guilty, it will help you to be a better carer.
- Get enough sleep.
- Exercise regularly.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Accept help from others, you deserve it!
- Caring can make life very busy. Making lists may help.
- A family meeting can help with planning the care your relative needs.
- Look after your relationships, both with your relatives and with others.
- Accept help for those practical things which can lessen your load.
- Perform relaxation exercises.
- Take regular breaks: get a friend or volunteer to stay with your relative while you do something for yourself.
- Talk to someone (a friend or someone from the palliative care team). There is help out there.
- Remind yourself that you are doing your best and that you are not alone, your feelings are normal.
- Be kind to yourself, give yourself plenty of rewards and maintain a sense of humour.
- Look for the positive in all situations – it may take some practice but it's worth it!

Remember, "We cannot change the outcome, but we can affect the journey."

Ann Richardson.



A dream come true

(L-R) Matthew, Wayne, Lara, VMCH staff member Justin and Andy at their Glen Waverley Home

Growing up and moving in with your mates is a rite of passage. But for some young people with disability, it's not so simple. It's been 18 months since Lara, Matthew, Andy and Wayne moved into their own Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) in Glen Waverley, run by VMCH.

The story behind how the four came to live together is unique, and a testament to the love and tenacity of their parents, who advocated for more than 15 years to ensure their children were able to live together in a home that fostered friendship, fun and family.

The families – Sue and Colin Chinner, Jill and John Cole, Kitty David and Karen Everett – met at Glenallen specialist school when their children were aged six. Over the years they became friends and discovered they shared a dream of seeing their children live in a place that was more than supported accommodation, but rather a home surrounded by people with similar values.

The process wasn't simple. Ordinarily, people with disability need to apply for accommodation that,

while practical, doesn't necessarily provide for their social and personal preferences.

The four, now aged in their thirties, had been attending a VMCH day program and staff knew of their dream. With support from VMCH and the introduction of the NDIS (making the process for finding appropriate accommodation easier) the dream became a reality in December 2019.

"Andy, Matthew and Lara were like the rat pack at school, they were thick as thieves. I'm really happy because I never thought it was going to happen," said Sue, Matthew's mum.

"It's (the move) been incredibly positive and I would love to see this for the future; for friends to be placed together."

Lara's mum, Jill, said living with her friends and having the support of their families was invaluable for her daughter.

"Lara loves it because she's very social and when the other families come in and talk to her, they know what's going on in her life. They're not saying 'hello' to be polite, they have meaningful conversations."

Kitty said her son Andy, who loves horror movies and the Bombers, was "very happy" at the Glen Waverley home.

"They've known each other since they were little so he's very comfortable and very happy there. wwl couldn't ask for more."

Living with his mates was also incredibly important for music-lover Wayne, said his mum, Karen.

"This is his extended family. He was quite proud to move out of home and live there."

Ensuring their children were safe and happy as they age was also a motivation for their parents.

"The next part of the dream was knowing there would be support there when we're not, through their siblings," said Jill.

VMCH has 14 Specialist Disability Accommodation houses (home to around 74 residents) across Victoria, including Austin Street (our permanent home for younger people with acquired brain injuries). In an effort to meet increasing demand, we have plans for another three new SDAs in 2021.

For more information on VMCH disability accommodation, call 1300 698 624.



Appeal update

We'd like to say a huge 'thank you' to everyone who donated to our 2020 Christmas Appeal. Around \$13,000 has been raised and will see residents, like Tracy (above), from three of our SDAs able to purchase new furniture to create indoor and outdoor living spaces that reflect their personalities and tastes.



Wayne and his pet bird, Ronnie

Sharing hidden talents

Many of our residents have very special hidden talents. Les, who lives at Corpus Christi Retirement Village, Clayton, is a bit of a secret poet, and has been for many decades.

He shared with us his poem called "Age" which we think might strike a chord with a few people in his age bracket (and maybe some who are a touch younger than his 94 years!)



Age, a poem by Les Mullins, from Corpus Christi Retirement Village, Clayton

We all get old before our time
At least we think we do
And many of your precious friends
Are getting older too.

You used to know the footy score
You used to drive a car
But lately you have reached a point
Where you don't know who you are.

The kids they all gather round
And yes it's nice to see them
The trouble they all talk at all
And you can hardly hear them.

You say summer is far too hot
And you find winter far too cold
But the climate isn't changing
It's just you are getting old.

By now you should have done
All the things you intended
But you don't control your life
And you can't get it extended.

Maybe I'm right maybe I'm wrong
It's only the truth I seek
But I can tell by the look on your face
I'm up the proverbial creek.

As you get older you may find
You get creaking in most of your joints
But this is no excuse I say
To be robbed of your brownie points.

I hope when I get to the pearly gates
St Peter lets me in
I'll either be met with a darkening face
Or perhaps a welcoming grin.

What I want you to know about parenting a child with autism

The mum of a young boy on the autism spectrum has penned a heartfelt letter to parents of neurotypical children, asking for kindness and understanding.

April was Autism Acceptance Month, aimed to encourage inclusion of people on the autism spectrum.

Libby Green's son, Oscar, aged 4, attends our specialist school St Paul's College, in Balwyn. Oscar was diagnosed with autism about six months ago.

And while the school environment is inclusive and welcoming, Libby wishes the same for the wider community. She's penned this letter in an effort to help people understand what children on the spectrum and their parents go through.

Dear parent with a typically developing child,

I want you to know I've already driven to two other parks to see how many people are there before getting to this one. This one had the fewest people, I'm sorry.

I'm sorry if he follows your child a bit too closely; it's just because he wants to start a chasey game but doesn't know how to ask, and has no concept of the fact that your child might not want to play that sort of game. Permission is not something that exists in his world, at least not yet.

But I will grab him and pull him away, kicking and screaming and hitting me probably. I'm sorry again, he's autistic. "I'm sorry if he pushes in to go down the slide before your child whose turn it clearly was. He's just so excited. Turn-taking is not something that exists in his world, at least not yet. But I will take him off the slide, kicking and screaming and hitting me probably. I'm sorry again, he's autistic."

I'm sorry if I can't even attempt minimal polite conversation with you – I just can't take my eyes off him for a second. He's super quick you see and might run away, without a single care in the world. Making sure he is safe with a parent close by is not something he cares about, at least not yet. I'm sorry I'm so distracted, he's autistic.

We've been here for 12 minutes, I've apologised three times and I'm out of energy. More people have arrived and I can't keep apologising, so we'll just go home.

We all want to take our children to the playground – they love it so much. Please know that while you can sit back and smile and enjoy your child having fun – I am an anxious wreck who won't relax for even a moment, always remaining 1-2metres away from my child.

But I still want to take him to the playground, and I'm doing my absolute best. Your understanding and empathy, and maybe even a kind word, means more than you could know.

Libby Green, Oscar's Mum.



St Paul's College student Oscar



A letter to my younger self

The ship Francis trained on

Francis Archer is a resident of our affordable homes community in Mentone. Here, he pens a letter to his teenage self, sharing some advice and imparting some wisdom for what promises to be an interesting life ahead...

Dear teenage Francis,

You're probably reading this on the bus on your way up the mountain to boarding school from Madras. I know the full days' journey and 21 hairpin turns are gruelling, and 9.5 months away from your family is tough, but this education will shape you in amazing ways.

There are happy and challenging times to be had at school. Believe it or not, but one day a spotted panther will roam the school grounds! You will be safe, don't worry, and it will become an exciting story for you to recount during your long and happy life.

Keep up with your favourite subject, maths, and you may not appreciate it now but daily Mass will one day make your faith so central to your life. This time at Church getting acquainted with Jesus is not wasted.

You're about to gain your sea legs and embark on a career that will see you live a life few people could only dream of. Listen to your brother's advice and follow him into a rewarding career in the Navy. Calcutta, South America, the Canary Islands, the Mediterranean, Africa, Japan, New Zealand and Venice will be some of the many exotic stops on your 35-year career journey.

On one trip you'll have a chance encounter with your now Principal. He will still be a man you admire and will gift you a special book detailing the history of your boarding school, including cherished photos of you and your brothers. Hold on to this book and also be ready for the daily whisky he gives you before lunch for the duration of his voyage, remember, you're still on duty!

Lourdes, France will be a place you're continually pulled to, and you'll travel there seven times. Later, this silent force will soon make sense when you find out the small chapel your grandfather built and is now buried in, he named after Our Lady of Lourdes.



Francis Archer

Also, be on guard when you're crossing from South America to the Canary Islands, when an angry ocean will tip your merchant ship 45 degrees and you'll think the end is neigh. But you'll be ok – there's smoother waters ahead for you.

Fatherhood will be your biggest role yet – and you'll be blessed with two beautiful boys later in life, after you migrate to Australia. You'll be very proud of your sons who will jokingly call you 'Grandfather'.

You will also face some confronting health issues. A heart attack and cancer will ravage your body, but your faith will keep you going. Nobody on earth will love you as much as Jesus – he died for you – and you'll have comfort that when you pass you'll be heading towards someone who is waiting with love. In fact, you'll find a safe and comfortable home directly opposite a church in Mentone when you're an old fellow. Just down the road from the bay, where you'll also find solace in the familiar beauty of water. The community is also lovely there and they will care for you too.

But these are all things that lie decades ahead of you. So for now, enjoy your midnight 'sneak outs' from school on misty days with your friends (but don't get caught or you'll miss the weekly movie) and be true and kind to yourself. Be prudent and be discerning – life will throw you many distractions. Cultivate your learning and follow things which nourish you.

Love, your 82-year-old self, Francis.



Francis' grandfather's grave



Young Francis



Francis, bottom row, middle

Meet our volunteers!



Sushma Anand

Sushma is an early career scientist who has volunteered as a TeleFriend (making social calls to VMCH clients) since mid-2020. Her supervisor describes her as a very caring person with a big heart who is always willing to help others.

Why did you become a volunteer?

During the COVID-19 lockdown I became unemployed and had the time to offer my assistance in a volunteer role that would help others. I felt blessed to be living a good life and felt deeply concerned for others suffering from social isolation.

What do you enjoy most about volunteering?

I find my volunteer role very fruitful. It has given me the opportunity to be there for another and to grow my own self confidence. I enjoy all the topics of conversation with my friend and have learnt words of wisdom from her.

Why do you think social connections are so important?

We are living in a technologically advanced era where people are so busy with their gadgets they forget to physically meet and talk to their loved ones. Talking to people can help lower anxiety, stress and depression and also helps us to control our feelings, lead to a better quality of life and we become empathetic to each other.



Cheryl Merrett

Cheryl has been volunteering at Star of the Sea Aged Care Residence, Torquay, since it opened in 2018.

Why did you become a volunteer?

I wanted to do something else in my life that would prompt me to get me out of the house a few days each week. The decision to volunteer here was made easy as I had friends who were affiliated with the service already.

What do you enjoy most about volunteering?

Seeing the reactions on the residents' faces.

How did you feel when you weren't able to volunteer during COVID?

It was disappointing but understandable as we had to keep the residents safe. I kept in contact every few days with many of them via telephone, which was good.

How was it coming back?

It was so great. I'm close with the residents; one man was our neighbour for 30 years and I know a few others from my home town.

**Would you like to volunteer with us?
Call 1800 036 377 or email us at
volunteers@vmch.com.au.**



Austin Street gets royal treatment

The Royal Australian Navy, Austin Street residents and Manager, Kaylene

There was something distinctly royal about one of VMCH's vaccine sessions, when members of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) visited our Austin Street residence, home to younger people with acquired brain injuries. Residents, along with VMCH staff and Board members, received the COVID-19 vaccine.

VMCH Regional Manager – Clinical Support, Kaylene Bradford, said it was smooth sailing for the vaccinations, with residents impressed by their new military friends.

"The Navy members were very kind and added a bit of excitement to the day. The residents applauded their efforts and presented them with a box of chocolates afterwards."

COVID-19 vaccine roll out continues

Our COVID-19 vaccination program continues to be rolled out across our services.

Star of the Sea Aged Care Residence, Torquay was the first of our 12 aged care residences to receive the vaccine.

VMCH CEO Sonya Smart she was very pleased that the vaccinations have all gone smoothly.

"Our teams have done a wonderful job in arranging the vaccination programs across our residences.

"Thanks to communication with some of the other Catholic aged care organisations around Australia, we have been able to appropriately prepare, knowing how it has run in other homes and some of the issues they had faced.

"We ensured we had additional staff on the floor, to assist with the constant moving of residents to and from the vaccination space, it has been all hands on deck.

"Our Lifestyle and Pastoral Care staff have been incredibly helpful in supporting residents whilst they were waiting to get their vaccination too, as we all know how boring it can be while waiting at the doctors!

"It has been a great team effort, and I look forward to the continuing successful rollouts across all aged care residences."



Jennie Magennis was VMCH Star of the Sea Torquay's first vaccination of the day



John Maynard and Kevin Holland

Memories of war and service unite St Joseph's community

Step inside St Joseph's Mews retirement community and you won't find many people untouched by war. You'd be forgiven for missing it within the beautiful surrounds, but get chatting to its residents and you'll find a melting pot of cultures, religions and backgrounds – united in their experience of conflicts across the globe.

Cornerstone met with WWII veteran Kevin Holland, 98, and Vietnam War veteran John Maynard, 83, as they prepared for their annual Anzac Day ceremony.

The men are among many residents involved in numerous conflicts and wars, whether through combat on the front line, on navy ships or in the air force, providing healthcare or keeping the home fires burning.

Kevin was aged 19 when he enlisted, alongside his twin brother, to defend his country in 1942. They joined Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and qualified as radar mechanics but were assigned to different areas. The brothers wouldn't be reunited until Kevin was discharged in 1946.

Radar life was pretty straightforward, said Kevin. He and his RAAF comrades took six months' supplies, including fuel and canned food, for their operations. These stints included working on remote radar stations across the Darwin area, tracking enemy aircraft up to 320 kilometres away.

On reflection of his service, Kevin – a much-loved resident at St Joseph's – is affably stoic.

“I just accepted it as a job and when it was over I got on with my life.”

And he did, becoming an accountant and marrying his sweetheart Beth, with whom he had five children, 14 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Decades later, Doctor John Maynard, then aged 33, said goodbye to his wife Andrea and two young daughters as he followed in his father Roy's footsteps and joined the Australian Army.

Father and son both ranked as Majors and worked as medical pathologists – Roy in Malaya in 1942-45 and John in South Vietnam in 1970.

Their work was perhaps lesser known than their infantry compatriots, but just as important; diagnosing and treating soldiers and civilians with salmonella, cholera, malaria and typhus, performing blood transfusions and post-mortems.

It was rewarding but relentless work. Helping people, a trait he admired in his father as a boy, kept John motivated through the 12 months.

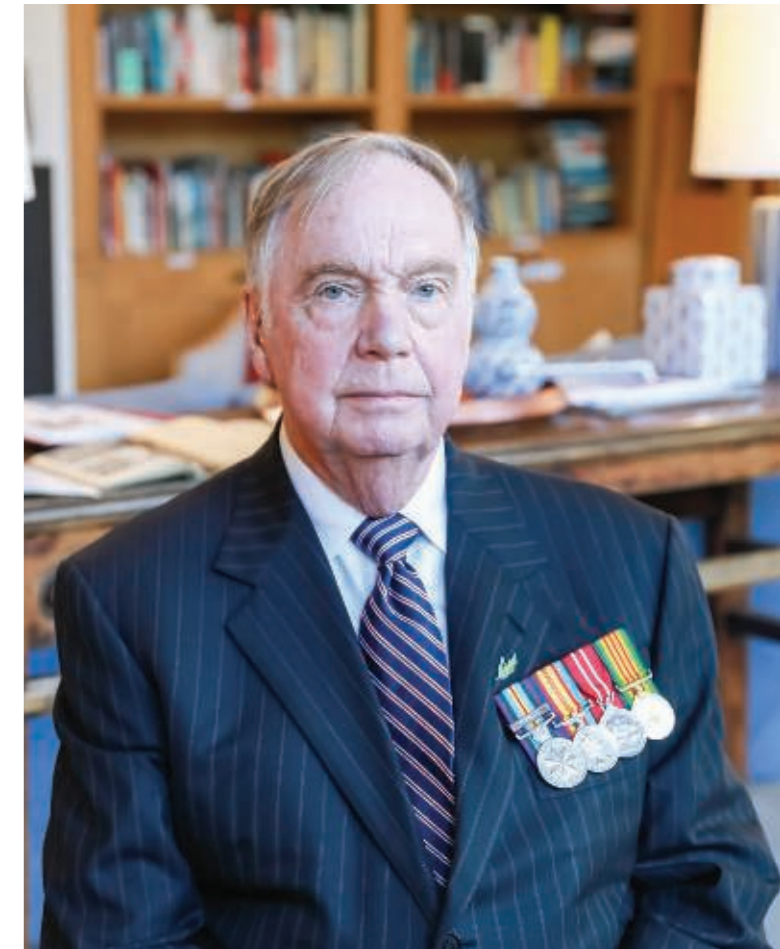
“He was a magnificent man. Always helpful and kind and he was a great father to me,” John said. “Interestingly, when we moved to St Joseph's I met another resident, also called John, who I knew as a boy. We worked out his father was the Commanding Officer of a field ambulance my Dad was part of. And we had both become doctors.”

Being part of the St Joseph's community is important to John, particularly as they gather for special events like Anzac Day.

“It's a significant day for me to remember how lucky we all are to have survived and how lucky I am to have my family. It's not a time to remember battles, but to thank those who served for us, and still do.”

Thank you to all the men and women across all VMCH services who've given so much, so that we can enjoy the life we do.

Lest We Forget.



John Maynard



F. I Gun detachment Fort Nepean (WWII)



Bob and Carmel Bott with a photo of their grandchild



Alistair and Shirly Lloyd



Kevin at the service

Introducing our loyalty cards

If you love op shopping, then good news! You now have another reason to visit one of our four fantastic op shops.

We have recently introduced our brand-new loyalty card system!

We're so thankful to all our regular, and new, customers that we wanted to reward those who shop with us.

The loyalty cards work like this:

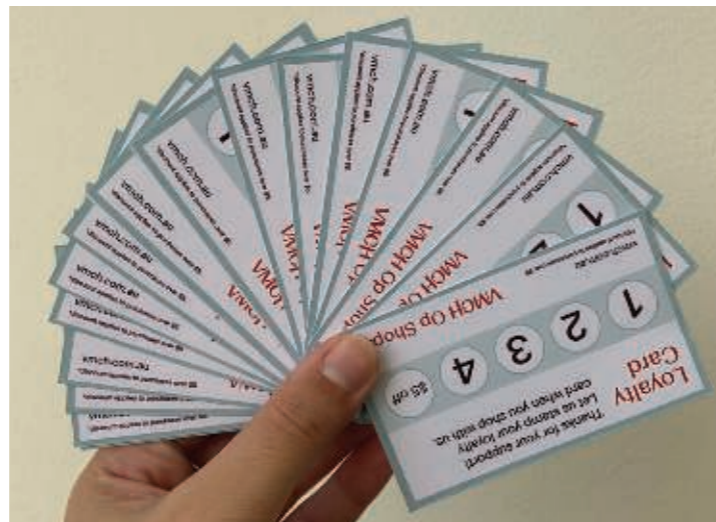
1. Shop at one of our VMCH op shops.
2. Get your card stamped each time you make a purchase.
3. On your fifth purchase you'll receive \$5 off (as long as the purchase is over \$5).

Our op shop managers and volunteers have had an extremely positive response to the loyalty cards and they're already in high demand.

Senior Manager Volunteer Services and Opportunity Shops, Bronwyn Summers was excited to implement the loyalty cards as another way to connect with customers.

"We wanted to introduce a loyalty program such as this to reward and thank customers who engage with us.

"It's a great way to connect more personally with them and show how much we appreciate and value their support. Customers say they are really enjoying these simple to use loyalty cards, which is what it's all about."



Come shop with us at Balwyn, Heathmont, Ferntree Gully and Wantirna.

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



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@vmchvic



@VMCHDisabilityServices

Find your passion

Meet Alan Roberts, one of our at-home aged care clients in Bendigo, Victoria – who shows us all that ageing and disability is no barrier to a happy, active life!

Alan currently receives support in the home to help him manage with a rare eye condition called Goldman Favre Syndrome, which has seen his eyesight deteriorate over the last 30 years.

"I started going blind back in 1985, but it's been a gradual loss to the point where I have been totally blind for the last seven years or so", says Alan.

Alan, who recently turned 70, also readily admits he has experienced other severe trauma in his young life, which led at times to issues with alcohol and severe depression. Fortunately he has many passions in his life which have kept him going through the rough times.

His number one passion is his love of animals, including his recently acquired Seeing Eye Dog Spike, his pet Labrador Nikki, and Roxy the cat.

"Nikki has been with me for 10 years now – she was my first Seeing Eye Dog. She's past retirement age now. I was fortunate to qualify for a new guide dog with SEDA (Seeing Eye Dogs Australia). Spike joined us in November 2020."

Alan's other great passion in life is his music.

He is an accomplished guitarist, singer and songwriter who continues to play and enjoy music with help from his support workers. He participates in a weekly folk pop choir called Choice Voices and he also performed at the Bendigo Club Open Mike Night where he sang a few of his own songs.

"Music has always been a touchstone for me – it just opened up a window to my soul at a very early age, and that window has never closed."

If that isn't enough for one person, Alan also cycles regularly in the TT Road Racing Group which includes riders from Castlemaine, Bendigo, Axe Creek, and all over the region.

He rides his tandem bike with his sighted mate Peter taking the forward position, and they ride weekly doing 50-80 kilometres with the group around the Bendigo region, enjoying cake, coffee and a chat, before heading home.



Alan and his dog, Spike

"I've been tandem riding since 1994. It's a good way to stay active and connect with some really great people – and I love the coffee and camaraderie," he says.

"In all sincerity, VMCH at-home services have absolutely been a sanity-saver for me. The support has really helped me to lead as close-to-normal a life as possible. But we have a lot of fun."

"The support of friends and interaction with acquaintances are important to keeping me engaged with life. I couldn't do my bike riding without the help of Pete."

Alan's advice for happiness in life is simple:

"Disease, illness or disability does not need to be a barrier to happiness. I still have the occasional down day that I can't explain but my motto is: greet each day with a smile, work at keeping a positive outlook, engage with other people as much as possible, engage with nature and animals, find or develop a passion for something you enjoy in life and get involved – don't sit in front of the TV all day."

We're here to support your health, wellbeing and independence. Call 1300 698 624 for more information.

✦ Mission in action

On Living and Dying Well

Dr Zachariah Duke, Formation and Ethics Advisor, VMCH

Australian social researcher and public commentator, Hugh Mackay, published a book in 2015, titled: *The Good Life: What Makes a Life Worth Living*. In this provocative book, Mackay explores the age-old how-and-why question: what does a life well lived look like? Mackay believes that a life well lived shouldn't hinge on one's wealth, status, career progression or locality. Rather, a life well lived should be determined by our ability to be other-centred.

The Catholic Tradition teaches us that death is part of our human journey and that death is not final. Catholics live in hope because of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, and through this we hope for our own resurrection and eternal life.

It often strikes me how much time and energy people invest in preparing for their engagement, wedding or a milestone birthday (as important as these celebrations are), why don't we invest the same amount of time and energy to prepare for a good death?

The theme of this year's National Palliative Care Week (23-29 May 2021) is: "Palliative Care: It's more than you think". It aims to raise awareness about quality palliative care – which encompasses far more than just end-of-life care.

It is therefore important that we plan for a good death which encompasses all our spiritual and emotional wishes.

In January 2021, Pope Francis announced the first World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly, which is to take place on 25 July 2021 – and will be celebrated each year on the fourth Sunday of July.

The theme is "I am with you always" which is an excerpt of a larger scripture quotation found in the Gospel According to Matthew (28:20). During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pope Francis urged young people to reconnect with the "wisdom and richness that older people provide" and calls people around the world to stop treating older people, weak and the infirm as "nonessential". The Catholic Tradition teaches us that all people are essential, and that all people deserve to have their dignity respected.

Catholic Matters: Amoris Laetitia Family Year 2021-2022

On the fifth anniversary of publishing the Apostolic Exhortation (a pastoral document written by the pope), *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis announced the 'Amoris Laetitia Family Year 2021-2022' – which will run from 19 March 2021 – 26 June 2022. This initiative aims to reach every family around the world through several spiritual, pastoral and cultural proposals that can be implemented within parishes, dioceses, universities, ecclesial movements and family associations.



Amoris Laetitia Family
Year 2021 - 2022

Joan's VMCH journey

Joan Waters certainly has a long connection with VMCH and Corpus Christi in Clayton. First as a volunteer, then as a resident at both Corpus Christi's retirement village and aged care residence.

It was around 15 years ago that Joan first saw Corpus Christi Aged Care Residence, however it was in the early stages of being built.

At the time, she was volunteering at the Kingston Centre, singing songs with her friend Pat, who played the piano. They performed for many different boards, groups and visitors.

As she watched the residence continue to grow, she thought it might be a nice place to volunteer, as it was a lot closer to her home.

Once Corpus Christi opened, Joan began to volunteer there, still singing well-known songs with Pat.

It was while she was volunteering at the residence one day that she saw the turning of the sod event for the soon-to-be-built Corpus Christi Retirement Village next door.

"I thought, that would be a nice place for us to live. I told my husband Kevin, who didn't really want to move to a retirement village – but he did. And he enjoyed living there!"

Joan and Kevin bought in the first round of units, and enjoyed their time in the village, attending as many of the activities at the Community Centre that they could. Joan would also sing at many of the occasions, as she loved being involved.

"Kevin looked after the veggie garden, which was a great source of silverbeet. All the residents would come and get it, as well as all the other different things he managed to grow."

The couple lived at the village for around eight years, with Kevin caring for Joan as her mobility and health became worse.



Joan, and the piano which entertained residents for years

Kevin then developed cancer, and whilst needing to undertake treatment, Joan attending the aged care residence for respite and care. Unfortunately, Kevin's treatment was unsuccessful, and he passed away in late 2019. Joan then became a permanent resident within Corpus Christi Aged Care Residence.

"While sometimes I would prefer to live on my own, I do like living here. There comes a time when you have to think about how you want to live, sometimes moving is all that you can do."

At Corpus Christi, Joan is able to continue her commitment to attending Mass.

"I went to daily Mass as a child, every morning, so I still go now. My father worked away, so I was mum's companion, and I went with her to Mass every day."

Joan watches Mass streamed from the Village Community Centre, as well as attending Mass twice a week in the residence.

"Other than Mass, I go to what I can. High tea, bingo, concerts, anything that I'm able to go to. The staff are very good here, someone is always able to take me there."

"There's always something on – which is nice."



World Down Syndrome Day - My story



Jenny

I have lots of achievements in my life I am proud of. The first would be representing Victoria for the Special Olympics in Hobart when I was 18 years old for swimming. I won a few medals for breaststroke and backstroke. I'm 49 now and live at a Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) in Carrum.

My four housemates and I moved here almost one year ago from our old VMCH SDA in Highett. I like the big spaces here and I have a bigger room. My favourite spot is the backyard where the BBQ is. I love to bake cakes, muffins and pancakes.

I like to do art and craft, get foot massages, go out for dinner and to the movies. I love travelling and have been to many countries. I've also gone on a cruise. When we can travel again I'd like to go on a holiday overseas.



Steven

Hi, my name is Steven and I am 51 years old. I follow the Richmond Tigers and have their team posters in my room at Carrum.

My room, the outdoor BBQ area and the sensory room are my favourite parts of my new home here. I also like the veggie garden and help staff to water it. I like to get out and about... I had a helicopter ride for my birthday, I've flown to Hervey Bay with my mum and my brother was the pilot, I've been on the Queenscliff ferry and have done a campervan trip around Australia with mum.

My favourite drink is Coca-Cola as a special treat and people would describe me as kind, considerate, softly spoken and gentle. I love my family (my mum Val, sister Della and brother Warren) and like spending time with my housemates.

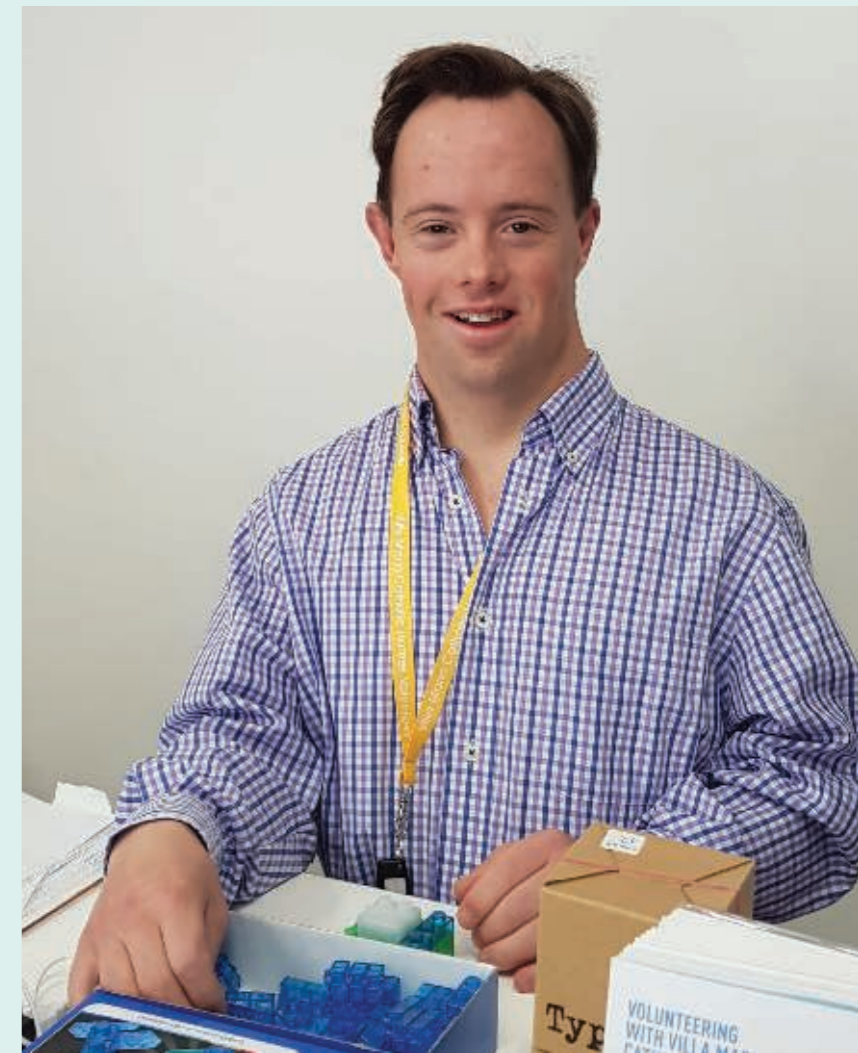
Peter

My name is Peter and I'm 33 years old. I have a certificate in Hospitality and have done some other job skills training, which has led me to my job at Alleycat Café in Balwyn. I work there Wednesdays and Fridays serving sweets, lunch and coffee. I like to spend my earnings on holidays, nice shirts and scarves.

I also volunteer each Tuesday at the VMCH Op Shop in Balwyn. My role there includes watering plants when it's hot, pricing, sweeping and ironing, which I'm pretty good at! I also pot plants in my own time and donate them to the shop for sale. I like volunteering because it helps me learn money skills and meet new people.

The money from the op shop goes to St Paul's College too, which is a good thing. In my spare time I like walking, bike riding with mum and doing yoga. I have an older sister called Clare and we get along well, I love her. My favourite foods are cake (sometimes), toast and salmon.

In the future I hope to continue working in hospitality and volunteering in my local community.



Patricia

My name is Patricia and I am 52 years old. I live at Wantirna SDA (Specialist Disability Accommodation) and I have three main dreams: to become a masseuse at Collingwood Football Club, to be in The Greatest Showman and sing with Hugh Jackman, and to be on Home and Away.

My favourite part of my bedroom is my Pies bedspread. My interests are colouring-in, spelling and learning money skills so I can get a job. I'm the youngest of ten kids. My parents have passed away but I am very close with my siblings and I'm an Auntie to a few nieces and nephews.

'Love is in the Air' is my favourite song; it played at my wedding to Robbie 12 years ago. Robbie lives in NSW but we talk on the phone. I miss him.





Taking care of carers

Marion and her husband John

Marion Kaye has been a carer for over 20 years. During this time, many things have changed, including funding streams, support services, and a pandemic. Even she has changed.

When Marion's son, David, was eight years old he was diagnosed with an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI). For Marion, this meant that the son she had known was gone, and she had to adjust as her new role of carer, as well as mum.

She says David requires a wheelchair, and has difficulty with fine motor skills and speech. While he has managed his own care through the NDIS since he was 18, he needs assistance from carers for everyday tasks.

Over the past 20 years Marion has been involved with the Carer Support program, coordinated through VMCH. Through this, she has had the opportunity to meet other carers, and have some time out to pursue activities and events to give her a break.

In more recent years Marion also became a carer for her parents. They relocated from their retirement village 17 years earlier to come and help Marion and her family. Now, in their 90s, they have their own health issues.

"In the last five years, our roles have reversed," says Marion. "Luckily, we were able to access emergency funding through their Home Care Package, for some additional help."

Despite the supports in place, Marion came to realise that the responsibility she was shouldering was taking a toll. Dealing with depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety, Marion now speaks with a psychologist once a month to keep her mental health in check.

"I realised that I was burnt out and I needed help. My carer role has not been easy. I have really had to come to terms with the fact that I need to look after my own wellbeing. I have to be selfish and be really aware of me."

As part of Marion's time with the Carer Support program, she became an art therapist, supporting carers for nine years. This also provided an opportunity to look at herself in a different way.

"It's made me grow, within myself, in lots of ways. So this had the benefit for helping others and myself at the same time. [Being a carer] was all thrown at me, there's been grief, mental health issues, and it is ongoing because I have my son every day.

"You just don't know what's around the corner. We don't plan any more, we just do it. This happened out of the blue and changed our life totally. We make the most of every day and if we want to do something, we do it.

"Just make the most of what you've got now. Don't leave your plans for tomorrow. If you want to do something, just do it."

If you care for someone, we're here for you. Call 1300 698 624.

Why I support VMCH

- Peter Walsh

"I was a foundation pupil when St Paul's College opened in 1957, aged eight. The school was then a specialised boarding school for the blind. The first principal, Brother O'Neill, established it as part of his work with Villa Maria Society.

The teachers and mothercraft nurses at the school adopted a person-centred approach. We children felt we were treated as special and important people. Years later, the school began supporting children with a range of disabilities.

I also served on the Board of Villa Maria from 1999 until the merger with Catholic Homes, when it became VMCH, in 2015.

Whilst I served on the Board, I was gladdened by parents who approached me to say that St Paul's provided a perfect fit for the individual needs of their children.

"So, when you give to St Paul's and VMCH, you are supporting a school which puts, up front, the specialised needs of the children in its care."



Peter Walsh



Peter as a young student at St Paul's College

There are so many ways to support VMCH. You can make a one-off or ongoing donation, visit one of our opportunity shops, become a corporate partner, volunteer with us, or leave a gift in your Will.

Call 1800 036 377. We are so very grateful for your support!

Can you help us fund some Pawfect Companions?



Have you ever owned a dog? If so, you'll know why they're known as man's (or woman's!) best friend.

Dogs offer unconditional love and bring joy, laughter and a bit of fun to those around them.

That's why we're launching our 'Pawfect Companions' program, to enrich the lives of older people in our 11 aged care residences.

We're seeking donations to help fund fortnightly dog therapy sessions for our 980 residents for the next two years.

We've partnered with another not-for-profit organisation, who believe the human-animal bond leads to a more enriched and fulfilled life – for both humans and dogs!

Their belief is scientifically backed, with therapy animals proven to have a positive impact on individual's social, emotional, physical and physiological health, improving quality of life and wellbeing.

As a not-for-profit organisation, we don't receive funding for programs like this. But we do like to go the extra mile for the people we support and do what we can to further enrich their lives.

Our aged care residents really did it tough last year. During the pandemic, when visits from loved ones stopped, social outings became impossible and boredom set in, the focus became on creating entertainment within their home.

We also hope to purchase some interactive 'companion dogs' that have built-in sensor technology, so they respond to petting and motion, much like real-life pets. These dogs provide comfort, companionship, help to reduce stress and are always available to our residents in between 'real-life' dog visits.



Aged care resident Isabel and dog, Roxy



Aged care resident Bernie and dog, Sunny

If you'd like to help bring smiles to our residents faces, please visit vmch.com.au/pawfectcompanions or email fundraising@vmch.com.au.



VMCH Charity Golf Day 2021

Melbourne delivered a picture perfect Autumn morning for our fifth annual VMCH Charity Golf Day on Friday 26 March.

The sun shone down on 72 players at the stunning Spring Valley Golf Club in Clayton, who fuelled up on a hearty breakfast before playing 18 holes of golf, all for a great cause.

The team from AESM (Australian Essential Services Maintenance) was victorious, taking out the competition from 17 other teams with a score of 54.



The winning team from AESM

If you would like to be involved in our 2022 event, please contact fundraising@vmch.com.au.

Golfers then set aside their friendly rivalries to network and enjoy a delicious buffet lunch, before learning more about the program they were there to support.

An incredible \$49,000 was raised for our In-Touch program, helping our aged care residents to connect with loved ones and their community through the use of technology.

VMCH CEO Sonya Smart thanked golfers from 21 companies for their generosity, particularly Gold Sponsor, Cura Health Group.

"In-Touch has been invaluable to our residents, clients and their families, particularly during the past year when face-to-face interaction with loved ones became impossible. We look forward to continuing to roll out this vital program and helping many more people into the future."



Thanks to our supporters



Introducing our new Memory Support Unit

We recently opened our brand-new Memory Support Unit (MSU) at Providence Aged Care Residence, Bacchus Marsh.

The MSU is a specialised home-like environment, created specifically for people living with dementia, with supports in place to encourage participation and independence.

The Providence MSU is purpose-built, with private rooms with ensuites, access to beautiful shared spaces and abundant natural light - all designed to inspire a sense of safety, security, independence and calm.

Melanie is one of Providence's Personal Care Assistants (PCAs), whose role is to ensure our residents have the best quality of life possible, by assisting with their everyday living, personal care, nutrition, activities, and making sure there is fun and laughter.

"Being able to have valuable one-on-one time is so important," says Melanie. "I spend a lot of time really building relationships with the residents and getting to know them, their likes and dislikes, and who they are as a person."

"I love knowing their background, and hearing their stories. We have a couple of real characters in here, so having a giggle with them is just beautiful."

"Being able to help them have the quality of life they deserve is a privilege, and seeing the smiles on their faces when they have achieved something they haven't done in a while is so satisfying."

Want to experience our warm, happy and friendly atmosphere? Contact us on 1300 698 624 to find out more.



Melanie loves spending time with residents



Providence MSU is purpose-built for people living with dementia



Natural light inspires independence and calmness



Volunteer with us.

Would you like to make a positive difference in the lives of others? We're looking for volunteers in both on-site and remote roles:

Residential Aged Care: lifestyle activities, pastoral care support

Op shops: customer service, sorting and mending

Disability Services: friendship and activity support

Palliative Care: end of life support at our new centre in Prahran

Stay active, meet new people, and give something back.

Like more information?



1800 036 377
volunteers@vmch.com.au

VMCH

Friendship and fun

Many things in life can spark a friendship. For Phil and Peter, it was dogs.

Living at Star of the Sea Retirement Village, Torquay, these two gentlemen and their much-loved pets have formed a close bond.

One day Phil knocked on Peter's door with a failed Guide Dog, Atticus and asked if he'd be interested in taking him on. He himself had taken on Persia, who also failed due to having epilepsy.

Peter couldn't say no, especially to a Labrador who was 'too placid'.

“Phil walked past my place every day so one day I said ‘hello mate’, and that’s how we met. If you’re on your own someone here is always up for a chat. Especially when the bar is open 24/7.”

“Now, we are dog lovers who also love a beer... that’s us!”

Now, Phil and Peter walk their dogs together every day, and chat about how much they love the place and brainstorm new activities and initiatives for the village.

Phil, who is also the Resident Group's Chairman, has many plans, including pet-friendly options for residents, including a closed off dog park.

“There's a lot of dog owners and some people don't have full mobility to give them a good run. It would be great for exercise, and allow people to come and play in an enclosed environment with the dogs especially if they don't have one.

“I want to show that we do have an active lifestyle here at Star of the Sea, and I believe dog walking is one way of doing this.”

Both Peter and Phil love the atmosphere at Star of the Sea, and chat about all the benefits they've found since living there.

“It's a great environment here,” says Phil, “you're only five minutes to the beach or the shops. It's a very open area, lots of free air, there is so much to love about this place.”

Pete agrees. “It's a wonderful environment. It's safe, welcoming and there's lots of social activities and outings. Including some pub crawls!

“Wherever you go there's always someone to say hello to.”



Phil (left) with dog Persia, and Peter (right) with Atticus



Now I'm getting help at home, I can focus on the things I love.

Sometimes a little help at home is all you need.

We can help with:

- household tasks
- showering and dressing
- shopping and errands
- lifestyle and respite.

Concerned about COVID-19? We follow stringent health and safety practices, so we can continue delivering care while keeping you safe.



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VMCH



Book your
private tour

Residential
Aged Care

Now mum's receiving care that's second to none

Take a tour of one of our 12 aged care
residences and feel the VMCH difference.



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