


# Cornerstone

VMCH

A man with short brown hair is smiling broadly while sitting in a wheelchair. He is wearing a dark blue button-down shirt with a vibrant pattern of orange and pink hibiscus flowers and green leaves. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Art unites students  
and artists during  
pandemic

A mother's love and  
tenacity

O'Neill House opens  
for end-of-life care

Edition Six

“A word or a smile is often enough to put fresh life in a despondent soul.”

- St. Thérèse de Lisieux

Publishing details.

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**Front Page:**  
Glen Waverley Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) resident, Andy.



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The information in this publication has been prepared by VMCH (Villa Maria Catholic Homes) as a general guide to our services and operations. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, VMCH accepts no responsibility for any loss or inconvenience caused by reliance on the information set out in this publication. Please contact us if you require detailed information about any of our services. November 2021.

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# 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.

## A note from our Chairman

**Welcome to the sixth edition of Cornerstone.**

In the midst of this global pandemic and lockdown fatigue, I'm constantly inspired by the commitment and dedication of our community to the safety and wellbeing of those we support.

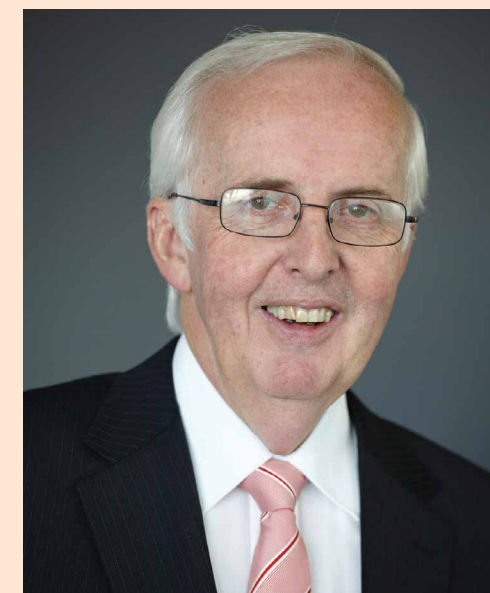
While the pause button has been hit on many of the activities and freedoms we enjoy, life rolls on and we must maintain a positive outlook as we work towards achieving our Mission: to continue the caring ministry of Jesus Christ for some of the most vulnerable people across Victoria.

Keeping our residents and clients safe continues to be our key focus. A critical part of this has been our COVID-19 vaccination rollout among staff and volunteers. This has been a huge undertaking and has gone very well. By January 2022, all VMCH staff, volunteers and contractors will need to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (aged care staff earlier, by mid-November).

Despite restrictions to our services, our community has been very innovative in continuing to deliver care and support. On page 21 you'll read about teacher Hygenia Lobo, who organised an artist in residence program for her young students, to help boost their learning experience during lockdown. And on page 25 you'll meet some grandparents from St Joseph's Mews, who are utilising technology to ensure they stay connected to their grandkids.

Innovation is a common practice at VMCH and we're always looking forward to ensure we're providing the right support to those who need it. Many of the people we support live with dementia, a condition which affects close to half a million Australians.

We're committed to providing care to our aged care residents with dementia through our Memory Support Units (MSU), our Specialist Dementia Care Unit at St Bernadette's Aged Care Residence in Sunshine North, and other projects currently in the pipeline.



In our first feature of this edition you'll meet Personal Care Assistant Mel, who works in one of our MSUs. Mel's nan had dementia, which has given her a personal insight into the condition and motivation to help people living with dementia. I'm proud to have people like Mel as part of our community, people whose dedication to their calling is unwavering and has a meaningful impact on the lives of many.

Our dedication to providing high-quality palliative care also continues. Recently we were thrilled to open of O'Neill House, a personalised caring experience for older people requiring temporary respite care or end-of-life care, and support for their families. You can read more about this important service on page 11.

As we approach the end of the year, I'd like to thank you for your support and interest in our organisation. I take this opportunity to wish you every blessing for Christmas and a happy and safe New Year.

Please take care and God bless.

**Julien O'Connell AO**  
VMCH Board Chairman



# At home in our memory support units

We caught up with Mel, one of our valuable Personal Care Assistants (PCAs) working within our Memory Support Unit (MSU) at VMCH Providence Aged Care Residence, Bacchus Marsh.

Mel's nan had dementia, and now Mel spends every day helping our residents to retain their independence and have fun in a warm, inviting, home-like environment.

## What does a 'normal' day look like for you?

We start off by doing a check of all the residents, even if they're still sleeping. We never wake them unless there is a real need. We then prepare the dining room, and assist the residents to get ready. In most cases the residents can shower and dress themselves with direction and reassurance, as keeping their independence is very important.

Residents can help themselves to breakfast as everything is labelled and easy accessible, and we are there to give help if needed.

We then have activities, which are very person-centred, so we have something for everyone. We do gardening, painting, jigsaws, reading, sensory games, walking groups and more! Music and dancing is very popular, so we often dance and sing along. We also have some residents who love to help with the house-keeping, including doing the dishes and laundry folding.

After lunch we have quiet time, and after this some of the residents help us bake for afternoon tea. Then we get ready for the late afternoon and evening, and to do it all again tomorrow!

## What is so special about Providence MSU?

The unit itself is so beautiful, with lots of light and a lovely garden area. Everything is accessible to all of the residents, which helps make it feel like it's their home. The staff don't wear a uniform either, which adds to that feeling of being at home. We often sit down and have a cuppa or a meal with the residents which is also really nice; they (and we) love it. The amount of care, understanding and compassion in this MSU is beautiful.



Mel loves working at Providence MSU

## Why do you love working in the MSU?

I love being able to have that one-on-one time and building a relationship while getting to know the residents. I love knowing their backgrounds. We have a couple of real characters in here so having a giggle with them is just beautiful.

**“I love helping them have the quality of life they deserve. Seeing the smiles on their faces when they have achieved something they haven't done in a while is fantastic. It's satisfying to help them overcome a bad day and smile on the other side.”**

Michele Toussaint's mum, Alix, is 92 years old. She spends her days happily folding and putting away clothes, doing the dishes, enjoying some craft or gardening and listening to music.

The only difference is that Alix does all of this while living in the MSU at St Catherine's Aged Care Residence in Balwyn. Alix, who lives with dementia, has lived at St Catherine's for eight years, however she recently moved into the new dedicated MSU as she started to need more help and support.

“She loves having company,” says Michele, one of Alix's 12 children. “She loves the activity programs, and there aren't as many people so it's a bit more supportive, and home-like. We are very glad we did it.

“The activities are great, there is always a lot on, but she also likes doing the things she used to do at home. It's a really nice environment. Mum had 12 children, and she has always been busy. She was a stay-at-home mum, and so she was very busy looking after all of us kids. So doing things like this, it helps her.”

Alix's dementia was diagnosed before she moved to St Catherine's. When her husband died in 2011, it became harder for her to live at home, and so in 2013, she made the move.

Michele says her mother's dementia is progressively becoming worse, with her finding it hard to remember people, including her family members.

“But she does have 24 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren, so it's understandable!” says Michele.

“We have also noticed that she is asking the same questions all the time, and she is speaking French more and more, even to the staff. Our family is from Mauritius, which is a French-speaking country. Before COVID, I would take mum home and we would cook a traditional Mauritian lunch together, and I try to get mum involved in preparing the food, just for the memories.

“She loves visiting, but she knows this is her home. Usually she is ready to come back after a couple of hours. So she has adjusted well, and settled in nicely.

“It is a really nice place, the atmosphere, and the kitchen especially, is lovely. The garden is great to go and walk around, mum can go in and out whenever she likes. The support of the staff is also fantastic. She always has so much to do during the day, and then in the evening she is happy to be in her room, because she gets tired. But she definitely tries to get involved as much as she can.

“It really is about doing things like a community. I like that for her.”



Michele and her mum, Alix



# A mother's love and tenacity

Entrusting the permanent care of your child to someone else is tough to comprehend. But it's a heartbreaking reality for many parents of children with disability.

Ruth's son David contracted meningitis when he was eight weeks old, resulting in severe intellectual disability. It was the 70s, and when Ruth was advised to place him into a local orphanage, she was horrified. And so began their challenging, life-long journey of finding the right care and support for David, now aged 44.

David lives at VMCH's Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) home in Carrum. It's a place Ruth describes as "safe and happy". "We (parents and guardians) are most grateful for all that VMCH has provided for our children. To know that your child is safe, happy, loved and comfortable in a caring and supportive 'home' is an enormous relief to parents as we grow old and cannot continue their care."

While David's future no longer keeps Ruth up at night, it wasn't always the case.

Ruth separated from David's father when David was two. She spent 10 years as a working single mother before she married Bart and gained support in her mission to find suitable care for David. The pair attended regular meetings focussed on the need for more residential options for children and young adults with disability.

At age 13, David was offered a permanent place to live at Marillac House in East Brighton.

"As a parent it is exceptionally hard to place your child into the care of someone else as it is only natural that you think they will not do it as well as yourself. Another huge concern is not knowing what the emotional parting will do to your child. However, the care and attention given to David was wonderful."

When David was 16, Ruth and Bart joined the parents of fellow resident, Lainie, in lobbying State and Federal Ministers to fund a new home, before they turned 18. She describes the process as "depressing and stressful".

Thankfully, in 1996, funding was granted to Eloura Homes Inc. and David, Lainie and three other residents moved into a home in Highett. In 1997, VMCH took ownership.

**"The residents spent over 25 very happy years there together," Ruth says. "The parents and guardians became a close unit and we always agreed we would look out for and advocate on behalf of each other's child."**

In July 2020, VMCH opened it's new, purpose-built SDA in Carrum and the five residents, and now lifelong friends, moved in. Ruth says David is enjoying all his new home and suburb have to offer.



David as a baby



Bart, Ruth and David

**"He still likes going outdoors and enjoys wheelchair walks in the local area. His laughter is usually heard all over the park!"**

Reflecting on their journey, Ruth pinpoints hard fought for moments that have made life easier for people with disability and their families, such as International Year of the Disabled Person's declaration of 'social inclusion for all' in 1981, the Futures for Young Adults Program in 1995, and the NDIS in 2018.

"We have certainly made enormous advances since my first day of 'living with disability' in 1977! I can't believe I have been part of 44 years of committee meetings to instigate change and address needs and problems," Ruth says.

**"David is a benefactor of these external lifetime influences through the changed societal attitudes, increased expectations and enormous efforts for social inclusion in all aspects of his life."**



David (left) and his housemate Steven

## What is SDA?

Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) is housing designed for people with high support needs. It gives people with disability the ability to live independently. At VMCH, houses are designed with warmth, comfort and people's individual personalities in mind.

VMCH has 16 SDAs, including Austin Street, our home for younger people with acquired brain injuries. We are opening a new SDA in Heidelberg Heights in early 2022.

We also have three short-term accommodation (STA) homes for children and teenagers with disability.



# Hampers lift spirits of entire VMCH community



**Aged care residents have been doing it extremely tough during lockdown. But many are finding joy and purpose in doing something for others in the lead up to the festive season.**

This is Mary (above). For the past seven years she's been making decorations to include in our Christmas hampers. Each year, we create and deliver around 600 hampers including food, decorations, toiletries and toys to our affordable homes residents, families from our St Paul's College and early learning and therapy communities, and clients receiving home care packages.

"This program has meant a lot to me, it makes me feel special to be part of it," Mary says. "I enjoy making the craft and being involved in a group; it makes me feel connected. I often imagine the person opening the door and receiving the hamper and this makes me feel special."

The hampers are a huge community effort. Along with our aged care residents, clients from our disability services and volunteers make decorations, a group of retirement living residents create bon bons, local students from Methodist Ladies College donate food items, charity Good360 Australia donate toys, and our staff volunteer to pack and deliver the hampers,



as well as some choosing to donate to our appeal through a Workplace Giving program.

Mission team member Jo Gray says the feedback from recipients is always so positive. "For some it's the highlight of their year, which says a lot about the impact. A daughter rang to say how grateful she was. She's caring for her mum and is quite socially isolated. She said VMCH is one of the best organisations she and her mum were involved with."

On receiving his hamper last year, affordable homes resident Michael said: "Thanks so much, I'm so thankful for all these goodies, you've made my Christmas."



This will be VMCH's seventh year delivering hampers, and perhaps the most important. Lockdowns have left vulnerable people even more isolated, and finances have been hit hard. We can't wait to knock on those doors and help spread some Christmas cheer this December.

**If you would like to support our hamper drive with goods or donations in 2022, please call 1300 698 624.**



## A letter to my younger self

Les Mullins

### Les Mullins – VMCH Corpus Christi Retirement Village

Congratulations, you've made it this far! I am here to tell you that everything will indeed, turn out alright for you.

Never mind being a loner, enjoy your time in the country, exploring and riding your bike around. You'll always look back at this time fondly. You'll have a great couple of mates that will you'll spend all your time with as you get older, playing tennis, squash, baseball – you'll never stop! Don't be a lazy person. Activity when young helps a lot as you get older, your body becomes stronger (even at the ripe old age of 94 and a half!)

And don't worry, you'll have a beer eventually, it'll just be at your wedding down the track, after you've spent a bit of time around Australia and overseas working. Val will wait for you, until you've got a job and are ready to settle down. You'll be married for 48 happy years. You will love it. But you'll also remind her constantly that she drove you to drink!

School will be a bit tough for you, you're not much of a reader, but you are stubborn. A career as a draftsman will lead to some great experiences and travel across the world – although you won't get to see too much of it while flying in and out. And be careful of the monsoon, which will keep you away from home and your four kids for a little while longer than expected.

Of your four children, none will be engineers like you. In fact, you will ask the question 'who will follow in my footsteps' and will receive silence in return. But that's OK, no need to encourage them one way or another, they will find their own way to their successful careers.

Remember to keep your faith. Treasure it. It can offer so much peace. You can be in diabolical trouble, you might be ill, but you'll always have someone to talk to upstairs. Two heads are better than one. Continue to go to mass, because you can't be on the team if you don't go to practice sometimes.

Life has had bumps, but without those bumps it's not much of a life. Just live the life you are living, and never wish for anything that you cannot afford. You will have no wishes left unfulfilled, you will have a good stable life.

Avoid arguments. They only cause anger. Debate by all means, but don't let it get personal. Try not to hold a grudge, most people want to forgive and forget.

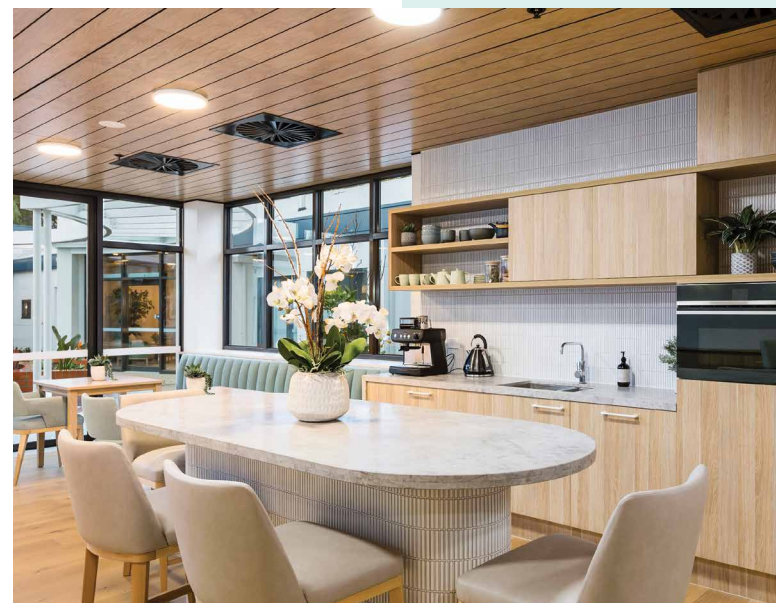
Things will fall into place pretty well for you, but when things do go amiss, don't worry, the man upstairs will help sort it out.

Take care,

Les

**This piece is in memory of Les Mullins. Thank you for your wise words, Les.**





# O'Neill House open for end-of-life services

VMCH's O'Neill House, an end-of-life comfort care centre has opened in Prahran. The service will provide 22 beds for people to experience the best available support at their end-of-life.

Sonya Smart, VMCH CEO says the concept of 'comfort care' is important to the organisation.

**"O'Neill House provides palliative support for people in their last months of life, and ensures family and friends can maintain their caring role in this comfortable home, in conjunction with our care teams."**

"This new service offers people options at this important time of their life, so they can be supported in a home-like environment. We are then able to care for their physical and spiritual wellbeing, as well as ensuring their family and loved ones can spend valuable, quality time together."

Ms Smart said in 2017, Palliative Care Victoria estimated that 1 in 4 Victorians who die each year (approximately 10,000 people), died without adequate access to palliative care.

"We also know that people are entering aged care much later in life, and at this stage, many of our residents are already palliative.

The admission process into mainstream aged care can be very stressful for the older person and their family.

"At VMCH we have taken this information and plan to continue to build on our palliative expertise and quality care, not just at O'Neill House, but across all our residences and, where appropriate, in our other services too.

"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."

Ms Smart says O'Neill was designed following extensive research, recognising the importance of the physical environment.

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

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

"This building is a sanctuary for the person dying and their families and friends."



**"The staff are so caring and go above and beyond to support the resident and the resident's family. The respect, care and love provided meant we could trust that his every need would be taken care of and that we would be listened to. Such an incredibly experience for our family."**

Lisa Minchin, whose father passed away at O'Neill House.

To find out how O'Neill House can support you, phone 1300 698 624.



# Honouring our volunteers

We were thrilled to thank and acknowledge the work of our 500 volunteers during National Volunteer Week and Student Volunteer Week this year. So much of what we do would not be possible without their amazing support!



## Meet Bob...

Bob Martin says volunteering keeps him young. The 80-year-old is a much-loved figure around our Mt Waverley day program for adults with disabilities, where he's volunteered for over ten years.

Despite his own personal struggles, including losing his wife, his son and surviving cancer, Bob's commitment to VMCH clients remains strong.

"I try to help out as much as I can and just make it a fun day for everyone, both the clients and the staff. We just hang out and joke around. I'm mixing with younger people, so it's kept me young and up to date with what's going on out in the world. It gets me up, gets me out and keeps me involved."



## Meet Gilda...

The Year 12 student spends her Saturdays volunteering at our Heathmont Op Shop, serving customers, setting up displays and pricing goods.

"I like helping other people and knowing it's all for a good cause," Gilda, 18, says. "Plus the other volunteers are really nice and it's a lot of fun!"

Gilda encourages her young peers to give volunteering a go.

"It's definitely worth doing to help the community but it's also good experience for you, and can help on your resume."



## Meet Andy and Carolyn...

This retired pair have been giving their time – Carolyn as a 'sorter' and Andy as a driver – at our Op Shop Warehouse for five years.

"Time goes so fast when you're having fun," says Carolyn, who followed her husband's lead into volunteering once she retired.

The former hairdresser, business owner and retail employee says sorting the op shop goods is right up her alley.

"I love a bargain and have a keen eye for fashion. The friendships are amazing and you're giving something back to the community."

Andy says he loves his driving role.

"At VMCH you connect with lovely people and form a wonderful circle of friends."

# Finding new ways to connect

With COVID-19 impacting the provision of services across Victoria, we are still doing all we can to ensure that our residents and clients are well supported.

Doris is one of our Community Home Support Program (CHSP) clients, who experiences short-term memory loss and arthritis. Doris used to attend our program at White Road, Wantirna, until March 2020 due to COVID-19. This April, when the centre reopened under a different format, Doris was thrilled to return, but unfortunately she again had to stop attending due to the ongoing lockdowns.

To support White Road clients, our at-home aged care team pivoted to offer other services, including in-home respite and online conversation times to keep clients engaged and connected. Fortnightly care packages were also delivered including puzzles, quizzes and some sweet treats.

Doris has been thrilled with the care she still receives from the team, despite the closures, as has her husband and carer, Norbert. She eagerly waits for her CHSP Community Support Assistant (CSA) Joanne to arrive, so they can do the puzzles and activities together. She enjoys the interaction and seeing her regular CSAs is a highlight of her week.

"I love receiving the hampers every fortnight, and I can't believe how lucky I am to get another one," says Doris. "I really enjoy the activities and the yummy treats."

Similarly, Norbert enjoys the time that the CSAs spend with Doris.

"I am very glad for (the CSAs) being here with Doris, but sometimes I feel a bit guilty that I then get to have that time to myself to go shopping. The time away does give me a bit of a break though, and it's also good for Doris."

"When the program is open, I am so very grateful that Doris can attend White Road for the four hours, as it also gives me the chance to attend the Men's Shed Group that I belong to."

Lyn Alexander, CHSP Respite Coordinator, says



Doris loves her regular hampers

that despite lockdowns the program has remained busy, with the teams finding new ways to support VMCH clients as much as possible. This has included regular phone calls, video calls, and hamper arrangements, while also coordinating clients' rosters and care. However, overall Lyn says it has been very challenging for both staff and clients.

"It is difficult for our clients, as they're not able to access our services in person. There is social isolation and decline in cognition, which can be due to limited stimulation outside of the family home. There is also a greater burden on carers as they aren't getting a break."

Lyn says despite the uncertainty and the challenges, the clients and their families have all been very accepting of the situation.

"During lockdowns we have still been able to offer in-home respite for two to three hours per week, or a weekly video conversation, which is great. Our CSAs have been amazing and so supportive. They've had to adapt quickly to the changed role from working in a centre to working in clients' homes. They work so hard, but they always have a smile on their face. We are so lucky to have our staff supporting our clients."

"I am just so looking forward to when we can reopen and get back to what we do best, supporting our clients and carers in the best possible way to lessen their isolation, improve their cognition and give carers a break."

**To find out about our at-home aged care services, call us on 1300 698 624.**

**Would you like to volunteer with us? Call 1800 036 377.**



# Looking towards the future in Disability Services

The impact of COVID lockdowns on our group programs has been disappointing, but there's been a silver lining. Our teams have taken these downtimes as an opportunity to refocus, reshape and respond to what our clients really want and need.

We're excited to launch some new, skill-based programs, all geared towards giving our clients the experience and skills they need to improve their independence, reach for their goals, or enter the workforce.

Here are just a few:

- We've purchased a café in Wangaratta! 'Where is my coffee?' will be a social enterprise, employing VMCH clients to give them invaluable, real-life work experience to help set them up for the future
- Retail Therapy – new program aimed to help clients learn retail and customer service skills at our op shops
- Green Team – a gardening and horticulture skills program already running in Ararat, looking to expand to the Knox Community Gardens and Collingwood Children's Farm later this year.

## So, let's meet some of our clients...

Tom, Josh and Jordan say taking part in our weekly cooking group in Ararat not only helps their culinary skills – but has some great health benefits too!



Josh

Each week, alongside their support workers, the guys visit the local supermarket armed with recipes and shop for ingredients. Then back at VMCH, they get started on creating dishes like spaghetti bolognese, tacos and stir fries.

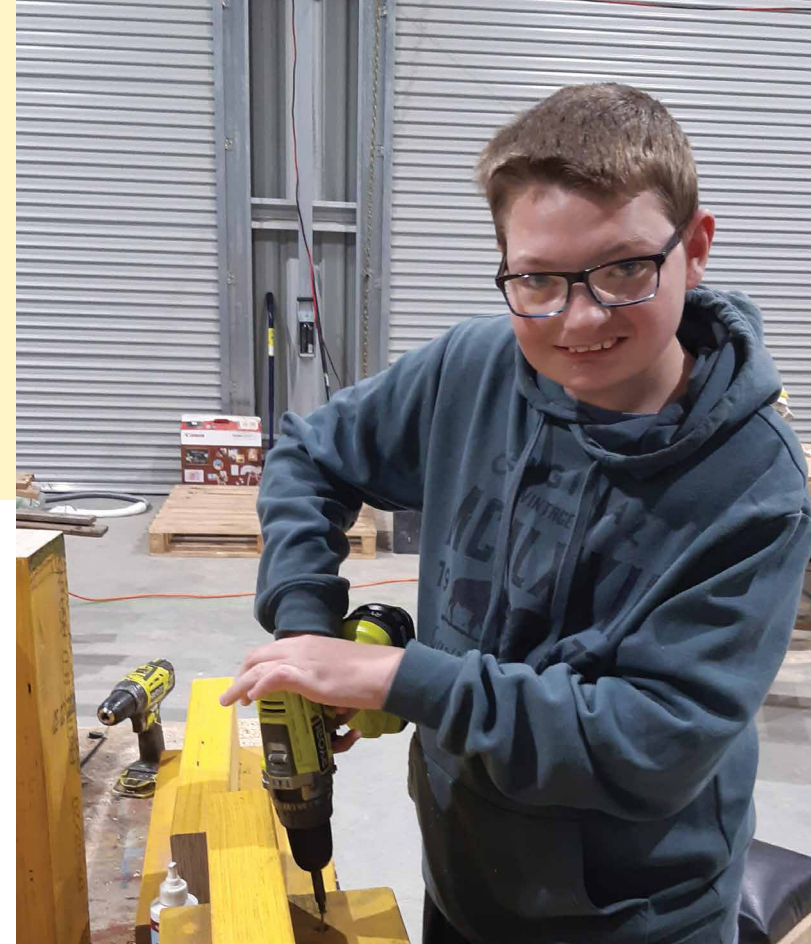
Jordan says, "I love coming to cooking group and hanging out with nice people." Josh says he enjoys learning new skills and getting out of the house for a fun activity. Tom agrees, saying he "loves cooking" and enjoys the walk there as well.

The health benefits are many, not just practically through life skills like budgeting, cooking and cleaning, but helping to build confidence and social connections.



Tom

Jordan



Aiden



Alex

Meanwhile in Wangaratta, Aiden and Alex are kicking goals at Cre8, our life skills program for children, teens and young adults.

Each week, Aiden joins around 12 young people in a local workshop, gaining confidence in using tools to create various pieces such as furniture from pallets, repairing bike punctures, and artwork from recycled products. Aiden's recent projects include a toolbox, coffee table and bench seats, most of which he's gifted to family members. Aiden says enjoys the social aspect, and loves being part of our new program, Cre8 Work Skills, which focusses on employment goals for older

teens. Aiden and his peers are guided by VMCH support worker John (a professional artist) who says the program is so important for building independence and teaching pre-apprenticeship skills for a variety of trades.

Alex loves repurposing unwanted materials for projects and has so far made a dog kennel, mud kitchen, garden beds, a custom chair, name sign and a shoe rack. The 21-year-old, who loves a bit of banter with his Cre8 mates, says he hopes the skills will help him to find paid employment in a trade.



Social Engine and VMCH Community Connections clients with the Street Law Van

Thank you to the Prowse family for donating \$10,000 to our fantastic Kickstarter Coffee Cart Program. The program – run in partnership with Social Engine and their Street Law Van – has given clients from our Community Connections program the opportunity to practice their coffee making, money handling and customer services skills. Unfortunately, COVID has delayed the launch of this program, but we hope to take the van out on the road to our aged care residences and retirement communities very soon!



# A pawfect time for some new friends

Our aged care residents are excitedly awaiting visits from some special guests who promise to be 'Pawfect Companions'.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our supporters, more than \$25,000 has so far been raised to help us introduce fortnightly pet therapy sessions at our 11 aged care residences.

Pet therapy is proven to have a positive impact on individual's social, emotional, physical and physiological health, improving quality of life and wellbeing.

With continued lockdowns over the past two years, our aged care residents are more than ready to have a bit of extra fun, laughter and joy brought into their lives.

However, we'd still love support from the community to ensure we can continue the program for years to come.

Non-profit organisation Delta Therapy Dogs has been working hard behind the scenes to bring the sessions to life at our residences, and we can't wait to bring you some good news stories about the program's benefits soon!



Would you like to support our Pawfect Companions appeal? Get in touch: 1300 698 624 or via the QR code.



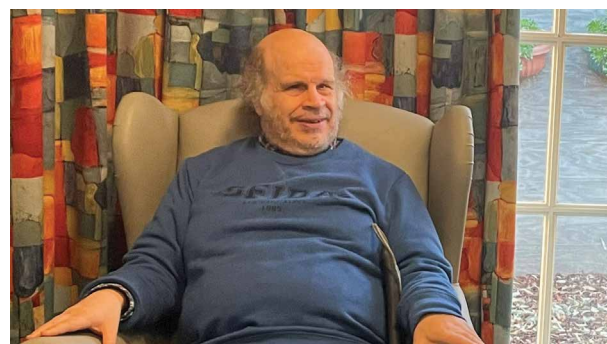
## There's no place like home

Residents at our Nunawading Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) are enjoying spring in a gorgeous new garden thanks to a generous donation.

Helen Shoebridge (pictured above) and her five roommates love nothing more than sitting outside enjoying some fresh air and watching birds in their garden.

Helen's family donated \$10,000 from their family's trust to add some colour and texture to the garden, with the purchase of Japanese maples, magnolias, gardenias and more. The landscaper also incorporated some ornaments the residents have collected over the years in a 'secret garden' at the side of the house, a natural rock water feature and solar powered fairy lights.

"We look forward to it growing and providing a beautiful outdoor space that the ladies will enjoy for years," says Team Leader Diane Jesson.



Meanwhile at our Moorabbin SDA, residents are enjoying new furniture and homewares thanks to \$13,000 raised in our 2020 Christmas appeal (shared across three SDAs). Team Leader Sam Chege went even further, organising a raffle to raise a little extra to purchase beautiful armchairs for residents (pictured above). Well done Sam!

A huge thank you to all of our lovely supporters, whose generosity helps brighten the lives of our clients and residents every day.

Want to learn more about how you can support VMCH? Visit: [vmch.com.au/get-involved](https://vmch.com.au/get-involved)

# Affordable homes a beacon for at risk seniors



Warrick Jennings (pictured above) says if it wasn't for VMCH he would be "another homeless statistic living on the street".

Warrick lost his private rental because he couldn't afford to pay the rent due to ill health. Social workers at Monash Hospital put him in touch with the VMCH affordable homes team, and thankfully, Warrick moved into our Caulfield North affordable homes community a few months ago.

**"It was a great relief I finally had a roof over my head permanently. It took away a lot of stress and worry."**

Anglicare Australia's Rental Affordability Snapshot 2021 found just 0.5 per cent of rentals were affordable and suitable for a retiree on the Age Pension. People aged over 55 are one of the largest at-risk groups for becoming homeless.

VMCH provides affordable homes for 459 people across Melbourne, as well as providing land for a peppercorn lease for another 40-plus homes through the Director of Housing.

Like so many, Warrick never imagined he'd be worrying about a roof over his head at this stage of his life. He was a self-employed gardener for 30 years, worked in a bank, for a gas and fuel corporation, and even owned a milk bar.

"These were all very successful so it just proves anyone can end up homeless without the help of people like those at VMCH."

VMCH CEO Sonya Smart says providing affordable homes is part of the non-profit organisation's mission to support the most vulnerable in the community.

"All people and especially older people deserve to live in comfort, with security and with dignity," she says. "There is a huge gap in housing for older people, particularly older women who are still very independent and many years away from requiring aged care services. That's why we continue to actively grow our affordable homes across Melbourne, including our most recent 40-unit development in East Ivanhoe (pictured below), due for completion in October 2022."



For now, Warrick is settling into his home and enjoying a new sense of ease.

**"Affordable homes are so important for a good quality of life, for independence and safety and not worrying about where the next dollar will come from."**

His new home has also given him hope for the future.

"Caulfield North is a good location for transport and shopping and will enable me to keep working part-time. I'm looking forward to having some financial security, and belonging to a community."



# Mission in action

## “Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor”

**Dr Zachariah Duke, Formation and Ethics Advisor, VMCH**

In May 2015, Pope Francis released his second encyclical titled, *Laudato si'*: On Care of the Common Home. It is a truly remarkable document! This encyclical links with a long tradition of popes exploring the social teaching of the Catholic Church about various socio-political issues, such as war, poverty, industrialisation and workers' rights. The encyclical highlights the many truths about the global environmental crisis, and Pope Francis is urging people to embark on an 'ecological conversion' – an opportunity to become closer to God, other human beings and the rest of God's creation. It is a key Christian belief that human beings, the pinnacle of God's creation, are called to work with creation and to care for it just as God cares for it. As Pope Francis notes: “Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (*Laudato si'*, 217).

In the spirit of *Laudato si'*, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) released its 2021/2022 Social Justice Statement titled, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, on Social Justice Sunday, 29 August 2021. This Statement is a pledge by the ACBC to “...become a more sustainable Church through their commitment to a seven-year journey towards the seven *Laudato si'* action goals.” The seven goals are: responding to the cry of the Earth; responding to the cry of the Poor; ecological economics; adoption of sustainable lifestyles; ecological spirituality; ecological education; and community engagement and participatory action. Both *Laudato si'* and *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* calls VMCH to respond.

VMCH has an Environmental Sustainability Statement which makes every effort to “tread lightly on planet earth by avoiding activities that contribute to the degradation of the planet and the wastage of its scarce resources.”

VMCH has several local sustainability projects, such as those at Corpus Christi Aged Care Residence, Clayton. They have introduced a number of initiatives, including the collection of plastic lids and bread tags, newspaper recycling, litter walks, bin audits, Plastic Free July, and the establishment of a Sustainability Committee. VMCH is also required by law to comply with legislation regarding new developments, with sustainability considered as a key design principle.

I invite you to discern your own ecological conversion so that we may tackle this crisis together. To conclude, in the words of Pope Francis: “The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.” (*Laudato si'*, 13).

### Catholic Matters: New Auxiliary Bishops for the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne

VMCH congratulates Bishop Anthony (“Tony”) Ireland and Bishop Martin Ashe, on their recent ordinations to the episcopate. Bishops Tony and Martin were ordained by Archbishop Peter A Comensoli at St Patrick's Cathedral on 31 July 2021. VMCH looks forward to welcoming Bishops Tony and Martin to VMCH in the not too distant future.



Photo courtesy of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne

## When listening is your calling

“My first career was in computers, then 15 years as a paramedic. Yet I felt a growing need for a profession that enabled expression of spirituality.”

John Prince is one of VMCH's newest Pastoral Carer Practitioners, but he has always had a passion and a need to help others. He says it wasn't a quick process, instead he had to discern where God wanted him to go, and then find out how he was going to get there.

“I enrolled in a Graduate Diploma in Theology, with units in Pastoral Care which I loved. I then started working in Pastoral Care in the hospital sector – Epworth Eastern, St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, and then Peter MacCallum Cancer Hospital.”

Now, John works with us at VMCH Wantirna Aged Care Residence, providing valuable support for 96 residents.

“I really love the core aspects of my role. To sit with someone, ask them how they are, and respond in a way that invites further exploration. You never know where that might go. I love the beautiful residents knowing they are heard – that their thoughts, opinions, and very life all matter. It is gratifying to see a person relax and share deeply. It is a privilege to be trusted. Many show gratitude in different ways. Some simply accept my presence, others thank with heartfelt emotions. I am the one that is thankful.”

John says he often doesn't plan for the day ahead, as it always changes based on the need of the residents, and ensures he is available to actively listen and respond to any needs that may be expressed.

“I meet regularly with residents, families, and even our staff. It involves giving time and a safe space to fully express, with no judgement. Creating this space takes effort, but is so worth it. Yet my role can vary greatly depending on the needs and interests of the person, which may or may not be religious or spiritual. For some it involves simple companionship and someone to talk to. Some need referral to another professional, prayer, assistance with rituals, access to services in the Chapel, or Communion. Others may benefit from activities or discussion groups. Many benefit from expression of their feelings. Then there is the extra



John is always there for residents

time which is dedicated to those feeling isolated, in crisis or at end of life.”

During time this time of COVID-19 and visitor restrictions, John says there is a real need for residents to have someone to talk to.

**“I believe that we each have a need to be heard and valued as unique human beings.”**

“Pastoral/ Spiritual Care has a unique way of doing this. It enables the other to express, promoting reflection and healing. This is so important to all, and only more so for the aged or ill. Listening to them, honouring their stories, views, achievements and dreams, helps them to know that they do indeed matter. This works in a complementary way with the other professions, and is only more important in times of social isolation with COVID-19.”

He also has some advice for those who are feeling uncertain or scared at this time.

**“Talk about it. It is wonderful how much better one can feel sharing a problem. The worst thing one can do is bottle it up, as things can work away inside you.”**

“Talk to a friend, partner, someone you trust. Pray to God if you have faith. But choose those that are supportive. Don't forget the help that pastoral carers, counsellors, psychologists and other professionals can give. You are not alone. Finally, remember to enjoy the good things in life, look after yourself physically and try not to let yourself be overexposed to the negatives.”



# Art unites students and artists during pandemic

An international Artist in Residence program is bringing joy to students with disabilities affected by lockdowns at our Balwyn specialist school.

Hygenia Lobo, teacher at our St Paul's College in Balwyn, was inspired to think outside the square during lockdown 4.0 and help lift the spirits of her six students.

She contacted three artist friends, Savanthi Jayawickrema from Melbourne and Alisha Aranha and Nandan Joshi, who both live in Mumbai, to run online Artist in Residence classes.

"The past lockdowns had a significant impact on our students' learning and the fourth and sudden lockdown got me thinking more about the personal and social wellbeing of my students," Hygenia said. "I wanted to bring something different and creative to my online classes. Since all my students love art, the idea of bringing guest artists online was a perfect way to meaningfully engage and connect them to their learning and interests."

The sessions were a hit, with students embracing the opportunity to express themselves through art and connect with their new artist friends.

"I liked painting with Nandan," Lola said. "I made a ladybug using markers. He made it easy to draw. It was nice."



Artist, Alisha Aranha

Liyuan said: "I liked painting with Alisha because the scribbles are fun to do. I used water paint with two colours. I can't wait to do it again!"

Artist and budding children's writer Nandan, whose homeland India has been hit hard by the pandemic, said the program was a "rich experience".

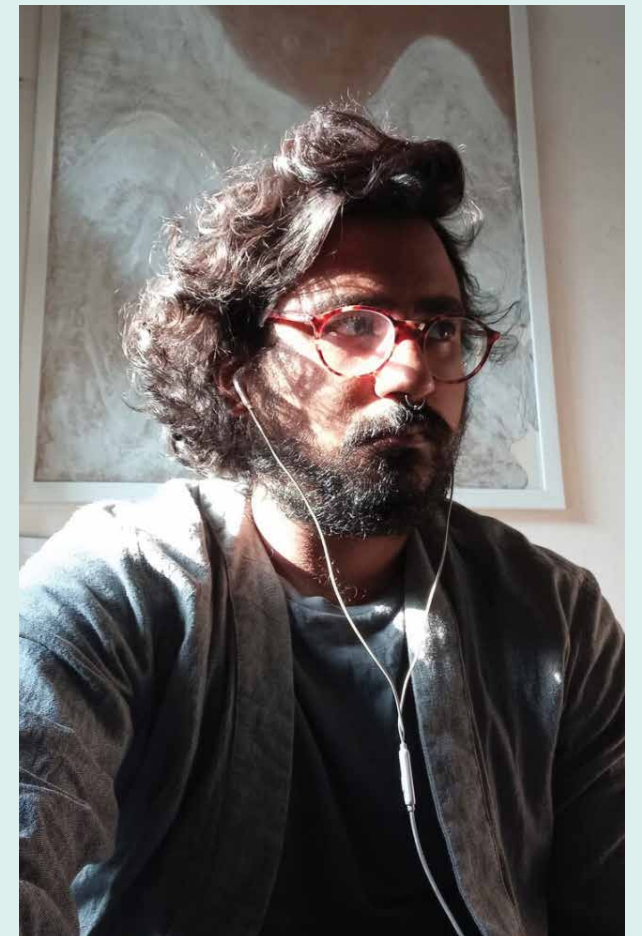
**"The pandemic has not been easy. I look for ways to help, learn, engage with children and animals in this time. It keeps me going. This program was an opportunity to do something for children with my skills."**

Alisha agreed. "The program is a fantastic learning opportunity, not just for the students but also for the artists. If anything, the pandemic has helped do away with geographical boundaries, especially in terms of exchanges related to the arts and education."

Savanthi described the experience as "joyous beyond words".

"The children were engaging and all of them created beautiful art unique to everyone. It's an experience I will never forget. I loved it."

Hygenia plans to make the program ongoing. Nandan and Alisha would like to create a storybook with students, featuring their illustrations.



Artist, Nandan Joshi

"This opens up a whole new world for students, they get to engage with artists from other parts of the world, immersing them with new experiences and culture," Hygenia said. "It allows students to connect and create art that has meaning to them."



St Paul's College specialist school students



Students having fun in one of their online classes with teacher Hygenia and artist Savanthi





## A full life at Providence

Mabyn, who lives with us at Providence Aged Care Residence, Bacchus Marsh is one of the busiest residents in the building!

Mabyn was an optical assistant for 12 years, and she loved it, mainly because she loved meeting people and talking.

Now, Mabyn still keeps herself very busy. She assists the lifestyle team with their activities, helps in the kitchen on a Friday (where she is known as 'the boss'), does the kiosk trolley, and calls bingo on a Saturday afternoon. In between all that, she likes to go and sit with those who are older than herself and give them some company.

**“I made the decision to come here myself. My family and ex-husband thought I might have dementia, but I didn’t agree. So I went to the doctor to prove them wrong - and guess what, it turned out I did!”**

After her separation from her husband, Mabyn was worried she was “too much for the family to handle” at home by herself, so she decided to make an appointment to look at Providence.

“They were doing the renovations at the time, but as soon as I walked in, I went ‘oh I like it here.’ And that was it, it was only place I looked at. The staff here are brilliant, I love them all, they take such good care of you. At the end of their shift, they’ll often come and have a chat with me before they go home.



Providence resident, Mabyn

Mabyn is also often seen on VMCH’s Facebook page, commenting on posts and complimenting the care staff.

**“I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t like it, and it wasn’t true, I love it, so I comment. It’s lovely. I have a nice view here of the garden, and I’ve been given the vegetable garden outside. Right now, there’s some flowers, and I have three planters. I’ll use those for vegetables.”**

“I miss my garden at home. I had a huge vegetable garden, 30 by six feet. I had absolutely everything – except lettuce, I never had any luck with lettuce.” The staff are taking me to Bunnings, and I will pick whatever I want and need, it’ll be great – just wonderful.”

For Mabyn, the best part is that she is happy.

**“I just absolutely love it here, I really do. I’ve made new friends, and I love the staff. There couldn’t be better people anywhere!”**

**To find out more about Providence Aged Care Residence, call our team on 1300 698 624.**

## The caring role from my point of view

A poem by Margaret, one of the many carers, doing the best that she can.



The caring role is difficult  
combining privilege and pain  
and all of us who've walked this path  
know that it can be, quite a strain.

To see my man who was so strong  
so weak and needing so much care  
you find yourself feeling that,  
somehow, it doesn't seem quite fair.

The garden was always his domain  
where he was the one in control  
but now our son does all his work  
it's a reversal of the role.

I know he finds it frustrating,  
that he can't do the things that he did,  
to hand control to someone else  
even though, it is his own kid.

I know that I am not alone  
many others do walk this road  
so I will write my feelings down  
I won't store them, or they'll explode.

I'll do my best for my loved one  
I'll see sunshine not just the rain  
and find some joy in each new day  
what good does it do to complain.

I've walked this path before you see  
with our son many years ago  
though these times are hard they're precious,  
they're a time for our love to grow.

I guess that this is a part of life  
a different role that I now lead  
not just a wife, but carer now  
I pray for the strength that I need.





Bob and Carmel with a photo of their new grandchild

# Grandparents Day

The love between grandparents and grandchildren is something unique and special. October 31 was Grandparents Day, a time to celebrate and honour the beautiful role grandparents play in the lives of so many.

We chatted to residents at our St Joseph's Mews retirement community to find out what they love about being a grandparent and how they've stayed in touch with their beloved grandchildren during the COVID pandemic.



## Carmel and Bob

"We have 22 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren. They're all on the calendar and we make sure they always get a birthday card and a little gift – that keeps the post office in business I think!

"We're all very close and before COVID we'd always have a yearly get together – it's like a YMCA camp! But we're really feeling it during lockdown, that we can't get together. The kids all sent Carmel flowers for her 87th birthday... we stay in touch via calls and regular emails, we're all very close.

"What we like best about being grandparents is the love and support and watching them grow up. We've enjoyed teaching them to always be responsible, honest and work towards their goals."



Hilda and Ollie embrace at the airport



Hilda and Elly

## Hilda

"My grandson Ollie is eight and lives in Canada. It's been 18 months since I've last seen him in person.

"We stay in touch via FaceTime and play interactive games online. I taught myself how to play Roblox, his favourite, on YouTube. He calls and we both get onto the game. I love hearing him say "Well done Nana!" when I get something right. Even after I hang up from talking with Ollie I can feel myself smiling because it's such a special moment to spend with him.

"I also look after my late brother's granddaughter, Elly, aged nine months. She's just like a granddaughter to me and she means the world."

"Being a grandparent is so special. I just love that you can spoil them and the genuine love that Ollie has for me is so, so special. You can give them all the love but you have less of the responsibility and worrying about if you're doing all the right things. Give them back when the sugar kicks in! It's the most heart-warming feeling to have the love of a grandchild."



Madeleine surrounded by her family

## Madeleine

"I have five grandchildren, three boys and two girls, all aged in their early twenties. My two grandsons live in Tasmania so I haven't seen them since 2019 because of COVID. But I'll be watching my grandson, who plays for the Launceston Tigers, in the Rugby Union Grand Final online tomorrow.

"I'm proud of all my grandchildren, one is studying nursing and the other in her second year at university. We all text and talk on the phone. I'm able to see my daughter throughout lockdown as she'd in my 'bubble', and she tells me what everyone is up to."

"The kids all still come and make a gingerbread house with me every Christmas time, which is nice. I'm missing them all."





# Coming soon to Kew....

VMCH is excited to be developing a new premium retirement living precinct in Kew.

Set to commence in 2022, the precinct will be designed to promote a healthy lifestyle with a diverse range of programs and services to support wellbeing, providing people with the infrastructure to live well now and in the future. This project will be a true asset to the Kew community and will make authentic contributions to Kew's thriving social, heritage and landscape environment.

The project is located on Studley Park Road which has been an icon in the local community for decades. The rooftops and chimneys of the historic buildings can be seen from Studley Park Road and Fernhurst Grove, with a third street frontage to Stawell Street.

The site was part of the Fernhurst Park subdivision in Kew in the late 1890s, associated with the mansion estate Fernhurst.

In total 25 lots formed the subdivision with the auction taking place on 27 November 1897. Over time, a number of other significant mansions were built on the site, some of which still remain today.

St Paul's School for the Blind was established on part of the site in 1957. From 1957 to 2018 the site operated as VMCH's St Paul's College, a specialist school providing education for children with a wide range of intellectual, physical, profound multiple and sensory disabilities, as well as complex medical needs. As our students' needs changed, the campus moved to a new, state-of-the-art site in Balwyn in 2019.

Now the time is right to see this beautiful site come back to life; to restore the historic buildings which have stood for generations, create new spaces for the community to gather, along with places for people to once again call home.

For more information about the development you can visit: [yoursay.vmch.com.au/studley-park-kew](https://yoursay.vmch.com.au/studley-park-kew)

# Allied health professionals changing lives



Here at VMCH we're so fortunate to have some incredible allied health professionals who make such a positive difference to the lives of people we support.

Speech pathologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dietitians, massage therapists, podiatrists and nurses all use their unique skills to keep people of all ages and abilities on track to achieve their personal goals, both in their own homes and out in the community.

"Physiotherapists treat clients with varying conditions but our main objective is to help our clients to move better with less pain," says VMCH physiotherapist Gareth Parsons (pictured above right).

**"It is really rewarding watching someone progress from struggling to move to moving freely about the community."**

Reduced pain, improved balance and mobility, and getting back into sport are some of the life-changing outcomes Gareth loves seeing his clients achieve.

"I wanted to become a physio so that I could give back to the community. My personal view is that we all have the ability to make a positive impact in the world and one of the best things that we can do in life is helping others."



Meanwhile, Lauren and Mia are speech pathologists, based at our specialist school, St Paul's. They believe recognising communication in various forms is a basic human right.

**"Not everyone is able to communicate verbally, but that does not mean they are unable of communicating."**

Lauren and Mia say communication apps and boards, known as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), can give students alternative means of expressing themselves and also help increase their vocabulary and use of verbal language.

"We believe that every student has the potential to communicate. It is very rewarding to be part of our students' communication journey and watch them grow."

**Are you a passionate and dedicated allied health professional? We want to hear from you! We have a variety of roles currently available. Call us on 1800 036 377 or visit: [vmch.com.au/join-our-team](https://vmch.com.au/join-our-team)**





## Our Op Shops hit the road!

What do you do when the Op Shop doors are closed due to COVID-19 lockdowns? Why, you hit the road of course!

The VMCH Mobile Op Shop was created to enable residents in our aged care residences to have an 'every day' nice, affordable, and fun shopping experience.

"Many of our residents miss visiting their favourite shops, so we wanted to bring the shops to them," said Bron Summers, VMCH Senior Manager Volunteer Services and Opportunity Shops.

"We bring along a wide range of items from our Op Shops, with prices ranging from 50 cents to five dollars. There are many bargains to be found, and all funds raised then go back to the Op Shop.

"Our visits had to stop due to COVID-19, but we are so glad to be up and running again, where we can, in line with restrictions. We held our first one at Wantirna Aged Care Residence, and it was a great success. One of the residents at Wantirna, Betty, actually used to volunteer at one of our Op Shops so it was even more special to visit there."

Bron said that staff at Wantirna became personal shoppers for the market day, helping residents find items that suited each of their personalities.

"The residents were keen shoppers and really got into the spirit of things purchasing clothing, jewellery, accessories and a range of ornaments, not only for themselves but for their loved ones. They also loved the fact they could shop and enjoy a treat from their coffee shop, with a choice of jam donuts, chocolate balls or chocolate éclairs.

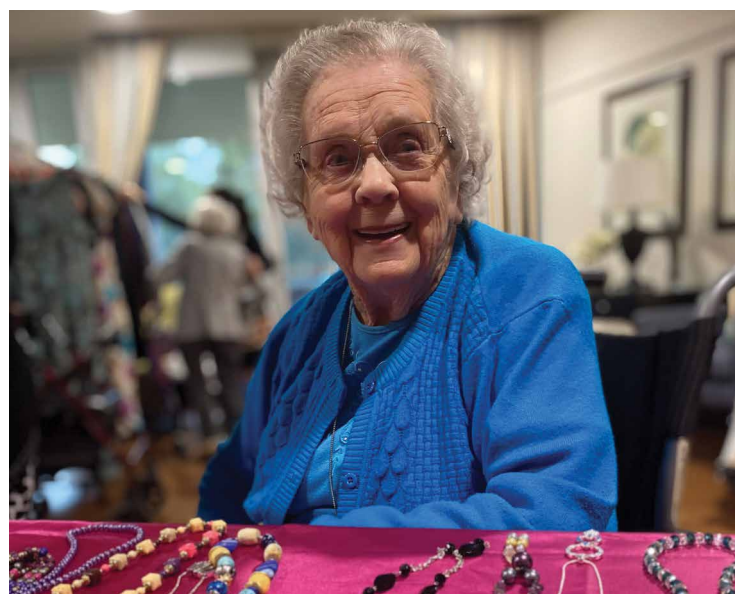
"They meandered through the market, mingling and having a laugh. The room was filled with the sounds of joy!"



It isn't just the residents that get a lot out of the Mobile Op Shop experience, says Bron.

"To be honest, all of us get just as much enjoyment from the experience as the residents do."

The Mobile Op Shop will still continue post lockdown, and the Mission team hope the program can grow, and visit more of the services across the VMCH community.



Happy customers at Wantirna



## Sometimes the best therapist has fur and four legs.

We've launched our 'Pawfect Companions' program, to enrich the lives of our aged care residents!

With your help, we hope to raise enough money to fund fortnightly dog therapy sessions. Your generosity will also help us purchase interactive 'companion dogs' that act much like real-life pets.

Donate today to help us deliver this heart-warming program and give our residents something unique and fun to look forward to!

Simply scan the QR code, visit: [vmch.com.au/pawfectcompanions](https://vmch.com.au/pawfectcompanions) or call 1300 698 624.



[vmch.com.au/pawfectcompanions](https://vmch.com.au/pawfectcompanions)

**VMCH**





Disability  
Services

Now I have  
my crew, it's  
smooth sailing.

We help people of all ages and abilities become more independent and more involved with the community. We work side by side with our clients and their loved ones to uncover what that means for them. For Wayne, it's being on the water. So every Wednesday, with our support, he goes sailing. It's just one of the ways we help him live the life he chooses.



1800 798 921  
[vmch.com.au/disability](https://vmch.com.au/disability)

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