

Cornerstone

VMCH



A trip down memory lane

When family is everything

Job skills programs grow
for people with disability

Edition Seven

“We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love.”

- St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta

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

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VMCH aged care resident Bernie with dog, Sunny.

VMCH

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You come first - VMCH Home Care

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We'll listen to what you need, then build and deliver home care services shaped around you, to help you remain living independently at home.

Our local workers across Victoria are eager to meet you, so call our friendly team today!



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A note from our Chairman

Welcome to the seventh edition of Cornerstone.

I hope you are keeping safe and well and are enjoying a return to a relatively normal way of life we've prayed for these past few years.

It's been wonderful to be able to get out and about to our sites once again, and reconnect face-to-face with our wonderful staff, volunteers and the people we support.

The VMCH community is buzzing, and there are many exciting things on the horizon. Even in the midst of the pandemic, it was incredible what we were still able to achieve, much of it through the generosity of our loyal supporters.

Some of these projects we've only recently been able to formally celebrate, including our new specialist disability accommodation homes in Carrum, Lilydale and Lysterfield, and O'Neill House, our respite and specialist end-of-life care service in Prahran. We were humbled to have Archbishop Peter A. Comensoli and Most Reverend Anthony (Tony) Ireland lead blessings at these lovely homes over the past few months. I know these blessings gave many staff members, residents and their families much comfort, and we were thankful they allowed us into their homes.

I was also very proud to travel to Wangaratta late last year to witness the official opening of our first social enterprise café, Where Is My Coffee? This fantastic café acts as a real life training site for people with disability, who are thriving in their roles. Where Is My Coffee?, along with some other exciting job skills programs featured on pages five, six and 27, will give people with disability a great springboard from which to pursue paid employment down the track, supported all the way by our incredible staff.

Our aged care residences have also been a hive of activity, and I enjoy keeping an eye on the fun activities residents, staff and volunteers get up to on VMCH's social media pages. We've selected a few highlights for you to enjoy on pages 15 and 16, and I recommend (if you don't already) liking or following our Facebook and Instagram pages to keep in touch with what's happening across the organisation.



During May we acknowledged the importance of supporting people through their end-of-life journey for National Palliative Care Week. I was moved to read the experience of Lydia, whose mum Carol resided with us at O'Neill House before she sadly passed away in March. Lydia's feedback of the holistic support delivered in a home-like environment is a credit to the staff who work tirelessly in what can obviously be a difficult role. I am constantly amazed by the compassion and dedication of all our staff members across many service areas who deliver such vital care.

As always, thank you for your ongoing support and interest in our organisation. I hope you enjoy reading this edition of Cornerstone as much as I have.

Please take care and God bless.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Julien O'Connell'.

Julien O'Connell AO
VMCH Board Chairman

Exciting times and expanding opportunities for people with disability

Did you know working-age people with disability are twice as likely as those without disability to be unemployed? Insufficient work experience is one of the most common reasons people with disability have difficulty finding work.

That's why VMCH is thrilled to expand our job skills programs, giving our clients the experience they need to improve their independence, reach for their goals, or enter the workforce.

In December 2021 we opened Where is My Coffee?, a social enterprise café in Wangaratta aimed to help people build skills and experience in a real life working environment, on their pathway to finding paid employment.

Bianca (pictured) is among 13 trainees who are enjoying their roles.

“I’m having lots of fun learning new things and making friends,” Bianca says. “I don’t want to be a barista, more of an archaeologist! But the skills I am learning here are helping me to talk to people outside of my comfort zone, and they’ll also help me in the future when I am studying and have a full-time job.”



We've launched a new appeal to help us raise funds for a VMCH-owned coffee van! Check out page 27 to learn more.



Café trainee, Bianca



Community Connections Manager Harley Dalgleigh, VMCH CEO Sonya Smart, Helen Haines MP and VMCH Board Chairman Julien O'Connell AO at the café launch



In April 2022 we launched the Green Team, a job skills program which sees our clients take on garden maintenance at VMCH sites across Melbourne.

Participants are enjoying learning practical horticulture skills, building their confidence and gaining vital experience. They will also be introduced to VMCH employment partners for further work experience and job opportunities, such as Collingwood Children's Farm, where they can enjoy gardening, farm tasks and woodwork activities.

Daniel Carter, VMCH General Manager Disability Services, says our job skills programs are focussed on giving adults and school leavers the skills, experience and confidence they need to move on to paid employment.

"The three areas we focus on are hospitality, horticulture and retail. From our Cre8 Program in Wangaratta, where people learn woodworking, to our travelling Coffee Lovers cart (in partnership with Social Engine), we want to help people learn the skills they need to progress to a job they love," Daniel says.

To learn more about our job skills and life skills programs, call 1300 698 624.



Steve from Collingwood Children's Farm

Thank you

Special thanks to the Killen Family Foundation and the Prowse family for donating \$12,500 and \$10,000 respectively towards our job skills programs. Both donors are passionate about supporting personal development and educational opportunities for people with disability. We thank them sincerely for their generosity and ongoing commitment to the people we support.

Combating carer burnout

Every carer in VMCH's Carer Support Program is different, with a different story to tell. For Christina Johns, her story has changed many times, but what has remained the same is her steadfast commitment to her son Ashley's wellbeing.

"Ashley has schizophrenia, anxiety and clinical depression, along with the dual diagnosis of substance misuse," Christina says.

"He is 42 now, but he started exhibiting problems when he was 14. When he was brought out of hospital, I was told that that he needed full time residential care. But I don't believe in diagnosis as a way of defining people, I believe that with right mindset, environment and support, people can change their medical condition for the better. Ashley has proved that over and over again by the advances he's made, and it would've been a dreadful story if I had of believed what they told me."

Christina and Ashley live in the Dandenong Ranges, which has been a beautiful part of the world for them to be at home during COVID-19 lockdowns. Ashley lives in a self-contained unit on the property, and helps Christina out with her new business as a life coach. Together, they ran a daily art class for kids during Melbourne's lockdown, with Ashley leading the session.

While tough for many, Christina says lockdowns were a positive experience, allowing them to have time to relax together.

"Ashley loves not having to go out, he has social anxiety, so he tends not to want to socialise. Throughout COVID-19 he has been able to resolve



Carer Christina

his drug and alcohol issues, which is amazing, that through the worst time in the world for people with mental illness, he has been able achieve a lot."

While there are many positives in their lives, Christina says being a carer has many difficulties, from financial struggles to the inability to find time to meet with friends and debrief.

"My life has been dedicated to my son, and now I am moving into a different era of my life, but it has cost me. Carers have what we call 'carer burnout',' she says.

"We store all the anxiety when caring for someone, and we push it inside and hold in our bodies, and when we do that, it has to come out somehow. Either as an angry explosion directed at someone, or if you're good at suppressing it, like I was, I ended up with cancer, hip and ankle replacements and many surgeries. I do think my caring role has contributed to my health.

"As carers, we literally pay with blood, sweat and tears for what we do, and people who aren't carers don't understand that."

Christina likens being a carer to living two lives.

“In the morning, you might get up, think about and decide what you have to do that day. But as a carer you have to do exactly the same thing, but for someone else. Every day you think ‘does our day match up, can we kill two birds with one stone?’. I don’t know how carers with more than one child do it, I don’t know how they cope.”

Christina has been utilising VMCH’s Carer Support Program for a number of years, and it was through this program that she met some lifelong friends.

“We get together when we can, and talk and talk and talk. We all bring some food and wine, and sit and play cards. It’s just a connection, a way to debrief with other carers. We all have different sorts of challenges, but what unites us is that we care for someone and we know how taxing it is on our lives.

We can just be who we are, there’s no pretence, and pretending that everything is fine, when everything is actually falling apart. Sometimes we just cry with each other because it’s hard. It is that camaraderie outside of that organised setting, where like-minded people can get together and have fun, it is just precious.”

For Christina, it is important that people understand that what they can’t see is what they don’t know.

“While Ashley may present with an ‘unseen illness’, it is very real what he and I are going through. Nobody knows what he is going through. That’s why it is so precious to have people that you can talk to, who understand.”

If you or someone you know needs carer support, call us on 1300 698 624.

Carer news

The VMCH Carer Support team was thrilled to receive more than \$1.7 million in funding earlier this year from the Victorian Government to further support our unpaid carers. We were allocated the largest amount of funding among 54 other programs from a pool of \$9.5 million. The funding will support an additional 855 carers across Melbourne and the Central Highlands with flexible respite options.

Meanwhile, our team has been working with our Marketing department to create videos featuring the personal stories of our carers and those they support. Please keep an eye on our Facebook and Instagram pages to view the videos, which give a real insight into the challenges carers face, and how incredibly important it is that they receive some respite and support in their vital roles.





Staying together is paramount for Ron and Bev

Ron and Bev

Moving into a retirement community or residential aged care can be a difficult decision. And what if your spouse needs more care than you, but you want to stay together? Co-located retirement and aged care communities are a great option.

This was Ron Hawkins' predicament back in 2013. His wife Bev had had a stroke and was unable to live independently. "My daughter and I searched but there weren't many (co-located) places around. Then we found Shanagolden, which was basically brand new and stood out immediately as a nice place," Ron says.

Bev moved into the aged care residence and after he'd packed up their family home, Ron moved to the retirement village next door.

VMCH has four co-located communities in Pakenham (Shanagolden), Bacchus Marsh (Providence), Clayton (Corpus Christi) and Torquay (Star of the Sea). Not only are they a great option for couples like Bev and Ron with different needs, but also for independent couples or individuals who'd like to know the next step in their housing journey isn't physically far away, if their needs change.

Ron enjoys living at Shanagolden and likes the option of having activities and events on hand, but mainly prefers to keep to himself and spend time with his beloved Bev.

Each day he walks over to the aged care residence while Bev's having her morning tea, then takes her for a walk in her wheelchair around the lovely grounds or to the local shops.

"I was a member of the Pakenham Bowling Club for four years and had a great time there. I loved playing bowls and enjoyed myself immensely, but I thought my time was better spent with Bev and taking her to all the places I could manage to do."

If Ron's needs change, Shanagolden also offers to organise a range of in-home services such as domestic assistance, access to allied health, respite, and transport to appointments or shopping. But for now, he's content in his daily routine spending time with Bev, his wife of almost 61 years.

"It's amazing how she's put up with me for all this time! What I've got left in life is her."

If you'd like to find out more about VMCH's retirement living or residential aged care options, visit: vmch.com.au or call 1300 698 624.

Appeals brighten lives

Generosity shown through our 2021 appeals continue to make an impact. Here's what we've been able to achieve, thanks to our wonderful supporters.



VMCH aged care residents are enjoying the companionship of dogs and interactive pets in their homes

Pawfect Companions

This incredible campaign really resonated with donors, and we were thrilled to raise \$34,487 to launch fortnightly dog therapy sessions at our 11 aged care residences. Our interactive 'companion dogs' have been a huge hit. These pooches help to provide comfort, companionship and reduce stress, in between 'real life' pet therapy dog visits.

Angela, who lives with dementia, said: "Look at those beautiful faces, I want to take them all home with me, they are beautiful".

Resident Nan said: "Oh my gosh, they are just so sweet, they look so real, they bark and wag their tails at you!"

Residents have faced many challenges recently thanks to COVID-19, so it's fantastic for them to have access to this beautiful activity within their own home.



An affordable homes resident is thrilled with the delivery of her hamper

Christmas Hampers

The festive season can be really tough for many people, especially those who are socially isolated or struggling financially. We were humbled to receive over \$13,000 to put together more than 700 hampers for our affordable homes residents and clients from our at-home aged care and disability services.

We were lucky enough to witness the joy on people's faces upon delivery; many have said it's the highlight of their year which says so much about the impact. Here's a snippet of a thank you note we received from a hamper recipient.

"I want to thank VMCH for its kindness and thoughtfulness in sending my son a Christmas hamper.

I was very touched as in all the 30 years he has been mostly bed-bound, no one has thought of him at Christmas apart from us (his parents). Having it personally delivered on Christmas Eve was really special and uplifted the whole family."

To learn more about our latest Real Shot appeal (featured on page 27), visit: vmch.com.au/realshot

A photograph showing two men from the back, looking at a large stained glass window. The window features a central crest with a shield and a crown. The man on the left is wearing a grey jacket and a yellow safety vest, while the man on the right is wearing a dark blue jacket and glasses. They are standing in front of a wooden frame.

A trip down memory lane

Craig Carey describes his time at St Paul's School for the Blind as a "Hogwarts type existence with its own special kind of magic".

The former student, now aged 54, spent eight years at the then boarding school – moving in on his fifth birthday in 1973. You could imagine a young child would feel very homesick and lonely, which he did for a short time, but the years that followed were filled with what Craig describes as "fun adventures and unique learning experiences".

It was even where he met his first childhood sweetheart, and the same school his now-wife attended.

Craig recently joined eight former students and teachers for a trip down memory lane, touring the former school site. More than four decades on, Craig says returning was a "privilege".

"My fondest memories are of being with friends that I remain in contact with even today," he recalls. "We would run down to the boys' house after school, grab a snack of cut apple or orange pieces, and then rush outside to play until dinner time. As a very young boy, I vividly recall playing in the dirt underneath giant pine trees with Matchbox cars, and kicking a ball was the best fun."

Craig, like all students, had a vision impairment, though he believes today he would have attended a mainstream school.

"I have reasonably good vision and was not considered legally blind. I thrived in learning and developing alongside other kids who were blind or had some eyesight. While blind children learnt braille, the sighted kids were taught how to write with a pencil and paper."

While boarding schools are often perceived as cold and not often desired places to be, Craig – who now works as a freelance copy and content writer – looks back with only fond memories. "St Paul's was special because it was unique in

many ways. Though it was a small school with well under 100 students, the staff were incredibly supportive, always strict but usually fair. The life-long friendships that I made have stood the test of time."

One of those friendships was with Barbara (Barb) Collins who also attended the school tour.

"It was quite an experience seeing my childhood girlfriend (Barb), and swapping stories about our time at St Paul's more than forty years ago," says the father-of-two. "I recall we would hold hands on the school bus when on excursions, and if I were daring enough, I would steal a cheeky kiss if we thought no one was looking. My wife Carmela also attended St Paul's and though we didn't know each other at the time, we met and married years later!"



Jim Pipczak reflects on the past



(L-R) Sam Ginsberg (former St Paul's teacher and principal), Martin Callan (former student), Craig Carey (former student), Terry Dreier (former student), Sister Mary O'Shannessy (former teacher), Barbara Collins (former student), Peter Hyczka (former student), Jim Pipczak (former student) and Natale Cutri (former student)

Barb says visiting the school was like revisiting the "most incredible part of my childhood".

"It gave me goosebumps and at one point I think I was fighting back tears, but they were happy tears."

Barb started school aged four in 1971. She went to public school 12 months later for some years, and then returned when her eyesight began to deteriorate. "I flourished at St Paul's. The education there was so good," Barb says. "We were a little more advanced than the public school system."

The grandmother-of-two says despite some early homesickness, looking back it was the best time of her life.

"I'm a very regimented person, so I fitted in very well with boarding school. The friendships... I've never had friendships like it since. You're like a family."

Craig and Barb, along with some of their former schoolmates, hope to visit the new site of St Paul's College in Balwyn and meet current students soon.

St Paul's School for the Blind

The school was established in 1957 by Br. Patrick O'Neill, its dedicated founding principal.

Brother O'Neill lost his sight in his 40s. What he found was a mission to help others with vision impairment. He was providing religious education to Catholic children at the Royal Institute for the Blind when Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Daniel Mannix, asked him to find a way to do more for vision-impaired children in Victoria. He accomplished this by rallying community support to open St Paul's School for the Blind, in Fernhurst Grove, Kew.

The school is now called St Paul's College, and provides education and support to around 60 children with a range of disabilities. In 2019 the school moved to an award-winning, purpose built site in Balwyn.

A one in a million volunteer

Volunteers are often described as the 'backbone' of an organisation. VMCH is no different.

Simon LeMaistre is one of our 500 volunteers who give their own time to making someone else's day a little brighter. Simon's dedicated 10 years of his life to older people at our Wantirna aged care residence. He's quiet and humble, but staff are quick to sing his praises.

"He's one in a million, the type of volunteer everyone dreams of," says Lifestyle Coordinator Janine Ridley.

"The residents and staff appreciate Simon's company very much. He is a very calm and nurturing person who understands the residents' needs. He works within the scope of a volunteer but is also a team player. He takes residents for garden walks, helps with art and craft or simply has one-on-one chats."

Simon, aged 72, began volunteering at VMCH because his niece-in-law worked there. The former automotive industry logistics worker says he looks forward to his three day a week visits, citing companionship as the biggest drawcard.

"I am close to Beryl in particular, a long-term resident here. We fold table linen first thing every morning. Occasionally the role can be challenging, but it's very satisfying and the staff are so supportive and helpful."



Volunteer Simon with Wantirna Aged Care Residence Lifestyle Coordinator Janine Ridley

While volunteers are so valued across all VMCH services, Janine says they are particularly important in aged care.

"Volunteers bring in new ideas and create friendships with residents that staff can't always tap into. At Wantirna volunteers are empowered to choose how they want to spend their time; some conduct activities while some simply lend a friendly ear to a resident. The residents look forward to their volunteers coming in and were very much missed when in lockdown as they enjoy the face-to-face contact."

Simon encouraged anyone considering volunteering to give it a go.

"It's very satisfying, and occasionally challenging. You'd be very glad you did!"

If you'd like to find out more about volunteering with us, call 1800 036 377.

Follow your passion and lead a happy life



John playing the piano

Piano man John and equine enthusiast Pam show age is no barrier to keeping up with the activities that make your life so fulfilling.

In 1936 at the age of seven, John Parker started learning the piano.

As someone with obvious musical talent, John then learned the organ and became one of the youngest cinema organists at the age of 14. He played the organ at many weddings and funerals in his mother's large family in England, and at many churches.

John migrated to Australia in 1966, where he worked for a couple of organ pipe firms and later started his own business of organ maintenance. He had this business for 20 years, where he had the opportunity to work for St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne.

John and his family recently chose to donate this gorgeous baby grand piano to our St Catherine's Aged Care Residence in Balwyn. John had this piano for more than 20 years before having it delivered to St Catherine's, John made sure that the piano was serviced and polished.

Now, he and his beloved piano are together again. And other residents can enjoy the beautiful sounds of the piano well into the future.

Pam is one of our Home Care Package (HCP) clients, and an absolute horse lover. Pam had ridden horses all her life, but sadly had to sell her last horse two years ago to move into town as her husband passed away.

All she wanted to do was to go for a ride again, and our wonderful Home Care team made it happen.

Now, through her HCP, Pam attends horse therapy on a fortnightly basis. Her family are absolutely over the moon for her, as it has lifted her spirits and has given her something to look forward to each fortnight. At 87 years old, Pam proves that age doesn't have to be a barrier to living an independent and fulfilling life.



Pam on her horse

VMCH Social



Have you checked out our social media channels lately? We love sharing all the fantastic events, celebrations and achievements from across our organisation. It's been particularly busy over the past few months at our aged care residences, with craft show wins, cultural days and animal visits. If you haven't already, please check out these platforms and see what all the fuss is about!



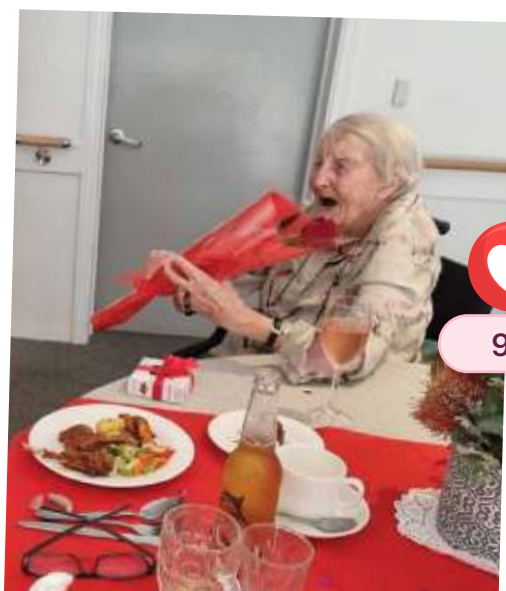
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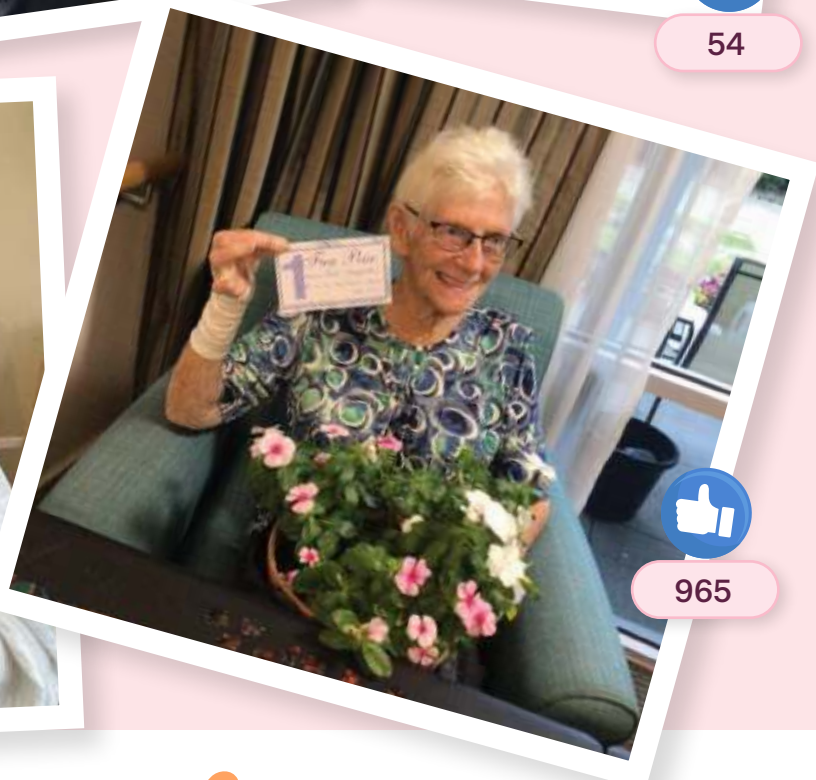
92



54



1.5k



965

Connect

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!



• [Facebook.com/VMCHVic](https://www.facebook.com/VMCHVic)



• [Instagram.com/vmchvic](https://www.instagram.com/vmchvic)



• [Facebook.com/VMCHDisabilityServices](https://www.facebook.com/VMCHDisabilityServices)



• [Linkedin.com/company/vmchvic](https://www.linkedin.com/company/vmchvic)

Dietitians improve lives

The health benefits of seeing a dietitian exceed far beyond lost kilos. For older people especially, eating well can mean better mobility, decrease the risk of disease and help them to live at home for longer.

For Alex, 69, the experience of seeing a dietitian has been life changing.

Alex cares for her husband Paul, who is waiting for a liver transplant. Due to COVID-19 lockdowns, a move from their family farm, and Paul's worsening condition, Alex's weight ballooned from 65 to 75kgs in 12 months.

“I was concerned that I could become pre-diabetic, and was depressed and unhappy with my appearance,” Alex says.

“My method of controlling my weight was to restrict my diet, eating only a banana for breakfast, no lunch, and a snack for evening meal with no carbs. As an osteoporosis patient, I was determined to eat calcium rich foods, but also cut milk down to low fat in coffee.”



Alex

Luckily, Alex found help from Debbie Chen (below), an accredited dietitian with VMCH, who helps older people and people with disability with their nutritional health.



VMCH dietitian Debbie

“People I support may be malnourished, or at risk of malnutrition, which we often see in aged care, people who live alone and want to improve their nutrition,” Debbie says.

“I love seeing the positive outcomes in my clients and seeing what a difference it makes to improving their health and quality of life.”

Alex says she was sceptical of Debbie's advice at first, but the results spoke for themselves.

“Eating from all the food groups and not skipping of meals resulted in a weight loss of three kilos in 10 days. I feel less sleepy during the day, sleep better at night, I'm happier, and have a total uplift in confidence.

“Psychologically, the consultations have probably benefitted me more than anything, as now I feel that I am in control. I would never have believed a dietitian could have helped me, as due to media 'advice' and calorie counting, I thought I could live on carrots and cucumber forever. Thank you Debbie for persisting with a recalcitrant patient and for the uplift in mood, health and outlook you have given me.”

VMCH has a range of Allied Health support options for older people and people with disability. To learn more, call us on 1300 698 624.



Blessings

Carrum resident David with his mum, Ruth, and step-dad, Bart

Residents of VMCH's newer accommodation sites welcomed members of the VMCH community and clergy into their homes recently for some special events.

VMCH was humbled to have Archbishop Peter A. Comensoli and Most Reverend Anthony (Tony) Ireland to lead blessings at our Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) homes in Carrum, Lysterfield and Lilydale, and at our comfort care and respite service, O'Neill House, in Prahran.

While some of the homes have been open for more than a year, blessings had been delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Ruth, mother of Carrum resident David, said:

"It was one of the most special and blessed moments I have ever shared with David. To know that David's house, and his own bedroom, have been blessed by a Bishop of the Catholic Church, is exceptionally moving to me."

VMCH Board Chairman Julien O'Connell AO said it was a privilege to attend the blessings, and thanked residents and their families for welcoming visitors into their homes.



Most Reverend Tony Ireland blesses Carrum SDA

"I would also like to extend our sincere gratitude to Archbishop Peter and Bishop Tony for taking the time to come and bless these homes. Their presence provided much comfort and joy to many residents and families, and staff who work in the homes."



Most Reverend Tony Ireland with Lysterfield SDA resident Sean and his mum, Yvonne

What is a blessing?

It is customary within the Catholic Tradition to mark the official opening of a residence with a blessing. Such a blessing is tied to a long tradition – steeped in symbolism – of bringing the sacramental dimension of the Church to life. Prayers are also said during the official opening to ask for the intercession of the Holy Spirit to bless the residence and the people who live and work in it.

Mission in action

Exploring Catholic Social Teaching – bringing our life to faith and faith to life

Dr Zachariah Duke,
Formation and Ethics Advisor, VMCH

Saint Mary MacKillop of the Cross once affirmed that we should “...never see a need without doing something about it.” In a way, the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church (known universally as Catholic Social Teaching) is the Catholic Church’s direct response of doing something about a need, specifically in attempting to address societal issues. The Catholic Church has been responding to significant societal issues such as: communism, poverty, global development, industrialisation, workers’ rights, threat of nuclear war, environmental concerns, among others, for hundreds of years.

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching become etched into a long heritage that is Catholic Tradition. Some of the more universal and well-known principles of Catholic Social Teaching include: the dignity of the human person; the common good; stewardship of creation; promotion of peace; and preferential option for the poor. These principles of Catholic Social Teaching have a direct correlation to our work at VMCH, for example:

- The dignity of the human person: many new clients, residents and students are welcomed to VMCH by the team completing a “Care Plan” to ensure all dimensions of their personhood (e.g., physical, spiritual, emotional, etc) are known and adequately and proactively addressed.
- The preferential option for the poor: our suite of affordable housing options ensures the most vulnerable in our community are afforded the opportunity of living in their own home within their means.
- Stewardship of creation: various recycling initiatives across some of our residences and services, including collecting plastic lids and bread tags, newspaper recycling, litter walks, bin audits and promotion of “Plastic Free July”.
- The promotion of peace: by virtue of VMCH’s professional memberships with organisations such as Catholic Social Services Victoria, we participate in peacekeeping initiatives. We also promote prayer for peace across our residences and services.

The Catholic Tradition prompts us to approach societal issues through the ‘see-judge-act’ method, that is, seeing or identifying the issue; judging or working through the issue through the lens of principles of Catholic Social Teaching; and acting or responding to address the issue.

Catholic Social Teaching is the topic of the third session of the Discerning Heart Leadership Formation Program, which was recently rolled out to VMCH board directors and members of the senior leadership council.

Catholic Matters: VMCH opposes modern slavery

VMCH is committed to supporting people who are disadvantaged and marginalised. According to our values, we are committed to respecting and promoting human dignity, which includes a commitment to walk alongside one another to eradicate modern slavery. Modern slavery can be understood as the exploitation of a human being for personal and/or commercial gain. VMCH has set up processes within our operations, business relationships and extended supply chains to ensure modern slavery does not exist.



Aged care staff make all the difference

It's no secret that aged care staff work incredibly hard. And unfortunately, much of what we see in the news these days are negative stories. Janine, Lifestyle Coordinator at our Wantirna aged care residence, admits sometimes she's so run off her feet she wonders if she makes a difference. Until her colleague Cris handed her the local paper recently.

"I was reading the paper for ideas to create change and add diversity to our activity calendar for our residents when I stumbled across a lovely letter from the wife of one of our residents who had passed away," Janine says. "It changed everything. I am so grateful I'm in this position with a great team around me to be able to make such a difference to our residents' lives. As much as some days are tough, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else."

Here's an abridged version of Lilian's letter, shared with her permission.



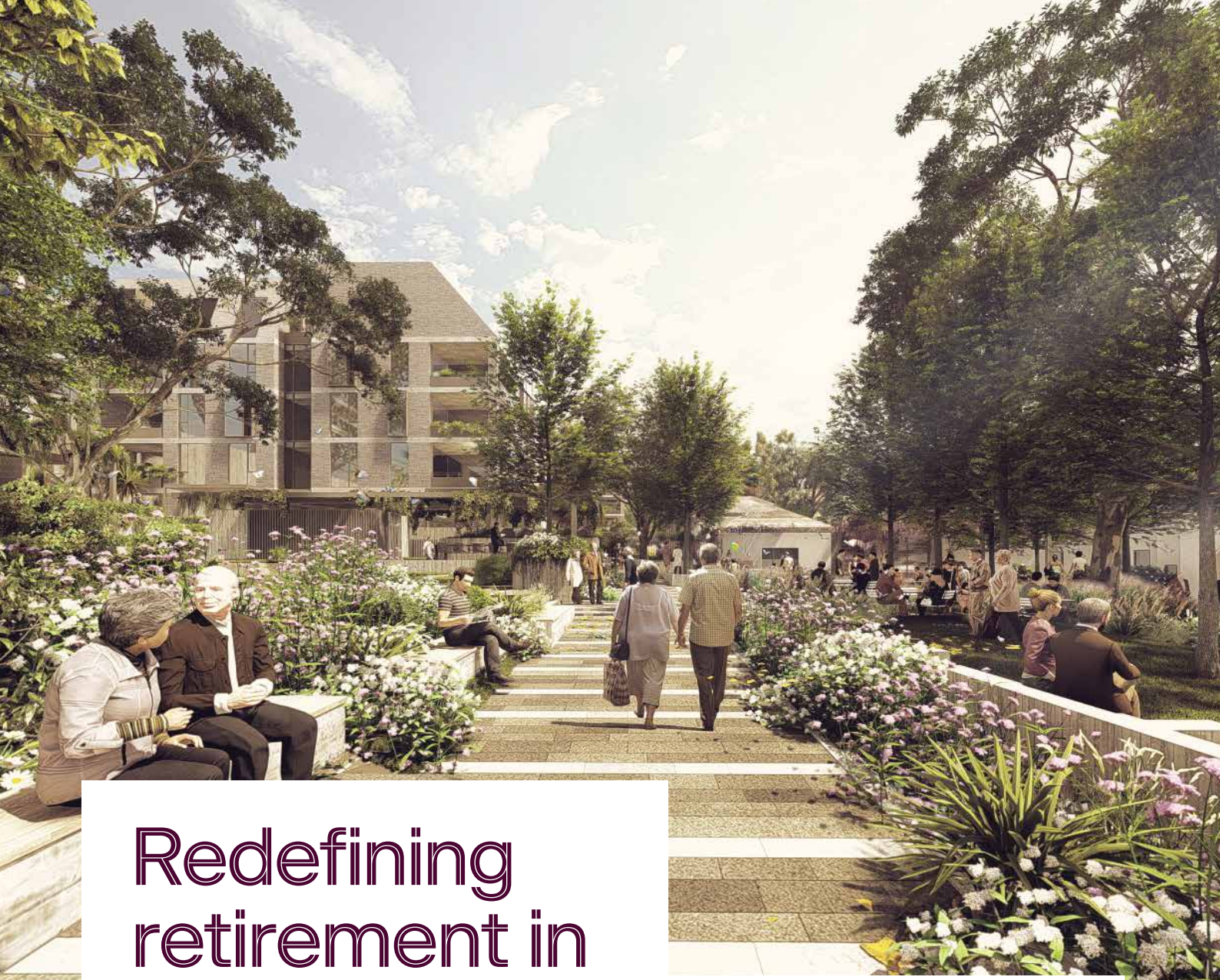
George and Lilian

"My husband George was a resident in VMCH, Wantirna for six months. Sadly, he passed away on November 18, 2021. He had dementia and other problems. I believe most people think that all age care homes are the same, and some do have a bad reputation. My children and I could not be happier with the love and care shown to George at VMCH by the wonderful Manager and staff, especially in the last few days of his life.

"I frequently asked George if he was happy and if the staff were good to him. He always said that the food was very good and everyone was friendly and kind. He often asked if he could come home, so sometimes I would leave in tears but if the staff noticed me, they would comfort me and assure me that George was in the right place... I could tell that they truly cared about George and his welfare. The lifestyle co-ordinator was particularly fond of George as he always liked a singalong and she took many photos and videos for me. During lockdown this was a great comfort.

"Near the end of George's life, the Pastor was particularly supportive, and my family and I felt respected and understood. During his last days many staff came into his room to farewell him and pay their respects, often crying with us. We never felt alone, our grief was shared and we feel blessed to have had such caring, kind, thoughtful people surrounding us during such a very sad time.

"I would like to recommend VMCH, Wantirna to anyone looking for aged care. It is a difficult decision to have to make, as there are many choices available. We were very lucky to have picked this home and I cannot speak highly enough of the facility and the staff."



Redefining retirement in Kew

We are excited to announce our premium retirement living precinct in Kew has been given planning approval from the City of Boroondara.

The Woods Bagot-design, at 6 and 14 Studley Park Road, will include 108 luxury apartments and see the restoration of three existing heritage buildings. It will include spectacular amenities, expansive green spaces and deliver a new public café.

The apartments will feature house-like proportions with sweeping views over Studley Park and residents will enjoy a high level of services and a vast range of amenities unlike anything currently on offer in the area.

The Landscape Masterplan, by award-winning Oculus Studios, has carefully considered a number of high value trees, centring them as part of large green spaces for residents and the public.

An artists' impression of the Kew retirement living precinct (subject to change)

VMCH CEO Sonya Smart said she was excited to commence work on the project, after two years of planning and community consultation.

"We are so pleased that the City of Boroondara has endorsed this project. This site has long been a part of our history, and this permit will allow us to bring it back to life."

VMCH Chief Property Officer Jason Uzice added:

"VMCH is writing a bold new narrative for retirement living. Downsizing doesn't mean compromise.

"It's not just about the architecture. Every aspect of the design is geared towards an active, social and low-maintenance lifestyle, while delivering the sense of community that is the hallmark of all VMCH projects."

Want to know more? For exclusive updates, please visit: vmch.com.au/kew

Community supports sees children thrive

Students at St Paul's College are enjoying the magic of movie making and building their skills and confidence thanks to the generosity of donors.

This past year, more than \$54,000 has been donated to the specialist school to help teachers implement extra programs and projects to enrich students' learning experiences.

The most recent is a Performing Arts/STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) program, enabling students to explore their creativity and apply real-life problem-solving skills.

Specialist Teacher Christy Vout supports students to take on roles such as prop designers, prop makers, performers and film makers, who then work together to record their performance on an iPad, to be compiled as a whole school iMovie production.

"Students express themselves through the performing arts which can then be used to help them engage in the world outside the classroom," Christy says.

"Having students working together on the production is helping to build relationships and social inclusion. The joy we are seeing on the students' faces as the special prop for the day is revealed from the treasure box is delightful."

St Paul's Deputy Principal Natalie Walsh said the benefits of programs like this for students across the school's 11 classrooms was immeasurable.

"Students are learning by playing and this is helping them achieve a sense of empowerment and satisfaction from being able to carry out tasks by themselves and share their ideas and opinions," Natalie says.



Ribbon twirling is a favourite activity

"We are extremely appreciative of the support from generous donors. Their contributions have enabled us to purchase props and equipment for the students to engage with during the performing arts lessons, as well as equipment to film the student-made movies."

The school is planning to expand the program to include animation and a radio show soon.



Students love dressing up as part of the program

A matriarch in more ways than one!

Meet Heather. She's gained the title of the first ever VMCH retirement living resident! Heather moved into our first retirement community, Corpus Christi, in October 2008. Now, we have 14 communities across metro Melbourne and regional Victoria.

This is her story...

"I moved into Corpus with my husband, George, from our home nearby in Mt Waverley. It was aptly named because there are hills everywhere and my husband's health became such that he couldn't get to the letterbox due to the slope.

"George didn't want to move (he didn't like change) but once we were here on the second day he said to me, 'This is the best thing we've done in a long time!'

"George was a devout Catholic, so he was able to go to Mass every day. We chose Corpus also because it had co-located aged care and with George being six years older than me, I knew he'd need it eventually. He had three years here with me before he went to aged care. He died ten years ago.

"George came from Austria and worked as a journalist in his working life, mostly with The Age newspaper. I was also in the communications field, having worked in the book trade. I had 15 years off when we raised our six children. We both grew up as only children so wanted a big family. We now have 10 grandchildren, too many great-grandchildren to count, and I'm now a great-great grandmother! Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I'd be the matriarch, the fifth generation of a family.



VMCH's first retirement living resident, Heather

"I enjoy living at Corpus. I'm quite ok on my own but I still like to meet with people socially. I belong to a walking group and twice a week we head to the Notting Hill hotel where they have a drive through coffee bar. A man who saw us getting out coffee one day began chatting to us, then when he left, he put up a tab for us so now we don't have to pay! We can afford it of course, but maybe we remind him of his grandmother or something. COVID-19-permitting, I also do card bingo twice a month, we have entertainers come in, and I do an exercise class on a Friday afternoon.

"I feel astonished to be honest, being the first ever VMCH retirement village resident. One of the things you have to accept is that you're going to lose people, but we still have a few friends in the aged care residence who are in their 90s but don't look a day over their age! We also have a lovely girl in the office, Janelle, she's very empathetic to all the residents and she makes sure we don't break the law too much!"

Want to learn more about our 14 retirement living communities? Visit: vmch.com.au

How Dylan Alcott gives me hope for change

Phin Meere, our Communications Officer, has shared his thoughts on Dylan Alcott winning Australian of the Year, and what a huge effect he believes it could have on generations of younger people with disability.

"I was excited to see the Australian of the Year announcement because Dylan Alcott (a fellow person with a disability) took out the title. I thought, 'we finally have some skin in the game and people with disabilities might be recognised by society'.

"As a person with a disability, I swelled with pride, thinking it was wonderful a person, proud of his disability, was given such an honour and platform. I wondered what my younger self would think seeing me, a person with a disability, visible and in a prominent role? I think younger me would probably feel validated and seen."

My younger self

"Growing up, I rarely saw people with cerebral palsy like me on TV, film or in the media. If I did, it was as a bit part of a character eliciting sympathy for the main protagonist, or cute kids in wheelchairs eliciting donations for charities.



Phin as a youngster with his parents



Phin Meere

"Adapting and learning to live life was hard but it was made harder through constant reinforcement from society (sometimes unconsciously) that I was different, that I was less than other people. This meant I rebelled against having a disability. I would constantly try to prove myself, trying to show people I was smart like them. I hated having a disability and didn't want to have anything to do with anyone else who had a disability.

"As an adult with a disability in my 40s, I sometimes ponder the imponderable... what would my life be like, if as a child, I had seen people with disabilities working, at school, at sporting clubs, doing art, having relationships, being included in all aspects of society? Would my life be different? How would I feel about myself? I'll never know but I like to think it would have had a positive impact.

Looking to the future

"As an adult with a disability, I'm excited to see Dylan Alcott be Australian of the Year because he will highlight our issues and society's failings toward people with disabilities, emphasise the discrimination we face, as well as speak positivity about disability. I am realistic enough to know that societal change takes time, but I think Dylan Alcott having the Australian of the Year platform might well incite society to change for the better."



When family is everything

Lydia and her mum Carol

“The words ‘palliative care’ initially sounded frightening to me, but all I can say is, it’s made my experience of the transition from illness to death a less scary one.”

Lydia Sorensen lost her beloved mum, Carol, in March this year. In the two months before she passed, Carol lived at O’Neill House, our respite and specialist end-of-life care home in Prahran.

May 22-28 was National Palliative Care Week, aimed at raising awareness and increasing understanding of the many benefits of palliative care.

Lydia cared for her mum – who she describes as a kind person who always saw the best in people – for several years. As Carol became increasingly ill, admissions to Cabrini Palliative Care became more frequent. Lydia then fell pregnant, and care for mum intensified. When a social worker suggested O’Neill House, the pair knew it was the right time.

“Once I could see mum was comfortable and content I let go of my guilt of not doing the main caring, and over the weeks I had a sense of relief that the care for mum was being managed,” Lydia says.

And so the family set about creating final memories and spending quality time together.

Carol’s laid-back nature and ability to find humour in any situation endeared her to the team at O’Neill House.



O’Neill House



The kitchen at O'Neill House



Carol

“Staff were warm, caring and genuine,” Lydia says. “Each person made a connection with mum and I. On my birthday they even decorated mum’s room for me because she wasn’t able to do it. I felt that was such a beautiful thing to do; to take time out of their day to help mum and I celebrate at such a difficult time. We both felt like the staff were extended family to us.”

The feeling was mutual.

“When journeying towards the end-of-life it’s very important for families to be with their loved ones, so we support them in any way we can. Not just with the day-to-day physical needs, but emotionally and spiritually too,” O’Neill House Manager Amy Jumalon says.

“Here at O’Neill House, we feel like we’re a family... looking after each other, and looking after our residents and families too.”

Despite her initial fear, Lydia says the palliative care experience was incredible.

“It’s allowed me to have real conversations with mum and really experience the transition of life. Mum’s wisdom showed me that death is not to be feared, that you can still positively impact people at the end.”

Lydia urged others to consider having a palliative care plan.

“I believe wholeheartedly this process can make the moments easier to deal with, because you know your loved one’s wishes and have no regrets of what potentially they may have wanted. It also gave us time and space to put things in place.”

Above all, it was important to Lydia that her mum die with dignity and respect, as she had treated people throughout her life.

“On my mum’s passing, staff came to see me while I said goodbye and provided their condolences. They also respected my mum by following the undertakers who were taking mum away by lining up as a procession, while singing Amazing Grace and supporting me. This was a beautiful moment that I’m grateful for and will never forget.”

About O’Neill House

- Opened in July 2021
- 22 residents
- 39 staff members
- 75% of residents are receiving end-of-life care
- More than 70 people have so far called O’Neill home

To learn more about O’Neill House, visit: vmch.com.au/oneill

To find out more about palliative care, visit: palliativecare.org.au





A Real Shot at a bright future

We are excited to launch our latest appeal, designed to give people with disability a real shot at building their job skills and independence!

On page five we shared our passion for creating meaningful opportunities for people with disability to gain vital work experience, and supporting them to pursue their future goals and dreams.

With this in mind, we're proud to launch our Real Shot appeal. With help from the community, we hope to raise enough money to buy a coffee van! A recent pilot coffee van program with community partners has been very successful, so now it's time to go out on our own.

This travelling café will be a mobile training site for people with disability to build their skills, confidence and independence.

We've seen some incredible positives for job skills program participants already.

Zach (pictured below) is one of 13 trainees who've been enjoying their roles at our social enterprise café in Wangaratta since it opened in December last year.



Zach and Bianca prepping food at the cafe

"I'd be happy to stay on here in a paid position down the track," Zach says. "I enjoy the company of the staff, and my friends and family come here for their coffee and get to see me!"

Support for our Real Shot trainees and job skills participants, like Zach, doesn't stop once the coffee machine does! We guide trainees throughout the whole journey, building their job-seeking skills and linking them with employers, should they wish to find paid work.

The coffee van will also see some incredible inter-generational benefits. Real Shot will visit our aged care residences, where participants will serve coffee and engage in friendly conversation with our older community members. Win-win!

If you want to be part of giving people with disability a real shot at a bright future, please donate today: vmch.com.au/realshot or call 1800 036 377.

Changing lives and having fun!

Caitlyn Socwell is a physiotherapist working at VMCH Corpus Christi Aged Care Residence. She is a firm believer that age should not be a reason to stop moving or enjoying life – and this is a big part of why she loves her job.

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

As a physiotherapist, a 'normal' day for me never quite looks the same! After checking our referrals and speaking to the nursing staff, we lay out our day this might consist of a meeting, running a manual handling training, reviewing a resident for falls prevention, welcoming a new resident and setting up their equipment needs, running an exercise class, and treating residents to assist with managing their pain.

Why did you choose to become a physiotherapist?

I loved sport! I was an avid softball player back in America and had my fair share of visits to the physio. I loved how their job encompassed health and healing and so made up my mind in grade 7 and didn't look back.



Caitlyn is also passionate about sustainability. Here she is with some lids that will be donated to be re-manufactured into meaningful products.

Are you interested in working with VMCH? Call us on 1800 036 377.



VMCH physiotherapist Caitlyn

What is the importance of allied health for those who are ageing, and what is your role in helping them to achieve their goals?

Allied health is an umbrella term that, in VMCH residential aged care, tends to encompass physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and even osteopaths. Our diverse skillsets can help identify a resident's concern, whether it be pain, reduced function, or inability to perform a certain occupation. We can then diagnose the underlying cause and prescribe treatments to work towards a resident's goal of pain relief, increasing their walking distance by 50m, or being able to knit again! Age shouldn't give us an excuse to stop moving or enjoying life – we can keep residents going!

What do you love about working as a physiotherapist for VMCH?

I love working for VMCH as a not-for-profit organisation, where the focus is so clearly placed on those it serves. Being part of an in-house team rather than a contractor means I get to be a part of an amazing team of staff, where we can work together to look after our residents. I also enjoy the inclusivity across the organisation and the innovative attitude of always striving to make things more efficient, technological, and pleasant for staff and residents, alike.

What do you love most about your job?

The residents! As a migrant with no family in Australia, I love going to work each day to work with over 100 residents whom I refer to as my adopted grandparents!

Why should someone consider a job in allied health with VMCH?

A career as an allied health professional within VMCH offers a great opportunity to work in-house as part of the organisation, providing a great work community (read: family). There's always room for new ideas and opportunities to improve the life of our elders.

Cultural connections in aged care

Staying connected to your culture has been proven to have a positive impact on a person's health and wellbeing. And with around 40 per cent of VMCH aged care residents born overseas, our homes place a big emphasis on supporting residents to stay close to their heritage, and celebrate diversity.

Aneta Donevska, Lifestyle Coordinator at our Bundoora aged care residence, is one of around 41 per cent of our residential aged care staff who were born overseas. She's also one of many who are fluent in languages other than English.

Born in Macedonia, Aneta believes it's important to be able to connect with residents on a cultural level.

“By understanding the culture of residents, we can help them feel welcomed and assist and support them to settle in better at the home. Every month at Bundoora we celebrate a different culture. All residents are welcome, and they enjoy learning about the different cultures, music, and tasting traditional food from that country.”

Resident Srmena enjoys staying connected to her culture.

“Having Macedonian-speaking staff working here makes me very happy. I have made very strong bonds with them and there are also other Macedonian-speaking residents I can spend time with. I like attending Balkans Club, Turkish Coffee Club, and watching Macedonian programs on TV.”

Despite the majority of residents being Australian-born, Lifestyle Coordinator Sharese James from Shanagolden says cultural celebrations are very popular.



Lifestyle Coordinator Aneta enjoys a Turkish coffee with resident and fellow Macedonian, Srmena

“We used to have specific days, but now we celebrate across entire weeks with food, ‘armchair travel’, music, decorations and clothing,” Sharese says.

“Religion plays a huge role in supporting our residents spiritually, and we embrace all services. It's really important to keep those community ties to people's respective homelands to maintain their wellbeing.”



A Shanagolden resident celebrates Bastille Day



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