


Cornerstone

VMCH



St Paul's brings out the best in students

Nurses – our heroes in comfortable shoes

Ready to Launch in Wangaratta

Edition Eleven

“As a preschooler I had a nurse’s outfit with a red cape... It was my superhero outfit rather than Wonder Woman or Batman.”

– Maree, VMCH nurse.

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Call or drop into one of our locations to meet our local team today!



A note from our Chairman

Welcome to the 11th edition of Cornerstone.

We have experienced an exciting start to 2024, full of achievements and celebrations that have impacted the lives of so many.

A recent event I had the pleasure of attending was the blessing of our Ready to Launch house in Wangaratta (page 5). The home provides practical, real-life experiences for young people wanting to move out of home for the first time. We are passionate about supporting people to become independent and reach for their goals. This unique program is the perfect pathway to achieve this, and I thank the team at Ready to Launch for their commitment and drive in seeing it become a reality.

On page 21 we introduce our new fundraising appeal, Work It!, which also aims to equip people on their journey to independence. Work It! will fund an exciting new retail hub, where young people can learn the skills they need to confidentially enter the workforce. The initiative complements our growing employment pathways, which we hope will help us reach our goal of supporting 100 people to find and sustain meaningful employment by 2025.

One of our earliest celebrations this year was the official merger of VMCH and Corpus Christi Community Greenvale (CCCCG), a home for marginalised men with specific needs for care. The union has been many years in the making, and I am very proud to finally welcome residents and employees to the VMCH family and ensure CCCC's vital specialist work can continue for years to come.

Our St. Clare development for over 55s in Kew continues to take shape. On pages 15 and 16 you'll see how we're already building a community there, which surpasses bricks and mortar. I'm told buyers are heartened that capital from St. Clare will be used to fund our ongoing mission-based projects, including affordable and specialist disability housing for some of our community's most vulnerable, which is great to hear.



Part of what makes VMCH such a special place of belonging for so many is our dedicated employees. On page 7 you'll meet three of our resilient nurses, who devote their time to caring for our residents and clients with compassion, professionalism and respect. Nurses hold a special place in the hearts of many, and we thank them for their ongoing courage and care.

Recently I had the pleasure of attending our annual Volunteers' Celebration and Service Recognition event. Our 440 volunteers truly are the backbone of our organisation, and we are so very grateful to them for choosing to donate their time and talents to VMCH. On page 23 you will find some joyous photos from this lovely occasion, which is one I look forward to each year.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our loyal donors for their support over the past year. Your generosity has seen many vital programs come to life, including our Christmas hamper drive on page 20 and social enterprise coffee van on page 22. During what is a tough time financially for many, your generosity is much appreciated.

I do hope you enjoy reading this fantastic edition of Cornerstone.

Please take care and God bless.

Julien O'Connell AO
VMCH Board Chairman



Ready to Launch resident Daniel



Ready to Launch resident Josh



Ready to Launch Team Leader Kelsey grabs a coffee from our social enterprise coffee van

Ready to Launch in Wangaratta

VMCH is thrilled to unveil a unique new home in Wangaratta, giving young locals with disability a springboard to launch their independence.

Our Ready to Launch house, opened earlier this year, provides practical, real-life experiences for young people wanting to move out of home for the first time in a safe and supportive environment. The program is tailored to each residents' individual goals and needs.

It's the first service offering of its kind for VMCH, and fills a vital need in the Wangaratta area.

Daniel Boschetti, aged 20, currently lives in the house full-time (housemates can stay for as little or as long as they wish until they're ready to move on) and says learning skills like budgeting, cooking and laundry are boosting his confidence to move out on his own.

“I have learnt to be more careful with buying things, trying to reduce food wastage and everything that my money needs to cover each week,” Daniel says. “I would like to get a better paying job, find a home in town or just out of town within my budget to move into. I’m also working hard to get my P’s.”

He admits his favourite part of living at Ready to Launch is “uninterrupted sleep”, away from his three younger sisters.

His housemate Josh West, aged 30, stays every Thursday and some weekends. Josh also aspires to live independently.

“It’s been good learning new things. And I like spending time with the staff and Dan.”

Budgeting has also been an important learning curve for Josh. “I’m shocking with money but I’m trying to save for a laptop!”



The VMCH community celebrates the Ready to Launch blessing

VMCH Ready to Launch Team Leader Kelsey Bowman says Josh has come a long way in a short period of time.

“He takes pride in his bedroom, showing consideration to other residents. Josh enjoys socialising and cooking his evening meal. In the future I’d like to see Josh to continue to progress and have the skills and confidence to move out of his family home and into his own home in town.”

Kelsey says Daniel has already acquired most of the skills needed to live independently.

“My hope for Dan in the future is for him to gain employment where he feels valued, for him to get his P’s and find a home that feels like home to him.”

The VMCH community was honoured to welcome Bishop Shane MacKinlay and Monsignor Cris Manongas to celebrate the blessing of Ready to Launch in April.

Chief Mission Officer Bridget O’Shannassy described it as a “very special celebration”.

“The local team went to so much effort offering us all wonderful hospitality. It was exciting to see all the great things VMCH is achieving in Wangaratta, impacting so many lives.”

Ready to Launch is part of an expanding suite of our Disability Services across the Hume region, all geared to help people with disability find and sustain meaningful employment, build life and job skills and live independently.

For more information, call 1300 698 624.

Nurses – our angels in comfortable shoes

Here at VMCH we are lucky to have hundreds of exceptional nurses working across our aged care, disability, educational and allied health services.

Often described as the backbone of healthcare, nurses play a vital role in ensuring the health and wellbeing of so many vulnerable people in our community.

Let's meet a few of them...



Daljit

It's the human connection Daljit loves most about being a nurse.

Daljit worked as a Personal Care Assistant for two years before deciding nursing was the career for her.

Fast forward 16 years, and Daljit continues to make a positive impact on the lives of older people at St Catherine's aged care residence.

"Being a residential nurse, it gives me satisfaction to be there holding their hands when no family members are there for them."



Sue

Suyesha (Sue) Adhikari chose to be a nurse because she "wanted to make a difference in people's lives."

The Unit Coordinator supports aged care residents with severe behavioural symptoms at VMCH's St Bernadette's specialised dementia care unit.

"I am proud that I can be a part of this amazing program and how I can advocate for my residents and their families."

Sue admits while nursing can be a challenge, "the happiness and satisfaction nurses can have after helping their patients/residents to have healthy lives is indescribable."



Maree

Maree Maher has known since childhood that her future would involve nursing.

"As a preschooler I had a nurse's outfit with a red cape, white cap and a small kit with a toy stethoscope and bandages. It was my superhero outfit rather than Wonder Woman or Batman."

Maree has spent over 35 years working as a nurse and the last 14 years working with people with disability who have complex health needs.

"Nursing is a rewarding career that can lead to all sorts of possibilities. It exposes you to many aspects of health and clinical care in which you may find your passion, which I have done in the disability sector."



VMCH chefs are ready to compete

Get your aprons ready

Excitement is on the menu as our residential aged care community gears up to launch a unique new cooking competition!

Spearheaded by Head Chef Sanath Wanniarachchi, the VMCH MasterChef Dining Room Competition has been months in the making. The live cooking competition – running over 10 months from September – will see teams from each residence face off to create a two-course set menu, including mystery ingredients received on the day.

Thirty lucky people, including residents, family members and judges, will taste the food, before it's judged on dining experience, culinary passion and skill, presentation, hygiene and food safety standards. The top three teams will move through to the semifinals, with the top two teams competing for the title of Residential MasterChef in June 2025!

The competition is part of VMCH's ongoing commitment to enhance culinary initiatives and improve the dining experience for residents.

We'll bring you coverage of the first competition round in Cornerstone's next edition.



Some delicious dishes prepared by VMCH chefs

If you would like to learn more about potential nursing careers with VMCH, visit: careers.vmch.com.au



Geoff finds a home in Cre8

Image above: Geoff works on a project, overseen by Cre8 Team Leader John Salafia

“It’s a big change to confront a life with disability. I’ve needed people around me to help understand the nature of my changing life.”

Geoff was aged just 42 when he was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, a progressive neurological condition that affects a person’s control of their body movements.

Working as a successful engineering lecturer, Geoff was fit and healthy, and, like many, viewed Parkinson’s as “a disease for old people”.

“It floored me,” Geoff, now 57, recalls. He describes the impact on his life since then as “profound”.

“It affects my mobility and balance; I’m constantly falling over. That’s embarrassing as a grown man to be sitting at the doctors with grazed knees, I feel like a five-year-old.”

One of the most challenging aspects for Geoff has been the knock to his confidence and self-worth. Finding and maintaining a job is a real struggle.

“I know at some stage I’m going to disappoint my employer – sometimes I can’t get out of bed. You don’t realise how connected you are with your job.

When you meet someone one of the first things they ask is ‘what do you do for work?’ It’s really hard.”

“ When you hit a life-changing illness like Parkinson, it’s so deep the way it affects you.”

And so, when Geoff found VMCH’s Cre8 Shed in his hometown of Wangaratta, he describes it as a “revelation”.

Cre8 gives around 45 people with disability the opportunity to learn new skills, build confidence, socialise, gain work experience, express creativity and have fun.

“I didn’t know what to expect when I showed up here. But it was magical to meet people who actually understand the nature of disability, and a relief to speak to someone who understood my journey and wasn’t trying to belittle me.”

John Salafia, Disability Services Team Leader of Cre8tive Programs, describes Geoff as “determined, patient and kind with a great sense of humour and a wealth of knowledge.”

“I feel Geoff has not only grown in his creative skills, but also his social outlet and interactions,” John says. “Geoff tells us he ‘feels hope again’. I think this is his greatest achievement of all.”

Geoff has also become a part of the VMCH Disability Consumer Advisory Committee and the Wangaratta VMCH Advisory Group, advocating for people with disability.

The Cre8 team has also offered Geoff paid employment, when he’s ready.

“The sense of having done a day’s work and producing something is great,” Geoff says. “That’s always been important to me. I feel so comfortable and happy now that I have purpose and focus. Cre8 is like a home, like a big family.”



Geoff at the Cre8 Shed

For more information on Cre8 or other disability programs, call 1300 698 624.



Looking for a gift with meaning?

Check out the VMCH Shop and purchase a bespoke item made by members of our Cre8 team. All funds raised go back into supporting our job skills programs for people with disabilities. Items include candles, bath salts, cheese and chopping boards, coasters and custom tables and benches.

Visit: <https://shop.vmch.com.au/>



Your generosity sees dreams become reality



Cre8 member Jamie at the Open Day

Thanks to an incredible \$69,890 in donations for our 2023 Build a Shed appeal, VMCH has opened a second Cre8 Shed in Shepparton! The team was thrilled to welcome community members to an open day earlier this year, and share samples of handmade goods, now being sold via our online social enterprise store!

Visitors also enjoyed coffee from our Where Is My Coffee? van, an initiative also made possible through our earlier Real Shot appeal. Money raised through Build a Shed will also fund a third Cre8 Shed in Melbourne, coming soon! We would also like to sincerely thank Ascot Group and Kovstruct for donating \$7,000 worth of tools and resources to our Build a Shed appeal.

We are sincerely grateful for the generosity of those who contribute to our appeals. As you can see, the incredible opportunities and joy they bring to those we support is priceless.



Melbourne Archbishop Peter Comensoli conducts Mass

Celebrating a new union

The VMCH community was honoured to welcome Melbourne Archbishop Peter Comensoli to a special Mass celebrating the merger of our newest community a few months ago.

Corpus Christi Community Greenvale (CCCG), situated around 20 kilometres north of Melbourne, provides accommodation and support for around 80 marginalised older men with a history of homelessness, complex health needs or addiction.

Originally founded in 1974 by Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity, CCCG was established as a refuge for men facing personal hardships. In 1977, the Missionaries of Charity entrusted the care of the home to the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

In January this year, VMCH officially merged with CCCG, securing the home's long-term ability to support marginalised men for years to come.

A special welcoming Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Comensoli, co-celebrants Fr Dishan Candappa and Fr Michael Ryan SJ, attended by VMCH Board Chairman Julien O'Connell AO, VMCH CEO Sonya Smart, VMCH and CCCG Board members past and present, friends of CCCG, local MPs, VMCH staff and residents.

"We (VMCH and CCCG) share a common mission and values to deliver compassionate care for people in need, particularly the vulnerable and marginalised," said VMCH Board Chairman Julien O'Connell AO.

"We thank everyone for joining us here today, particularly Archbishop Comensoli, to celebrate the bright future of this important home."

To learn more about CCCG, visit the Aged Care locations page: vmch.com.au

A home to rest, recover and grow

At the heart of Corpus Christi's work, you'll find the men who have had the courage to make a fresh start, surrounded by community, kindness and friendship. Let's meet some of them...



Ray

Corpus Christi is a kind of sanctuary for Ray.

The 70-year-old has lived there on and off over the past 15 years and credits the home for his improved health and wellbeing after decades of struggling with alcoholism.

"My marriage broke down around 30 years ago. At the time I lived in Parkdale with my wife. It (the breakdown) was because of my drinking problem. My wife used to drink but then joined AA and stopped, she didn't look back, but I didn't."

However, after finding Corpus Christi, Ray's health and outlook on life has improved.

"I don't drink hardly anything now compared to what I used to. Being here has helped me a hell of a lot."

Ray's also formed some good friendships, which is helping him on his journey.

"We have a great pool team! I enjoy the companionship. The staff are fantastic too."

Ray says he'd encourage anyone struggling with addiction issues or ill health to join Corpus Christi.

"Come here and sort your life out – you'll get all the help you need."

While some residents have goals to move out and live independently, Ray is happy where he is for now.

"I'd love to try to get my own place, but I'm not quite confident enough. There's so much violence in the world now ... I don't know if I'd be safe out there anymore. I feel very safe here."



Tom

Most days you will find Tom hanging out with his pet fish in Corpus Christi's recreation room.

A keen aquarist, Tom enjoys keeping the saltwater tank looking clean and fresh for his beloved marine fish. It's a hobby he enjoys and helps to calm his mind.

The 54-year-old has lived at Corpus Christi for the past 13 years. Tom was diagnosed with schizophrenia at age 22. It changed the course of his life.

"I was at university studying psychiatric nursing and working as an assistant in a nursing home. But when I got sick, I had to drop out of university due to the medication I was on."

Tom, who also has a heart condition, describes Corpus Christi as a "pretty caring place".

“It's lovely. The staff are great, and the guys (residents) are really good as well. If you need support, this is the perfect place to be.”

Tom says eventually he'd like to move out on his own and go back to work.

"However, my NDIS worker has advised me I probably wouldn't be able to afford the rent, the electricity, all the bills. It's pretty tough out there. But it's ok, I like it here, I've made some good mates and that adds to my life."



Alex and her mum Liz

St Paul's brings out the best in students

St Paul's College, our specialist school for children with a wide range of disabilities, has been supporting children to reach their full potential for well over 60 years.

Anyone who walks into St Paul's can feel the real sense of community and joy that lives there. Teachers work in partnership with students and their families and take the time to understand every child's individual needs so they can make the most of their learning.

There has been some recent debate in the wider community around a recommendation made in the Disability Royal Commission's final report to phase out segregated education by 2051. The Australian Government is currently considering this recommendation and has stressed any potential changes would be made in consultation with the community, and not made overnight.

Parents from St Paul's have shared their personal feelings on why specialist education is so important to their children, and the incredible progress the students have made since joining the school. Let's meet them...

Meet Alex

Alex is a cheeky girl, who loves swimming, dancing and reading. The 10-year-old, who lives with autism, started prep at St Paul's in 2020. Her mum, Liz Turner, says while 2020 was an unlucky year to begin schooling, once remote learning moved back to the classroom, her daughter has thrived.

“Before, we would have considered her non-verbal, but now, Alex can express what she needs in three or four words,” Liz says. “She’s come quite a long way because the teachers have really encouraged her. Communication is so important because it reduces her anxiety and she gets what she needs, when she needs it.”

St Paul's College has run a dual-school program for many years (where students can try both a mainstream school and St Paul's as part of their educational experience). Liz says this was one of the drawcards for enrolling Alex at St Paul's, but in the end, mainstream school didn't support her needs.



Matthew and his mum Christina

“Alex has quite specialised needs and behavioural issues. At the moment the small class size is really helping her. I don't think she could cope with the noise (in a mainstream school) because of her sensory issues and I don't think she'd learn a lot. She'd probably need two staff members with her at all times. St Paul's is the right place for Alex and her abilities.”

Alex's teacher Carmen Walters agrees.

“I personally feel that Alex would benefit more from a specialist school, as we can offer smaller classes, one to one support, and our smaller size also helps Alex with establishing and maintaining friendships at school,” Carmen says.

“Alex is a very bright student who has grown in many ways. She is working more independently, reading and writing with more confidence, and she is positively engaging in group activities.”

Liz says along with the dedicated teaching team, the facilities offered at the specialist school, such as the sensory room, physical aids and equipment for all abilities, have also been amazing, equipping Alex for her future.

“I'm hopeful Alex can get the practical skills she needs to eventually live by herself and maybe get a job. The school has been really supportive, and I know they do a lot of practical things to help support students in the next stage after school.”

Meet Matthew

Matthew is a social teen, who's curious, gentle and loves animals. He joined St Paul's College, aged 6, and has come along in leaps and bounds since then.

“Matthew was completely non-verbal when he started,” his mum Christina says.

“But over the years the teachers have been so accommodating and catered for his individual needs. They know how to make Matthew blossom. He's very much independent now.”

Matthew tried St Paul's dual program early on, but it didn't work for him.

“I could sense his anxiety at the mainstream school. Matthew felt neglected. I could tell he was stressed every morning, but since he's gone full time with St. Paul's, he's so happy. He never refuses to go to school, that's the best thing ever!”

“They (the government) can't rule out our kids. They'd need so much more support in mainstream.”

Matthew's teacher Hygenia Lobo describes him as a “polite young gentleman with a positive attitude”.

“Matthew always perseveres with his learning, even if he finds it tricky or challenging. He has grown in confidence and shows maturity as a young teenager.”

Now a senior school student, Matthew is learning all about life beyond the school gates. Weekly excursions out in the community are supporting his life skills in road safety, public transport, shopping and budgeting.

Post school, Matthew would like to go to TAFE and perhaps work in an industry related to gardening or food.

We wish Matthew and Alex all the best in their respective school journeys!

If you would like to support St Paul's by making a donation, call 1300 698 624.



St. Clare – building a community

St. Clare, our world-class retirement living precinct, is coming to life in Kew...

VMCH's Board of Directors visit the site to witness the amazing progress made by the project team

Construction and Sales

We recently celebrated some major milestones, including more than \$110m in sales (prior to construction completion in 18 months). The team is well ahead of its sale targets, with 70% of available stock sold and almost 50% of all stock sold. This is an outstanding achievement, particularly in a premium retirement living community, where pricing ranges from \$1.3m to more than \$5m.

Meanwhile, construction is running on schedule. Heritage restoration works have commenced on the two beautiful existing buildings, creating spaces for future residents to enjoy, while retaining historical features.

Suspended concrete has been poured on Ground Level over the basement, which marks the beginning of our concierge, café and gym. A second crane has arrived onsite, which will see another construction milestone hit.

Community connections

While the physical community is being built, the growing network of purchasers are already forming the future St. Clare community. Recently, a group of future residents took a bus trip to the Sorrento Writers Festival to see Australian cook and restaurateur Stephanie Alexander speak, followed by lunch. The next outing for those who have reserved an apartment is a Christmas in July lunch at the Kew Golf Club.

Kew locals and construction workers are now enjoying coffee from the Where is My Coffee? van, parked onsite.



Above: Ground level takes shape
Below: Future St. Clare residents are already forming a great community

The van – made possible through generous donations – is a VMCH social enterprise, providing life changing opportunities for people with disability. You can read more about the van on page 22.

Proceeds from the sale of St. Clare's 103 luxury retirement residences will contribute to VMCH's important mission-based initiatives, including the development of affordable housing and specialist disability accommodation.

If you know someone who may be interested in living at St. Clare, please get in touch via hello@stclarekew.com.au or www.stclarekew.com.au



Theresa at home



Theresa's award-winning art

Curating a life of colour

Theresa Carroll is curating a life of colour and success thanks to her huge talent and a little guidance from her NDIS Support Coordinator.

Theresa, aged 57, lives with her mum at VMCH's Corpus Christi Retirement Village. For the past two years, she's worked with VMCH NDIS Support Coordinator Rishmi Rodrigo, to help her navigate the NDIS and find the right services and funding to suit her needs.

Pivotal to Theresa's happiness and fulfillment is her connection to arts and crafts.

"I love making things, choosing colours, and I enjoy painting as well. I also like making presents for family and friends," she says.

Just last year, Theresa won first place for her art (an alpaca made from pom poms) at the Royal Melbourne Show, and took out first, second AND third places for three of her works at the Lilydale Show.

"I was very excited and proud of myself that I won so many prizes. I am the artist in the family!"

Theresa says she's felt support to achieve her goals thanks to Rishmi's knowledge and understanding of the NDIS and disability services.

"(Without Rishmi's help) we would find it so difficult and time consuming to search for therapists and possible community activities."

Rishmi's role also includes support during annual NDIS plan reviews, which can be a time-consuming and confusing process.



NDIS Support Coordinator Rishmi Rodrigo

"We recently requested for Theresa to have art therapy and custom-made furniture to continue to do her arts and crafts at home," Rishmi says.

"I love to see clients like Theresa achieve their goals. It could be a small goal or a big goal, but it means a lot for clients and their families."

If you would like to learn more about VMCH support coordination, call 1300 698 624.



Paul's 'angel' helps find him a home

Access to safe and secure housing is a fundamental human right. You may know about VMCH's affordable homes, offered to older people living on low incomes, and people with disability. However, one of our lesser-known housing support services is also positively impacting the lives of those unable to live in the private rental market.

Our free Housing and Care Connections (HCC) program helps vulnerable older Australians who need extra support to access housing, aged care and community services. Clients may not have family or friends to help them research, apply for, and set up support services, and may experience literary or language barriers.

Paul, aged 70, was homeless and living out of his car before he was referred to HCC in late 2022.

He ran a successful boat manufacturing business in Indonesia before COVID hit in 2020. Paul then lost his business and moved back to Australia but was later injured in a workplace accident. With no income, Paul could not afford to live in a private rental and became homeless.

Thankfully, Paul was referred to HCC and dedicated Case Manager Amy Yuen, who found him transitional accommodation in Rowville, where he'll live until a more permanent home can be found.

Paul describes Amy as his "angel" and says he's enjoying the safety and comfort of living in the home and tending to a garden.

Amy – who helps up to 15 people each year find a home – says HCC fills a gap in the system for those who need others to advocate for them.

"People may have language barriers, mental health problems or bad experiences with the social welfare system in the past, which make it harder for them to seek help," she says.

Amy hopes Paul's story will help raise awareness of the needs of older, vulnerable people who need extra support.

Increasing rental assistance, building more affordable housing for people with additional needs, and simplifying the public/social housing application process would go a long way, Amy says.

"The system can also be rigid and not take into consideration people's unique, yet important, needs. Just because someone lives alone does not mean they will enjoy living in a small, cramped apartment, for example. I get a lot of satisfaction in going above and beyond to help people take back control of their lives and improve their quality of living."

If you would like more info on the HCC program (cities of Knox and Whitehorse only), call 1300 698 624.

Mission in action



Embracing Hospitality: the key to unlocking genuine and authentic belonging

Dr Zachariah Duke, Formation and Ethics Advisor, VMCH

VMCH has been busy embedding our new Mission, Vision and Values across the organisation. As a Catholic for-purpose organisation, these statements guide us in everything we do. Over the next four editions of Cornerstone, one of our new Values will be spotlighted and linked to a critical aspect of our ministry of caring for thousands across our community. This edition, we focus on Embracing Hospitality...

The Parable of the Great Banquet is a profound story told by Jesus in the Gospel According to Luke (chapter 14, verses 15-24). Fundamentally, it's a story about hospitality: what it means to be hospitable to others, especially people who may be living on the peripheries of our society. Through this story, Jesus creatively brings attention to the dignity of those who were isolated, segregated and pushed to the margins.

Dignitas infinita, meaning "infinite dignity," is a recently released Vatican declaration on the Catholic Church's teaching on human dignity. Among other things, the declaration challenges Catholic organisations around the world to resist "throwaway cultures" and become communities where "real attention is given to the dignity of every individual", including people with disability. VMCH is a leading provider of disability accommodation and services, so this challenge is worthy of close thought and reflection.

Cristina Gangemi advocates for a paradigm shift to occur "...from a culture of doing **for** people with disability to a culture of doing **with** people with disability," and it is precisely the preposition "with" that leads us into a reimagining of hospitality, as argued by Thomas Reynolds.



Paul and Stephanie from Austin St

Belonging is described best by John Swinton: "To belong, you have to be missed when you are not there." Genuine and authentic belonging can only occur once hospitality is done well. Remember the wise words of Maya Angelou, the famous American poet: "At the end of the day people won't remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel."

Hamper drive hits the news, and hearts!

Our 2023 Christmas hamper drive was our biggest one yet, with an incredible 800 hampers packed and delivered!

Each year this important initiative grows, with more people who may be struggling financially or socially isolated in need of some extra festive cheer.

The hampers would not be possible without support from the community. Donations totaling \$17,000 were gratefully received and ensured nobody missed out.

We were also lucky enough to have Channel 9 News film our packing and delivery, shining a light on the huge need in our community (you can watch the story via our YouTube channel: @VMCHVic).

Affordable homes resident Bobbie Bartkus, aged 78, described her hamper as a "generous and thoughtful gift".

"Given how expensive everything is these days it certainly means you don't have to purchase several items on your Christmas list, which is a big help. I especially like that the aged care residents create some of the hamper items; that's really special."

Along with our generous donors, we'd like to extend a huge thank you to everyone involved in the hamper drive, including our staff, volunteers, aged care residents, disability clients, Good360, Wallies Lollies and Methodist Ladies' College.



The Channel 9 News crew with hamper recipients Bobbie and Carlene and VMCH Mission team members Mary and Peter

If you would like to donate to our 2024 hamper drive, please call 1300 698 624.



L-R: VMCH employees volunteer their time to pack; Mission team member Deb Hall reflects the festive spirit for hamper packing; a happy hamper recipient

Work It!



Did you know that there are 2.1 million Australians with a disability of working age? Less than half of these people have a job. This rate of unemployment for people with a disability has not shifted in 30 years...

If you are as disappointed by these statistics, there is an easy way to help us make a change!

Introducing 'Work It!' – our new fundraising appeal aimed to support young people with disabilities to get into the workforce and begin their journey to independence.

Work It! aims to raise \$80,000 to fund a unique, new retail space in Melbourne's east, all geared towards readying people to work. This will be more than a traditional op shop, it will be an exciting learning hub where up to 15 clients each year will build on skills such as money handling, customer service and product displays, guided by disability support workers and volunteer mentors.

Once they've honed these skills and are ready to move on, we'll equip them with all the tools they need to find and secure paid work, like dressing for success, interview skills, and linking them with our employment partners in their chosen fields.

We have a goal to help 100 people find and sustain meaningful employment by 2025. With over 30 people realising this dream so far, the clock is ticking. We are hoping you can help us get there!

This program goes over and above what is funded in clients' NDIS plans – so we are relying on the generosity of donors to see it come to life. If you remember that amazing sense of achievement from earning your first pay cheque – please consider donating today. You can help make that life-changing experience a reality for someone who really wants to Work It!

Donate today



Meet Sarah

Sarah, aged 23, is a client at our Community Connections program. For the last few months, she's been undertaking job skills at our Op Shop Warehouse, sorting clothes, toys, puzzles and forming bonds with staff and volunteers. Chatting and socialising are Sarah's favourite activities. "I like to ask my op shop friends what they have for lunch and if they need help – that boosts my confidence."

In the future, Sarah hopes to work independently. She also hopes Work It! is successful, so she can build on her current experience on a bigger and more exciting scale. "Working in the op shop is a great opportunity and great fun!"



Meet Cody

Cody, aged 23, is one step closer to realising his dream of working in the I.T industry thanks to our Employment Pathways program. For the past eight months, Cody has worked at Puckapunyal Australian Defence Force base with VMCH Employment Partner and hospitality contractor Ventia.

He supports kitchen staff with meal prep and service. "I struggled to find a job before this," Cody says. "I was a bit nervous when I first started, but I'm definitely more comfortable now. I like making the soldiers happy and giving them the food that they like. Working with others is definitely a good experience and has helped me build skills. Eventually I'd like to work in computers. This is helping me find the confidence to do it."

Coffee to go!

Our mobile social enterprise, the Where Is My Coffee? van, has been clocking up some serious milage!

Following a successful fundraising campaign in 2023, the van is now officially on the road, serving up delicious coffee and snacks to our various sites, and invaluable training for our Disability Services clients.

A regional road trip earlier this year was a great success, allowing the team to troubleshoot any potential operational issues, and build valuable engagement and connections with VMCH's regional services.



The coffee van hits Bendigo!

The van is now visiting VMCH's Melbourne-based residential aged care homes every Friday; delighting residents, staff and visiting families.

2024 is the year to volunteer!



Images – The VMCH volunteer team and volunteers celebrate at Cathies Lane Receptions



Carol Pickering receives her volunteer service award from Board Chairman Julien O'Connell AO

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

Our 440 volunteers each have a unique role to play across our extended workforce. They are listeners, caregivers, communicators and friends, who devote their time and talents to people who may otherwise feel alone.

In May we hosted our annual Volunteer's Celebration and Service Recognition event at Cathies Lane Receptions in Wantirna South.

This lovely luncheon included service awards for 44 volunteers who've dedicated five to an incredible 45 years to our organisation. Carol Pickering is our 45-year recipient, who has devoted more than half of her life to volunteering with VMCH.

Carol volunteered within VMCH's Disability Services for some time, before returning to aged care at our Berwick residence six years ago.

"There are so many people out there who don't have anybody," Carol says. "Sometimes people need someone to be able to give them encouragement or a bit of warmth."

"I've gotten so much happiness from volunteering. It's been a great experience."

The 2024 Volunteer Celebration saw plenty of smiles, new connections and some fabulous dance moves – check out the images for a glimpse into the festivities!





A Case Manager's journey to care

Asmir Huzejrovic possesses the type of empathy and kindness that comes only from lived experience.

Asmir is a Senior Case Manager with VMCH, supporting older people to manage their home care packages so they can continue living independently at home. But Asmir's journey to the job he loves has not been straightforward, or easy.

Arriving in Australia as a 16-year-old after fleeing the Bosnian war, Asmir was forced to 'start from scratch'. Even though he didn't know English, he tackled the difficulties of high school and worked hard to finish his education. Eventually, his hard work paid off and he landed a successful role in the field of Information Technology.

"It was difficult," Asmir reflects. "Luckily, at that time, there was a lot of us kids who came over as refugees. So, we all worked slowly together and were able to gain jobs."

However, Asmir's career trajectory changed once his father received a diagnosis of dementia.

“Where we come from, we look after our parents. So, when Dad got sick, I dropped everything to look after him.”

Lacking in the practical skills of personal care, Asmir enrolled in a three-month Personal Care Assistant (PCA) course. Now a successful I.T. professional, Asmir never planned on pursuing it as a career. During work experience at an aged care home, his employer noticed his talent. The employer encouraged Asmir to continue working in the field.

Asmir juggled the two jobs until his father's health worsened.

"Dementia hit him hard, and he became aggressive. We (Mum and I) couldn't keep him at home anymore."

When his dad moved to residential aged care, Asmir took a job at the same home to be near him. He later qualified as a nurse, but his dad passed away just one week later.



Asmir shares a laugh with Aileen

"All that work, you know, I did it for him – so I could be close to him. After that, I didn't want to stay on. But I did, until COVID hit."

Asmir was feeling overwhelmed by the stress of nursing during the pandemic. He was also dealing with strains on his marriage. Additionally, he was grieving for his father. A friend suggested case management, and Asmir found a role with VMCH.

His caring nature, experience and professionalism have made him a favourite among clients.

“I treat my clients as my own parents,” he says, adding he finds the process of helping people with their care plans rewarding.

"There was one client who had a phobia about moving into aged care. All she wanted was to stay living at home. I found the best package for her.

"It included assistance with personal care, social activities, and breaks. She was happy with it. She stayed at home until the last day (of her life)."

For Asmir, VMCH has given him the job satisfaction and flexibility he craves in life.

"The work/family balance is great. I love it here. I don't even think about going anywhere else."

To learn more about VMCH's help at home, call 1300 698 624.

Protect yourself from cybercrime

Cybercrime has long been on the rise in Australia. A recent survey found almost half of all Australians who were online in the last 12 months reported being a victim of some form of cybercrime (Australian Institute of Criminology).

VMCH is committed to helping ensure our community stays as safe as possible from cyber criminals.

And while you can't fully prevent yourself from becoming a target, you can arm yourself with knowledge to help falling victim to cybercrime.



Scams to watch out for

- **Fake parcel delivery texts** – scammers pretend to be reputable delivery services, like Australia Post, and send messages asking to click on a link to track deliveries.
- **Buying and selling scams** – fake websites are set up selling items at bargain prices which don't exist.
- **Invoice or bill scams** – increasingly sophisticated scam emails that appear to be from a well-known product or service provider requesting payment of a bill or renewal fee.
- **Charity scams** – scammers set up fake donation websites to take advantage of people's generosity.
- **Investment scams** – offering quick, high cash for minimal effort. If an offer appears too good to be true, it probably is.

How to protect yourself

- **Be alert** – criminals often use email, SMS, phone calls and social media to impersonate individuals or organisations you think you know or trust. Always be alert when clicking on attachments or links within emails.
- **Update your device software** – this improves your device's performance and makes it secure. Setting up your device to auto-install updates can keep hackers at bay.
- **Turn on multi-factor authentication (MFA)** – when activated, you need multiple pieces of information to gain access to your account, making it harder for hackers to get in.

If you would like more detailed information about how to be cyber secure, visit: www.cyber.gov.au

Education is key

Federal Member for Corangamite, Libby Coker MP, and Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services, Stephen Jones MP, visited Star of the Sea aged care in Torquay in April to host a resident educational session on online scam awareness. The forum was well received, with residents learning many tips to help stay safe from cybercrime.

Personal care builds bonds and independence

Spend just a few minutes with **Community Support Assistant (CSA) Dani Craig** and her clients, **Jean and Alan**, and you'd be forgiven for thinking they're family.

The trio has formed a strong bond since Dani began visiting twice a week to help 87-year-old Jean with personal care and tasks around the home.

Jean, a keen line dancer, likes to keep fit and healthy. However, a slip on the train a few years back saw her suffer a serious shoulder injury, which has affected her ability to manage many everyday tasks. Dani's support, as part of Jean's Home Care Package (HCP) with VMCH, has allowed Jean to continue to do the things she loves. This includes spending time with her husband of 15 years, Alan, who also has a HCP with VMCH.

"Dani is very, very caring and goes out of her way to help us with things that maybe nobody else would do, like filling in forms or helping with my iPad," says Jean.

Dani believes the personal support she provides to Jean has helped build their relationship.

“When you do personal care, it's vulnerable, and Jean had never had help before she did her shoulder. So, going from no help to then having someone literally help you get undressed, wash your hair, you need to have that trust there.”

Dani and Jean have built a great friendship

Jean agrees.

"It was a little confronting at first because I was very independent. But I know I can ask Dani anything and she'll help me."

Dani admits CSA work isn't for everyone, but it's perfect for her.

"You don't do this job for the money; you need to want to be here. I love that I feel like I make a difference. I know when I leave that Jean and Alan are happy, they've got everything they need and can relax for a bit. I treat my clients as I'd like my own family treated."

Jean and Alan say they certainly feel the love from Dani.

"We look forward to her coming. I said to Alan, we'd get better looked after here (in Australia) than if we were still in the UK. It's wonderful."



Dani, Jean and Alan share a laugh

To learn more about VMCH's help at home, call 1300 698 624.

Let's get social!

Make sure to follow us on social media for all the latest VMCH news! We are proud to share the stories of people in our community; from Cre8 Shed client Geoff discussing his journey with Parkinson's disease, to aged care couple Gaye and John celebrating 60 years of marriage, you'll find it all on our socials. Here are some of the highlights from the past few months.







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Our latest centenarians





90

The 2024 Care and Ageing Well Expo





81

Spotlighting Lydia on International Women's Day





102

Dorothy Dodd wears her poppy with pride





288

Geoff shares his experience of Parkinson's disease





90

International Day of People with Disability





700

St Paul's is the place for Matthew





1.4K

The new MasterChef in town





2.6K

Gaye and John reach a marriage milestone










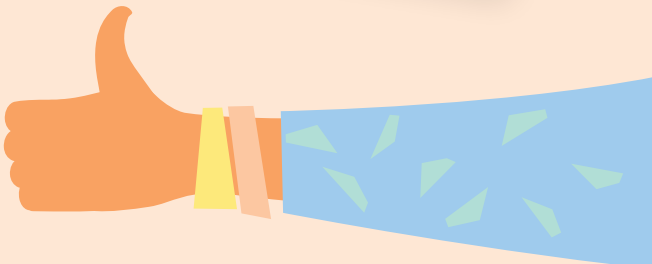
3.1K

101 reasons to celebrate Mavis

Want to find out more? Check us out on the following platforms:

-  Facebook.com/VMCHVic
-  Facebook.com/VMCHDisabilityServices
-  Instagram.com/vmchvic

-  Linkedin.com/company/vmchvic
-  [TikTok: vmch_vic](https://TikTok:vmch_vic)





It's the relationships that count.

Jobs in Aged Care
and Disability Services.

Recruiting now!



 careers.vmch.com.au

VMCH