

Cornerstone

VMCH



Affordable
homes for life

Intergenerational
café serves up joy

Volunteers – our modern
day superheroes

Edition Nine

“ We can find no social or moral justification, no justification whatsoever, for lack of housing.”

– Pope Francis

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VMCH affordable homes resident, Helen.

VMCH

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A note from our Chairman

Welcome to the ninth edition of Cornerstone.

Well, what a start it has been to 2023!

As you will read in this edition, our wonderful community has enjoyed many achievements and celebrations so far this year. From the release of a book on diversity and inclusion, penned by the mother of one of our specialist school students, to a prestigious award for our palliative care home, O'Neill House, it's been humbling to witness all the incredible work of our dedicated staff, volunteers, and especially those we support.

Many of our stories in edition nine showcase our commitment as an organisation to innovate and progress, including our second social enterprise venture, Star Café, in Torquay. This café is achieving incredible outcomes for people with disability as they learn vital job skills, and giving aged care residents and their families a lovely meeting place to connect and create memories, alongside local community members of all ages.

Another initiative which reflects our drive to change the status quo is St. Clare, our world-class retirement living precinct in Kew, featured on pages 15 and 16. We are proud to be part of projects such as St. Clare, which helps us to generate vital capital to deliver on our Mission-based projects, like Trinity Lane.

A few months back I had the pleasure of attending the blessing of Trinity Lane, our newest affordable homes development in Ivanhoe for older people marginalised by adverse circumstances.



It was a lovely event (which you can read about on pages seven and eight) filled with the spirit of community and good will. I was honoured to give a speech, in which I shared the story of the starfish...

A young girl was walking along a beach where thousands of starfish had been washed up during a storm. When she came to each starfish, she would pick it up and throw it back into the ocean. A bemused man approached her and said, "Little girl, why are you doing this? You can't save all these starfish. You can't begin to make a difference!"

The girl continued to bend down, pick up another starfish, and hurl it back into the ocean. Then she looked up at the man and replied, "Well, I made a difference for that one!"

This story, to me, is indicative of what we do here at VMCH; every person does their bit to create positive change for someone else, however small it may seem.

I hope you enjoy reading this fantastic edition of Cornerstone, and are reminded of the starfish message threaded throughout its pages.

Please take care and God bless.

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

Julien O'Connell AO
VMCH Board Chairman



Resident and 'boys club' member Aurel.



Trainee Connor and Cafe Coordinator Cathy Rundle.



Resident Will and friends.

Café serves up intergenerational meeting place

VMCH's latest social enterprise café on the Surf Coast is bringing a slice of 'normality' to residents and their loved ones, with an intergenerational twist.

Star Café opened in December 2022 at our Star of the Sea Aged Care Residence in Torquay, and since that time, has given four young trainees with disability vital job skills on their pathway to finding paid employment.

And while the social enterprise aspect of the café is delivering invaluable experience for trainees, it's the older customers and their families who have really embraced its introduction.

Customer Nonie says sharing a coffee and morning tea at the café with her husband Ken, who is a resident, has brought them "such pleasure".

"The café has opened up opportunities for all residents to extend their friendships with residents from each unit, which is such a lovely way for them to interact, and then families arrive. It is so nice to see the socialising across the board, and lots of chatting and laughing," Nonie says. "The added plus is for residents is to be among different generations while sitting in the café."

Café Coordinator Cathy Rundle agrees the intergenerational aspect has been a lovely bonus. She's set up toy baskets, a colouring in station, and provided highchairs to entice local mother's groups, young families, and residents' visiting grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

"We had a family in the other day with their little girls and a few of the residents just sat there smiling at the kids. The residents' faces just light up – it's beautiful to see."



Nonie and her husband Ken.

Trainee Carlyn says interacting with older customers has already helped to build her confidence. The intergenerational relationships hit close to home, with Carlyn's own nan, Linda, a resident.

"I like seeing Nan on a Monday morning. I'm enjoying my time here, especially having hot chocolates and iced chocolates, and when Cathy brings her dog Rosie to visit the café," says Carlyn.

The café has also been a drawcard for people seeking residential aged care.

Resident Aurel, who meets his two mates Ron and Wayne at the café each morning, says his son Pete chose Star of the Sea because of the café.

"He picked this place over two others because he knows I love my coffee, and it's good coffee too!" Aurel (pictured left) says. "The café has given us a nice place to meet away from our rooms."

Cathy says Aurel, Ron and Wayne are known around the café as 'the boys club'.

"I have watched them become good mates who now meet every day at 10am. They take turns shouting rounds of coffee and sometimes Aurel's son will pre-pay for them. According to Aurel, it's also a great place to meet some ladies!"

For Nonie, the café has been a game-changer after a very tough few years.

"COVID-19 has changed us all, and for this café to bring some normality of the things residents enjoyed prior to entering aged care and lockdowns is wonderful."

Star Café is located at Star of the Sea Aged Care Residence, 1290 Horseshoe Bend Road, Torquay.



Affordable homes for life

As Australia's housing crisis grows, VMCH is stepping up to help meet the huge demand for secure and affordable homes, particularly for older people who struggle in the private rental market and want to age in place.

Our newest affordable homes development – Trinity Lane – was officially blessed by Most Reverend Martin Ashe, Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne, on 31 March. It includes 39 accessible and modern apartments for people aged over 55 who are on a low income, and people with disability.

VMCH offers affordable homes to 436 people in 21 communities across Victoria, but this is the first time we have purpose-built an affordable homes development for intergenerational use.

“We've all witnessed the terrible reports on Australia's housing crisis,” says VMCH Board Chairman Julien O'Connell AO. “Rents, interest rates and the cost of living continue to rise, and there's simply not enough affordable housing stock to keep up with demand.

“Things are worse for the more marginalised and vulnerable in our community, and it's simply not good enough that older people who have given so much to our society and deserve to live in comfort, are struggling to put a roof over their heads.”

Anglicare Australia reports that just 0.5% of rentals are affordable and suitable for a retiree on the Age Pension. And that 87% of renters surveyed say they want to remain at home as they get older, but only 46% believe their home is suitable for an older person.

Likewise, studies show accessibility is a huge barrier for people with disability to live comfortably in a private rental.

Image above: VMCH Board Chairman Julien O'Connell AO, VMCH CEO Sonya Smart and Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne, Most Reverend Martin Ashe conduct the blessing.

Thirty-one of the 39 units are deemed 'Gold Standard' accessible under Livable Housing Australia's (LHA) design guidelines, which means people with disability can also live comfortably and independently.

Helen is one of Trinity Lane's new residents, moving from VMCH's outdated affordable homes site on nearby Lower Heidelberg Road. She's also among Australia's fastest growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness, women aged over 55.

Despite an affluent start to her married life, 40 years ago Helen found herself divorced and homeless following a string of bad business decisions made by her ex-husband. Decades of instability and financial strain followed, until she found VMCH in recent years.

"The opportunity that VMCH has given me to move into this beautiful place is extraordinary. When I first saw this place, I was overwhelmed, it's such a beautiful building. As soon as I got here, I thought 'How lucky are we?' I mean, I lost everything, and now I'm here, I feel so fortunate."

Helen says easy accessibility to her ground floor apartment will help with her mobility issues.

"It means I won't have to move out of this place in the future. I can be here for the rest of my life. As far as I'm concerned, this is my final home."



Trinity Lane residents (including Helen, third from left) enjoy some morning tea in their new home.

Mr O'Connell said VMCH's vision to help ease the housing struggle for those who need it most, like Helen, continues with an "absolute commitment" to invest in more affordable homes projects into the future.

"We want our residents to feel secure, safe and comforted by the fact that their tenancy here is forever, if they choose. These homes are not temporary rentals; they're homes for life."

To learn more about VMCH's affordable homes, call 1300 698 624.



Trinity Lane.

Caring for our carers

“Being a carer can be rewarding, but it isn’t without obstacles.”

Fredricka Gonsalves, Carer Support Manager.

There are approximately 2.65 million Australians who provide care and support to their loved ones. The most common reason for taking on a caring role is a sense of family responsibility, with over 70% of carers identifying with this statement.

One of these carers is Buena, who takes care of her twelve-year-old son Ahneil who has Down syndrome. With most of her energy put toward taking care of her son, Buena cites burnout as a common occurrence.

“I suppose you feel isolated and that no one fully understands you,” she says. “You also feel that exhaustion not only mentally but emotionally and physically. But you have to keep going.”

After being introduced to VMCH through a friend, Buena discovered the benefits of carer support. Our Carer Support Services concentrate on the health and wellbeing of the carer and offers personal care, flexible respite and a range of social events.

While her main focus will always remain caring for Ahneil so he has the optimum possibility of being independent one day, Buena has come to understand the importance of looking after herself.

“VMCH opened my eyes. They were able to make me see it was worth participating in the program and enjoying yourself and connecting with other people. It makes you happier and a better carer.”

VMCH currently provides support for over 2,000 unpaid carers, with numbers steadily growing. As Carer Support Manager, Fredricka Gonsalves understands the significance of providing support for those in a caring role.

“Our goal is to provide carers with flexible respite opportunities that are of interest to them, and work with them to achieve their caring goals,” she says. “We’ve all seen the toll that the pandemic has had on carers. It’s exciting for us as we’re now able to support our carers face-to-face.”



Carer Buena is grateful for support from VMCH.



The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the lives of carers in a multitude of ways. According to the ABS Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, 1 in 4 carers over the age of 18 had difficulty providing care or assistance because of restrictions put in place following COVID-19. Of this group, 22% noted a decrease in their recreational activities.

For Buena, our Carer Support Services was 'essential' in combating the social isolation during this period.

“During lockdown it was lifesaving to be able to do some activities and feel special. Like cooking lessons, all those fabulous recipes that I wouldn't have a clue how to do. They also offered some yoga classes which I really enjoyed, learning breathing exercises and being calm.”

After the easing of restrictions, Buena was able to connect with other carers and start a new social network.

“I have been to a few wineries and had lunch with the other carers. That was a fantastic experience to taste those wines and feel special on the day.”

To find out more about VMCH Carer Support Services, call 1300 698 624.

Made with love

In our last edition of Cornerstone, we introduced you to some of our incredible VMCH chefs! These passionate and talented foodies, led by Head Chef Sanath Wanniarachchi, are constantly thinking outside the square to elevate the dining experience for our aged care residents.

Residents love to share their feedback on dishes, and there are many favourites. Food is best enjoyed when shared, so each edition we'll feature an original recipe created by one of our chefs, so you can share the residents' dining experience at home.

This month, it's a delicious winter warmer, Red Lentil Soup, created by Chef Wanniarachchi...

Red Lentil Soup

Ingredients

- Red Lentils 200g
- Carrots 150g
- Potatoes 100g
- Onions 150g
- Vegetable Stock 2 Litres
- Salt and Pepper

Directions

1. Wash lentils and cover with vegetable stock.
2. Bring lentils to the boil and skim.
3. Add the remainder of the ingredients and season.
4. Simmer for 45 minutes, skimming when necessary.
5. Liquidise, correct seasoning and consistency, skim if necessary.
6. Serve and enjoy!

Chef's note

This soup can be accompanied with fried bread croutons, coriander and lemon if desired.





Flagship service makes immeasurable impact

Palliative Care Victoria estimates that 1 in 4 Victorians who die each year (approximately 10,000 people) do so without adequate access to palliative care.

Since it opened in July 2021, our specialised palliative care care and respite home, O'Neill House, has supported more than 110 people journeying towards the end of life, with dignity, respect and compassion.

O'Neill House aims to provide a modern, luxurious, and homelike environment for those entering the last phase of their life and their families. Care is highly personalised and based on each resident's needs and wishes.

Earlier this year, O'Neill House was honoured with a Future of Ageing Award in the Palliative Care category.

Now in their fourth year, the awards recognise leadership and innovation across Australia's aged care sector, and those solutions designed to improve the lives of ageing Australians.

The judging panel cited O'Neill House as "a great pilot for other organisations nationally", "a beautiful program" and "hugely important".

VMCH CEO Sonya Smart believes the aged care industry as a whole has a key role to play in providing palliative care that is "holistic, personal and empowering".

"Our team at O'Neill House do an exceptional job of caring for people and their families during arguably the most challenging time of life. I'd like to thank them for the important and lasting impact they make on O'Neill residents and their loved ones."

"Thank you to all at O'Neill House who carried Pamela through her final months with such tender care and genuine friendship. You will forever be a part of her story."

Family obituary of late resident, Pamela.

For more information on O'Neill House, call Sue on 0418 511 731.



Volunteers – our modern day superheroes

Approximately 6 million Australians devote their time to volunteering, playing an important role in responding to challenges facing the world.

Enter Billie and Laurie Kempton (pictured) who have been volunteering with VMCH since 2005.

The couple currently devote their time to the Mount Waverley Community Connections program, where Billie has a soft spot for the music program.

“We sing to each other and everyone has a go on the microphone,” she says. “Truly it is the most wonderful, joyous thing ever. Sometimes you go in and you’re not quite as happy as you could be. By the time you come out, your heart is singing and you’re on cloud nine.”

Married for 52 years, Billie and Laurie have a rich history of providing care and support to others.

In 2014, the couple were awarded The Margaret McGregor award courtesy of Extended Families

Australia, which recognises excellence in volunteering and supporting children with disability.

Billie and Laurie see volunteering as their way of giving back to the community.

“And it’s also to say thank-you,” Billie says. “We’ve been very fortunate. I got to marry my best friend and we’ve had a wonderful life.”

Having gained so much from their experience, the couple want to encourage others to take that leap.

“All you need is time,” Billie says. “We don’t have any special skills, we just go in and we do our thing. The connections may not happen immediately, but give yourself time. It’ll open up a whole new world and will make you very grateful.”

“When you start out volunteering, you think you’re going to be the one who is giving. But you get so much more back than you could ever dream.” Billie Kempton

We want to thank Billie and Laurie for their lifelong contributions, we are so blessed to have you both!

If you’d like to join the VMCH volunteering team, call 1300 698 624.

Mum's mission to shine a light on diversity



Gabrielle and her son Jack.

The mother of a St Paul's College student has penned a funny and heartwarming book based on her son, to help create awareness around diversity and inclusion.

Jack, aged 11, attends VMCH's specialist school in Balwyn, along with dual enrolment at a mainstream school.

His mum, Gabrielle Bassett, says she'd love to see her newly penned book, Jack's Best Day Ever, on shelves in schools to help foster understanding among his peers.

"School is a time to really focus on encouraging inclusive behaviours and acceptance of everyone's differences," Gabrielle says.

"The book was designed so a child can just have fun with it and read it for the entertaining story that it is. Or they can sit down with parents or teachers and have a chat about what it means. Why is Jack flapping his hands? Why is he covering his ears? Why is he eating the same thing all the time? It's designed to break down that stigma in a fun and inclusive way."

The colourful and vibrant picture book is a beautifully written tale about the blossoming friendship between two children with disabilities, their preferences, and how they experience the world around them.

Gabrielle says she'd always wanted to write a book, but lockdown was the catalyst to kick-start her dream.

"Lockdown really shone a light on students like Jack. It was a huge challenge at the time as he struggled to engage with the online content and couldn't learn independently. I also realised during this time that on my own bookshelf there was no diversity; no representation of the whole community. When children see versions of themselves it makes them feel seen, loved and accepted for being their true selves."

Jack's principal, Timothy Hemphill, described Gabrielle's book as "a beautiful tribute to Jack".

"Jack is one of the real characters at St Paul's; a born conversationalist. Interacting with Jack is always a joy for me and for everyone around him.

"The depiction of St Paul's College in the book makes me feel extremely proud that Jack in the real world and in this wonderful book has places where he can grow, learn, discover and achieve."

"St Paul's is fully committed to celebrating diversity and differences with respect, kindness and fun and Gabrielle's book joyfully does the same. I have no doubt that many children and families will fall in love with this story."

Jack's Best Day Ever is now available via woodslanepress.com.au/collections/author-gabrielle-bassett and in most bookstores.

Include GABRIELLE15 at the checkout to receive 15% off the price.



Friendship and fundraising

The St Paul's community would like to thank their young friends and teachers at St Columba's College, Essendon, who have confirmed their support of the specialist school for the eighth year!

The students from Cater House have gone above and beyond for the school community for almost a decade, raising funds for arts and crafts, sports equipment, musical instruments, and more. Our students are grateful for their continued friendship over the years, including through lockdowns where they wrote personal letters to keep spirits up. Thank you most sincerely for your support St Columba's.





St. Clare – Life is best lived when curiosity is kept alive



An artist's impression of the St. Clare precinct.

There have been some exciting developments for our world-class retirement living precinct in Kew.

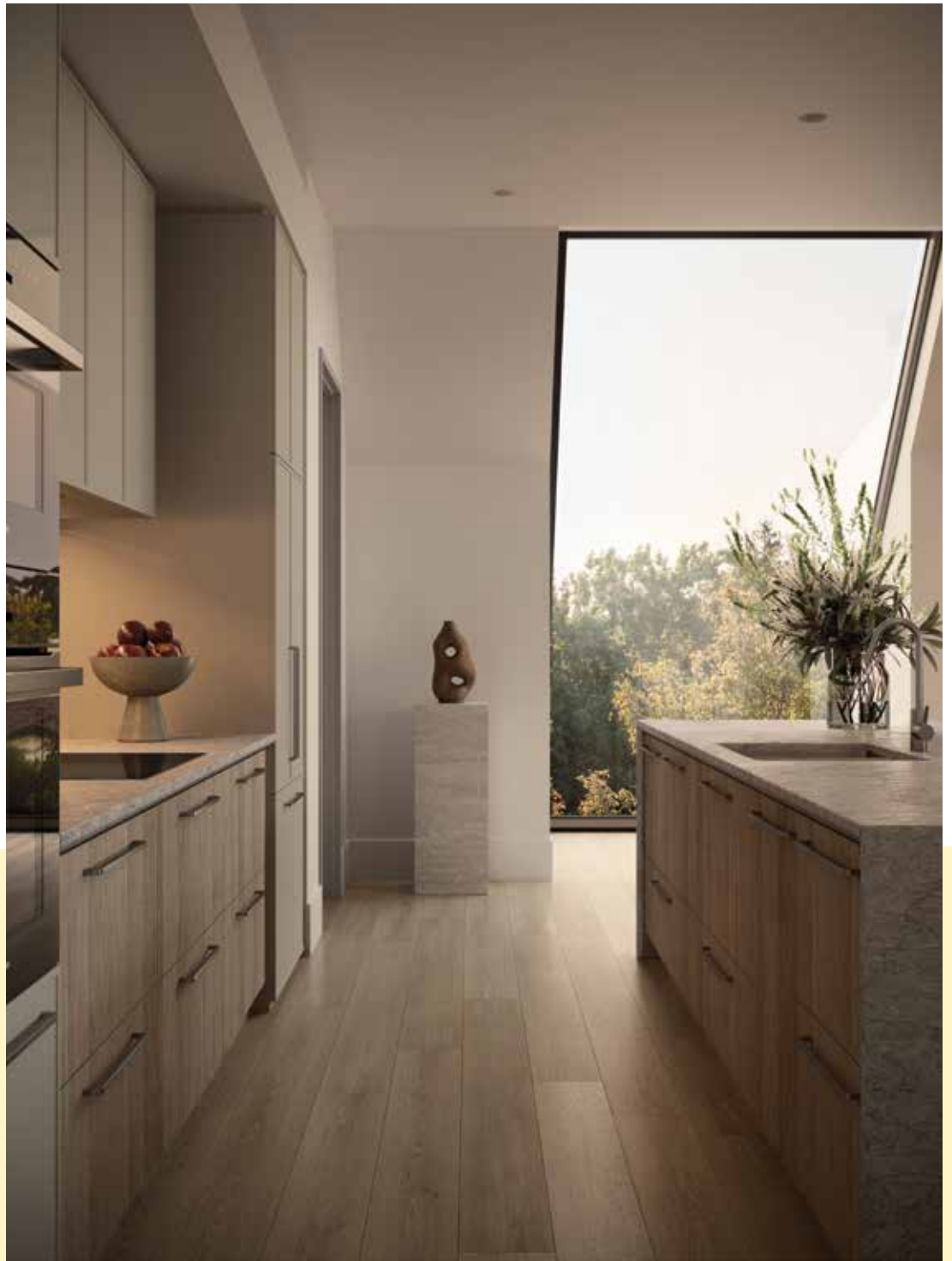
St. Clare, on Studley Park Rd, will offer a new standard of living within its 102 premium apartments, with innovative architecture, expansive green spaces, and breath-taking views.

Work is now complete on an immersive, state-of-the-art display suite, featuring an almost full-scale apartment and gallery, allowing visitors to fully experience our vision and premium design for this incredibly rare precinct.

Cornerstone readers can book exclusive VIP tours of the immersive display suite before we launch it to the public in June. Please email hello@stclarekew.com.au or call 03 8595 2444 to find out more or book your tour.

We are proud that premium projects such as St. Clare help us to generate vital capital to deliver on our Mission-based projects, such as our new affordable homes development, Trinity Lane, featured on page 7 of this edition.

To learn more about St. Clare, visit:
stclarekew.com.au





Meet the women of VMCH

Beryl and Jennie.

Here at VMCH we're lucky enough to have a huge community of women across many diverse cultures and generations. Let's meet some of these inspiring females as they share details of their lives, inspirations and what being a woman means to them.

Beryl and Jennie, Star of the Sea aged care residents

Beryl and Jennie met in the most appropriate of ways – during Happy Hour!

"I was sitting on one side of the table, and I looked across and saw Beryl." Jennie says. "She was happy and she was smiling, and I just felt comfortable to reach out and say hello!"

The two women are residents at VMCH's Star of the Sea aged care, with Beryl having moved in during 2019 and Jennie a year later.

After their initial meeting at Happy Hour, the ladies began saying hello when they passed one another in the halls.

A few conversations (and a few cheeky bevs) later, they quickly realised they'd found their new best friend.

Despite having a lot in common (including both having lived in The Macedon Ranges for most of their lives) there's one big difference between the women – Jennie is 62 and Beryl is 98.

"I never think of Beryl's age," Jennie says. "Our friendship was just meant to be."

"That's what I appreciate so much with Jennie; it didn't mean a thing to her," Beryl echoes. "I certainly don't behave like a 98-year-old!"

Both Jennie and Beryl agree that they are lucky to have found each other.

"My favourite thing about Beryl is that she knows how to make me happy again." Jennie says.

"If I'm down, she just knows how to make me feel okay. If we are facing a big problem, we get to halve it."

"Jennie is such a special person," Beryl says. "She is up against so much, but not once does she complain."

"She's a person I can trust with my life. I don't say that often."



**Olivia Scott,
Where Is
My Coffee?
trainee**

Olivia, aged 17, is one of our first five trainees (all female) to secure paid employment following her time at our social enterprise café, Where Is My Coffee?

“I wanted to be independent and buy myself things instead of asking my parents,” Olivia says. “I used to be insecure but after the traineeship I feel more confident to get a job.”

When she started, Olivia needed to be picked up from school by café staff for her shifts. But after some coaching, she was soon comfortable enough to catch the bus on her own. Olivia was totally committed to her traineeship, even working through school holidays when others took a break.

Olivia’s hard work paid off when she received a call back from McDonald’s recently.

“I was relieved and over the moon. I am very grateful for everything I learned during the traineeship.”



**Shilpa
Chandrapalka,
Residential
Services Manager
O’Neill House**

“Women are still struggling for basic rights all over the world. I am scared to think that every second, a woman is abused, exploited or humiliated because of her gender.”

“In my culture (South Indian), society and norms hinder gender equality in every step of life. Fortunately, I was born in a family where gender had minimal significance in my progression.”

“Despite all odds, we three sisters persisted to break the (cultural) norm, biased towards males.”

“Every woman who challenges herself every day with work life balance is my inspiration, but in particular, Mercy Manjula (my mother), Kalpana Chawla (NASA astronaut and aerospace engineer) and Jacinda Ardern (former New Zealand Prime Minister).”



**Beryl Clarke,
St Catherine’s
aged care
resident**

Beryl Clarke is young at heart, wise, hilariously funny and larger-than-life resident at St Catherine’s aged care.

She spent four years in the Army nursing core, and these days presents our wreaths at St Catherine’s to remember those who served in war. Beryl had many great experiences during service and gained a great sense of adventure.

Beryl was a significant part of her parish in Croydon and took her dog, Oscar Barnabus, to mass with her every Sunday.

She loves spending her time at St Catherine’s playing cards and word games, singing, and attending lifestyle activities.



**Carol Pickering,
VMCH volunteer**

Carol has been volunteering with VMCH since 1979! For 44 years Carol has devoted her time to supporting people with disability at our Community Connections program, and more recently, older people at our Berwick aged care residence.

A keen crafter, Carol has shared her love for creating with countless people, bringing joy to everyone she meets.

Carol says volunteering keeps her active and involved and she has many fond memories of time spent with VMCH clients and residents over many years.

Mission in action



A place to call home

Dr Zachariah Duke, Formation and Ethics Advisor, VMCH

The famous war poet, Edward Thomas, composed a classic poem aptly titled, “Home”. In short, it’s a poem about a young man at war longing to return home. Our home is somewhere we experience comfort, safety, peace, community, and love in abundance. An experience that a lot of us can relate to and appreciate, but a lot of people within our community sadly don’t have a place to call home. Perhaps having a roof over our heads is something those of us who are blessed with take for granted. It’s important to also note that ‘home’ can also be a reminder of family and domestic violence, distress, and anxiety.

Catholic Social Teaching emphasises that access to safe and adequate housing promotes the dignity of the human person and enables positive and meaningful contributions to the common good. Pope Francis highlights this in his pastoral letter, *Laudato Si’*: “Lack of housing is a grave problem in many parts of the world, both in rural areas and in large cities. Not only the poor, but many other members of society as well, find it difficult to

own a home. Having a home has much to do with a sense of personal dignity and the growth of families” (par. 152). Moreover, the United Nations also speaks of the universal human right of a “... standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of a person and their family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care ... ” (United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

VMCH responds to this great need by providing a place to call home to over 400 older people living on low incomes across Melbourne. On the back of the COVID-19 global health pandemic and the cost of living crisis, there has been considerable demand for affordable housing, particularly from older women. VMCH’s affordable housing residences also provide opportunities for social connection and pastoral care. This not only provides residents with the practical ‘bricks-and-mortar’ aspect of having a home but also a sense of belonging and community.

Catholic Matters

VMCH sustainability community

VMCH is excited to launch a sustainability community in the coming months. Emanating from Pope Francis’s letter, *Laudato Si’*, and responding to the seven *Laudato Si’* Goals, the VMCH sustainability community is a safe space where colleagues can discuss and share ideas, resources, good practice, and practical innovations regarding social and environmental issues.





Building futures

We are excited to launch our latest appeal, aimed at helping young people with disability become more independent, learn practical skills, and have fun!

We hope to raise \$80,000 for the purchase of tools, equipment and materials such as timber, saws, sanders and safety gear to help us set up two Cre8 Sheds in regional Victoria and metro Melbourne. It follows the huge success of our Cre8 Shed in Wangaratta, which has helped many teens and young adults explore their creative sides, build confidence, and make new friends.

Participants join in the weekly program to make wooden items such as garden beds, picnic tables and chopping boards, or design and create something themselves.

Program Coordinator John Salafia says the positive change he has witnessed in participants is incredible.

“We have one young man who was very shy and withdrawn and rarely left his house. But with some mentoring at the shed he’s come out of his shell ... he’s made some friends and created some fantastic woodwork pieces,” John says. “Watching him present his dad with his first completed project was incredible to see; they were both so proud.



Members of our Wangaratta Cre8 Shed love getting on the tools.

That’s the kind of life-changing opportunities the shed gives these young men and women – and we’d love to see it happen for people in other areas.”

Cre8 is part of VMCH’s wider Job Skills program, which gives people with disability the opportunity to build on their skills across areas such as horticulture, hospitality and retail in readiness to enter the paid workforce.

If you would like to support this appeal, please call 1300 698 624.



Remembering Alistair Lloyd

“There was always a kindness about him. That’s what he taught me, and that’s what I live with now.”

Earlier this year, the VMCH community mourned the loss of Alistair Lloyd.

Alistair, a born leader and caring, generous person, achieved a great deal throughout his life.

He is best known for his outstanding contributions to the pharmaceutical profession, alongside a highly successful career in the Army Reserve.

Alistair was also a dedicated family man, a proud father to his children and loving husband to wife, Shirley.

The couple have been part of the VMCH family since their adopted daughter Alana joined our Early Learning and Therapy program almost 20 years ago. They are also valued and long-time VMCH donors.

Cornerstone was lucky enough to recently meet with Shirley, who shared her thoughts and memories on her life with Alistair.

The couple met at Manning Pharmacy in Melbourne, where Shirley was working as a shop girl and Alistair an apprentice to shop owner and visionary pharmacist, Nigel Manning.

Shirley recalls their first date as a funny yet endearing occasion.

“I was sixteen when he first took me out,” Shirley says. “He borrowed his uncle’s car and planned to take me to the pictures. I wasn’t nervous, I was very excited.

“I was waiting at home for him to pick me up when I heard a ‘beep’ from out the front. I got up to go, but my father, who was six foot three and an RSM (Regimental Sergeant Major), said ‘Sit! Nobody toots my daughter.’

“Next thing you know there was a ring of the doorbell and dad stood up to answer the door.



The couple were married in March 1957 and had three children together, along with two adopted children. Shirley says Alistair was a wonderful father, who always knew the way to solve things.

“He was always calm, he never raised his voice. The kids adored him. He never treated them like children, he treated them as equals. That’s what he was like with everyone.”

In the early 1970s, Shirley realised she wanted to provide pre-adoptive foster care for young babies. Together, the couple provided foster care for over 70 babies, on top of caring for their own three children and two adoptive children. Alistair was always supportive of Shirley in this endeavour.

In October of last year, Alistair was bestowed Monash University’s highest honour, an Honorary Doctorate (pictured below). Ever humble, Alistair at the time said being surrounded by fellow residents, friends and family is what gave him the most joy.

“The award itself is wonderful, but what is just as wonderful is this event and being able to spend time with our friends,” he told us. “It’s lovely they’re all here.”

For Shirley, it’s Alistair’s kind and gentle nature that will stay with her.

“He would always say not to let things worry me. That’s why everyone thought he was so wonderful - he never fussed. There was a kindness about him. That’s what I live with now.

“We were married for 65 wonderful years and we were always a team. I miss him dearly as we were not two separate people, but one. Living an individual life is not easy, but he will always be with me.”

Alistair greeted dad, and quickly realised my dad had been his RSM. He said he nearly wet his pants. He and dad became the best of mates, eventually!”

The couple were inseparable after that and began their incredible life together. Alistair excelled academically during his studies at The College of Pharmacy, receiving the intermediate gold medal for achievement in 1954, and winning the Australia wide Kodak scholarship in 1956.

This scholarship meant Alistair would be overseas for quite some time, investigating the role of pharmacy in civilian defence. Shirley and Alistair got engaged before he left and kept in contact by writing letters.

“I’ve got two big bags of air letters.” Shirley says. “I saved all of mine, but I didn’t realise he was also saving his. We wrote every single night. I don’t want to share them because they’re pathetic. They say things like ‘I miss you so much, I love you!’ They’re dreadful.”





Yes we van!

The wheels are turning on our Real Shot coffee van!

At the start of last year we launched our 'Real Shot' appeal, designed to give people with disability a platform to develop their job skills and build their independence. This will be achieved through the purchase of a coffee van, that will serve as a travelling café and mobile training site.

We are pleased to announce that after raising \$93,688, we have made a formal offer on a van – and it's been accepted! This brings us one step closer to creating new pathways for people with disability.

We hope to have the van up and running later this year, something our Community Connection clients are eagerly waiting for. Having already

learnt some new skills through a coffee cart pilot program, the team is keen to keep that momentum going and begin serving top quality coffee.

The Real Shot van will be based at VMCH's Star of the Sea Aged Care Residence for the time being, where we will serve the people of Torquay from selected locations on the coast. You'll also catch us at special events and visiting our other aged care sites.

We hope this program will encourage positive community engagement and help form new and meaningful relationships, along with promoting strong intergenerational benefits.

Thank you most sincerely to everyone who donated to our Real Shot appeal.

Watch this space!

With Us Not For Us

Earlier this year we celebrated World Down Syndrome Day.

On this day, we use our collective voice to advocate for the rights, inclusion and well-being of people with Down syndrome.

This year's theme With Us Not For Us, promotes a powerful message that reinforces the importance of people with disability being treated fairly and having the same opportunities as everyone else.

Down syndrome is the most common genetic cause of intellectual disability, accounting for approximately 15% of people with intellectual disability in Australia.

It is estimated that there are between 13,000–15,000 individuals with Down syndrome in Australia, as of 2019.

People with Down syndrome experience developmental delays early in life, however they lead happy and fulfilling lives with the help of supportive families and community members.

Here at VMCH, we are proud to support many people with Down syndrome and their families, guiding them to achieve their goals and live their best lives.



Watering the garden.



The famous police cap.

One of those people is 45-year-old Adrian, who has been part of our Community Connections program since he was 18-years-old.

Adrian is an enthusiastic participant of the Community Connections program, with some of his favourite activities including cooking, bowling, art and the occasional disco.

He's also a huge fan of music, with Barbara Streisand, John Farnham and the Victorian Police band topping the list.

Adrian's a pretty social guy – at his Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA), he enjoys helping his fellow housemates with shopping, gardening and assisting them on and off the bus to activities.

You'll also rarely catch him without a cap on, particularly his famous police cap.

Similar to many Australians, Adrian faced personal challenges when confronted with the Covid-19 lockdowns. The disruption to his regular routine was a steep hurdle, one that was difficult to overcome.

With the help of his close-knit family and the Community Connections team, Adrian was able to build his self-confidence back up, and adjust to everyday life once again.

This is proudly one of Adrian's biggest achievements to date – along with being a star ten pin bowler, averaging three strikes per game!



Hamper delivery in action.

Our biggest Christmas hamper appeal yet

Back in December, we undertook our biggest Christmas hamper appeal yet!

In a massive effort from all involved, we packed and delivered 750 Christmas hampers to those we support who may be financially disadvantaged or socially isolated during the festive season.

We received some wonderful feedback from our hamper recipients, including Affordable Housing resident, Michael, who says he is very grateful and looks forward to our visit each year.

Customer Service Team Leader Sarah Mueller says participating in the deliveries was a fantastic experience.

"I can't begin to express how much joy it gave us to see the expressions on the residents' faces when we handed over the hampers of goodies," Sarah says.

"Every single person was just so grateful for this gesture from VMCH and said how much of a difference something like this makes to their lives at this time of year."

A big thanks to all staff, volunteers, family members, residents and clients who helped contribute to this appeal. Your support has put a smile on many faces and ensures we can continue this tradition for years to come.

We also extend our gratitude to all those who donated to this appeal, including Higgins Coatings who assisted with packing and delivery on the day, along with a generous donation.



Op shop innovation

Back in 2018, VMCH created the 'Mobile Op Shop', a unique experience that enables our aged care residents the opportunity to go shopping from the comfort of their own home.

The concept is simple: we handpick items from our op shop warehouse in Wantirna, bring them to our aged care residences, and set up shop!

Senior Volunteer Manager Bronwyn Summers says it's all about offering our residents an everyday, affordable and fun shopping experience.

"Many residents miss visiting their favourite shops and being able to purchase items for themselves," she says. "It has never been about making money, it's really about making the residents' days a little bit brighter."

Our residents seem to love the experience and will often eagerly await the shop's arrival.

"We've been told by residents that it feels like they're going to a market, or a fete as one described it," Bronwyn says. "To be honest, all of us (staff and volunteers) helping on the day get just as much enjoyment from the experience as the residents do."

The mobile op shops also bring back fond memories for our residents, many of whom used to volunteer in op shops themselves.

Our latest visit was to Bundoora where we found some very happy customers!

The Future is Green

Back 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.

Since then, the program has gone from strength to strength! We currently have six participants, each of whom are building their confidence and kicking personal goals week to week.

One of those people is Samuel Usci, who joined the program in September of last year, right after finishing his schooling.

Sam was tackling tasks he had little experience in; de-nailing planks of wood, mowing lawns and using power tools, to name a few.

Green Team Coordinator James Eckersley says Sam took it all in his stride, and has enjoyed watching him take on new and challenging activities.

“At the beginning Sam was quite dependent on others for assistance with daily tasks, but is becoming more adept and confident in his own abilities,” James says. “His focus and skill with tools has improved greatly.”

The program has expanded to Collingwood Children’s Farm, where participants can join in



Sam and James working together.

on gardening, farm tasks and woodwork activities – with proceeds from much of the work going back to support the farm and fund inclusive community programs.

Going forward, Sam would like to find work that challenges him with a range of tasks, and would love to work with a big group of people.

He would also like to make new friends while exploring different options to engage with his local community and increase his independence and capacity to learn.

For James, it’s been a pleasure to watch Sam thrive.

“It can be hard navigating the world as a young man just out of school, with different routines and new places,” he says. “It has been a pleasure being part of Sam’s transition and growth. Keep up the great work, Sam!”



There’s plenty to do at Collingwood Children’s Farm!



Get connected



For all the latest news on what's happening at VMCH, tune into our socials! We love sharing all the fantastic stories from people in our community, and it's a great way to keep up to date with upcoming events. It's been an exciting few months for us, from celebrating our biggest Christmas hamper appeal to date, to launching our latest social enterprise café on the Surf Coast. You'll find it all on our socials!



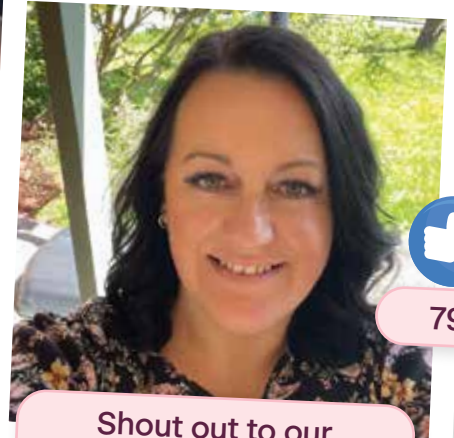
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Floods in Vic



755

Buena's caring journey



79

Shout out to our customer service team!



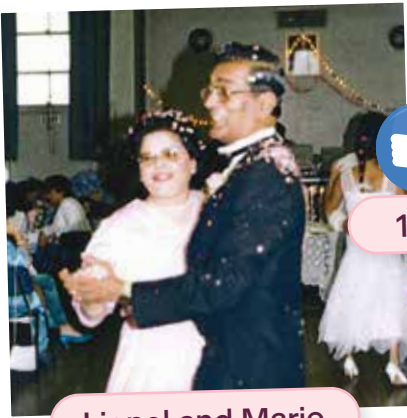
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Christmas hamper appeal



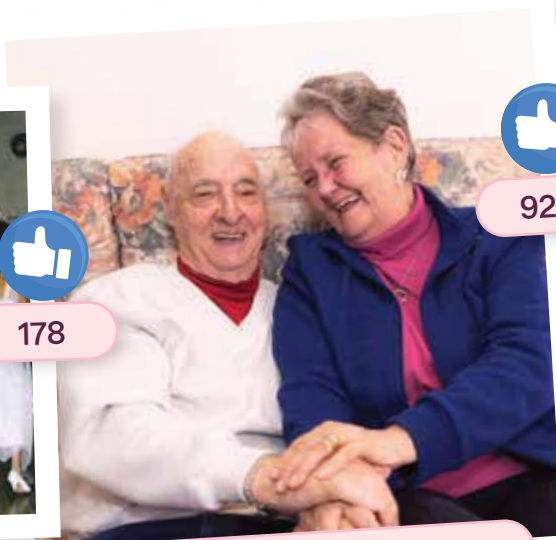
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Atu and Lawrie



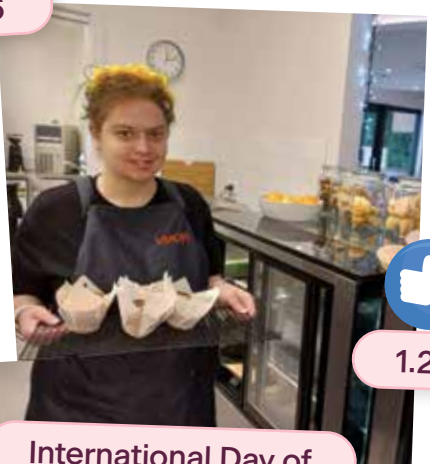
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Lionel and Marie



926

International Volunteer Day



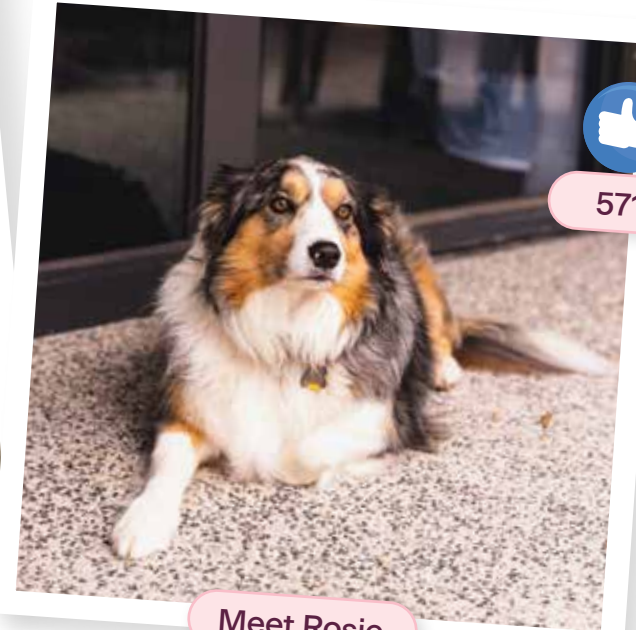
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International Day of People with Disability



900

Thanking our teachers



571

Meet Rosie

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





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