

Media Release

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Mavis reflects on a century: International Women's Day

When Mavis Kohler was born in 1923, women were not allowed to drink in public bars, stand for federal elections, or to work in public service jobs once they married.

Thankfully, society has come a long way since then, and Mavis – who turned 101 last month – is thankful she's here to have witnessed the shift.

Friday March 8 is International Women's Day, celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women.

It's an important date on the calendar for aged and disability organisation VMCH, with females like Mavis making up 71% of its aged care residents, 79% of its workforce and 77% of its volunteers.

Mavis believes IWD is also an opportunity to reflect on the struggles faced by women in years gone by, including her era, which endured WWII and the Great Depression.

"Women did most of the holding together of the family and house and we weren't recognised for it," Mavis says. "Back in my day women didn't even have a license or drive."

However, Mavis concedes she enjoyed more freedom in her 20s than some.

While holidaying in Melbourne, Tasmanian-born Mavis met her future husband, Bob. A fiercely independent woman, Mavis rebuked Bob's offer to assist her ice skating, or to pay for her tram ride home. However Bob's persistence in courting Mavis paid off, and the pair soon married, with Mavis relocating to Melbourne.

"I was lucky my parents wanted me to experience life. Even though my mother wasn't happy when I moved, she didn't tell me or stop me from going."

Mavis and Bob had two children and were happily married for an incredible 72 years before Bob sadly passed away in 2016.

The great-grandmother of two believes "having patience and helping others" are the best aspects of being a woman. She also recognises society still has a long way to go to ensure true equality for women.

"We need more women in positions that are high up in companies and politics, so they can make a change."

VMCH CEO Sonya Smart says she's proud to lead an organisation that employs and supports such a large number of incredible women, like Mavis.

"Step into any of our aged care residences or retirement villages and you will find a hugely diverse group of women who have lived some extraordinary lives," she says. "We have so much to learn from our older generation – who've lived through some extremely challenging times that have shaped them into the resilient and inspirational people they are today."

Sonya added it's important as a female leader to help be a catalyst for change.

"At VMCH we have a great representation of female leaders who are natural advocates for women within our workplace. Offering flexible working conditions and opportunities for career progression are other ways VMCH tries to minimise those barriers to success. I think when we support each other as females, we get a better future for all women in the workforce."

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About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic, for-purpose organisation, love, joy, hospitality and courage aren't just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we've been around for over a century, we're always moving forward. Always staying true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives; providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and compassionate teams are with you on your life journey; helping you with a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.

