

Media Release

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Pastoral care during palliation a vital support

John knew Corpus Christi Community Greenvale (CCCG) would be the last place he would live.

The 90-year-old had called CCCG (a residence for marginalised older men) home for 21 years before he passed away late last month.

May 19-25 is National Palliative Care Week, aimed to raise awareness about the importance of talking about death and dying.

For-purpose aged and disability organisation VMCH offers palliative care to aged care residents at the end-of-life stage, and through its specialised palliative comfort care centre, O'Neill House, in Prahran.

An important part of VMCH's palliative care is its 27-person strong Pastoral Care team, who provide emotional and spiritual support to residents and families throughout their journey with VMCH. The support is particularly vital to residents – like John – who have no family or friends at the end-of-life phase.

As Corpus' longest residing person, John had forged some lasting bonds with fellow residents and staff since he moved in decades ago.

"I was in Sydney basically living in a gutter before here," John recalled. "My sister, who was a Catholic nun, got me in here. It saved my life. When my sister passed on recently, the support the staff gave me was wonderful. I have been really well looked after, and I appreciate it."

Also important to John was his Catholic faith. "I got that back being here. We have a chapel on-site. I know that I will die here, and I am happy with that."

So, when John's time of death arrived last month, the CCCG community was ready to provide the support he needed.

"We followed John's wishes, which included arranging his funeral at our chapel with a full mass," said CCCG Residential Services Manager Donela Perry. "The residents sat with him, and staff spent extra time with John, engaging in pastoral care and activities. Right up until the end, John enjoyed people being with him. He died surrounded by his friends."

Support at CCCG continues after palliation, with the home providing funerals and burials for men who cannot afford services.

"We currently maintain 350 graves at our cost and have room for future needs. We believe that dignity is shown to our current clients by knowing we are a community that supports and understands."

VMCH Chief Mission Officer Bridget O'Shannassy says its stories like John's that really shine a light on the huge role pastoral carers can play in a positive death experience.

"Pastoral carers provide a caring, understanding and confidential shoulder to lean on. They are non-judgmental listeners in times of loneliness, anxiousness, fear or ill-health," Bridget says.

"I'd like to thank our dedicated pastoral carers for the empathy, strength and kindness they show to our residents, clients and families not just during Palliative Care Week, but every day."

Media enquiries

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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.

