

Media Release

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Specialised dementia care unit changing lives

“The relief you see on family’s faces when they come to Lady Lourdes House is palpable” - Amelia Desormeaux.

The family of a man living with dementia is calling for more specialised dementia care units to help improve individuals’ wellbeing and slow progression of the disease.

September 16-22 is [Dementia Action Week](#). The 2024 theme, ‘Act Now for a Dementia-Friendly Future’, emphasises the importance of building awareness and acceptance of dementia in the community.

Bernie Desormeaux, aged 74, was diagnosed with dementia 10 years ago. From the beginning, his loving family – partner Amelia, daughters Lilly and Olivia, and mother-in-law Mary – struggled to find the support he and the family needed.

"It was a difficult journey. Not just the financial constraints and administrative burdens of navigating a very complicated system, but also the emotional toll," says his daughter Lilly. "Our hearts go out to anyone struggling with the complexity of the system and those without the resources that we luckily accessed."

After numerous stays in aged care homes that didn’t suit Bernie’s needs, his health suffered.

Things turned around with [Dementia Australia](#) support and their recommendation to the [award-winning specialised dementia unit, Lady Lourdes House, part of \[St Bernadette’s Aged Care Residence in Sunshine North\]\(#\), run for-purpose aged and disability services organisation \[VMCH\]\(#\).](#)

The home is funded by the Australian Government’s [Specialist Dementia Care Program](#) (SDCP) and is purpose-designed for up to nine residents who experience very severe symptoms of dementia. Residents are offered up to 12 months’ intensive, supportive care to help them manage their symptoms so they can transition into mainstream aged care.

Lady Lourdes is one of only three SDPC’s in Victoria, and only 10 in the country.

Since it opened in 2020, the team has cared for 21 residents and successfully transitioned 11 to its mainstream residence, including Bernie.

“There was a quietening of demeanour, less anxiety; we felt he relaxed,” says Amelia. “Physically he improved, putting on weight. The relationships staff build with the families, the gentleness and empathy that they show to the residents and to us, is just extraordinary.”

VMCH Lady Lourdes Unit Coordinator Sue Adhikari says staff are highly trained and have ongoing education with Dementia Training Australia.

“We utilise non-pharmacological interventions as a first line of action and work on minimising people’s triggers to help manage behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia. Ultimately, our success lies in giving residents time and maintaining a consistent approach with a familiar face. We provide them with person-centred care and treat everybody as unique individuals.”

Amelia agrees: “respect and understanding is at core of what Lady Lourdes has given our family and Bernie”.

Bernie, a former environmental scientist, was a passionate reader with a keen interest in people and music before dementia took hold. Lady Lordes harnessed this love of music with music therapy, and this coupled with regular visits from old friends and grandchildren (in comfortable, separate lounge areas) have helped to improve Bernie’s sense of wellbeing.

When the time recently came for Bernie to transition to the mainstream residence, the family had mixed emotions.

“We didn't want Dad to leave because we wanted him to have the best care, but we were also conscious that Lady Lourdes has a waiting list, and we didn't want anyone else to miss out,” Lilly says.

Amelia hopes more families in the future can access specialised units like Lady Lourdes.

“We couldn't recommend it highly enough, for the dignity engendered and the sense of wellbeing created for those living with dementia, and for their families, knowing their loved one is safe, comfortable and seen.”

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.

