

Cornerstone

VMCH



Dementia care unit
changing lives

Intergenerational
program brings joy

Café serves up
confidence

Edition Twelve

“ The residents are so giving of themselves; so many of them have so much to share. Coming here just fills my bucket every week, I love it.”

– Rebecca, VMCH volunteer.

Publishing details.

Cornerstone magazine features articles, commentary and information about our residents, clients, community, partners and services.

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Disability Support Worker Caitlin with Community Connections client Cathy.

VMCH

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A note from our Chairman

Welcome to the 12th edition of Cornerstone.

As 2024 comes to a close, I am delighted to reflect on the accomplishments we have achieved as a strong community, together, and envision how they'll continue to uplift those we support in 2025, and beyond.

Attending various VMCH events has been truly inspiring; witnessing firsthand the remarkable dedication of our staff and volunteers. Their efforts are helping people from all walks of life to live their best lives, and for that, myself, the Board and Executive team, are profoundly grateful.

Something VMCH is particularly passionate about is not only providing support and care to those who are vulnerable but championing them to advocate for themselves and develop a strong sense of independence.

Our Consumer Advisory Groups across our Residential Aged Care, Disability and Volunteering Services – featured on page 13 – are excellent vehicles in which to do this. It has been exciting to witness the outcomes achieved so far, and those still to come. We are dedicated to ensuring the support we offer at VMCH is driven by lived experience and the needs and wants of those we serve.

Expanding our job and life skills programs continues to be a focus for our organisation, recognising the huge need in the wider community for genuine opportunities for people with disability to find meaningful employment.

On page 9, we share exciting details of our latest social enterprise hospitality venture, Where Is My Coffee? in Nunawading. This follows the success of our original cafe of the same name in Wangaratta. If you find yourself in North East Victoria over the Christmas holidays, please pop in and say hello to the team there (plus the coffee and food are excellent!).

On page 10, you'll meet Pia and Stef from our Athelstan Café training program, who are enjoying their work experience and becoming part of an intergenerational community with the retirees who call Athelstan home.



The intergeneration theme continues on pages 23 and 24, where a truly heartwarming and inspiring program is featured. Volunteer students from Mannix College have been visiting our aged care residents as part of the Mannix Young Hearts program. Mannix College is also part of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, so it's been wonderful to see our two organisations unite and create joy for students and aged care residents, underpinned by our shared faith and values.

As always, we are extremely grateful to our loyal supporters who help us sustain our services. I was humbled to join some of these lovely, giving people who have chosen to leave a gift to VMCH in their Will at our recent Fawkner Fellowship Luncheon. You can see some photos from this fantastic event on page 17.

As we approach the end of the year, I'd like to thank you for your continued support and interest in our organisation.

I take this opportunity to wish you every blessing for Christmas and a happy and safe New Year.

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



Amelia and Bernie Desormeaux

Specialist dementia care unit changing lives

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

— Amelia Desormeaux.

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 VMCH’s

award-winning specialised dementia unit, Lady Lourdes House, part of our St Bernadette’s Aged Care Residence in Sunshine North.

The home is funded by the Australian Government’s Specialist Dementia Care Program (SDCP) and is purpose-designed and funded by VMCH 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 SDCPs 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 Lourdes 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.”



Top: Bernie, Amelia and daughters Olivia and Lilly several years ago
Middle: Bernie with Amelia and Mary
Bottom: A lounge area at Lady Lourdes House

DINING ROOM SHOWDOWN



Ready, steady, cook!

The VMCH Dining Room Showdown has launched across our aged care residences!

Now, you might be asking, 'what is a Dining Room Showdown?' It's a friendly competition born from our team of chefs who are constantly thinking outside the box to elevate the dining experience for our aged care residents.

Each team from one of our 14 aged care residences receives a 'mystery box' of ingredients on competition day, where they will create fresh and exciting meals for 30 people, including residents, family members and judges.

These lucky taste testers then rate the dishes on dining experience, culinary passion, presentation and food safety.

Head Chef Sanath Wanniarachchi says the aim is to create an "immersive dining experience" for our residents.

"At the heart of this competition lies our unwavering commitment to providing unparalleled dining experiences for our residents. Through this event, we aim to elevate the standard of culinary excellence across our aged care residences."



So far, we've had two rounds of the competition, with St Bernadette's triumphing over Providence and Wantirna besting Berwick. Regardless of the results, it's clear that some truly delicious meals have been created.

We're thrilled with this initiative, which not only showcases our chefs' diverse range of skills but has also been a fantastic experience for our residents.



Wantirna and Berwick Aged Care Residences go head-to-head in the second VMCH Dining Room Showdown



Where Is My Coffee? Nunawading

Full steam ahead!

VMCH is thrilled to reveal our third social enterprise café!

Where Is My Coffee? (WIMC) Nunawading is set to be launched on December 3 as part of International Day of People with a Disability celebrations.

The café, which will provide vital job skills training and employment for five trainees, is modelled on our original Where Is My Coffee? café in Wangaratta, which has supported 12 people with training and paid work since opening in December 2021. The café will also join its mobile namesake – our WIMC van!

The new venture is part of our suite of social enterprises, including our online store (featuring goods made by Cre8 Shed and Community Connections participants) and VMCH Op Shops.

Along with our job skills programs – garden and maintenance group the Green Team and our on-site training cafes at Star of the Sea Aged Care and Athelstan retirement community – VMCH aims to help 100 people find and sustain meaningful employment by 2025.

Where Is My Coffee? Nunawading is located at the Nunawading Community Hub, 96-106 Springvale Road. Open Monday to Friday, 9am to 3pm. Come and see us and say hello!

Café serves up confidence

Our Athelstan Café training program has just celebrated one year in operation!

The café, located at VMCH's Athelstan retirement community in Camberwell, is part of VMCH's wider job skills suite and helps people with disability gain hospitality experience on their way to finding paid employment. Since it opened, four trainees have worked in the program across three days each week.

Trainee Pia, who joined as part of her Year 11 work experience, has gained immense confidence over her time at the café, and is now able to set tables independently, take and deliver orders, and process payments with very little support.

Trainee Stef (pictured right) also loves the program and looks forward each week to working with her support worker Danielle and Athelstan Food and Beverage Team Leader Anna.



Stef is enjoying her traineeship at Athelstan Café

Anna says the trainees' presence has been positive for residents too. "Our residents have really embraced the program. We love having our trainees and watching them grow in confidence and skill."

Bright futures

Preparing students for life post-school is a big part of the educational journey at our specialist school St. Paul's College.

The Balwyn campus includes an Assistive Technology Centre, a Sensory Room, a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) centre, specially-designed inclusive playgrounds, and a café and kitchen garden to help senior students develop vocational skills.

Older students also enjoy heading out into the community and learning about life beyond the school gates, supporting their life skills in road safety, public transport, shopping and budgeting.

Teacher Hygenia Lobo, who this year celebrated 25 years of teaching, says at St Paul's, student goals and wellbeing are based around collaborative partnerships with families.



Hygenia and former student, Ben

"We prioritise preparing our students for adulthood and whatever post-school options they choose, so that they are confident and ready to explore and embrace new opportunities in the future."

To learn more about St. Paul's, call (03) 8595 2470.

Caring for the carer

Recently we celebrated National Carers Week – recognising and raising awareness of the 3 million Australians who provide care to a family member or friend.

Here at VMCH we are proud to support around 3,000 carers, including 175 young carers, in their incredibly important roles across metro Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Our 24-member Carer Services team focuses on the health and wellbeing of the carer and offers education and information, personal care, flexible respite and a multitude of special events.

Here, we meet some carers to learn more about their respective journeys and the impact caring has on their lives...

Haeli and Flynn Walker **Carer and young carer**

Aston, aged 8, is a kind, shy kid who loves animals, lego and playing Minecraft. He also loves his big brother, Flynn, aged 11. Their bond transcends that of most siblings. Flynn acts as Aston's carer, alongside their mum Haeli, aged 44.

Aston's diagnoses of autism, epilepsy and learning delays mean he needs 24/7 care. Haeli, who also juggles a career as a support worker, assists Aston with twice-daily medications, driving to medical appointments, personal care and advocating via the NDIS. It's an exhausting role, and one she'd struggle to maintain without Flynn, who helps Aston dress, do his homework, and help calm him down when he's upset.

"My caring role looking after my brother is hard," Flynn says. "But I love my brother and the time we spend together."

VMCH's Carer Services team helps Haeli and Flynn so that they can continue to be there for Aston. Haeli accesses carer catchups and events, and vital respite for weekends away with her partner.

"Being a carer has caused my mental health to escalate at times but having support helps me to cope with life's stresses," Haeli says. "Having the carers group gives me something to look forward to. Case Manager Nicola is a listening ear when we need someone the most. Without it, I would feel isolated and alone."



Haeli, Flynn and Aston

Flynn is supported with school equipment and supplies, and access to young carer events to connect with peers.

Case Manager Nicola Mallinson says for the 175 young carers VMCH supports like Flynn, having a break to "just be a kid" is vital.

"Young carers really are legends, you've not always consciously made the choice to step up and take on more responsibilities, but you're showing up each day and making sure the people you love are able to get through the day with a bit more ease. For our team, normalising the tricky feelings and celebrating the positive moments alongside Flynn is our biggest form of support."



Aruna (second from right) with her late daughter Morina (far right) and family

Aruna Perera

Carer

Carer Aruna Perera, 68, connected with VMCH's Carer Services team when her daughter, Morina, began receiving palliative care in 2022. Morina was diagnosed with bowel cancer aged just 37, and endured almost 10 years of chemo, radiation and surgeries before finally succumbing to the disease last year, aged 46.

"Morina was a very independent, strong and brave girl," Aruna says. "As a family we were there to give her all the support we could and help and understanding whenever she needed. It was so good to have VMCH help too. My daughter was finding it difficult to walk her dog, so they helped us find someone to do that, also to help with cleaning the house, and hospital transfers."

Aruna now cares for her husband Kuranage, 76, who struggles with rheumatoid arthritis and is recovering from a stroke. Aruna, who also has osteo arthritis, is reluctant to leave Kuranage's side. VMCH Case Manager Ishita Bains links the couple with support through My Aged Care, including garden maintenance, so they can enjoy their outdoor space.

"I'm so thankful to Ishita – she has been so kind and has explained everything to us about the help we're eligible to receive. Our two sons and their families are very supportive, but they are also busy with their own commitments. The support from



Aruna and her late daughter Morina

VMCH has given us great strength and courage. Not just financially, but to know there are people out there who care about us and want to help us. My daughter was really relieved when she knew we were getting support from VMCH too. It gave her peace of mind before she passed that we would be looked after."

To learn more about VMCH Carer Services, call 1300 698 624.



Strength in self-advocacy

VMCH staff and clients share a laugh at their most recent meeting

VMCH's mission – to create genuine places of belonging for all aged, disadvantaged and people with disability – is an objective that is weaved through all of our supports and services.

Feeling as though you're part of something bigger than yourself is a huge part of belonging. Helping others can give life meaning, and self-advocating can create a strong sense of independence and self-worth.

This past year has seen some great strides within our Consumer Advisory Groups across Residential Aged Care, Disability Services and Volunteering. These groups – including clients, residents, volunteers, family members, VMCH executive team members and staff – help inform our service delivery from a lived experience perspective.

Geoff Pearson is a member of our Cre8 Shed in Wangaratta and joined our Disability Consumer Advisory Group to represent the voices of his client peers and help create positive change.

"I want to make a difference, I want to help people," says Geoff, who lives with Parkinson's.

"I know how difficult life with a disability can be. People with disability deserve the best services and that's something I think I can help with. I have a background in engineering, and I've been on many boards and committees so I know how they operate – how to get things done."

“ So far, I've found it very rewarding. It feels great to help people and provide my five cents' worth. I'm already feeling a bond between the clients; we'll nod and laugh to each other. It feels like I've made new friends. I love it.”

Daniel Carter, General Manager of Disability Services, says the group “plays a pivotal role in making sure any changes we make as an organisation are in the best interests of the people we support”.

Our Volunteer Experience Advisory Group has been making great strides in their quarterly meetings.

Bron Summers, Senior Manager Volunteer Engagement, says some positive suggestions so far include the formation of a 'buddy system' to help welcome new volunteers, more frequent social media communications, and social group activities for volunteers.



The hospitality experience is a common subject for members of our Residential Aged Care Consumer Advisory Group meetings

“ Although we’re a relatively new group, we hope to continue to involve even more volunteers through online meetings or holding meetings at different sites to try and hear from as many voices as we can. The ultimate aim is to always make the volunteer experience a happy and positive one for all.”

Meanwhile, our Residential Aged Care group has spearheaded a new working group for menu inclusions, and initiatives are being considered to improve assessable communication, including the installation of large telephones in residents’ rooms and the use of assessable apps.

To learn more about our advisory groups, call 1300 698 624.



Disability Consumer Advisory Group member, Geoff Pearson



Our Volunteer Experience Advisory Group aims to improve the experience of volunteers, like Marion

St. Clare –
looking to the future,
preserving the past





Two beautiful buildings on the Kew site of our world-class retirement living precinct, St. Clare, have played a rich part of VMCH's history.

Esmonde House and Plumstead House became part of St. Paul's School for the Blind in 1957, after being acquired by its founding Principal, Br. Patrick O'Neill.

As part of St. Clare's development, the grand, historic homes will be restored.

Hacer, VMCH's contracted builder partner for St. Clare, has specialists working carefully to retain the historic features of the beautiful buildings, giving them a second life as leisure and wellbeing facilities for St. Clare's residents. Having stood the test of time for generations, it's a complex task, but one that is important to get right.

As restoration works continue, scaffolding will surround the buildings until they are revealed in 2025.

Meanwhile, construction work at St. Clare is progressing well.

Concrete structures are now formed, with window installation and brickwork in progress. The final 25 residences (of 103) have just been released, and the sales team expects they will be as popular with the locals as the previous apartments already reserved.



Brick restoration work continues

Proceeds from the sale of St. Clare's 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



An elevated shot of Esmonde House with Plumstead House, to the back right

Fawkner Fellowship: Celebrating generosity

On Thursday September 12, we celebrated the 2024 Fawkner Fellowship Luncheon at Athelstan Retirement community in Camberwell.

Since its inception in 2013, the Fawkner Fellowship has honoured VMCH supporters and donors, many of whom have generously chosen to leave a gift in their Will.

This year's luncheon coincided with Include a Charity Week, an initiative dedicated to inspiring and educating people about the profound impact of leaving a gift in their Will, after taking care of their loved ones.

Chairman Mr. Julien O'Connell AO and CEO Sonya Smart warmly welcomed our guests. We were also privileged to hear from Harley Dalglish, Senior Manager of Disability Group Programs, who shared insights into VMCH's Disability Services and the transformative impact of donations and legacies on our clients.

A heartfelt thank you to all our loyal donors, supporters and those who leave a Gift in Will. Your incredible generosity, unwavering support, and lasting legacy will ensure a brighter future for so many people.



(Back) Grants and Bequests Officer Sandra Rosano with donor Maureen. Seated: Maureen's sister Sue, who is a VMCH bequestor



(L-R) Donors Lesley and Eric, CEO Sonya Smart chats to donor and VMCH resident Anne, Athelstan Café trainee Stef with Support Worker Victoria

Christmas at O'Neill House



Christmas can be a challenging time for many – particularly for those facing health struggles, and their loved ones. Our specialist end-of-life care home, O'Neill House, in Prahran, has been supporting people during the last phase of life for more than three years. The dedicated team ensures the festive season is a special one for residents and their families – many of whom will share their last Christmas together.

Here, Registered Nurse Anthony Auxilio shares his experiences supporting residents and their families throughout this time...

“ Looking after the dying is not for the faint-hearted. Whenever we see terminally ill residents, we are confronted by our own vulnerabilities and mortality. But for O'Neill staff, we must put these feelings aside and ensure the advent season is a month full of meaning and reflection.

Central to this is our Christmas celebration on 13 December. Along with great food, residents will reminisce about their favourite music with some live entertainment, and enjoy a visit by some local Girl Guides, organised by our Lifestyle Coordinator, who will sing some traditional Christmas carols. Residents will also be entertained with a dance presentation to be performed by O'Neill staff, something everyone is looking forward to (or is a little nervous about!).



Anthony with O'Neill residents Nella (in red) and Betty

Festive treats and entertainment aside, staff at O'Neill are focussed on strengthening residents' inner resources through prayers and reflection, aware that this can be an emotional time.

For some residents, it may be their last Christmas. Others may still be here next year, but experience the loss of fellow residents, some of whom they will have formed strong attachments with. Others may be experiencing anticipatory grieving for themselves and/or for the other residents. Being mindful of this, our Pastoral Care Practitioners will facilitate group prayers and guided meditation sessions all throughout December and one ecumenical service for everyone to gather and to celebrate the birth of Jesus. One-on-one pastoral conversations with residents from different faiths and beliefs will also continue throughout the four-week advent season, with love, peace, joy and hope weekly themes.

For the team at O'Neill, Christmas is most importantly about reflecting on the 'reason for the season', recognising that Christmas 2024 may look a little different for O'Neill residents and their families. We want our residents to know, no matter what their circumstance – they are loved, and they are not alone.



The beautiful chapel at O'Neill House where residents and loved ones can rest, reflect and pray

Mission in action



Bringing love to life: A catholic understanding of palliative care

Dr Zachariah Duke, Formation and Ethics Advisor, VMCH

It has been 12 months since VMCH launched its new suite of values of bringing Love; creating Joy; embracing Hospitality; and showing Courage. In the previous edition of Cornerstone, we made a commitment to spotlight a new value and link it with an organisational matter of importance over the next few editions of this publication. This edition offers a brief reflection on the value of Love and a Catholic understanding of palliative care.

In the Catholic tradition, all human life is valued and nurtured with love – as all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. This especially includes the steadfast commitment to caring for people in the final stages of their lives. This is known as palliative care.

Earlier this year, Pope Francis addressed an audience of interfaith spiritual and social carers on the topic of palliative care. The Holy Father stressed: "... palliative care, while seeking to alleviate the burden of pain as much as possible, is above all a concrete sign of closeness and

solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are suffering."

St Paul – a prolific writer and one of the first leaders of the Early Christian Church – wrote many of his letters to specific communities addressing specific issues. St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians was no different. It was written to address several structural problems that were present in the church at Corinth (in modern day Greece). The crux of his message in this letter was to challenge the people of Corinth to reorientate their ways of relating with one another – not through hatred, violence, and destruction, but with the gift of love. This letter continues to serve as one of the most profound writings on love ever to be written. Let us continue to be inspired by St Paul's witness to bringing love to life.

"And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

(1 Cor 13:13; NRSV).

Catholic Matters

Human and divine love of the heart of Jesus Christ

It is very fitting given our focus on the value of Love in this edition's Mission in Action feature, that Pope Francis has released the fourth papal encyclical (otherwise known as a pastoral letter) of his pontificate titled, *Dilexit nos*. With war, violence, oppression, and marginalisation all around us, it is timely that the Holy Father is encouraging us to rediscover the heart of Jesus Christ. As an organisation, we look forward to making meaning and connections between this profound letter and the work we do in creating genuine places of belonging, through service and compassion for all aged, disadvantaged and people with disability.



The community of Christmas shines bright



Are you familiar with VMCH's Christmas Hamper drive? Each December, we deliver festive cheer to more than 800 people in need across our affordable homes, home care and disability services.

What you may not know is the positive impact the initiative also has on those who volunteer to make the hampers a reality.

Our Arts in Action program, which sees more than 100 aged care residents and clients with disability create lovely items for our hampers, this year celebrates a decade.

The initiative – created by late aged care resident, Norma, who wanted to give back to others – has become a favourite pastime for those involved, who enjoy the chance to get creative and use their artistic skills for a worthwhile cause.

VMCH also relies on the generosity of donors for the other important contents of the hampers – food, toiletries and toys for younger recipients. As the cost of living continues to rise – receiving some goodies at Christmastime is a welcome treat for many.

Please meet some of our community members who are contributing to make sure our hampers reach as many people as possible this year.

If you would like to help join us by spreading some joy and kindness, please donate today. Call 1300 698 624 or visit www.vmch.com.au/donate

Velda, aged care resident

Hamper contributor

"I enjoy being part of the program. It helps you connect with other people and it makes you feel useful too."



Anna, VMCH employee

Hamper delivery

"I've been involved in hamper packing and delivery for the past 18 years – I love it! Packing day is a happy hive of activity and everyone is so excited to be part of such a great community initiative. The best part is the hamper delivery and seeing the smiles on the faces of recipients, it's something I look forward to each year."



Bobbie, affordable homes resident

Hamper recipient

"It's a really generous and thoughtful gift. I especially like that the aged care residents create some of the hamper items; that's really special. It's also a budget saver. 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."



We're almost ready to Work It!

Our Work It! fundraising appeal has reached the halfway mark! We are hoping to raise \$80,000 to fund a unique, new retail space in Melbourne's east, all geared towards readying people to work.

The learning hub will see 15 clients each year build on skills such as money handling, customer service and product displays, guided by disability support workers and volunteer mentors.

Thank you to those who've helped contribute to the \$41,000 raised so far. If you'd like to make a donation, please call us on 1300 698 624 or scan the QR code.





Keeping you connected

As we age, it's important to stay connected to our community and maintain our physical and emotional wellbeing. Studies show that one in five older Australians feel loneliness, especially those aged 75 and over. This can also lead to health issues such as cognitive decline and dementia. If you live in Melbourne's eastern region and are aged over 65, VMCH has some fantastic programs to keep you healthy, happy and social.



Active Minds

Our Allied Health team recently launched an Active Minds Program at our Wellness Centre in Wantirna.

This nine-week program is designed for older adults with a dementia diagnosis, and is facilitated by an Occupational Therapist. It aims to help manage symptoms and encourage social engagement.

In small groups of 4-6 participants, members enjoy hands-on activities, discussions and games, all tailored to improve quality of life, enhance cognitive function and foster new brain connections.



White Road

Our White Road Community Centre in Wantirna is a warm and inviting place for older people to enjoy day respite. It's a friendly environment where participants engage in stimulating activities tailored to the group's interests.

Creative art sessions, word games, and of course, bingo, are regularly requested activities and eagerly awaited at White Road.

Jose, aged 71, says: "I like the nice company. It's nice to have a chat ... I'm all about the word games, and enjoy a game of scrabble."



Multicultural Wellness Centre

Lyn Lane has been a member of our Multicultural Wellness Centre (MWC) for almost two years.

After her husband passed away, Lyn felt isolated and vulnerable, then, she found the MWC and Filipino group.

"Since I've started here, I felt good straight away. I have the most fun here and I get along with everyone. I've made so many friends."

Our centre also runs Chinese and Sri Lankan groups.

Interested in connecting with your community? Call us on 1300 698 624.

G'Day Line

If you are unable to attend our programs and are feeling socially isolated, the Australian Government has created a free national phone support service offering older people, anonymous, friendly chats with volunteers (8am to 8pm, seven days a week). The G'Day Line also connect callers to resources, information and social activities to alleviate the impact of loneliness and social isolation.

Call 1300 920 552.

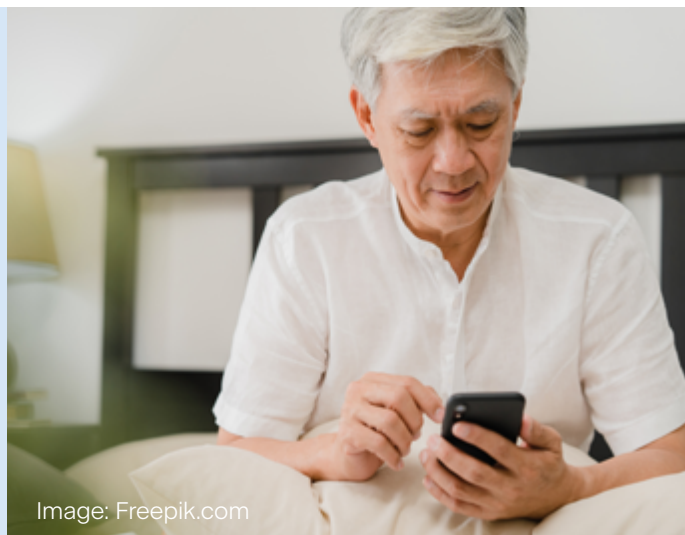


Image: Freepik.com



Sr. Bernadette and student Alice

Creating bonds that transcend generations

An intergenerational volunteering program is bridging the gap between our generations and fostering a sense of family for young and old.

VMCH has partnered with Mannix College, a Catholic residential college affiliated with Monash University, to create a community service program, Mannix Young Hearts.

Since September, around seven students have begun visiting VMCH Corpus Christi Aged Care Residence in Clayton, taking part in activities such as music, arts and crafts, exercises, technology lessons and pampering days.

The aim of the program is to enhance the lives of both aged care residents and students – meeting both Catholic organisation's respective Missions: to create genuine places of belonging for the vulnerable; and fostering students' desire to make a difference in the world.

And while the huge benefits of intergenerational relationships are not new, the special connection between Mannix students and aged care residents is unique. Both cohorts live in non-traditional family homes, away from loved ones.

Alice Hengel, aged 19, who is studying a Bachelor of Engineering, says living on campus is a great experience, but admits it can be a bit difficult at times.

“You don't get to see family and friends as often as you used to, but it's a really good community, very similar to the aged care resident's community, actually. Both of my grandmothers are about the same age (as Corpus residents). I haven't been able to visit them as much as I used to, so it is good to be able to still have that connection with the older generation. So many residents have had so many different things happen in their lives, and there's just so much that you can learn from them.”

Fellow student Grace Burns, who is studying a Bachelor of Arts, says visiting Corpus is the “highlight of her day”.

“ I joined the program because I personally have seen the positive impact volunteering has made on the lives of aged care residents and I just wanted to be a part of that. Hearing what things were like back then and how that is impacting how things are now is really cool; it’s allowed me to open up as a person.”

Likewise, VMCH residents are enjoying the company.

“I have all my family all over the place on three continents,” Sr. Bernadette Gauthier, aged 86, says. “So, they don’t come very often.”

Sr. Mary Jenkins, aged 90, adds, “For me, it’s sort of like a breath of fresh air. I find young people give you a new life. You feel uplifted that young people are prepared to give their time and their energy to help us. I taught senior students in my tuition career, so I just love having new people around.”

Both groups are discovering new skills, passions and appreciation for the other generation.



Phyllis and Alice enjoy a dance



Resident Maria and student Alice share a laugh

“One of the marvellous things for me is somebody to help me with my computer, so that’s wonderful,” Sr. Bernadette says.

Mary particularly enjoys the exercises.

“When I came in here the doctors had said I’d never walk again, so the activities are just so important. And having young people come in (to participate) is even better. That’s why I like it very much.”

VMCH CEO Sonya Smart describes the partnership as “exciting”, with both organisations sharing a desire to make a difference in the world, and people’s lives.

“We’re looking forward to collaborating on other meaningful projects with Mannix College, which will profoundly enrich the lives of residents and clients, students, staff and volunteers, and advance the mission of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne.”

If you are interested in volunteering with VMCH, call 1800 036 377.

Life in an aged care residence



Have you ever wondered what it's like to live, work or volunteer in residential aged care? The Cornerstone team visited one of VMCH's most vibrant and diverse residences to find out.

VMCH Bundoora is home to more than 90 residents of diverse backgrounds including Italian, Croatian, Chinese, Greek and Sri Lankan. There is a strong sense of community within the home, underpinned by its dedicated staff, caring volunteers and friendly residents who love to socialise, especially over a game of bingo, or 10! Let's meet some of them...

Aldo Celot Resident

If you want to find Aldo, pop into the Italian social club on Tuesdays. The 94-year-old is passionate about his coffee, and enjoys helping staff make strong brews for his friends.

Aldo migrated to Australia from Northern Italy in 1956, working in the sugar cane fields in Far North Queensland. "It was hard work, but you have to work hard in life," he says.

He later moved down to Melbourne and took up carpentry, settling in Thornbury. It was there he met neighbours Nancy and Mary. The trio became friendly, often catching up for coffee. So, when Aldo moved to Bundoora in mid 2023, Nancy, 94, and Mary, 98, soon followed. The trio remain close and are often found sharing a laugh and talking about old times.

Aldo also enjoys a spot of gardening, overseeing the vegetable patch and the successful growth of tomatoes, zucchini and silverbeet.



Like so many residents, Aldo is a big fan of bingo. And while the stakes are relatively low, "\$2 is still \$2!" he says.

Staff tell us Aldo is a favourite among residents, encouraging everyone to join in with activities so nobody feels lonely.

Aneta Donevska

Lifestyle Coordinator

Aneta Donevska has spent almost two decades of her life at Bundoora. The Lifestyle Coordinator plans and runs activities to help residents achieve their goals and improve their quality of life. She's also one of many staff and volunteers who speak languages other than English, believing connecting with residents on a cultural level is important.

"By understanding the culture of residents, we can help them feel welcome and support them to settle in at the home. Every month at Bundoora we celebrate a different culture. All residents are welcome, and they enjoy learning about the different cultures, music, and tasting traditional food from that country."

Aneta counts Bundoora as her "second home".



"Residents have a lot of life experience and talking to them is like reading a history book as every person has a story to tell. I get great satisfaction in being in a role that I can make small differences in the residents' life. Working here means a lot to me – I like to think of the residents and my colleagues as my second family."

Rebecca Waingold

Volunteer, and her therapy dog, Wicket

Wednesdays are popular at Bundoora – it's when a favourite furry visitor arrives! Volunteer Rebecca is happy to take a back seat to her therapy dog Wicket, who steals the show, and many hearts, during their weekly visits.

"Residents will come down and pat him and shake his paw. Those who are less mobile look into his eyes and engage with him – or I'll put him on their bed and he'll curl up beside them. Some residents have said 'If you come and I'm asleep, wake me up! I don't want to miss out!'"

Rebecca found Bundoora when her in-laws moved in two years ago.

"Being a kinder teacher I'm all about the children and I just didn't realise there was another side of me where I could get so much joy out of being with the elderly. The residents are so giving of themselves; so many of them have so much to share. Coming here just fills my bucket every week, I love it."



Spending time at Bundoora has helped Rebecca on a very personal level too.

"My mother has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's so I know there will be a time when she may need to be in aged care. Not having had anything to do with aged care prior to this, it's really been a comfort to me to see the staff here really care and there's so many beautiful interactions."

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

Shopping safely this Christmas



Image: Designed by Freepik

The festive season is a time for celebration and gift-giving, but it is also a peak time for online shopping scams.

As part of VMCH's ongoing commitment to help ensure our community stays as safe as possible from cyber criminals, please see below some tips to help protect you while shopping online during the festive season:

- 1. Make sure websites are legitimate:** Before entering your personal and financial information on any website, ensure its secure. Look for the "https" in the address bar and a padlock icon, which indicates a secure and encrypted connection.
- 2. Avoid using public Wi-Fi where possible:** Especially when conducting any financial transactions. Criminals can intercept data that is transferred across open and unsecured Wi-Fi.
- 3. Beware of 'too-good-to-be-true' deals:** Scammers often use attractive offers to lure shoppers into providing their personal and financial information.
- 4. Verify the seller:** Before making a purchase, verify the seller's reputation by reading reviews and checking their ratings. Stick to well-known and trusted retailers.
- 5. Be mindful of shipping deadlines:** Ensure that the items you purchase will arrive on time by checking the shipping deadlines. Scammers may promise quick delivery but fail to deliver the products.
- 6. Keep track of your orders:** Keep a record of your online purchases, including order confirmations and tracking numbers. This will help you monitor the status of your orders and identify any discrepancies.
- 7. Watch out for fake charity scams:** During the festive season, scammers may pose as charitable organisations to solicit donations. Verify the legitimacy of the charity before making any contributions.

By following these tips, you can enjoy the convenience of online shopping while minimising the risks, especially during the festive season. Stay vigilant and prioritise your online security to protect your personal and financial information.



Beautiful insights into the life of a Pastoral Carer

Anne Gleeson has worked at Providence Aged Care Residence for most of the past two years. Her commitment to pastoral and palliative care stems from extended involvement in palliative care volunteering, working in the funeral industry and researching better ways of supporting people in the last stages of life. She is highly regarded as an Australian poet and uses her poetry as a vehicle for drawing attention to those whose voices are not heard. In this edition of Cornerstone, Anne shares an original poem, inspired by her experiences.

“ I arrive early, determined to be a step ahead.
But you need your bra done, and you need
your lost glasses found. You need to tell me
about the unsatisfactory night you've had,
and you want someone to know your son
is coming today and will bring the grandchildren,
and your fear is that the daughter who didn't
come yesterday might not come today. And you?
You are late again, want to be taken to breakfast.
I push wheelchairs, fix bras, find glasses, listen -
to tiredness, frustration, delight in an expected visit,
fear in a pattern of no visits. Later I will share
the pride you take in your son, your grandchildren.
When you hover at the front door, disappointed
that she has not come again, I stand with you.

There is a struggle to keep your sacred space.
You, who have lost so much contend with this
fluctuating loss. Are the money changers at it
again? Some days your chapel fills with arguments,
performance indicators, complaints, on-the-job
training. Other days, it is the quiet place where we
meet our God, each other, where we gather to pray,
wonder, hope, a place for all faiths and no faith.
We listen, sing, meditate.
We remember the ones we loved who have gone.
We share the ceremonies we create
for special occasions, monthly masses, weekly services.

We gather with those who mourn. Here we remember
each other, ourselves. From here, for those who are sick
or struggling, we visit, share communion, prayer, a hymn,
a few moments of familiarity, comfort, of quiet joy.
When your mind is confused, and your memory won't
do what you want, we go back to safe topics, chat to
your adopted dog, the doll you cuddle, the flowers
brightening our walk. We listen to favourite songs,
walk the familiar corridors. You tell me again about
your work and the position you held. We talk fashion,
family, farming, favourites, football. You teach me what
I don't know. I massage your restless hands, aching
legs. You massage my ego. Your jokes are not the best.
Mine are worse. But we enjoy the easy banter. I watch
family members jettisoned into loss, invite them to link
in with others further along a similar, but different path.
On days when loss is leaning in on you, when all you
can feel is emptiness, big questions, a fearful future
I do the only thing I can do; I lean in with you.

We keep the traditions of cultural days, honour
your past, keep special days of remembering.
bless the room where your days will end.
And when death is becoming yours and you
become uncertain, and beg not to be left alone,
we hold your hand, listen, tend your sacred leaving.
And for you with your unsure family, we move
between tears and laughter as you edge away,
as we edge in. We create our small ritual, gather
symbols, gather ourselves around you. Remind
each other of fun memories, the richness of your
life, the deep ache. Sometimes a word of thanks,
a song, a blessing for your long-lived worn-out body.
Together we weave this blanket of love, holding us
in its warmth, wrapping you in this final gift.

— Anne Gleeson

Let's get social!



Stay connected with us on social media for the latest updates from VMCH! We love to share the stories of our community; from an epic Olympic torch relay across our aged care residences to celebrating our dedicated long-serving volunteers, you'll find it all on our socials. Check out some highlights from the past few months!



Mother's Day at St Catherine's



Geoff shifts into high gear



Service Awards at the Hyatt



Celebrating our fab volunteers



All yellow for R U OK? Day



45 years of volunteering for Carol



Kim thrives at Star Café



Tamas finds joy in share house living



Dementia Action Week



The VMCH Olympic torch relay

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



Facebook.com/VMCHVic



Facebook.com/VMCHDisabilityServices



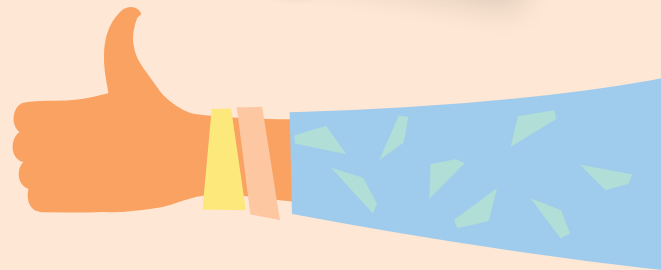
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