

# Cornerstone

VMCH

Inside VMCH's debut  
photography exhibition

Jonathan's school journey  
comes full circle

Rosemary honoured for  
60 years of volunteering

Edition Thirteen

“ In my heart and soul,  
I hope I’ve made a little  
difference to their lives,  
added a little spark,  
I suppose.”

– Rosemary, VMCH volunteer.

#### Publishing details.

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## A note from our Chairman

### Welcome to the 13th edition of Cornerstone.

It's always a joy to see the incredible stories that come together within these pages—and this edition is no exception.

One of the most moving moments for me recently was attending our annual Volunteers' Celebration and Service Recognition Luncheon during National Volunteer Week. It was a truly special afternoon, filled with warmth, laughter and heartfelt gratitude. I had the honour of presenting service awards to 36 of our amazing volunteers—including the extraordinary Rosemary Parfrey, who has dedicated 60 years of service to VMCH. Her story, featured on pages 25–26, is a beautiful reminder of the lifelong impact one person can have.

Another standout in this edition is our debut photography exhibition, *Through Our Eyes*, on pages 13–14. The two-week exhibition, which showcased the talents of our clients with disability, was a truly inspiring event. It was also heartening to see people from across the VMCH community and beyond join together to support the exhibition, which I believe was successful in its intention to invite visitors to see the world through a different lens.

This issue also includes reflections from our Co-Chief Mission Officer, Paul Zammit, who shares his personal and pastoral perspective of the Jubilee Year. It's an inspiring and thought-provoking piece, which I encourage you to read. I was also privileged to travel to Rome earlier this year as part of the Jubilee pilgrimage—a deeply moving experience that reminded me of the global nature of our mission and the shared values that unite us.



A story which may stay with you long after reading focuses on former Austin Street resident Paul Jamieson (pages 5–6). Paul suffered a traumatic brain injury following a wakeboarding accident some years ago. With care, determination and therapy, Paul regained his ability to live independently, and recently bid farewell to Austin Street to start a new chapter living on his own – an incredible feat.

And finally, if you're looking for a new way to connect, I encourage you to join our recently established VMCH choir. It's open to everyone – no experience needed, just a love of music and community. We'd love to have you sing with us! Call our team on 1300 698 624 if you'd like more information.

Thank you for your continued support and interest in VMCH – we are all the richer for it.

Please take care and God bless.

**Julien O'Connell AO**  
VMCH Board Chairman





## Austin Street farewell marks a new chapter for Paul

Eight years ago, Paul Jamieson suffered a severe traumatic brain injury in a freak wakeboarding accident.

"I fell headfirst into the water," The 41-year-old recalls. "Because we were going so fast, it was like hitting a slab of concrete."

Paul's friends were quick to call for help, and he was helicoptered to the Alfred Hospital. There, it was discovered he had a brain bleed and Paul was taken straight into surgery.

"Things weren't looking too promising," Paul says. He recalls repeatedly contracting infections while in hospital and his doctors eventually recommending palliative care – commonly known as end-of-life care.

**“ But then miraculously – and it was a miracle – I started getting better. I think someone was looking out for me.”**

Paul was initially sent to a rehabilitation centre, an experience he considers himself 'lucky' to have no memory of. Unfortunately, his family remember the ordeal all too well, leaving Paul's mum determined to find alternative accommodation.

It was Paul's Social Worker at the time who recommended Austin Street, VMCH's permanent residence for young people with a significant acquired brain injury (ABI).

"That's when my life changed," Paul says. "When I came to Austin Street, it saved my life."

Austin Street opened in 2010, developed under the government's 'My future my choice' initiative that represented a new era; a new model of support that blended nursing care with rehabilitation and community inclusion. When it opened, Austin Street was the only home of its kind in Victoria and the first of only two such residences in the nation.

While this makes Austin Street all the more amazing, it is also a sobering statistic as it means thousands of young Australians are still living in aged care homes as there are no other options



Thumbs up from Paul!

open to them. Paul himself was initially recommended to move into an aged care residence, a decision he feels would have held him back.

When Paul first came to Austin Street, he was unable to walk, talk or eat. Now, Paul loves going out for dinner with friends. He walks to his local café for delicious Melbourne coffee. And self admittedly, you can't get him to stop talking!

He credits his dedicated therapy team and the staff at Austin Street, in helping him to re-learn these skills. If you were to ask the team, however, they would credit Paul's progress to his sheer determination, stubbornness and positive outlook on life.

"It's weird, but before my accident I used to get a bit down on myself. I would feel those negative vibes setting in. Since my accident they've just been brushed aside. It's like the accident banged them out of my head."

Arguably one of his biggest achievements to date, Paul recently said goodbye to Austin Street to live independently. He has since enjoyed having friends over to sit back in the privacy of his own space, where they listen to some of Paul's favourite bands including Radiohead, Pearl Jam and Smashing Pumpkins.

While the team all misses Paul's presence at Austin Street, they are so proud of his achievements and wish him all the best in his next phase of life.

Scan the QR code to learn more about Austin Street.



Paul with VMCH team member Stephanie of Austin Street





## The power of music

Music Therapist Jessica McCarthy sings to a resident at O'Neill House

“Where words fail, music speaks.”

- Hans Christian Andersen

For Music Therapist Jessica McCarthy, this isn't just a quote, it's something she's privileged to witness through her work each day, journeying with people through to the end-of-life.

Recently we recognised National Palliative Care Week, aimed to increase awareness of the many benefits of palliative care, which can include music therapy.

VMCH offers end-of-life and palliative care to aged care residents, and to those residing at our specialised palliative comfort care centre, O'Neill House, in Prahran.

VMCH's palliative care includes a 27-person Pastoral Care team that offers emotional, social and spiritual support to residents and families. Jessica recently joined the team at O'Neill House, where she provides music therapy sessions to residents.

“I was planning on becoming a primary teacher whilst exploring my passion for singing when I heard about music therapy. I then realised I could blend this passion with supporting and empowering those who are vulnerable in the community.”

Jessica says working with older people living with dementia is particularly rewarding.

“The moment when a person with dementia starts singing along to every word, after being adamant that they don't remember the song - that's a heartwarming moment that I am so lucky to share in. I love to learn about all the unique musical lives that people have lived, and the dynamic, endlessly fascinating stories behind people's most or least favourite songs,” Jessica says.

“In later life stages, it's very special to be able to reflect on a person's life with the music that accompanied them on the journey. Being able to support that sense of identity is a part of the job I cherish.”

VMCH Chief Mission Officer Paul Zammit says VMCH is grateful to have Jessica's support, with her role made possible through the Melbourne Archbishop's Charitable Fund.

“When people think of the end of life they often associate it with the medical aspect, but nurturing someone's emotional, spiritual/religious needs is also so important,” Paul says. “Jessica is making such a positive impact in the lives of not only our residents at O'Neill House but also their families, during what can be a traumatic and difficult time.”



O'Neill House

Jessica agrees, stating meaningful music can support families to process memories and emotions.

“Legacy work, for example, is a very special family-centred practice, supporting a dying person to create original songs or a playlist to give to their families to support them in grief. This is a profound process to be involved in, and I am truly grateful to share such moments with residents and families.”

To learn more about O'Neill House, call 1300 698 624.



Music Therapist Venus Lai and a client.

## Sound connections

Meet Venus Lai. She's a passionate Music Therapist for our Early Learning and Therapy program, supporting children's development and wellbeing through singing, playing instruments, improvising and structured music-led activities.

“I've loved music since I was young, thanks to my family's influence,” Venus says. “At the same time, I've always wanted to help people. (After study) I realised I could use my passion and strengths to support people in need.”

“For some children, they may not feel safe talking at school (selective mutism), but through music - whether it's a song we create together or other forms of expression - they can safely express themselves.”

VMCH has no wait lists for Occupational Therapy and Music Therapy within our Early Childhood Metro service and for Early Childhood Speech Therapy in regional Wangaratta. Call 1300 698 624.



# Hello Sunshine!

**At the beginning of May we celebrated the grand opening of our newest Cre8 Shed in Sunshine!**

Cre8 Sunshine follows in the footsteps of our successful Cre8 Sheds in Wangaratta and Shepparton, where people with disability can learn practical workshop skills as they strive toward finding paid employment. Our regional sheds have already helped around 60 people gain valuable training and paid work since 2022, an achievement we're proud to share – and it's only the beginning!

Just like our Social Enterprises in hospitality, horticulture, and retail, Cre8 is all about providing real opportunities for people with disability. It's a place to learn practical, job-ready skills and grow the confidence to thrive in the workforce. The need for these kinds of programs is real; working-age people with disability are twice as likely to be unemployed compared to those without disability.

What makes our newest Cre8 Shed so special is its connection to Corpus Christi Community Greenvale, VMCH's residence and safe haven

supporting marginalised older men who have experienced homelessness, battled addiction, or face complex health challenges. The men in the CCCG community have become our first Cre8 Sunshine clients and were all in attendance at the grand opening. It's been so encouraging to see the men dive into their creative practice, embrace this community of like-minded individuals and watch their confidence grow.

None of this would be possible without our generous VMCH donor community. As a collective we raised over \$80,000 for our 2023 'Build A Shed' appeal, ensuring the Cre8 Shed in Sunshine is now part of our job skills learning hub. It was an honour to welcome several of our donors – including Paul Fanning, representatives from Aidacare, Bunzl Distribution and Med-X Solutions – to the recent launch, for an opportunity to see firsthand the impact of their contributions.

We can't wait to see the incredible impact this program will have in the years to come.

**Want to learn more about our job skills programs? Call 1300 698 624**



L-R: CCCG resident Robert; Robert painting; CCCG resident Peter; VMCH team members and donors



Members of the disability services team in front of the Where is my Coffee? van



# Safe and affordable housing a human right

Brian Devenish has spent a lifetime volunteering with marginalised people across the globe, witnessing first-hand life's inequities, including access to housing.

Today, the 75-year-old finds himself the grateful recipient of secure, affordable housing; joining a growing number of older people seeking housing support.

It follows a recent Grattan Institute report that found two in three retirees who rent in the private market live in poverty.

VMCH provides affordable homes to 421 people living on low incomes across 22 communities in Victoria. Brian has lived at our Balwyn community for two years, following the closure of his former housing development.

"I think the man upstairs was looking after me when he's given me this beautiful front unit at Balwyn," Brian says. "It's just been wonderful – the people here are wonderful too."

When you learn about Brian's life of service, it's easy to see how private rental is out of reach. The great-grandfather of seven has devoted 30 of his working years to supporting some of society's most vulnerable. His Christian missionary work includes building orphanages, rebuilding communities after natural disasters, working with people experiencing homelessness, and running programs in remote Aboriginal communities.



VMCH affordable homes resident Brian

Brian is grateful having a roof over his head is something he no longer needs to worry about. It leaves him time to get on with helping others.

"It's great there are organisations like VMCH providing homes like this. In a country as prosperous as ours, there shouldn't be people without a home."

## Trinity Lane a national finalist

We are excited to announce our affordable homes community Trinity Lane is a finalist for Best Affordable Housing Development in the 2025 Property Council of Australia's Innovation and Excellence Awards!

Trinity Lane was built in 2023, and since that time, it's provided outstanding and much-needed homes for life for 39 older people on low incomes and people with disability.

As Australia's housing crisis continues to grow – we hope this nomination will also shine a light on what can be achieved when organisations prioritise



Mission for the benefit of our more vulnerable community members.

The winner of the Best Affordable Housing Development will be announced at a special Gala Dinner in September.



## Come and visit our cafés!

Have you visited one of VMCH's social enterprise cafés yet? These aren't your average coffee spots; they're helping people with disability build skills, confidence and pathways to paid work. With support from experienced hospitality and disability support staff, trainees learn at their own pace in a welcoming, inclusive environment.

The impact is real. Over 27,000 hours of training have been delivered through the cafés, and 11 staff with disability are now earning wages across the cafés and our mobile coffee van.

The cafés are growing too. Our original Where Is My Coffee? Cafe in Wangaratta has supported more than 46 trainees, and its counterpart in Nunawading, opened late last year, is buzzing with energy. Located at Nunawading Community Hub,



it's open Monday to Friday and is about to launch a catering menu – perfect for local events or meetings. These spaces aren't just about coffee; they're about connection and community.

So next time you're near Wangaratta, Torquay (Star Café) or Nunawading, pop in! You'll get great coffee and be part of something bigger. Every visit helps someone take a step toward independence.

Want to know more or check out catering options? Head to [vmchcafe.com.au](https://vmchcafe.com.au)





## A picture tells a thousand words

June 2025 saw the launch of VMCH's very first photography exhibition – **Through Our Eyes**. Hosted by ACU University, **Through Our Eyes** celebrated the talents of people with disability and gave an unfiltered glimpse into their everyday lives.

This project began back in 2024, when eight VMCH clients put their hands up to take part in the exhibition. Aided by VMCH photographer Fi Douglass, each artist was given a reusable film camera and asked to visually document moments from their day, authentically and unapologetically.

Too often people with disability are spoken for, without being given the opportunity to speak for themselves. Our goal for this show was to give our artists the agency to tell their own story and amplify these underrepresented and marginalised voices. It was inspiring to see how each artist interpreted the project in their own unique way, reinforcing the power of the lived experience.

For budding professional photographer Ashlee Milne, aged 27, the exhibition was the perfect opportunity to hone her skills and break down barriers.

"I did my Cert 3 in photography and visual arts last year and I am currently studying to get a Cert 4. I would like to do something creative in the future."

Ashlee is also passionate about advocating for positive change for people with disability in the workforce.

"I like that VMCH don't do wage assessments on their disabled employees, and you can get a proper wage. More employers need to put in the work to accommodate and educate themselves on disability."

A huge congratulations to all involved in bringing this show to life – we can't wait to share more important projects such as these in the future.

Special thanks to our eight incredible artists: Ashlee Milne from the Cre8 program, Courtney Van Kesteren from Wantirna Community Connections, Daniel Johnston and Wayne Dunderdale from The Green Team, David Barrot from Star Café, Julian Demsky from Austin Street and Rose Wetherill and Colette Deavin from Mount Waverley Community Connections.



Above: Through Our Eyes at ACU Gallery  
Right page, L-R: Photography by Daniel Johnston, Courtney Van Kesteren, Rose Wetherill, Julian Demsky, David Barrot, Colette Deavin, Ashlee Milne, Wayne Dunderdale





## Retirement Living with VMCH

Building progress at St. Clare

There's plenty of exciting news across VMCH's retirement living communities, from new developments to community events. Whether you're a current resident or considering joining us, there's something for everyone.

### St. Clare nears completion

St. Clare, our new retirement precinct in Kew, is on track to welcome residents in early summer. Fit-outs are progressing across apartments, along with shared spaces like the wellness centre, dining areas and commercial kitchen. Landscaping is underway, and the heritage buildings are starting to shine following restoration works.

With almost 75% of residences already reserved, interest has been strong. Once complete, St. Clare will also help support VMCH's mission, including our affordable housing.



An artist's impression of the St. Clare street entry

### Point Cook Village Open Day

VMCH's first Open Day at Point Cook Village was a great success. Visitors toured display homes and community spaces, met staff, and heard directly from residents about life in the village.

One couple was so impressed, they returned the next day to reserve a unit! Residents also enjoyed a special Easter event back in April, including live music and an Easter egg hunt for the grandchildren. VMCH was proud to acquire Point Cook Village in January this year.

### Rightsizing in the Inner East

An informative and well-attended event recently brought together people interested in moving into VMCH's Eastern retirement communities—St Joseph's Mews, Athelstan, Barnsbury and St. Clare. The "Rightsizing in the Inner East" Expo featured a presentation from Kathryn Elleman of Russell Kennedy Lawyers, who explained key aspects of the Retirement Villages Act and what to consider before signing a contract.

A panel discussion followed, with representatives from each community joining Chief Retirement Living Officer Liz Hickey to share insights into daily life in their villages. Guests also had the chance to speak with downsizing experts from Classic Moves, learn about home care options from VMCH representatives, and explore local services through Boroondara Active Ageing. The event wrapped up with drinks, canapés and tours of available residences at St Joseph's Mews—creating a relaxed and informative environment for anyone considering their next move.

### Anne Lewis honoured

Congratulations to Anne Lewis, VMCH Senior Sales Manager for St. Clare, who was named 2025 National Salesperson of the Year at the National Retirement Living Awards! Anne's warm, honest approach and consistent results have made a big impact on our legacy development, St. Clare.

VMCH CEO Sonya Smart said Anne's recognition was a proud moment for all at VMCH.

"Anne's ability to lead with integrity, connect authentically with prospective residents, and deliver exceptional results is inspiring," Sonya said. "This achievement also reflects the strength of the team around her, and the collaborative spirit that drives our success."

#### Want to learn more about VMCH retirement communities?

Visit [vmch.com.au](https://vmch.com.au) or get in touch to book a tour and see what makes our communities special.



Ladies enjoy the Easter event at Point Cook Village



St Joseph's Mews



VMCH Senior Sales Manager Anne Lewis





## Crafted with love

**Meet Jahne Hope-Williams, a talented yoga teacher and professional artist who brings a unique and valuable contribution to VMCH!**

For many years, Jahne has collected teddy bears – giving discarded teddies a re-fresh and donating them to new and appreciative owners.

Late last year, Jahne donated around 30 bears to VMCH to sell in our op shops.

While she's based in regional Victoria, people come from far and wide to donate their pre-loved bears. Even her local op shop has a box called 'Jahne's bears' for people to donate items they think Jahne could use in her upcycling.

Jahne describes bears as "little people" and says she's witnessed first-hand the joy they bring to people of all ages.

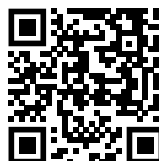
"Even adults who you think are a bit hardened and unresponsive... you give them a bear and suddenly all those walls fall, and you can see this inner child emerge!"

Thank you, Jahne, for your bespoke donations which we have no doubt will bring joy to many new owners for years to come!



**You can find opening times and locations of our op shops on our website**

**If you have a pre-loved bear you'd like to donate to Jahne, please email her on: [yogafirst2@bigpond.com](mailto:yogafirst2@bigpond.com)**



## A carers journey made better – together

**As a retired medical professional, Henny Thompson is familiar with the physical impacts of dementia.**

**It's the emotional and social side of being a carer that Henny has found challenging following her husband Ken's diagnosis in 2021.**

Henny Thompson, retired nurse aged 71, cares for her husband Ken, 68, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in July 2021. As Ken's condition has progressed, Henny has gradually taken on more responsibilities in her caregiving role.

Due to her background, Henny values the importance of clinical trials, knowing that even if they didn't help Ken, they can help grow doctors' understanding of the disease and potentially ease other people's symptoms.

Unfortunately, Ken did not benefit from clinical trials and has since suffered brain bleeds, his health deteriorating over the last year.

Being Ken's primary caregiver means that Henny has less time to look after herself and get out of the house.

Henny enjoys attending carer groups, where carers are treated to events like movies, dinners, comedy shows and craft activities. However, she finds it difficult to organise alternative care for Ken and can't participate as much as she'd like to.



Henny is a carer for her husband Ken

That's why VMCH's monthly Craft Workshops, hosted by Scoresby Bunnings and supported with a Dementia Australia grant, appeal to Henny. Here, carers are encouraged to bring the person they care for and participate in a craft activity together.

Henny can relax and enjoy the company of other carers, knowing that Ken is in a familiar and safe setting.

**“ It's getting out of the house for one. But it's doing something different and it helps me feel comfortable because no one is asking Ken why he's doing this or that. He's comfortable in the environment.”**

To other carers unsure if this group is from them, Henny says, "you can usually tell the first time you come if it will work. Just try it and see what you think."



Henny and Ken enjoy craft workshops at Bunnings

**If you would like to learn more about VMCH Carer Support, call 1300 698 624.**





## On Hope and Suffering: a personal and pastoral perspective of the Jubilee Year

Paul Zammit, Chief Mission Officer.

It's hard to think about the place of suffering in the broader matrix of human experience.

We are especially conscious of people doing it tough: those transitioning into residential aged care; people living with a disability and struggling to access the needed supports; those in dire need of affordable housing. The experience of suffering could be something distant, or it could be something very close to home!

Why human suffering? I am not sure of the answer to this. And yet this must be one of the most profound, and confounding, of existential questions. I think it is important, when touching on an event in the life of the broader Catholic community such as the Jubilee Year 2025, that our reflections are grounded in the lived experience of people and communities, their experiences of joy as well as pain and suffering. After all, the Judeo-Christian heritage underlying Pope Francis' declaration of a year of Jubilee, is centred on a call to renewal, reflection, healing, liberation, social justice, and hope. It is a celebration of all that it means to be human, and all that it means to care about each other and about our planet and all that inhabit it.

How may we reflect on the place of suffering and hope? The artwork of August Schenck (1878 – pictured above) has always been a source of fascination. In much of his art he depicts animals in an anthropomorphic technique that powerfully captures the depths of suffering. In his work, "Anguish," the Ewe stands over its injured lamb, crying out in anguish as the murder of crows circle ominously. What may resonate powerfully is the desperate cry of the mother as she does all in her power to protect her child from further harm.

My mother, Maria, died several years ago. For as long as I can remember, mum had lived with pain and multiple chronic illnesses. Amid all this there was this indomitable love for her family. Not to



August Schenck, *Anguish*, c. 1878

mention her laughter and her spontaneity. In so many ways, despite bearing the typical limitations imposed on so many post-World War II migrant women of her generation, she was nevertheless a great teacher of life, love, suffering and hope filled transcendence.

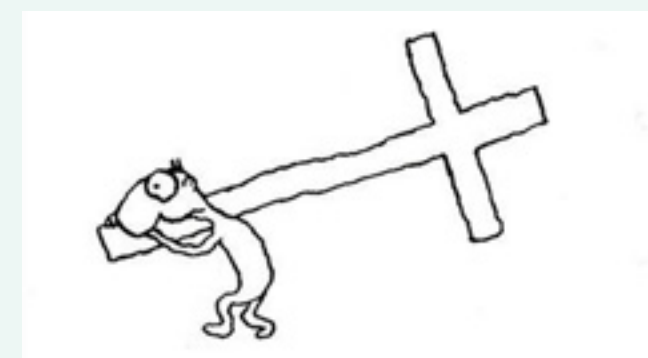
**“ These days, as I too grow a little older with the passage of time, I have this deep sense of what I like to call a “whole-of-life” perspective. That suffering is but a part of a much bigger canvas; that we must find ways to make a home for suffering in our lives, acknowledging all the beautifully complex parts of what makes us human: joy, happiness, pain, achievement, work, relationships...”**

When reflecting on all of this, there is also a sense for me of what I like to call “the paradox of suffering”. Some years back, a “Good Weekend” article in the Saturday Age (17 March, 2018) told the story of Cynthia Banham, a survivor of the horrific plane crash, whose recovery involved painful skin grafts due to catastrophic burns and amputations of multiple limbs. “Suffering can be isolating,” recounts Cynthia... “when phantom pain from missing limbs strikes in the early hours of the morning, [I] sit in the dark in an island of misery...” And yet, in the very depths of this island of misery, Cynthia adds however that “the reverse is also true, that suffering actually connects people... it makes us realise our humanity and the humanity of others.”

Perhaps then, the flip side in this equation of the paradox of suffering may well be compassion.

The Middle English use of “compassion” literally means “to suffer with”. I have a hunch that at VMCH, we know a great deal about compassion! Maybe the question is not so much “why suffering?” Perhaps the question is more around, “how do I respond?” For with compassion comes a concrete and practical response – such as our commitment to pastoral care, or affordable housing. Compassion also invites a wise balancing act that involves the capacity for healthy self-care.

I end this reflection by sharing with you one of the little things that has been my companion along the journey thus far. It is a prayer written by Michael Leunig many decades ago (and slightly adapted!). Accompanying this prayer is a favoured Leunig character who clumsily but poignantly attempts to “carry his cross”, seeking to make a home for the more difficult and challenging dimensions of life.



Cartoon by Michael Leunig

### Prayer by Michael Leunig

God help us to find our truth;

The truth within us which is hidden from our mind;  
The beauty or the ugliness we see elsewhere  
But never in ourselves;

The stowaway which has been smuggled

Into the dark side of the heart,

Which puts the heart off balance and causes  
it pain,

Which wearies and confuses us,

Which tips us in false directions and inclines  
us to destruction,

The load which is not carried squarely  
Because it is carried in ignorance.

God help us to find our truth.

Help us across the boundary of our understanding.  
Lead us into the darkness that we may find what  
lies concealed;

That we may confess it towards the light;

That we may carry our truth in the centre of our  
heart; That we may carry our cross wisely

And bring harmony into our life and our world.  
Amen.





## VMCH welcomes new Aged Care Act transition delay

VMCH is pleased with the Federal Government's decision to delay the implementation of the new Aged Care Act from 1 July to 1 November 2025. This delay will ensure a smoother and more inclusive transition for aged care providers like VMCH and the people we support.

The delay, announced in early June, follows sustained advocacy from VMCH and our peak body, Catholic Health Australia (CHA), for a more measured rollout of the reforms. The new legislation introduces a human rights-based framework and significant changes to funding and service delivery models across residential and home care.

While VMCH has already made great progress in reform readiness, the additional time will allow our teams to finalise critical operational, legal and digital systems.

VMCH is also using this time to deepen our commitment to consumer engagement. Our

Consumer Advisory Committees — spanning Residential Aged Care, Disability, and At-Home Aged Care — play a key role in shaping our services.

These groups are vital in ensuring our services reflect the lived experiences of those we support. They meet regularly to discuss issues that matter most to residents, clients, and families, from lifestyle programs to community inclusion.

Each committee typically includes four to six members and meets two to three times a year. We are currently encouraging more residents, clients, and family members to join. If you are interested, please call us on 1300 698 624.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the new Aged Care Act



## St. Paul's the perfect fit for Jonathan

Jonathan is a kind and caring young man who loves listening to music, going for walks, drinking Slurpee's, and watching cooking shows on YouTube. The 17-year-old is also halfway through his final year at our specialist school St. Paul's College, a 12-year journey his mum Helen says has seen him grow "in leaps and bounds".

St Paul's College is a small school, with just under 60 students. Helen believes this is one of the keys to Jonathan's success at St. Paul's, since joining in prep, aged 6.

"The smaller the school the better. Especially for children who have additional needs. Staff can invest more time with each student and provide individualised attention," Helen says.

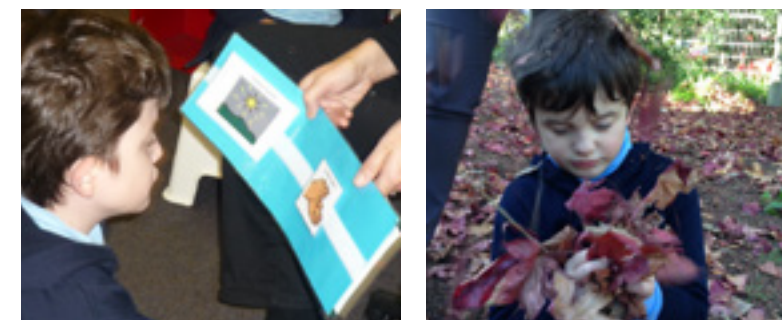
"We chose St. Paul's because Jonathan has multiple disabilities, and they adapt the curriculum to cater for individual needs. The staff and teachers always strive to form partnerships with the students' parents and therapists to create a better learning environment for the student. Other schools we investigated at the time were not able to provide such services, so that's why we decided on St. Paul's, and we've never looked back."

While all teachers and therapists have made a positive mark on Jonathan's education and personal growth, one teacher stands out for Helen: St. Paul's teacher of 26 years, Hygenia Lobo.

"Hygenia was Jonathan's teacher when he first started back in 2013 and is now his teacher for his final year. So, I guess it's come full circle," Helen says.

"Hygenia is an absolute wonder. She has so much empathy and patience with all her students and always finds ways to adjust her teaching methods to meet their individual needs." Another highlight in Jonathan's journey so far has been his recent appointment of school captain for 2025.

"We were so proud of Jonathan to be chosen. He's come such a long way and to be nominated as school captain in his final year of school provides a sense of accomplishment for all the hard work he's put in to get to where he is today."



Top: Jonathan receives his school captain shirt  
Bottom: Jonathan during his first year at St. Paul's

Following graduation later this year, Helen hopes Jonathan will continue his journey towards independence.

"St. Paul's strives to encourage each student to gain independence and engage with the community, especially when they're in their final years of school. We hope Jonathan continues this trajectory after he leave St. Paul's."

If you'd like to learn more about St. Paul's, call (08) 8595 2470.

## Vale Rita Andre

Rita Andre was a beloved VMCH benefactor whose quiet strength and unwavering generosity left an indelible mark on generations of students at St. Paul's College over the years.

Born on 6 January 1924, Rita celebrated her 101st birthday earlier this year before passing peacefully on 25 May 2025.

Rita's connection to St Paul's dates back to its establishment as a school for blind children. Alongside her sister, Dorothea O'Sullivan, she volunteered her time to transport students to and from the school.

Over the years, her commitment never wavered. Through her lifetime, Rita donated over \$350,000 to the school, a testament to her belief in the power of education and community support.

Rita's legacy is one of quiet service and profound generosity. May she rest in peace.





Community Connections client Adam enjoying the new coffee machine

## Thank you to our amazing supporters!

As a for-purpose organisation, VMCH relies on the generosity of our community for many of our programs and services.

This year we have seen many new and exciting initiatives realised thanks to funds donated from individuals and trusts alike for our Community Connections programs across Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Our Community Connections programs are designed to help children, teenagers and adults achieve their goals, alongside peers who share their interests.

Activities include music making and dancing, cooking, budgeting, travel, going to the gym, the cinema, exercising, painting and creative arts, swimming, gardening, and much more.

Our groups have also initiated small business ventures, including a car wash, a recycling program and arts and crafts, giving them the opportunity to earn money and learn new skills.

Recently, thanks to donations from The Halpin Trust and the Masky Beacon Charitable Trust (LMCF), our programs have purchased a coffee machine, BBQs and a fish pond!

The whole team at our Wantirna is benefitting from their new coffee machine, with participants like Adam (pictured) enjoying honing their barista skills!



Courtney enjoys cooking on the new BBQ



Our Community Connections clients have started their own car washing business!



## Work It!

We are thrilled to share we have exceeded our fundraising target for our 2024 fundraising appeal, Work It!

Work It! aimed to raise \$80,000 to fund a unique retail space in Melbourne's east, all geared towards readying people to work.

Now that our target has been reached, thanks in large part to a generous \$40,000 donation from the Veith Foundation, we are currently researching potential venues to house the new retail hub.

We look forward to sharing more details with you as this exciting program progresses. Thank you sincerely to everyone who donated to this appeal.



# Rosemary's incredible 60-year gift of time

You'd be hard pressed to find a longer serving – or more passionate – volunteer than Rosemary Parfrey.

At age 90, she's clocked up an incredible 60 years of volunteering with VMCH – and she's not done yet!

Rosemary was one of 36 VMCH volunteers honoured for her years of service at our annual Volunteers' Celebration and Service Recognition Luncheon in May. The luncheon is held during National Volunteer Week, and is a favourite event on the VMCH calendar.

Rosemary's volunteer journey with VMCH began in 1965, when she volunteered to help with Christmas Day lunch at our St. Catherine's aged care in Balwyn.

"I took two of my daughters with me and left my poor husband at home with the other five to sort out quarrelling over toys and take care of Christmas dinner!" Rosemary laughed.

Over the years, along with paid roles, Rosemary wore a variety of volunteer hats; reading at Sunday Mass, pampering residents with manicures, and helping with lifestyle activities. However, her favourite pastime has simply been spending quality, one-on-one time with residents.

**“ I love getting to know residents on a deeper level; their past lives and their families. I also came up with a special project for the residents who had no families or visitors. On their 70<sup>th</sup>, 80<sup>th</sup> or 90<sup>th</sup> birthdays, I'd buy them a gift, help them get dressed up, and take them for lunch at the Windsor Hotel. That was very enjoyable for them and for me.”**

Volunteering has also been a family affair for Rosemary, with all her seven children having been either employed or volunteered at St. Catherine's over the years.

Rosemary is proud that all her children have since entered human services roles.

Her daughter Mary says: "Certainly, we all spent time learning how to talk and care with elderly



Rosemary pictured with her son, Matthew.

residents, which has held us in good stead for our respective careers. I'm incredibly proud of mum and of how deeply caring she is of all of humanity. She is the best example of a good 90 years, and I feel confident that she will be volunteering when she is 100."

Indeed, in recent times, Rosemary has been volunteering with VMCH's TeleFriend program, making weekly calls to affordable homes residents who are at risk of social isolation.

VMCH Senior Manager Volunteer Engagement Bron Summers says the organisation is "deeply grateful" for Rosemary's selfless contributions.

"Rosemary has enriched the lives of so many residents in our community. We thank her sincerely for her compassionate spirit and the warmth she brings to others, particularly when she is so busy in other parts of her life as well."

The grandmother of 12 and great-grandmother of five has no plans to slow down. If she's not out riding her bike, tending to her veggie garden or spending time with family, Rosemary is busy in her other volunteer role of 37 years with The Smith Family, raising funds to support students entering university.

Rosemary is keen to share her advice with anyone considering becoming a volunteer: "I'd tell them to jump in! Come and do it and your life will never be the same! It will be full of beautiful experiences."

Thank you to Rosemary and to all our lovely VMCH volunteers. **If you would like to volunteer with us, call 1300 698 624.**



L-R: Team member Angela and volunteer Bernie; Team Shanagolden; Patrice, Bob and Billie from Mount Waverley Community Connections; The gang's all here!



# Growing Together

“ I think there can be things going on in your life, but when you are in the garden, there’s so much peace.”

- Beryl, aged care resident.

Moving into aged care can be a challenging time for many, particularly for those who leave behind a garden cultivated through a lifetime of joy and love.

Beryl, aged 84, joined our Wantirna aged care home last year. And while she’s enjoying her new life and friendships, what she does miss is her garden.

“I loved all my different coloured roses and my magnolia tree. My daughter, who’s an avid gardener, would always say, ‘Mum, I’m so proud of you having all these plants.’”

VMCH is proud to launch our latest fundraising appeal, Growing Together, which will help aged care residents like Beryl reconnect with their love of gardening, and each other.

We hope to raise \$90,000 for a Sensory Garden at our Wantirna residence, featuring fruit and veggie patches, potting and tool sheds, beautiful flower beds, and even chickens!

The benefits of sensory gardens are widely known, particularly for those living with dementia. They support cognitive function, boost emotional and physical wellbeing, and stimulate the five senses.



Beryl is looking forward to a new sensory garden

However, one of the most important aspects of the garden will be the opportunity for residents to connect with a shared purpose, forming new friendships and helping to reduce social isolation.

Our Lifestyle team is excited at the prospect of starting individual and group workshops, for gardening, planting, maintenance, woodwork skills and harvesting.

The Wantirna Sensory Garden will be a pilot program. While VMCH does enjoy maintaining lovely gardens at our aged care residences, special projects like this require community support. Once successfully established, we hope to roll this out at our other aged care homes, bringing joy to hundreds more residents across Victoria.

“To have a sensory garden here at Wantirna would be such a blessing,” says Beryl. “When we (residents) are all together, we will make a beautiful garden.”

If you’d like to make a donation to Growing Together, call 1300 698 624 or scan the QR code.



“ I would absolutely love a sensory garden. It would bring the people who don’t get out as much into the garden, and they can get involved in it.”

- Graeme, Wantirna resident



Mannix College student Holly with Corpus Christi resident Ersula

## Mannix partnership in full swing

In 2024 we partnered with Mannix College, a Catholic residential college affiliated with Monash University, to create a community service program, Mannix Young Hearts.

Since September last year, Mannix students have been mingling with residents from Corpus Christi Aged Care Residence, participating 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 and in turn create genuine places of belonging.

One of the latest activities saw our aged care residents visiting students on campus for a special Valentine’s Day event. The community shared coffee, chocolates and chats as they used their creative skills to create Valentine’s Day cards.

A separate Mother’s Day ‘Crafternoon’ saw Mannix students return to Corpus Christi to help create floral centrepieces to brighten the resident’s space.

The benefits of this intergenerational partnership are second to none.



Corpus Christi resident June with Mannix College student Alex

“I think it’s great to hear from people who have experienced more of the world than we have,” Mannix student Rory says. “They’re able to let us know what the world has to offer.”

Want to learn more about volunteering with VMCH? Call 1300 698 624.



# #VMCHRecap: The stories you loved

Follow VMCH on social media to catch up on all the latest news and stories; from our debut Photography Exhibition showcasing the talents of artists with disability, to opening our latest social enterprise café in Nunawading, you'll find it all on our socials. Check out some highlights from the past few months!



Launching VMCH's photography exhibition!



Nunawading social enterprise café opens



Celebrating our volunteers



2024 Christmas Hamper Appeal



A day in the life of a Disability Support Worker



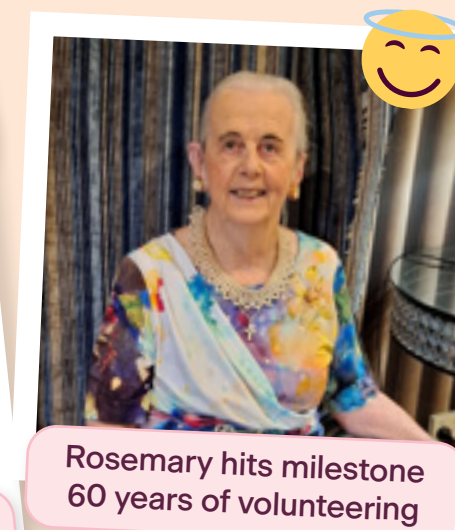
Wantirna Community Connections get creative



Mavis turns 102!



Easter celebrations across our aged care sites



Rosemary hits milestone 60 years of volunteering



Remembering Pope Francis

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



Facebook.com/VMCHVic



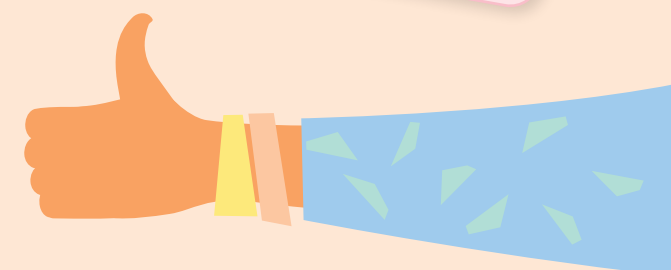
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