

Issue 48
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VillaNews

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CEO's Message

On July 1, Villa Maria and Catholic Homes will become one. This is an incredible achievement less than eight months after announcing an intention to merge.

Yet while the merger becomes official on this date, the two organisations have been working steadily to integrate their services and staff and ensure the transition to the merged entity is seamless. This has included the consolidation of staff to central offices and the appointment of key senior managers.

This is a time of great opportunity for Villa Maria Catholic Homes. The board and executive have identified a number of projects we are keen to pursue across all areas of disability, aged care and specialist education. We are continuing to develop our strategic plan and these projects will form part of that. They are exciting opportunities and show we remain committed to providing high quality services across the life spectrum.

Our Marketing Team has been steadily preparing for the launch of the new organisation. This includes creating a new logo to represent the organisation for an interim period, and a look and feel that draws on both Villa Maria and Catholic Homes. We feel the

vibrant design of the new logo, below, retains the personality of the individual logos while reflecting the Catholic ethos and the bright future of the shared organisation. With the new look will come changes to all marketing and communications products, including Villa News. This is an important way for us to communicate with our supporters and while the look will be updated, it will continue telling the stories of Villa Maria Catholic Homes in a fresh and engaging way.

An event celebrating the merged entity will be held later in the year. This will include a Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral followed by a luncheon. We hope this celebration reflects our enthusiasm for the future of the organisation and that we can share this with the people we support, their families and carers, our staff and supporters. More information will be provided about this closer to the date.

I am pleased to tell you the last apartment was sold at Athelstan in May. We celebrated the occasion with a function with residents and people key to the Athelstan journey. As Villa Maria's first luxury retirement living project, Athelstan sets a high precedent for future developments. The community built by the residents, and the wonderful staff, shows how great planning can create such a welcoming and supportive environment.

We also celebrated our volunteers during National Volunteer Week in May. Without volunteers, Villa Maria would be much the poorer. Their passion and dedication

means we are able to offer the highest quality of care to the people we support. It is so pleasing to be able to thank them in a small but tangible way through the luncheon. I enjoyed catching up with and meeting many of the 160 dedicated Villa volunteers who attended. We also held our first luncheon for 120 Catholic Homes volunteers, which was just as successful. I am confident that all those attending either event would have enjoyed the entertainment as much as I did. We are already thinking how we might top what we saw at the first combined function next year.

As you can see, we have much to be proud of at Villa Maria. But there are great things to come under the merged entity. I am excited to be leading the organisation along this path and look forward to sharing the journey with you.

Kind regards

Greg Pullen
CEO



Our Values: Compassion, Accountability, Respect, Courage, Person Centred.

VILLAMARIA



Join the Villa Conversation on



Hanging out at the bowling alley or playing mini golf should be a normal weekend for most kids; laughing with friends, taking it easy and sharing dreams and aspirations.

But for young carers in Victoria's north, a day out with like-minded young people is a rare treat.

And that is what made Villa Maria's Young Carers Mentor Program Fun Day in Wangaratta so special.

Sixteen young carers from the region, some as young as eight, and 12 mentors came together in March for a day of relaxation and fun, and valuable time out from their regular caring duties.

Program Co-ordinator Marion Rak said the day gave the group the opportunity to meet other young carers with similar caring roles and responsibilities.

It also gave the mentors insight into the valuable roles they play in being able to take the young carers out for some respite.

Tammy has been a mentor with the program for two years. She tries to do "girly things" with her young carer - also named Tammi - such as going to the movies.

"I really enjoy the program and I think it's a valid program for young people, especially regional children," she said.

For young carer Tammi, she just clicked with her mentor and the relationship has been a wonderful experience.

"It's really hard to explain, but, it's just opened so many doors and I get to experience stuff," she said.

Glenys is mentor to young carer Angelina. She says her aim is to get "Angie" to work out what she's interested in.

"I think sometimes when you're a young carer you're very much

focussed on the person you're caring for and not yourself," she said.

"Sometimes you've come a long way yourself, and you've come that way with hard work and one of the benefits of all that hard work is being able to help someone do it a lot easier."

Angelina agrees: "With me and Glenys going out it gives me time by myself ... so (I'm) not always with (brother) Dominic (who she cares for)".

"I would recommend it to other people, it's a good program."

Marion said everyone had a fun day and two new mentors were matched to two young carers.

"It is a case of becoming a friend to somebody who needs a friend, someone who can talk to them confidentially, someone who can keep a secret if they needed to," she said.

To watch a video of the Fun Day, visit Villa Maria's YouTube page: youtube.com/VillaMariaSociety

You're helping us Build a Bus

Thanks to the generous donations of our wonderful supporters, St Paul's College is now well on its way to purchasing a new bus and ensuring more children can get to school each day.

Victorians have embraced the Build a Bus Appeal and helped us raise an incredible \$61,893 towards a new bus.

It means parents like Tracey will no longer see getting their children ready for school each day as an overwhelming obstacle.

Tracey used to find preparing her sons Massimo and Thomas (pictured) for school a long and challenging process – until they began taking the bus.

The brothers have a rare genetic chromosome disorder – MEPC 2 – a duplication of the XQ28 chromosome. It causes severe global developmental delay and a variety of health problems.

Trips in the car together are a nightmare for mum Tracey. "They won't sit still in the car with me, they try and get out of their seats," she says. "Everything is just hard work with the boys."

Which is why Tracey calls the school's chaperoned bus service a "God-send".

She loves how the driver and assistant come to the door of the house and take the boys and everything they need to the bus. It means she can also concentrate on getting her third son, seven-year-old Luka, ready for school.

"It's like a silver service ... it's priceless. It's not so much the bus, it's the service that you get from the bus; it's just unbelievable," she says.



"You can't explain what you get in just a bus service, it's the time, the convenience, the stress reduction, everything."

To learn more about how the bus helps St Paul's families, watch our moving video at: villamaria.com.au/buildabus

St Paul's College Principal Cheril Dewhirst says the public support for the school and its chaperoned bus service was humbling.

"It's so important all our children are able to attend school each day; everyone deserves the opportunity to receive a good education. Providing a safe and reliable way for students to get to school is a vitally important part of this." 



The Villa Maria community recognised the courage and sacrifice made by all Australians who have served or died in wars as part of commemorations for the Anzac Centenary.

Four plaques recognising the Centenary of Anzac Day on April 25 were erected at the organisation's four aged care residences in Berwick, Wantirna, Bundoora and Prahran.

Each plaque was set in a rose garden and unveiled by the local federal Member of Parliament.

Residents joined the celebrations, including some who fought in World War II.

Wantirna resident Gordon Cant, 92, vividly remembers his time as Flying Officer in 31 Squadron of the RAAF – particularly his narrow escapes from death.

Making a low-level sweep over the Celebes in Indonesia, his plane was hit by Japanese machine gun fire. Smoke billowing from the damaged engine, his pilot struggled to maintain altitude with the remaining motor.

Desperately trying to clear the coastal mountains and reach the sea, the aircraft began vibrating violently.

"We got about half way home to our base (at Morotai) when the engine caught fire and we had to go into a steep dive towards the sea," Gordon recounts, as if still on board the plane.

"At zero feet we pulled out of the dive and ditched it in the sea.



Croydon RSL's Sam Berrie, Federal member for Aston and Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, the Hon Alan Tudge MP, and Villa Maria CEO Greg Pullen

"The aircraft would float for 20 seconds. In that time we had to extricate ourselves. The water caused the dingy to emerge from the wing and we had 20 seconds to get to the dingy.

"My pilot's harness was tangled, but luckily he was able to get out safely."

Four hours later they were rescued by Air Sea Rescue Catalina. "A very welcome sight," Gordon, pictured right, says.

Gateway Services also recognised the sacrifices made by so many Australians in war.

Some people visited the Shrine of Remembrance while others took part in local Dawn Services and ceremonies or travelled into the city to watch the Anzac Day March.

Coordinator Kath Hill said there were a number of events at the Kew site to recognise the day.

"We also baked Anzac biscuits in the cooking program and our art group spent some time making poppies. Collectively we reflected on the courage and sacrifice these men made so many years ago."



Villa Maria has cared for many returned service people and those with family members who went to war since its inception in 1907, and continues to care for generations of families with strong ties to WWI.

Villa Maria CEO Greg Pullen said with such strong linkages to WWI, it was only fitting Villa Maria recognised the significant event.

"The memorials not only commemorate the Centenary of Anzac Day, but ensure it is remembered well into the future," he said.

"The memorials will be set in rose gardens where people can sit and reflect, and they will enable families and friends to congregate to commemorate the First World War." 

Out & About stars on ABC radio



Villa Maria was excited to be involved in a Conversation Hour on 774 ABC Melbourne in April for a discussion about accessibility and how well Australia is addressing the needs of people with disability.

Villa Maria's Out & About Ambassador Tim Ferguson co-hosted the program with ABC presenter Zoe Daniel, and discussed his own views on how easy – or difficult – it is to get out and about for people with disabilities.

He was joined by disability advocate and parent of a student at St Paul's College, Liz Kelly, who has taken a leading role on the debate on the NDIS and ensuring the needs of people with disabilities are met.

Australian wheelchair tennis player Luba Josevski, who attended last year's Out & About Family Fun Day at Albert Park, joined the panel and shared her extraordinary story of how she chose to have a double limb amputation at the age of 16, to save her back.

She says playing wheelchair tennis has changed her life. But for someone who uses both

prosthetic limbs and a wheelchair, Luba says accessibility is a very fluid notion – one that is different for all people.

Audio of the Conversation Hour program is available on the ABC Radio website here:

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2015/04/09/4213591.htm> 



For Gordon James, helping Villa Maria is his way of honouring his late wife.

As a regular donor to the organisation, the 96-year-old has made a significant contribution over many years to the people Villa Maria supports.

Gordon's wife, Vera, became involved with Villa Maria in 1952, 21 years after she lost her sight.

Over the years, she began visiting other people with vision impairment – a program that continues today.

Gordon said St Paul's first principal Brother O'Neill, himself

blind, took Vera under his wing and she continued her volunteer work until the couple moved to Queensland in the 1980s.

"The last three or four years when we were in Melbourne she was going out three times a week visiting the blind," he said.

"When we moved up here she was disappointed in leaving all her friends down there."

Since Vera's death, Gordon has continued his relationship with Villa Maria through regular donations and his decision to become a bequestor.

"Doing what I'm doing now is in honour of Vera of course, keeping in touch with Villa, helping out if I can," he said.

"I just appreciate what they did, the help with my wife, and secondly I know what good use they put the money to.

"They seem to help everyone that needs help around the place."

Gordon says he hopes that by leaving a bequest to Villa Maria in his will, he can continue making a difference to all the people the organisation supports.

"Oh yes, I hope so."

If you would like to learn more about leaving a bequest to Villa Maria in your will, please contact Donor Relations and Bequests Officer Mandy Shutie on 9412 8413. 

80th birthday wish raises \$550 for school bus

Date for your diary



No presents, please. Just a seat for my grandson on the school bus.

That was Maria Bizzotto's one wish when she was planning her 80th birthday celebration in November.

Her grandson, Anthony Bonato, attends St Paul's College and catches the school bus every day.

Maria's daughter and Anthony's mum, Angela Bonato, said her mum was adamant that no one give her a present, but instead make a donation to the St Paul's College Save Me a Seat appeal, which is now part of the Build a Bus program.

Anthony, 15, has been the poster boy for the appeal. Angela said they wrote all guests a letter about the bus service, why it was so important for Anthony and how much it cost to run the service.

"We only had 15 people and we raised \$550," said Angela.

"Mum said, 'it's meaningful because it's a service my grandson uses'. And because everyone who came knows Anthony, it was also personal to them."

Angela said the school bus was a lifesaver for her family.

"I was driving him to school at the start, but he's a Houdini with the seat belt and would get out," she said. "I am very lucky he gets the bus every day."

Bus driver Ray Lacey, pictured with Anthony, Maria and chaperone Samantha Maher, has been taking Anthony to school since 2005.

Angela said her mum's 80th birthday celebration was a touching night with close friends and family. [VM](#)

Join the inaugural Villa Maria Catholic Homes Charity Golf Day and make a difference to the lives of older people, people with disabilities, their families and carers.

With the merger of the two organisations on July 1 this year, a combined Charity Golf Day will be held on Monday, October 19 at Southern Golf Club in Keysborough.

Enjoy a round of ambrose golf as you network with customers, showcase your company's services or products and promote your commitment to community development.

To find out more, contact Veronica Lyons on 9412 8407. [VM](#)



Seniors from Villa Maria's White Road Activity and Respite Centre in Wantirna have joined the digital age.

Fifteen Telstra staff members visited the centre in April as part of the Telstra Digital Ambassador Program, volunteering to teach simple digital literacy training for seniors.

"Through the program, Telstra staff explain what the internet is, how it can be used in day-to-day life and how to get started in a fun and engaging way," said Telstra Digital Literacy Advisor Heather Rea.

"Developing the confidence and skills to use technology and participate in the digital community and economy is increasingly important for seniors."

White Road Team Leader Angela Ng said the 20 White Road participants had relished the opportunity to learn.

"The Telstra volunteers showed them how to use the tablets to watch clips on YouTube, read the news and access social media," Angela said.

"The volunteers were friendly, patient and professional and it was particularly helpful for the Chinese-speaking group to have volunteers who could communicate with them in Mandarin and Cantonese.

"Our program aims to help older people to remain independent and maintain their physical, emotional, social and intellectual welling. It's so important that we help them to connect to their community."

Some of the client's feedback included:



"I have never touched an iPad before and didn't know what it was. Now I know I can watch Chinese opera from YouTube."

And: "My grandson has an iPad and I can now tell him that I know how to use it too."

Telstra Digital Ambassador Chinwei Eow said it was very rewarding to help seniors see the possibilities of technology and the internet.

"They were pleasantly surprised and the glow on their faces made my day!"

Her colleague Ming Zhao said: "I was so glad to see the enthusiasm from the Chinese seniors to learn about new technology, in particular the

smiles on their faces when they accomplished a task. I coached a lady who was 89 years old and still wanting to learn. I am proud to be a Telstra Digital Ambassador to offer my assistance to the community." 



Volunteering with heart

They sang, they ate, they waved their napkins in joy and cheered each other with gusto.

Villa Maria's Annual Volunteers Luncheon was an entertaining celebration of the wonderful and valuable contribution volunteers make to the organisation every day.

Held during National Volunteer Week, the lunch is also an opportunity to thank volunteers for their significant commitment through the presentation of service awards.

Twenty four Villa Maria volunteers were recognised for years of service ranging from five to 35 years.

Guests were entertained by the Undercover Singers – Mario Lasagne and Banquet Manager – who acted as chef and hostess before surprising the audience by dramatically breaking into song.

Manager Volunteer Services Bron Summers said whether a volunteer was new to the organisation or had been involved for several years, every contribution they made was valuable and much appreciated by the people Villa Maria supported, their families and carers.

"The volunteer luncheons are a small way for Villa Maria to say 'thank you' to a wonderful group of volunteers who generously give their time and energy each week," she said.

"It is a time where we can reflect, celebrate and give thanks for the huge difference that volunteers make to the lives of the people we support.

"We are very blessed to have such an amazing group of people involved in the organisation."

Villa Maria relies on more than 340 volunteers to help achieve its vision of creating choices and building inclusive, sustainable and compassionate communities every day.

When Villa Maria volunteer Sue Taylor says she counts the seniors she visits as "part of her extended family", she means it.

"I've built some lovely strong relationships with the residents over the years. Trudy, who's 103, came to our place for Christmas lunch four years ago. And if anyone else is ever alone I will invite them over; there's always a place at our table."

Sue began volunteering at Villa Maria Bundoora aged care residence in 2004. She pops in up to three times each week to help with "anything and everything", including craft activities, driving the bus to community outings, organising birthday celebrations, or simply providing a "friendly ear" for residents to chat to.

"I find volunteering really enriching," Sue says. "My philosophy is to give back, that's what the world's all about. One day I may be sitting in an aged care facility and need someone to talk to. A five minute chat can mean the world to some people. I don't think we realise how much input and power we have to make a difference, just with our time."

Sue's dedication over a decade as a volunteer was recognised at the Villa Maria Annual Volunteer Luncheon and Service Awards.

Sue, who runs a mechanical business with her husband and has been Bundoora Tennis Club Treasurer for 25 years, also devotes time to the families of the residents. 



A Western Victoria couple who had their lives transformed by Villa Maria are now giving hope to troubled teens.

Karen and Derek Wiseman were depressed and had anxiety issues until they became involved with Villa Maria's Mental Health Respite: Carer Support program.

Case Manager Johanna Kirley says through Emotional Wellbeing therapy, respite services such as a break away, a Reiki retreat and consistent carer support, Karen and Derek are living life to the full.

And now Karen, a trained art therapist, has opened her own art gallery in Nhill and is running art retreats for troubled teens.

Most of the teens are affected by mental health issues. The Year 11 students from Nhill Secondary College attended the three-day

retreat and completed at least three pieces of art work each day.

Villa Maria supported the program by funding additional art supplies for the students.

Following the positive outcome of the retreat, Villa Maria funded six Year 12 VCAL students to participate in Intuitive Art Therapy as their Personal Development Stream in terms one and two.

The work culminated in an exhibition at Karen's art gallery in Nhill on Friday, April 24.

The students invited Villa Maria to open the exhibition, as a way of thanking the organisation for its support.

Johanna said one teen was so appreciative of the support he had received from Villa Maria, he requested all gold coin entry fees be donated to the organisation "so that Villa Maria can support someone else to have the same opportunity".



"How thoughtful for a teenager to recognise the opportunity he had been given and wanting someone else to experience the same," Johanna said.

Villa Maria Western Community Services Team Leader Kevin Dallinger said the exhibition was a fantastic success.

The Hindmarsh Mayor and principal of the Nhill Secondary College attended and everyone was impressed with the quality of the artwork, Kevin said.

One of the VCAL students who particularly benefited from the program was Winee, a member of the Karin community. Winee arranged for a group of other Karin teens affected by mental health conditions to take part in an art therapy program in the April school holidays. 

Dinner and Art with Heart



- ✓ Exclusive, gourmet dinner
- ✓ Picturesque setting
- ✓ Wonderful entertainment
- ✓ Raising money for a wonderful cause

Help Villa Maria raise funds to support children with disabilities at its St Paul's College in Kew.

The third annual Dinner & Art with Heart will this year be held at Fenix on the banks of the Yarra River in Richmond on Friday, August 7.

Once again it will feature art from some of Melbourne's most prominent artists, including Michael Leunig, James O'Brien and Stan Yarramunua.

Guest speaker is former deputy prime minister and Ambassador to the Holy See, Tim Fischer AM. Mr Fischer will talk about his own experiences raising a son with Autism, and how vital an education is for all children.

The exclusive, intimate evening will include live and silent auctions of artwork and other great offers, artistic surprises and entertainment.

Comedian and women's health campaigner Jean Kittson is MC and sure to keep guests entertained. Host a table, come on your own or with a small group of friends. Tickets are \$250 a person.



For more information or to purchase your tickets, call Veronica Lyons on 9412 8407. 

Reader Update

Due to the merger of Villa Maria with Catholic Homes, the next edition of Villa News will have a new name and updated look and feel. While this will change, the interesting, informative stories about the people we support, and the difference our supporters make in helping us to provide innovative services and programs, will remain the same. We hope you will continue to enjoy reading about the expanded range of services under Villa Maria Catholic Homes and come with us on this exciting journey. 

VILLA MARIA

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