

SEASONS

KEEPING YOU CONNECTED

ISSUE **57**

New garden is accessible to all

Celebrating 110 years

Teach & Tumble raises \$135,000

Student volunteering a win-win



WE CELEBRATE
110 YEARS OF
BUILDING INCLUSIVE
COMMUNITIES



**YOU'VE HELPED US
EXCEED OUR TARGET AND
RAISE \$135,000 THROUGH OUR
TEACH & TUMBLE APPEAL**

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raises \$135,000

SEASONS

We welcome your feedback and contributions to Seasons.

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Cover Image:

Lenny was a student at VMCH specialist school, St Paul's College. He continues to receive support from VMCH disability services to learn new skills and enjoy his independence.

CEO'S MESSAGE

Welcome to the spring edition of *Seasons*.

This year we mark a huge milestone, 110 years of supporting people with a disability.

On page 6 and 7 we explore this journey, which began in 1907 when Louisa Fawkner, a partially blind early colonist of Melbourne, led a group of volunteers to translate publications into braille for the visually impaired.

Since then our organisation has grown to provide a diverse range of services to meet the needs of not only people with disabilities but their families, older people, and carers.

Everything we do for the community is made possible through the support of our donors, sponsors and volunteers. For example our recent Teach & Tumble appeal, featured on page 8, raised an astounding \$135,000 to buy new toys and equipment for around 150 children who access our Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS).

On pages 10 and 11, you will meet one of these special donors, James 'Jim' Wells. Jim's late wife, June, was a resident at Corpus Christi. He takes us through the emotional journey of placing his wife in care, and the decision to support other seniors at the residence by donating interest from his Bond back to VMCH.

Supporting us doesn't have to be monetary. The gift of time is so valuable. On page 11 we celebrate our volunteers; the people whose dedication and passion helps to brighten the lives of so many people we support.

I hope you enjoy this edition of *Seasons* as much as we enjoy bringing these stories to you.



Sonya Smart
Chief Executive Officer
Villa Maria Catholic Homes



**EVERYTHING WE DO FOR THE COMMUNITY
IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE
SUPPORT OF OUR DONORS, SPONSORS
AND VOLUNTEERS.**

NEW GARDEN IS ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

An Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) cruelly takes away many of life's simple pleasures.

A new accessible garden is giving 10 people with an ABI something wonderful back at their Alphington home, operated by Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH).

Austin Street is Victoria's first purpose-specific residence for young people with an ABI and VMCH has raised about \$30,000 through fundraising to create the new garden space for them.

The generous donations have paid for three accessible and landscaped spaces for residents to enjoy.

The main courtyard is paved with bluestone and includes a raised pond, now home to some goldfish. A sensory garden surrounds the pond and features plants that stimulate the senses. It is a safe, tactile and relaxing environment to enjoy nature.

Austin Street manager, Joanne Herbert, said the layout of the previous spaces stopped many residents, particularly those in wheelchairs, from fully enjoying Austin Street's outdoor spaces.

"Residents always enjoyed coming out to the garden, but it was difficult for some of them to enjoy it," she said.





“RESIDENTS ALWAYS ENJOYED COMING OUT TO THE GARDEN, BUT IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR SOME OF THEM TO ENJOY IT. NOW THEY HAVE THIS LOVELY SPACE THAT IS PAVED AND ACCESSIBLE TO PEOPLE IN WHEELCHAIRS.”
JOANNE HERBERT, AUSTIN STREET MANAGER



“Now they have this lovely space that is paved and accessible to people in wheelchairs. We love the pond and the sound of the trickling water and the goldfish. It gets a lot of use.”

Landscape gardener, Damien Carmody, from YMCA ReBuild, said the aim of the project was to make it accessible to all residents.

“It was a nice area, it gets a good amount of sunlight throughout the year,” he said.

“But there wasn’t anywhere really suitable for them to sit and congregate, so we wanted to open up what was a pretty poorly maintained garden and put the paving down so that there was access and somewhere to sit that was pleasant.”

Damien has also created a smaller and more private garden in a courtyard off a spa room. It is a lovely space with a timber deck, landscaped garden and retaining wall.

He has also landscaped an aviary where residents enjoy watching two playful blue-throated parakeets fly around and sing from the comfort of Austin Street’s dining room.

BRAIN INJURY AWARENESS WEEK

August 21 to 27 was Brain Injury Awareness Week – aimed at raising awareness and reducing the incidence of Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) in the community.

ABI refers to any type of brain injury that occurs after birth. It can include damage from infection, disease, lack of oxygen, a stroke or a blow to the head.

About 730,000 Australians have an ABI. About 160,200 of those people have a severe ABI and need daily support.

Austin Street provides accommodation and innovative therapy for 10 young people with an ABI who might otherwise be living in aged care.

It has helped them achieve many goals they once thought were out of their reach, since opening its doors in 2010.

Two residents are preparing to move out, something they dreamed about, but thought might not happen.



WE CELEBRATE 110 YEARS OF BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

In 1907, a young, courageous and partly-blind woman, called Louisa Fawkner, led a group of volunteers to establish the Catholic Braille Writers Association, later called Villa Maria.

From those humble beginnings of transcribing Catholic literature into braille, Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH) this year celebrates 110 years of providing disability services across Victoria.

Louisa Fawkner was one person who made a difference all those years ago, and individuals who share VMCH's values continue to help the organisation grow. VMCH's longevity and growth would not have been possible without generous supporters who share a vision to build inclusive, compassionate and sustainable communities.

VMCH's supporters have backed numerous campaigns that help people with a disability realise dreams and goals they could not achieve alone.

This year VMCH supporters helped raise more than \$130,000 for new toys, digital resources and outdoor equipment for children with a disability who use Early Childhood and Intervention Services (ECIS).

VMCH also recently built an accessible garden for a unique residence for 10 people with an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI), called Austin Street, in Alphington. Supporters helped VMCH raise more than \$30,000 to build an accessible and peaceful space.

This edition of *Seasons* is dedicated to raising money for VMCH's disability services and help them continue to grow.

VMCH'S SUPPORTERS HAVE BACKED NUMEROUS CAMPAIGNS THAT HELP PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY REALISE DREAMS AND GOALS THEY COULD NOT ACHIEVE ALONE.

The money raised will support all VMCH disability services including ECIS, day support programs for adults with a disability, respite services for children and adults, accommodation for people with disability and specialist school, St Paul's College.

St Paul's College also celebrated an important milestone this year – 60 years of teaching children with additional needs.

It is a celebration close to the hearts of Peter Walsh and Bill Jolley. They attended the school when it first opened its doors on February 12, 1957. Back then, it educated blind children.

VMCH IS GOING ON THE NDIS JOURNEY WITH ITS CLIENTS, SUPPORTING MORE THAN 550 PEOPLE WHO ARE ALREADY NDIS PARTICIPANTS OR IN THE TRANSITION STAGE THROUGHOUT VICTORIA.

“There were no government grants. It was all the community and we owe so much to that philosophy of the community and self-help,” Bill said.

Peter, who was eight when he started at St Paul’s, recalled the wonderful teachers and the dedicated founding principal, Brother Patrick O’Neill.

Brother O’Neill lost his vision in his 40s and he made it his mission to provide Catholic education for blind children.

“It was amazing what those teachers and Brother O’Neill did. They always aimed for the highest and the best (for us),” Peter said.

While the school’s mission has expanded to include children with various special needs, many things remain the same. Things like wonderful community support, dedicated teachers and innovative programs.

VMCH supported the campaign to introduce a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to replace a disability support system that was underfunded, disjointed, inequitable and burdened with long waiting lists for important services.

Now VMCH is going on the NDIS journey with its clients, supporting more than 550 people who are already NDIS participants or in the transition stage throughout Victoria.

Specialist Education and Evolving Disability Services General Manager at VMCH, David Williamson, said the NDIS offered new opportunities for people with a disability.

“We are planning with our clients to support them and to understand and navigate the NDIS. We want everyone to dream big and set life goals that they may not have considered before,” he said.

“We are committed to people who are marginalised and disadvantaged, as everyone should get the opportunity to have an enriching and ordinary life. All people should live a life with the simple joys and opportunities many Australians take for granted.”

HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE

VMCH is committed to working in partnership with people of all abilities to help them achieve their goals and dreams, remain connected to their communities and enjoy their independence.

To donate to VMCH and make a difference to the lives of children and adults with disability, their families and carers please call 9926 2412 or 2296 2413.

DONATIONS BIG AND SMALL – THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

- Melbourne couple, Lisa Buxton and Ariel Lakman, raised more than \$29,000 for VMCH when they walked around Manhattan as part of the *Lap4Life* fundraiser.
- Students at St Columba’s College, in Essendon, raised more than \$1,000, for VMCH’s specialist school, St Paul’s College, by organising lunchtime raffles.
- A parent from our specialist school, St Paul’s College, raised more than \$10,000 for the upgrade of the school’s warm-water swimming pool. Walter Dodich and friends completed a half-marathon to raise this impressive amount.





TEACH & TUMBLE RAISES \$135,000

Villa Maria Catholic Homes' (VMCH) major fundraising appeal for the year has raised \$135,000 to buy new toys, digital resources and equipment for a service that supports young children with additional needs.

About 150 children, who use VMCH's Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS) in Kew, will soon get some fabulous new resources, thanks to the generosity of the supporters of the Teach & Tumble fundraising appeal.

One of those children is Joshua. He is a gorgeous three-year-old who loves the music and play therapy sessions at ECIS and receives support from one of its speech pathologists.

Joshua needed multiple surgeries and specialist therapy after he was born without functioning thumbs and a hole in his heart. That is where ECIS has played a vital role.

"I cannot stress how finding the Early Childhood Intervention Service in Kew has changed our lives. It was a lifesaver for us. Joshie has come on so much with the regular therapy and time spent playing during the parent support group," his mum, Catherine, said.

Joshua was the face of Teach & Tumble and Catherine gave it a voice when she shared her family's story to promote the campaign.

"ECIS is a wonderful centre and the staff do a wonderful job, but they're really working with some dated equipment, so that money is going to make such a difference, not just to Joshie, but other kids and their families too. I can't wait to see what they are able to buy," she said.

People who attended VMCH's annual Art After Dark fundraiser, in June, supported Teach & Tumble to the tune of more than \$50,000. They bought artwork, items from the silent auction and made generous donations.

Supporters of VMCH have also donated generously to the cause after reading about the campaign in *Seasons* magazine and in the local media. VMCH also received support from trusts.

Specialist Education and Evolving Disability Services General Manager, David Williamson, said the support would make a huge difference for many young children.

"Specialised equipment and resources are vital in current therapeutic practices. They can make a huge difference to young ones with disabilities and additional needs and really enhance their development and wellbeing," he said.

"Birth to eight is such a critical period of learning and communication, and we want to ensure we give them every opportunity to thrive."

Special thanks goes to our partners and sponsors for supporting the Art After Dark fundraising gala: Lexus of Blackburn, Access Health and Cura Pharmacy. Other generous support came from those who donated art items for the silent auction and wine for the yet again popular wine-wall.

2017 VMCH CHARITY GOLF DAY – MAKE YOUR DRIVE COUNT

The countdown has started for the 2017 VMCH Charity Golf Day!

All funds raised through player registration and corporate sponsorship will go towards supporting children and adults with a disability.

Event Details

When: Friday, October 20, 2017

Where: Southern Golf Club, Keysborough

Time: 11:00am – 7:00pm

For further information and to register your interest please contact Narrelle Paige
T: 03 9926 2412 or E: narrelle.paige@vmch.com.au

Places are limited so please register quickly to avoid disappointment.

STUDENT VOLUNTEERING A WIN-WIN

When she's not tied to her desk studying for her medical degree, Stella Ngyuen can be found hanging out with seniors at Corpus Christi aged care residence.

The 20-year-old is one of 50 secondary and tertiary students who volunteer their time with VMCH. In VMCH's aged care residences, student activities include accompanying seniors to Mass, shopping trips, helping with craft activities and games, or just keeping them company. While at our op shops, students hone their customer service skills, and help with pricing and sorting clothes.

Stella, who is studying her Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery at Monash University, has a special interest in geriatrics – so volunteering in aged care was a logical choice.

“I just get this very peaceful feeling around older people. I'm at uni most of the time and my circle of friends are from medical school, this is something completely different. I've met so many people from other walks of life. It's really opened my eyes; hearing about their stories and those of their families.”

Stella admits the role has at times been challenging, particularly communicating with residents who have dementia

“I look back at myself from the first time I came here, one year ago, and I feel more confident that I'm handling situations better and helping residents to feel more comfortable.”

Aquinas College year 11 students Harry and Thomas volunteered at VMCH's op shop warehouse in June, where they helped to sort, hang and price clothes.

“We learnt how op shops work and that it is very tiring working every day,” they said.

Aquinas Pathways Coordinator Anne McLaughlin said volunteering helped to create community awareness among students and an understanding of work experience and employability skills.

“Volunteering also supports our Catholic ethos for the students to be involved in helping others. VMCH does such incredible work in the community and were so welcoming of our students.”



**“I'VE MET SO MANY PEOPLE FROM OTHER WALKS OF LIFE. IT'S REALLY OPENED MY EYES; HEARING ABOUT THEIR STORIES AND THOSE OF THEIR FAMILIES.”
– STELLA NGYUEN**

VMCH Volunteer Services Manager Bron Summers says student volunteers are great because they “bring a fresh, youthful perspective, plenty of energy and enthusiasm.”

“Students adapt well and are always willing to help,” Bron said. “Residents also enjoy chatting to and receiving help from younger volunteers. When they see the world through younger eyes that can make a huge difference to their day and bring much happiness; alleviating the risk of loneliness and isolation.”

Student volunteers join more than 500 volunteers of all ages and backgrounds across our varied services. Whether it's social visits, arts and crafts, music, education, transport, administration, op shop customer service or support with one-off events – the possibilities are endless.

If you would like to learn more about volunteering with VMCH, call 1800 036 377 or visit: <http://www.vmch.com.au/get-involved/volunteer-with-us/>



JIM ENSURES JUNE'S LEGACY LIVES ON

It's hard not to shed a tear when listening to James 'Jim' Wells talk about his wife of almost seven decades. He lost his beloved 'Junie' to dementia 12 months ago, and the grief is understandably raw.

"She stood beside me for nearly 70 years... never put a foot wrong. She was an energetic and hardworking person all her life. She lived for her family. Dementia brought such a contrast..."

Jim becomes emotional when recounting the day he realised he could no longer care for June at home – the physical demands had become impossible. He reluctantly turned to VMCH Corpus Christi aged care residence in Clayton – which became June's home for the last six months of her life.

"I'D LIKE TO ENCOURAGE OTHER PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES BEING HELPED TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION – I THINK PEOPLE MAYBE DON'T KNOW THEY HAVE THAT OPTION." JIM WELLS

"It was a tragic time for us. There were a few incidents and it came to crisis point and we had to put her into care. I had the erroneous view that nobody could do it better than me... but it got too much."

Jim said he chose VMCH because of its Catholic values. "That was important to me. They (staff) really fulfilled all of our expectations. They cared for her so well and I admired that."

His daughter Pauline said: "They're (staff) so busy but they found the time to bring us comfort when Mum was dying, from bringing cups of tea, to playing music and saying the rosary. We weren't expecting anything like that."

Jim and his family were so impressed with the care their wife and mother received they chose to donate part of their Bond interest back to VMCH to help support other seniors at Corpus Christi.

“They are beautiful people down there doing a marvellous job. They made such a contribution to our time and are making a similar contribution to all the others (residents),” Jim said. “I’d like to encourage other people and their families being helped to make a contribution – I think people maybe don’t know they have that option.”

As the first anniversary of June’s death approaches, Jim likes to remember his wife as the young woman he fell in love with, who blossomed into a “matriarch” of their family of five children, 14 grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren.

June was also a keen and talented gardener. Jim recounts passers-by complimenting them on the “best garden in the street”. However as June’s care needs deepened, the garden became neglected; a sad reminder of what dementia had stolen and a low-priority on Jim’s list of chores.

Recently, Jim has begun to tend to the garden and it’s showing signs of life. Though it may never return to it’s former glory without June’s green thumb – the annuals beginning to peek out for spring reflect his determination to carry on his wife’s legacy.

Jim has submitted a beautifully-written and deeply moving piece about his wife’s illness and subsequent transition into aged care. If you would like to read it, please call Sandra Rosano on 9926 2407 to have a copy posted out.



Q&A WITH VMCH GRANTS & BEQUEST OFFICER, SANDRA ROSANO



1. Describe your role at VMCH

My role is varied, but essentially it involves listening to our valued supporters and always ensuring that funds, donated by living donors or by way of Trusts or Bequests in Wills, support VMCH with respect to the donor’s intentions. The best part of my role here at VMCH is when I meet people, like Jim, and I feel privileged when they share their stories with me.

2. Why are donations to VMCH so valued?

When people like Jim donate to our organisation, it validates the work VMCH is doing. People like Jim, through their donation, are saying ‘thank you’ and are helping us to look after more people and to provide better care, programs and facilities.

3. How can people donate if they’re moved to help?

Via our website, through appeals received in the mail, or by calling me directly on 9926 2407 (Monday, Wednesday and Thursday).

September 11–17 is Include a Charity Week, aimed at encouraging and educating people to leave a gift in their Will once their family and friends have been provided for.

To coincide with this week, VMCH will host a special Fawkner Fellowship luncheon on Thursday, September 16 at St Joseph’s Mews, Hawthorn. The Fellowship aims to acknowledge and thank loyal supporters who have decided to leave a gift to VMCH in their Will, or who are considering this decision.

SEPTEMBER
11–17

YOU CAN MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE TO THE LIVES OF OTHERS BY SUPPORTING VILLA MARIA CATHOLIC HOMES.

Whether through a one-off contribution or ongoing donation, your generosity will help put a smile on the faces of some of the adults and children in the VMCH community.

Thank you for your support.



YES! I WOULD LOVE TO SUPPORT VMCH AND GIVE MONTHLY.

\$10 \$15 \$20 \$30 Other \$

I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A ONE-OFF DONATION TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH A DISABILITY

Your donation will help support and grow our vital disability services.

\$25 \$50 \$73 \$125

\$ amount of choice

DEBIT / CREDIT CARD

I authorise VMCH to charge the amount selected by me to my credit card.

Cardholder's Name:

Credit Card Number:

Expiry: / Visa Mastercard

Cardholder's Signature:

YOUR DETAILS

Mr / Mrs / Miss / Dr / other

Name:

Address:

Suburb:

State: Postcode:

Phone:

Email:

DONATIONS OF \$2 AND OVER ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE.

- Please find enclosed my cheque made payable to Villa Maria Catholic Homes
- I am considering leaving a bequest and would like more information
- I wish to find out more about making a monthly gift
- If you do not wish to receive further communication from VMCH, please tick this box

Villa Maria Catholic Homes is committed to protecting your privacy. If you prefer not to receive mail from VMCH, please let us know by writing 'do not mail' on this coupon and return it to PO Box 134, East Melbourne 8002.

Postal Address PO Box 134, East Melbourne VIC 8002
T: 03 9926 2000 Freecall: 1800 036 377 F: 03 9287 5575
W: vmch.com.au/donate-now

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