

# SEASONS

KEEPING YOU CONNECTED

ISSUE **56**

Young learners thrive

Rental relief for seniors

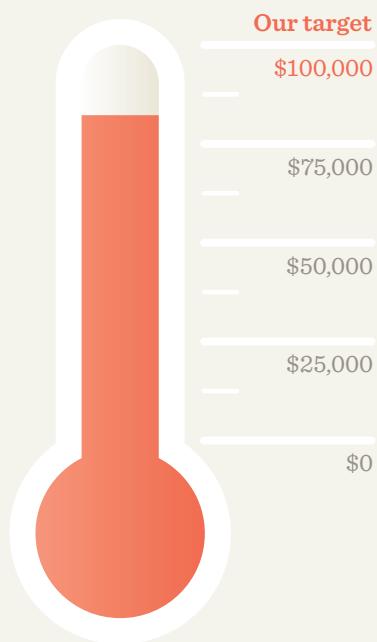
Our fundraiser for the kids

Volunteers find that happy place



HELP US CHANGE A  
YOUNG CHILD'S LIFE:  
TEACH AND TUMBLE

## TEACH & TUMBLE 2017 APPEAL



**WE ARE ALMOST THERE!**

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## SEASONS

We welcome your feedback and contributions to Seasons.

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**Cover Image:**

Joshua and his mum Catherine enjoy playtime at our ECIS centre.

# CEO'S MESSAGE

## Welcome to the winter edition of *Seasons*.

In May, we launched *'Teach & Tumble: change a young child's life'*. The appeal, our key fundraising campaign for 2017, focuses on children with disabilities who access our Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS) – children like Joshua who graces the cover of this magazine.

Through the 'Teach & Tumble' appeal, we hope to raise \$100,000 to transform the ECIS site in Kew with new play and gym equipment, toys and digital devices. Specialised resources are vital in current therapeutic practices and can make a huge difference to children with a disability or developmental delay. Read more about this project on pages 4 to 6.

On page 7, we profile a special ECIS program for pre-schoolers called the 'School Readiness Group'. The six-week course, run by specialist teachers, centres on teaching skills needed in primary school such as raising your hand to ask a question, and playing with other children.

Eve Olejniczak is one of the 600 volunteers who 'donate' their time and talents to VMCH. Eve talks about her volunteering role in a dementia specialist unit in an article on page 10. VMCH volunteers work across all our service areas and display immense compassion and respect to the people we support. We celebrated their efforts at a special lunch at the Melbourne Town Hall during National Volunteer Week.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of *Seasons*.



**Sonya Smart**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Villa Maria Catholic Homes



## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS AND SPONSORS FOR SUPPORTING THE ART AFTER DARK FUNDRAISING GALA

### PLATINUM PARTNER



### GOLD PARTNERS



### SUPPORTING SPONSORS

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worn.

## TEACH & TUMBLE: CHANGE A YOUNG CHILD'S LIFE

**Meet Joshua: a gorgeous two-year-old boy who loves to play with toys and dig in sandpits.**

Joshua was born without functioning thumbs, and a hole in his heart. He has endured multiple surgeries on his hands which have involved wearing full-arm casts for months. Recently, Joshua underwent open-heart surgery.

Joshua attends the VMCH Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS) in Kew. The centre supports around 150 children, birth to eight, who have mild to severe disabilities or additional needs.

Simple childhood joys such as playing with friends or playing sport can be more challenging for children with disabilities. Due to intellectual, physical, or speech limitations, they can find it hard to interact with other people and their surroundings. They can feel anxious and alone.

“The surgeries and anaesthetics have resulted in Joshie having Global Development Delay,” says Catherine, his mum.



**“UNDERSTANDABLY, THESE EXPERIENCES HAVE ALSO AFFECTED HIM EMOTIONALLY. WHAT HAS SAVED US IS FINDING AN AMAZING PLACE LIKE EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION SERVICES.”**

Therapy using play, toys, sensory and digital resources can greatly assist these young children to learn, feel connected and have fun.

“Specialised equipment and resources are vital in current therapeutic practices,” says David Williamson, General Manager of Specialist Education and Evolving Disability Services at VMCH.

“They can make a huge difference to young ones with disabilities and additional needs and really enhance their development and wellbeing. Birth to eight is such a critical period of learning and communication, and we want to ensure we give them every opportunity to thrive.”

However, most of the play equipment and resources at ECIS are outdated or worn.

**Through our 2017 ‘Teach & Tumble’ appeal, we want to raise \$100,000 to transform the Kew**

*continued...*





**centre with outdoor and sensory gym equipment which aid gross motor skills, such as ball pits and trampolines.**

We want to give ECIS digital communication devices that assist with language skills, and special moulded bean-bags designed to regulate emotions.

All of these items are expensive and none of them are government funded.

You can make a huge difference to the lives of young children like Joshua by supporting our 'Teach & Tumble' appeal.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- ECIS currently supports families to optimise the development of over 150 children with disabilities or developmental delays
- Music therapy helps with children's vocabulary, literacy, numeracy and attention skills
- Occupational therapy and physiotherapy helps with sensory issues, gross motor and fine motor skills
- Speech therapy supports language and communication skill
- Education support helps develop and enhance play skills
- Play promotes learning, creativity and social skills.

## SUPPORT

**Change a young child's life and make a donation to VMCH.** Complete our donation coupon on the back cover, call 1800 036 377 or visit: [vmch.com.au/donate-now](http://vmch.com.au/donate-now)

## SCHOOL'S NOT SO SCARY ANYMORE

**The children come into the classroom equipped with their backpacks, lunch boxes and drink bottles. Some are shy, while others rush in full of enthusiasm to explore the toys and books set up around the room.**

They are here for the School Readiness Group, run by Villa Maria Catholic Homes, where they will learn important skills they will use in primary school. Children eligible for the program have a disability or development delay.

The group, part of our Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS), teach the pre-schoolers practical and social skills they will need in school, specialist teacher Dor Beilharz says.

“It’s a program which sets about trying to emulate school in some of their routines, such as putting their bags in their specific lockers, raising hands to ask and answer questions, having a snack together and playing outside with other children,” she says.

“We also want to encourage the children to make the move in inviting their peers to join in with them so that they can act as a group of people who look after each other to a certain degree.”

It meets over six weeks, usually during the school term, for 90 minutes. Specialist teachers run the class with a small group of pre-schoolers.

It uses a team approach that involves ECIS, parents, the child’s kindergarten and future school. ECIS therapists visit schools and kindergartens to provide support and advice on strategies to support inclusion in the mainstream program.

Lino, a clever and curious five-year-old who has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attended the six-week program. His mum, Kirsten says that while Lino was the one getting ready for school, the whole family was learning.

**“IT’S AN EDUCATION FOR ME AS WELL BECAUSE I AM WITH HIM ALL THE TIME. IT’S GREAT TO HAVE STRATEGIES THAT I CAN USE ALL THE TIME AND IT’S GREAT TO SEE THEM WORKING,” KIRSTEN SAYS.**

As the teachers get to know a child, they are able to choose activities that cater to their individual interests and address challenges they have. The small class sizes allow the teachers to give students more tailored support.

The group was able to help Lino become more comfortable in group settings, socialise with other children, take turns and learn new skills for school.

Two years down the track and Lino is doing really well. When challenges arise, his parents have strategies and support to address them, Kirsten says.

“It’s things as simple as when I drop him off at kinder, he is actually saying hello to the teachers, greeting people, being able to ask for help a bit more. He has friends at kinder,” she says.



**Top:** Dor Beilharz, a specialist teacher at ECIS.

**Below:** Lino and a couple of fellow classmates participate in the School Readiness Group.



## RENTAL RELIEF FOR SENIORS

**The rental market has locked out up to 40 per cent of Australian renters due to soaring rental prices, statistics show.**

Affordable housing programs represent the only way that many vulnerable people like pensioners and low-income earners can find safe and comfortable housing close to important services.

Villa Maria Catholic Homes has eased the problem in Mentone by opening 14 new units, as part of its affordable housing program. The homes are next to 21 existing units it operates in Mitchell Street.

Pensioners, Ewald and Cheril Seidel, recently moved into one of the homes. They had been renting for many years when recently their circumstances changed quickly.

“The last 10 years we were very fortunate because we rented from friends. But they had to sell,” Ewald said.

“We’re 78, so it’s not an easy project to start looking afresh. There is a lot of uncertainty in the rental market.”

They moved into their new Mentone two-bedroom unit in late February, and are relieved the uncertainty of house hunting is over for them.

“We’re very, very happy with the unit. It’s more compact, but I think by the time we have finished sorting things out we will be very, very comfortable,” he said.

VMCH provides affordable and comfortable accommodation at 21 locations throughout Melbourne and at Bacchus Marsh.

VMCH Residential Services General Manager Geraldine Webster says VMCH aims to locate the units close to shopping facilities, public transport and other community amenities and the local parish church.

“Our organisation has a long history of offering affordable accommodation to vulnerable and disadvantaged people,” she said.

“This new project continues this important work at a time when finding affordable housing is a huge problem.”

The program is open to people aged over 55 years and they must meet certain asset and health requirements.



### SOME FACTS:

- Melbourne is the sixth least affordable housing market in the world for buyers.
- The average Melbourne household spends 24 per cent of its income on rent.  
Households experience budget distress when more than 30 per cent of their income goes to rent.
- The most affordable houses for rent privately are the furthest away from services and job opportunities.

Sources: Demographicia Report 2017, Rental Affordability Index, November 2016.



## CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

**Past and present students, teachers and supporters of Villa Maria Catholic Homes specialist school, St Paul's College came together to celebrate its 60th anniversary in February.**

About 200 people attended a Mass in the morning at the school, led by Monsignor Greg Bennet.

Following the Mass, VMCH Board Chairman, Bill Scales and founding student Bill Jolley spoke at an opening ceremony of the celebrations. Everyone was also invited to a barbecue lunch and tour of the school.

Mr Jolley, like many past students, has gone on to do great things since graduating from St Paul's and it was wonderful to see them return to the school with fond memories.

Mr Jolley, the first blind person in Australia to gain an honours degree in mathematics, was part of the original 23 students who were there on the day the school opened on February 12, 1957.

Another founding student who came along to the celebrations was Professor Ron McCallum (AO). He was the first blind person appointed to a full professorship and a Dean of Law at an Australian University.

Villa Maria Catholic Homes thanks all the people who attended the day, including the Honourable Member for Kew Tim Smith, City of Boroondara Mayor, Cr Phillip Healey, VMCH CEO, Sonya Smart and several VMCH board directors.

It was also wonderful to see representatives from the Christian Brothers and Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, who were instrumental in the early years of the school.



**Right:** Founding teacher Bill Holligan and present St Paul's College student Mikey Eastaugh cut the cake to celebrate a special 60th. **Top left:** Past students pictured (from left) Ron McCallum, Bill Jolley, Sheilah Blanchfield, Peter Walsh, and founding teacher Bill Holligan. **Bottom left:** St Paul's 60th Mass and ceremony.

## RETIREES WHO VOLUNTEER REAP THE REWARDS

**Eve Olejniczak likes a challenge and keeping busy. That has not changed in retirement.**

That may be why she volunteers in a dementia specialist unit at one of Villa Maria Catholic Homes' (VMCH) aged care facilities two days a week. It can be demanding and at times confronting work – and she loves it.

“I hope I am making a difference and helping residents in some small way to help brighten up their day,” she says.

“It’s a two-way street. I am always learning, I am meeting people and making new friends.”

Eve is two years into retirement and says the transition has been reasonably easy. She feels an active lifestyle and volunteer work has played an important role.

“My transition to retirement was pretty smooth and that was probably because I was doing volunteer work, getting out being amongst people,” she said.

“I am quite comfortable in my own company, but I need to socialise too. That’s why volunteering is great.”

Research supports Eve’s experience and shows people who volunteer experience health benefits such as increased general happiness and less stress. It also combats depression and provides mental stimulation.

VMCH Volunteer Services Manager, Bronwyn Summers, says retirees make up more than 50 per cent of its 600 strong volunteer army.

“Retirement can be a really active time of life and volunteering is a meaningful way to be involved in the local community. Retirees bring such wonderful life experiences, energy and time that makes a huge difference to the people we support,” Bronwyn said.

**“WE EVEN HAVE A SPECIAL LADY WHO STILL VOLUNTEERS AT THE AGE OF 102, KNITTING SQUARES TO BE MADE INTO KNEE RUGS, PROVING AGE IS NO BARRIER.”**

VMCH volunteers donate their time in many roles that range from helping with activities for older people, children and adults with disabilities, at their opportunity shops, pastoral care and one-off events.

VMCH volunteers are supported by staff and receive excellent induction, a volunteer role description, opportunities to attend in-service training and education sessions for personal and professional development appropriate to your role.

“We are committed to ensuring individual interests, experiences and skills are reflected in the types of volunteer opportunities offered,” Bronwyn said.

If you would like to learn more about volunteer opportunities at VMCH call our friendly volunteer services team for further information on 1800 036 377 or email [volunteers@vmch.com.au](mailto:volunteers@vmch.com.au)



**Pictured:** Volunteer Eve Olejniczak

### DID YOU KNOW:

- About 31 per cent of Australians over 15 years volunteer, that is about six million people
- Volunteers provide 521 million hours of work to the not-for-profit sector
- About 95 per cent of volunteers say that it improves wellbeing and makes people happier
- Volunteering is associated with better mental and physical health and longevity.

Source: Volunteering Victoria Information Sheet

## FUNDRAISER TO CHANGE YOUNG KID'S LIVES

It was the words of a dedicated mum that stole the show at this year's major Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH) fundraiser, Art After Dark.

Catherine Devine told an audience of about 240 guests about her family's journey with VMCH's support services for young children with special needs, Early Childhood Intervention Services, in Kew.

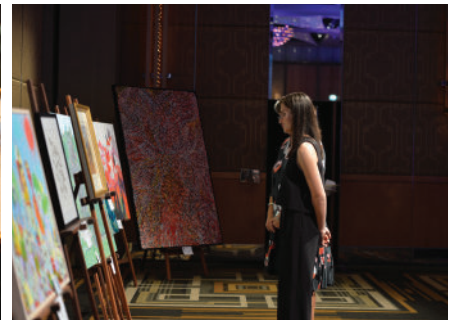
Her two-year-old son, Joshua, has required multiple surgeries and specialist therapy after being born without functioning thumbs and a hole in his heart. That is where ECIS has played a vital role.

"I cannot stress how finding the Early Childhood Intervention Service in Kew has changed our lives. Joshie has come on so much with the regular therapy and time spent playing during the parent support group," Catherine told the audience at the fundraiser.

The very funny and talented Brian Nankervis was the night's MC and kept the audience entertained, especially with his ladies v gentlemen 'RocKwiz' – and for the record the ladies won!

VMCH CEO Sonya Smart summed up the importance of the fundraising evening.

"It's about the 150 children who access our Early Childhood Intervention Services in Kew. This vital service provides a range of educational and therapeutic programs to young children from birth to eight years of age and supports their families," she said.



**Top Left:** Catherine Devine shares her story. **Top right:** Nelson Alexander partner Michael Fry conducts our AAD auction. **Middle left:** MC Brian Nankervis inspects art with one of our guests.

The evening raised more than \$50,000 to go towards our Teach & Tumble campaign. It will buy new play and gym equipment, as well as digital resources, which can be used during therapy and play sessions.

Nelson Alexander partner Michael Fry again did a fantastic job during the auction of 26 donated pieces of art. The top seller of the night was a bold and bright piece by Indigenous artist, Jeannie Petyarre, which sold for \$5000. A painting by renowned Australian artist, John Olsen, was also a crowd favourite and sold for \$3100.

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.

We look forward to keeping everyone updated about how money raised on the night will help us continue to support children like Joshua.

# 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 THE TEACH & TUMBLE APPEAL.

My donation will help buy new outdoor and sensory equipment, digital resources and toys for children with a disability or additional needs who access our Early Childhood Intervention 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

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### 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.

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