

STAY

SUPPORT TAILORED AROUND YOU

ISSUE 03

Help to stay at home for longer

Seniors get physical in Bonnie Doon

Celebrating our CALD communities

Carer shares powerful story



SOCIAL GROUPS FOR CULTURALLY DIVERSE SENIORS ARE POPULAR AT VMCH

ENHANCED COMMUNITY SERVICES

VMCH leads the way in meeting the needs of an ageing community.

05-07



Members of our Chinese social group celebrate Chinese New Year

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Home Care Packages help seniors like Hendrik and Paulina stay healthy and happy

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**STAY IS A VMCH MAGAZINE
PROFILING PROGRAMS, PEOPLE
AND NEWS FROM OUR
COMMUNITY SERVICES AREA**

We welcome your content ideas and feedback to STAY.

Contact:

Cassie Zlonzak on 03 9926 2419
or cassie.zlonzak@vmch.com.au

BONNIE DOON SENIORS GET PHYSICAL

Move over Jane Fonda, there's a group of lively ladies in Bonnie Doon picking up the exercise pace.

Mansfield resident Patricia Morris is one of around ten seniors who've recently joined the Bonnie Doon Wellness Exercise Program, run by Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH) and funded by the Community Home Support Program.

The classes, also open to men, aim to improve overall health and wellbeing through simple yet effective exercises, social interaction, and physical education.

"It's lots of fun," Patricia said. "We play old songs everyone can sing along to and it's great because everyone varies in ages, attitudes and aptitudes and is willing to try something new."

Patricia, who also volunteers at the community centre, said she's even started to do some of the exercises at home.

"AS YOU GET OLDER, YOU START TO SEE THE VALUE IN THESE (WELLBEING) THINGS. PEOPLE WANT TO STAY FIT AND HEALTHY, NOT SIT AROUND LIKE A BAG OF POTATOES."



Suchir, Barryne and Sylvia enjoy a well-earned frappe after class.

VMCH Community Physiotherapy Coordinator Suchir Agrawal said the group was gaining a lot of interest from local seniors.

"We want to spread awareness about the benefits of exercise groups towards improving social cohesion."

Patricia said the affordable \$5 class fee was a major drawcard.

"We're really grateful to have it subsidised because some people wouldn't be able to afford to go, we have lots of pensioners."

The VMCH Bonnie Doon Wellness Exercise Program runs Thursdays at the Bonnie Doon Community Centre. It is open to people aged 65+ and referred by My Aged Care. Those interested are welcome to attend a free intro session.

**For further information please call:
1300 919 850.**



VMCH Community Physiotherapy Coordinator Suchir Agrawal (second from left) with participants Bonnie, Sylvia, Barryne, Lynn, Honor, Marg and Patricia.

91 AND STILL GOING STRONG

JOE'S HEALTH HAS COME ALONG IN LEAPS AND BOUNDS SINCE ACCESSING VMCH'S NEW SHORT-TERM RESTORATIVE CARE (STRC) PROGRAM FOR EIGHT WEEKS LAST YEAR.



Pictured: Joe and his wife, Roma.

VMCH is the only organisation delivering these Commonwealth Government-funded packages to seniors in the Hume region. The packages aim to improve the health and wellbeing of seniors through various therapies and services, providing things like physiotherapy, occupational and speech therapy, cooking and nutritional assistance, or transport to health appointments.

Joe, from Murchison, was struggling with a variety of health issues causing limited mobility, a loss of appetite, weight loss, reduced muscle strength and impaired balance.

VMCH clinicians provided Joe with an in-home therapy plan including physiotherapy to manage Joe's chronic pain in both knees, strengthening exercises for his lower back and legs, therapeutic massage and a dietician. Rails and door alterations have also improved Joe's accessibility around the home.

Today, Joe is thrilled to have reached his weight goal of 65kg, have improved mobility, and a decrease in pain.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE CHANGES MEAN JOE CAN REMAIN LIVING AT HOME WITH HIS LOVING WIFE OF 68 YEARS, ROMA, AND BE WELL ENOUGH TO GET OUT AND ABOUT, VISITING HIS THREE CHILDREN, NINE GRANDCHILDREN AND 22 GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN.

"The program has really helped. I have more good days than bad days now," Joe said.

"I'm still following the advice I was given and I have Sustagen each day. I think I'm going pretty well for a 91 year old!"

If you would like more information on STRC, please call 1300 919 850.

CONNECTING CALD SENIORS

A UNIQUE, NEW VMCH SUPPORT GROUP FOR CULTURALLY DIVERSE SENIORS IN WARRNAMBOOL IS HELPING TO REDUCE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND IMPROVE WELLBEING.

Seniors aged 65+ years from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds have been attending the Multicultural Social Support Group on Fridays since February.

The weekly meetings, including community outings, cultural events, exercise classes, bingo, games and singing, link CALD seniors and act as respite for those caring for a loved one with health conditions such as dementia, mobility issues, diabetes and depression.

VMCH Senior Case Manager Johanna Kirley says there is a “great need” to support CALD seniors in the local community.

“Some of the common challenges among seniors who have limited English skills include a lack of understanding of local laws, understanding what health support services are available and accessing transport. Research has shown that difficulty in accessing appropriate services, or receiving the correct advice and care, may lead to poorer health outcomes for older people.”



Wei-Lin Mai (Pic courtesy Warrnambool Standard - photographer Rob Gunstone)

WEI-LIN MAI, WARRNAMBOOL MULTICULTURAL SOCIAL GROUP ACTIVITY ASSISTANT AND TRANSLATOR, SHARES HER MIGRATION JOURNEY...

1 WHEN DID YOU COME TO AUSTRALIA?

I had been teaching in Taiwan for years and arrived in Warrnambool in 2012 on a working holiday visa with friends. I was then given the rare opportunity to transfer to a permanent visa. Most of my Mandarin-speaking friends left in the end. I felt lonely and helpless. These feelings (of isolation) became stronger after I gave birth to my daughter.

2 HOW DID YOUR LIFE TURN AROUND?

A Chinese friend told me about an Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) at TAFE. I attended and made friends from different cultural backgrounds, which helped improve my social life. I do not feel lonely and helpless anymore and my life is enriched. Now, I go out with my new friends very often and we help each other all the time.

3 WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO YOUR ROLE IN THE VMCH SOCIAL GROUP?

I was subjected to the loneliness and I remembered how upset and helpless I felt, which became part of the reason why I took this job.

CARING FOR CALD SENIORS

The VMCH Community Services team is passionate about caring for culturally diverse seniors. Here, VMCH Operations Manager Angela Ng shares her thoughts on what makes VMCH a leader in this area.



Pictured: Angela Ng, VMCH Operations Manager.

“At VMCH, we aim to deliver the highest quality of care to our clients. By adopting the Person Centred Approach, we look at people’s individual background, expectations and needs. Cultural and linguistic backgrounds form an important part in the care planning process.

People with dementia often revert to their first language and offering care to them by culturally and linguistically appropriate staff is the key to their enjoyment.

Engaging with seniors in a meaningful way is the reason why our programs at the Multicultural Wellness Centre are so successful. We have staff who speak the same language, or are from the same cultural background, who are able to share their joy or frustration in life, and able to connect and work with them.

The main cultural group we support is Chinese, though we also have participants from other backgrounds. Both the Chinese and Sri Lankan

communities have significant ageing population in the Eastern regions and having ethnic-specific groups provides gives them the opportunity to connect with each other and have some fun.”



FILIPINO GROUP GOES FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

Brenda Allsop, 68, joined the Filipino group at the Multicultural Wellness Centre (MWC) last year after a recommendation from a friend.

Although she migrated from the Phillipines 48 years ago, Brenda has at times felt culturally isolated and makes it a priority to stay involved in the Filipino community.

Belonging to the MWC helps Brenda feel “closer to her culture”.

“We do exercises, morning melody, trivia, colouring and cooking some of our favourite foods,” she said.

“Since my husband died eight years ago and my son moved out, I enjoy the company of my friends, they’re like my family. Now I’m getting older I get aches and pains and it can be easy to get tired, now I’m joining my friends, I feel a bit more alive again.”



Pictured top: Brenda. Pictured bottom: Ursula.

Ursula Corten, 76, said she “very happy” with the group and enjoys dancing, singing and cooking traditional Filipino food.

“I also enjoy chatting to people from the Chinese group. And exercise is important at my age as my body is getting older.”

FAST FACTS

- **The VMCH Multicultural Wellness Centre was the first culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)-specific, integrated, aged-focused wellness centre in Victoria.**
- **Older persons from CALD backgrounds in 1996 comprised 18% of Australians aged 65 and over. By 2021, 30% of older Australians will come from a CALD background. (source: FECCA, 2010).**
- **One in eight older people with dementia do not speak English and are more comfortable with people from a similar cultural background.**



YEAR OF THE DOG



Chinese New Year is the most important festival for the Chinese community. It is a time for all family members to come together and to celebrate the hard work and harvest of the whole year... a time for good food, new clothes, laughter and joy. Chinese seniors supported by VMCH enjoyed a ‘family lunch’ at Favourite Kitchen in Wantirna on February 21.

“Being migrants, not everyone is able to celebrate the festival with their family members and people can feel lonely,” Angela said.

VMCH also joined the Chinese New Year Fun Fair in Manningham on February 24, hosting a stall to help spread the word about our support services to the community.





Community Development Workers (L-R) Fiona Hawken, Marianne Troup, Fredricka Gonsalves and Jenny Thompson.

NEW ROLE BUILDS CONNECTIONS

VMCH's Community Services team has extended its reach to support seniors in metro and regional Victoria with the appointment of four new roles.

Since December, Community Development Workers (CDWs) have been busy getting to know service providers and residents in their respective communities (Metro Melb, Western, Northern and South East Victoria) and ensuring local seniors know help is at hand. They will organise local information sessions on aged care and Home Care Packages, form relationships with service providers such as GPs, and try to identify gaps in local support needs.

CDW Fredricka Gonsalves, who previously supported carers as a VMCH Community Engagement Case Manager, said she was excited about the new role.

"I know it may sound cliché but seeing the positive impacts that we make to families, whether it be carers or the individuals who need support living independently at home, is what I love most about my job."

Fredricka said she hoped to change seniors' lives for the better through her work as a CDW.

"Speaking from experience, I've found many people are unaware of the services available for older people to remain living at home, so I feel educating them and their families is important. We are fortunate at Villa Maria Catholic Homes to offer such a variety of supports to clients and work with them to tailor the services around their needs."

VMCH COMMUNITY SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Allied health and therapy
- Carer and home support
- Lifestyle and respite services
- Home Care Packages
- Post hospital and nursing support

For more information call 1800 036 377.

CARERS: YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Caring for someone can be very rewarding. But it can also take a huge physical and emotional toll.



Pictured: Carer, Mel Spencer

Mel Spencer is a full-time carer for her children aged 16, 14 and 11, who have autism. She is also one of around 670 carers from Melbourne's east who receive support from Villa Maria Catholic Homes' (VMCH) Carer Support Program.

Mel has chosen to share her journey to let other carers know they are not alone, and that there is support available if they need it.

She says having access to respite activities such as retreats, musicals and luncheons with her husband, Anthony, has been “powerful”.

“When we first got respite it almost saved our marriage. We could do things together we couldn't do before because we didn't have the supports in place. We were so busy paying for therapies (for our children) we didn't have any money left over to spend on ourselves. Suddenly, we were a priority, it was like a gift.”

Along with the demands and challenges of her caring role, Mel has also battled her own mental health issues.

“My girls became my carers for a time – so we had a full role reversal. Without my children, the story may be entirely different and I might not be sitting here talking to you.”

Mel said experiences with support services such as VMCH had empowered her to “give back”. She now runs a walking group for carers, Pathways for Carers and is involved with Different Journeys, a social group for teens and adults on the Autism spectrum, and their families.

“CARERS ARE SOME OF THE MOST ISOLATED AND MARGINALISED PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY. IT IS A HARD AND LONELY JOURNEY, BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE IF YOU CAN TAP INTO SUPPORT SERVICES AND CONNECT WITH OTHERS IN THE SAME BOAT, WHO WON'T JUDGE YOU,” SHE SAID.

VMCH Carer Support Program Team Leader Lynda Waterman said feelings of isolation and a disconnect from mainstream society were common among carers.

“Often carer's own lives are put on hold, creating financial burdens and negatively impacting their relationships with other people.”

Lynda said support given through respite, social outings, education and information made a big difference to carer's lives.

For more information on VMCH carer support, please call 1300 971 720.

NEW YEAR, NEW OUTLOOK

Are you looking to improve your health, maintain your independence, or perhaps take up a new hobby in 2018?

VMCH Home Care Packages HCPs are government-funded packages of care services designed to help you remain living at home, as you get older.

Here, three seniors share their stories about how HCPs are helping them to do just that.

HENDRIK AND PAULINA

Staying together and staying fit and healthy are Hendrik and Paulina's top priorities in life.

The pair, aged 81 and 78, have been working hard to improve their overall health and wellbeing – supported by HCPs and visits to the VMCH Wellbeing Centre in Wantirna South.

Hendrik has had a total knee replacement and a heart bypass, while Paulina has asthma, thyroid and kidney problems, as well as a pacemaker.

Their HCPs provide ten meals per week, support to get to and from medical appointments, cleaning assistance around the house and a support worker to take Paulina out for a walk three times per week.

“Without the support we would be very much struggling,” Hendrik said. “The house gets neglected because we can't keep up with the dusting and vacuuming. Paulina hasn't had an asthma attack since we've had the home help, which is great.”

As the pair both have diabetes and high blood pressure, help with their meals has been vital, as well as visits to the Wellbeing Centre for remedial massages and weekly exercises.



“I DON'T KNOW HOW WE WOULD GO WITHOUT THE EXTRA SUPPORT,” HENDRIK SAID. “WE WANT TO REMAIN LIVING TOGETHER – WE COULDN'T THINK OF GOING TO A (AGED CARE) HOME. WE BUILT THIS HOUSE IN 1963 AND IT'S VERY PEACEFUL HERE. I COULDN'T THINK OF A BETTER PLACE TO BE.”

MARGARET

Margaret was a woman used to doing things for others. The Gordon resident had found her calling in caring for children with disabilities and various volunteering roles until a severe back injury in 2000 turned her world upside down. Suddenly, Margaret became the one who needed care.

“That was the end of everything, my whole life. I had to give up everything and I was a very active person,” the 70-year-old said. “Then two years later another (back) disc went, three years later, another one went, and now another one is on the go. The first few years I went through a terrible depression and I was in massive pain.”

Thankfully, Margaret found support through VMCH. She is one of around 170 seniors in Victoria's Western region who receive a HCP from VMCH.

Cleaning, laundry and companionship support have kept Margaret as independent as possible.

"I'd hate to think what I'd do without the HCP. I'd be in a black hole and feel so alone. It's the company, as well as the practical support, that's so important. The carers bring the world to me and encourage me to go out into the world. My carer who takes me out to go shopping and have a coffee is just fabulous. We go out and have a ball – we paint the shopping centre red!"

Despite her setbacks, including an escape from a violent marriage and the death of her beloved second husband, Margaret is embracing life.

"I decided about ten years ago I wasn't going to let it beat me. I've taken up all these new hobbies;

I make jewellery, I've started painting, I write poetry and I'm writing an auto-biography."

She urged other seniors to seek support if they felt they were losing their independence.

"Reaching out is so important, don't hide yourself away. It's not an easy thing to do because you feel like a burden, but there is help out there."

If you would like more information about how a Home Care Package can help you to remain living independently at home, call 1300 650 615.

Our Wellbeing Centre has a dedicated team of Allied Health professionals offering a range of wellbeing, allied health and therapy services on-site or in-home. Call: 1300 919 850 for more details.



ARE YOU WAITING FOR A HOME CARE PACKAGE?

VMCH Direct is funded to deliver Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) Personal Care and Domestic Assistance services across parts of Victoria. Service duration can range from 45 minutes to two hours per week, depending on your referral from the Regional Assessment Service (RAS) who will help determine the level of care you require. CHSP can be valuable for those who need support for a short time, such as post-hospitalisation or injury.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

E: direct@vmch.com.au **T:** 1300 484 552



NEED HELP AT HOME?

VMCH Community Services offer a wide range of support options to ensure you receive the care and support you deserve while staying at home, independent and active.

Call 1300 919 850
or visit vmch.com.au

Personal Care | Cleaning | Shopping | Companionship | Gardening

COMMUNITY SERVICES
PHONE 1300 919 850 OR VISIT VMCH.COM.AU

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