

Our Voice



Mercy Health
Care first

THE GROUPWIDE NEWSLETTER OF MERCY HEALTH
SUMMER 2017/18



Knitting for those in need

A 97-year-old
Home & Community
Care client helping
disadvantaged children
one stitch at a time

Country and belonging

Creating connections
through Mercy Hospital
for Women's new map
of Indigenous Australia

A better future for mums and bubs

Pram Jam
Ambassador
Annie Nolan leading
the fight to bring
mums and babies
home safely



Giving gifts of comfort and joy

At the grand age of 97, former nurse Connie Goode has devoted her life to helping others. This Christmas is no exception, with Connie completing a marathon knitting mission for children in need.



Connie lives independently with support from Mercy Health Home & Community Care

Over the past few months, and with support from Mercy Health Home & Community Care, the amazing nanogenarian has helped knit more than 60 beanies for children attending Cottage by the Sea, a charity offering educational and camp programs for disadvantaged children.

"I have knitted for as long as I remember. I started when I was at school where we learnt to knit socks," says Connie, who was born in Buckinghamshire, England, and moved to Australia 60 years ago.

Though mostly housebound now, she is helped daily by a friendly team from Mercy Health Home & Community Care in Geelong. She remains happily independent at her Torquay home where she spends hours knitting beside a garden outlook of draped wisteria and distant waves.

Connie's community care workers love helping her get ready for the day and picking up wool for her projects. "I have four



Connie Goode has been knitting for almost a century

people from Mercy Health who help me get up in the morning, prepare my meals and help me do the shopping," says Connie. "They are lovely, very kind and helpful. You get very attached to them."

Over nine decades, Connie has created hundreds of hand-knitted items including jumpers, blankets, scarves and crocheted cushions, some of which adorn her peaceful living room. It is a world away from the action-packed life she lived during World War II, where she spent eight months on a train treating wounded soldiers returning from the horrors of battle. "We were terrified when we passed through London — you could hear the bombs dropping," she recalls.

"I had to be very independent," says Connie, who experienced a challenging childhood and later life. "My mother died when I

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Mercy Health care workers are lovely, very kind and helpful. You get very attached to them.”

was 10 and I was an only child. I helped my dad cook and cared for him when he had Parkinson's disease. He died when he was only 57," she says.

Despite her experiences, Connie radiates compassion and positivity. Her legacy of care lives on in her knitting projects, which have helped children all over Victoria. In the past year, she has created 'trauma bears' which comfort children when they

travel to hospital by ambulance and she regularly contributes to the Beant Beanie Group — a local club that knits for charities.

"It's lovely — you do feel like you are doing something for the children. It's satisfying to produce something that will give somebody happiness," says Connie, whose beanies will be handed out to youngsters in need over the festive season and beyond.

Though age may have restricted her ability to get out and about, Connie shows no signs of slowing down with her favourite hobby. "I can knit one beanie in two days," she says. "It's a lovely occupation and I love to see the finished article. I hope I can continue next year — God willing!"

This article is a tribute to Connie Goode, who passed away shortly after the story was written.



Percy Fernandez looks forward to the Friday lunches



Suzanne 'Sue' Pile at the weekly Dining With Friends lunch



Joy Shaw enjoying a laugh with Allied Health Assistant Aanal Shah



Food and friendship: a recipe for success

Like a restaurant full of old friends, there is nothing but chatter, laughter and the clink of cutlery in the Werribee Mercy Hospital Geriatric Evaluation and Management (GEM) dining room on Fridays.

Dining With Friends is a weekly lunch program giving patients an opportunity to get to know staff and one another. It also seeks to address therapy goals relating to feeding and communication, through socialisation.

"You are not alone, but with company," says patient and Dining With Friends participant Percy Fernandez. "Otherwise you're sitting alone in your room. Here you have somebody to talk to and eat with."

The GEM Unit supports people who have had an injury, illness or medical condition, or who have a disability and are finding it difficult to engage in everyday

activities. While patients may be on the ward for long stretches of time, there are nothing but smiles at the dining room table.

Many of those staying on the rehabilitation ward are there for up to five weeks. The weekly lunch gives them an incentive to get out of their rooms, build confidence with eating and get to know the staff more personally.

"You get to know the staff and be friendlier with them. It's great eating together because you eat more," says Percy.

The staff have observed anticipation among patients as Friday approaches. Rehabilitation can sometimes feel lonely, but the weekly get-together is a social affair.

"We have a few recurring patients going to Dining With Friends and they are always looking forward to it," explains Allied Health Assistant Aanal Shah.

"It helps patients to not feel so lonely and have something to look forward to while they are rehabilitating."

While chatting away, the staff always keep a watchful eye on their patients. The group is attended by speech pathologists and dietitians who have a unique opportunity to evaluate their patients' eating habits in a comfortable environment.

"The program allows our dietitians and speech pathologists to see the diet and eating habits of the patients," Aanal says. "Staff can see if patients are having trouble eating or not eating enough. We can also see if a patient is at risk of choking and if they need attention. This can sometimes be difficult when they are eating alone, but in a group it is much more noticeable."

Introduced 14 months ago, Dining With Friends has proven so popular it may soon occur more regularly. For now, Aanal enjoys the happiness a weekly lunch offers.

"It's great to see patients happy and looking forward to each Friday lunchtime."

“It's great to see patients happy and looking forward to each Friday lunchtime.”



Picturing a bright future

Since being diagnosed with dementia, Margaret*, a much-loved grandmother and resident at Mercy Place Westcourt, Cairns, has found it difficult to connect with her family. But an arts appreciation program at KickArts Contemporary Arts in Cairns appears to be improving her confidence and memory.



KickArts Art and Dementia program facilitator Anna Crooks (left) guides Mercy Place Westcourt residents Esme Maggs and Ina Greenwood through an exhibition by Marnie Hutchinson



Main image L-R: Mercy Place Westcourt residents Judith Martin, Esme Maggs and Ina Greenwood study artworks with KickArts Exhibitions and Education Coordinator Miriam Carter. Inset: Ina and Miriam enjoy art by emerging artist Hannah Murray



“Margaret surprised us after coming to two of our exhibitions,” says Miriam Carter, the gallery’s Exhibitions & Education Coordinator. “She could not remember us at the start of the second tour but towards the end of it she said, ‘This exhibition is different to what I saw last time’ — which is phenomenal.”

Since October, the gallery’s Art and Dementia program, which is backed by a Regional Arts Fund, has welcomed eight residents from Mercy Place Westcourt. The initiative started at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra in 2007, and now encompasses more than 25 galleries across five states.

More than 400,000 people live with dementia in Australia and many feel isolated and socially excluded. By 2025, this figure is expected to rise to more than 500,000. By inviting people living with the condition to critique artworks, they are encouraged to voice their opinions, demonstrate their knowledge and recall memories. The program has had a remarkable, positive

“A lot of the residents become more energised and engaged during the visits.”

effect on participants, with evidence suggesting it has led to reduced anxiety, depression and use of medications.

“It’s a real treat for the residents to go to an art gallery and see something they otherwise would not view. They feel a sense of achievement and purpose,” says Miriam, who says one woman who struggles to stay awake found a new lease of life at the gallery.

“A lot of the residents become more energised and engaged during the visits. For one-and-a-half hours they answer questions and offer their opinions,” says Miriam. “We encourage them to be more honest and express if they don’t like an exhibition

— it’s really good to discuss what they do — and don’t — like about things.”

Antoinette Lapre, Lifestyle Assistant at Mercy Place Westcourt, says it is important for residents to feel comfortable about expressing themselves. “The interaction seems very beneficial to the residents as they are often voicing their opinions with the facilitators, which does not always occur in the home,” she says.

The program also nurtures stronger relationships between residents and their carers who see a different side to their clients or family members in the social environment. “The activity has been shown to trigger memories so people see their loved ones in another light. They think, ‘This is how I remember you when I was a child’,” says Miriam.

*Name has been changed.

All images courtesy of KickArts Contemporary Arts and Blueclick Photography.



Keeping it personal

Mercy Place Fernhill's memory support unit for residents with dementia is awash with different colours and designs. From soft pastels and striking reds, to stained glass and classic wood panels, each resident's front door boasts a distinct character and personality of its own.

Funded by Mercy Health Foundation, all generic doors in the unit of the Sandringham home were replaced with personalised doors in May 2017, using made-to-measure decals resembling a real door to help residents find their own rooms.

"While residents may have difficulty remembering their room number, they can recognise something similar to the door they previously had in their own home," says Andrew Ratcliffe, Service Manager at Mercy Place Fernhill.

"Personalising the front doors makes the home more personal and homely. It also helps reduce the chance of residents walking into someone else's room by accident.

"Although there were only limited designs to choose from, we spoke to staff and residents' families

to find the best design for each resident to support them with wayfinding," says Andrew.

The response from residents has been overwhelmingly positive, with one resident saying it was a brilliant idea. "I like the individual designs," says resident Molly Banks. "It's much easier to find my own room now."

Family members were equally impressed with the transformation, which included the installation of memory boards containing residents' photographs or keepsakes next to the rooms.

Vincent Devery says the memory board provides a valuable link to his mum Bonnie's life story. "Mum was Victoria's champion track cyclist in her day. The lifestyle team made the effort to search for giftwrap with pictures of bicycles to complement

the photos of mum with her trophies. It's absolutely wonderful," says Vincent.

The concept of personalised doors was first conceived in the Netherlands to replace a clinical atmosphere with a friendlier and more home-like environment. Popular in Europe, the concept fits well with Mercy Health's model of care for residential aged care which values each person and their life story.

"Our environments should support the care of people living with dementia, ensuring each home is calming and capable of enhancing individual experiences," says Wendy Dunn, Clinical Director Aged Care. "I visited a few aged care homes in Europe, particularly areas for people living with dementia. They would have doors chosen by the residents, or specifically for the residents based on what's important to them.



Bonnie Devery, 98, is fascinated by the memory board outside her room

“It’s much easier to find my own room now.”

"For example, I went to a home where the theme was flowers, so every resident has a different flower on their door. If the resident knows their door is a rose, they will have a much better chance of finding their door than if all doors were of the same colour. This is an innovative concept, and we are exploring how we can roll it out to other homes."

Soon, residents in the memory support unit at Mercy Health Bethlehem Home for the Aged in Bendigo will also have personalised doors, thanks to funding from Alzheimer's Australia.



Molly Bank proudly shows off her personalised door



Pushing for healthy mums and bubs

Annie Nolan was just 26 weeks' pregnant with twin daughters Delphine (Delphi) and Cheska when her contractions started. Despite every attempt by doctors at Mercy Hospital for Women to delay her labour, Annie's waters broke a week later. Soon after, her extremely fragile premature daughters were born via caesarean section.

"We were really quite unprepared," Annie recalls. "Even though I had been in hospital for a week, I had high hopes that I wasn't going to go into labour. When the first one (Delphi) was born... apparently she did cry but because they are so small and over the sound of the machines — I didn't hear any crying."

Upset and apprehensive, Annie asked her husband, AFL star Liam Picken, to make sure he captured photos of the twins. "In my mind, it was like these photos might be the only things that we have (of the girls) one day," Annie says.

Weighing about 900 and 700 grams respectively, Delphi and Cheska spent more than four months in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and Special Care Nursery before they could go home to their parents and big brother Malachy.

Four years on, Delphi and Cheska are healthy and happy. But Annie's experience with premature birth will be one that stays with her and obstetrician Dr Neil Israelsohn forever. "You never quite forget how delicate and fragile they are when they are born that premature and small," Neil recalls.

When Annie — a writer, activist and online personality with more than 87,000 followers on social media — was approached to become an ambassador for Mercy Health Foundation's 2017 Pram Jam fundraiser, she jumped at the chance. "It was a no brainer — it made complete sense," Annie says.

"Being involved in Pram Jam allows us to show our gratitude for Delphi and Cheska, who are the happiest kids ever."

Pram Jam is a community walkathon in which participants push their pram, walk, or run any distance over seven days

in November. Friends, family and colleagues are recruited to sponsor them online. The Australia-wide campaign raises awareness and funds for stillbirth and complications from babies being born prematurely.

Mercy Hospital for Women Director of Perinatal Medicine Professor Sue Walker says stillbirth is not discussed as often as it should be because it is such a traumatic topic. "It's easy for people to forget how prevalent an issue it is — and how desperately we need to fund ongoing care, research and education for mothers and babies around the world," Professor Walker says.

About one in 130 Australian pregnancies ends in stillbirth. Worldwide, premature birth is the number one killer of children aged under five. All money raised from Pram Jam goes to Mercy Perinatal, a three-pillar centre of excellence in clinical care, education and research based at Mercy Hospital for Women.

It's not too late to donate, visit pramjam.org.au



Liam Picken,
Dr Neil Israelsohn,
Cheska and Delphi
Picken and
Annie Nolan

Annie Nolan visits Cameron Nicholls
and his daughter Adrian in the
Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

Annie Nolan performing
kangaroo care with Delphi

*Make a difference
for a family in need
this Christmas*

Sadly, many families will experience a difficult and lonely time this Christmas. Mercy Health Foundation is asking for support at this special time of year to help families in our hospitals, homes and services who are experiencing financial and social disadvantage. Our Compassionate Support Appeal is uniquely tailored to support the most vulnerable people in our care. Please support us so we can help ease the burden on families at what should be — and with your help, can be — a special time to celebrate together.

mercyhealthfoundation.org.au



Giving carers a well-earned break

During her weekly visit to Southern Cross Care (Vic) Macleod Cottage, Edna Lordan enjoys helping out with household tasks such as setting the table for lunch or washing the dishes. Being involved in daily activities makes it feel more like home, says Edna, who spends one day a week at the respite cottage in Macleod, Melbourne.



Edna Lordan enjoys doing the dishes at Macleod Cottage

Edna was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease seven years ago, and is cared for at home by her daughter, Margaret Lordan. Every Thursday, Margaret drops Edna at the cottage in the morning and picks her up just before 4pm. It has become a weekly routine for the couple over the past year, giving Margaret much-needed time to recharge.

"Knowing mum is somewhere safe and having a good time takes the stress of worrying off me when I'm not with her," says Margaret. "It also gives me the opportunity to have a day off to tend to my own needs."

Macleod Cottage Coordinator Christine Vice says caring for older people can be a very rewarding experience, but also physically and emotionally demanding for family or friends who take on the role.

"Carers become so involved in looking after someone else that they allow their own needs to be put aside," says Christine. "They often report exhaustion, stress, isolation, depression and physical ailments. That's why it is important for carers to take a break now and again to focus on their own needs."

By having some time out from caring — to catch up with friends,

attend an event, follow an interest or even have a holiday — carers can lead a healthy and balanced lifestyle. It also helps make them better carers in the long run, says Christine. However, help may not always be available from relatives, friends or neighbours.

"Sometimes, it is necessary to seek outside help. This is where respite services can come to the rescue. At Macleod Cottage, we offer a range of flexible respite options. If someone needs to pop out for a few hours, take a day off here and there, have an evening out or go for a short holiday, we offer a secure and friendly environment to support their



George Southey and Louise Gregory enjoying the spring sunshine with outdoor activities



Macleod Cottage Coordinator Christine Vice (right) showing Mary Bongailas how to use an iPad

loved one during their absence," says Christine.

"We understand every individual is unique and our staff work hard to learn and respond to each client's needs. We gather information about their past, their interests, and their likes and dislikes, so we can tailor our services to their wishes and requirements.

"We also consider the client's usual routines and try to maintain

them as much as possible to minimise any confusion for the older person when they return home; an issue which can occur with people living with dementia."

There are many activities to keep clients engaged physically and mentally, Christine explains. They can include interactive games on iPads, physical exercises, discussions on current events, or giving clients a chance to help out with household tasks such as folding linen or watering the garden.

"We try to come up with new activities for clients all the time," Christine says. "For example, with the beautiful spring sunshine, clients have been enjoying our sensory courtyard garden and picking lavender for flower arrangements. Staff also bring in collectibles from home as part of our reminiscence activity to encourage meaningful discussions among clients. Seeing the smiles on our clients' faces makes our day."

“We understand every individual is unique and our staff work hard to learn and respond to each client's needs.”



Bruce Carroll serenading other clients with his guitar



Speaking up for the sick

While Karen Barclay-Moss was visiting both of her parents in hospital for over two years, she realised how hard it can be for people to find information about their illness or treatment options.

After supporting her parents through major operations and her mother's subsequent illness, after which she sadly passed away, Karen wanted to make a difference for people facing their darkest moments.

"When people are not well, they can feel very vulnerable and unable to express their needs easily," says Karen, who is also a Research Officer for the Australian Stroke Clinical Registry.

Wanting to help make a difference, Karen joined the Mercy Hospital for Women (MHW)

Community Advisory Group (CAG) in early 2016. The CAG consists of Consumer Advisors — patients, clients, families and carers — who help Mercy Health improve its care and services by offering feedback on projects, marketing material and policies.

As a Consumer Advisor, Karen attends regular meetings and helps many people feel more confident about navigating the health system. Her involvement in the CAG has included reviewing wayfinding signage at MHW. She also particularly enjoyed reviewing content for Mercy Health's new Health Services website, which launched in August.

"When people are looking for their way around a hospital, or a hospital website, it's usually because they need information for themselves or a loved one.



They could be feeling a bit anxious so it's important to have the information as accessible as possible," she explains.

"I was looking at it from the point of view of people using it — what they are looking for and what they would like to see on it," she adds.

Karen's input was part of extensive consultation with Mercy Health patients, staff and stakeholders at more than 70 workshops and meetings. She is happy she could make a contribution by volunteering. "Sometimes women and the elderly are not listened to as much. I feel it's important that they are represented and their voices are heard," she says.

Visit our new website at mercyhealth.com.au

You can help improve our care and services

We are currently recruiting for our Community Advisory Committee (CAC). The Mercy Health CAC provides strategic advice to our Health Services, Aged Care and Home & Community Care divisions. By joining the CAC as a Consumer Advisor, you can help us better understand and respond to the needs of the communities we serve.

But what is a Consumer Advisor? Consumer Advisors are people who have experienced our care or services directly or indirectly, or they are part of our local community. Consumer Advisors want to help improve our care and services across Mercy Health. We welcome applications from people of all ages, backgrounds, cultures and

religions, as well as people from LGBTIQ communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people with a variety of experiences.

For more information please visit mercyhealth.com.au/our-structure/consumer-engagement/consumer-advisory-committee/

Applications are now open.

Visit careers.mercy.com.au to apply, or contact our Consumer Participation & Experience Team at getinvolved@mercy.com.au or on 03 8416 7872.



Connecting to land



Sophie Issamael indicating Yorta Yorta land on Mercy Hospital for Women's new map of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander country

It is on Yorta Yorta land that Sophie places a pin on Mercy Hospital for Women's (MHW) new map of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations. Located beside the Outpatient Clinics waiting area, the map already has a handful of pins on it — all of which indicate an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patient and where they come from.

Conjured up by Nurse Unit Manager Deb Pidd, the map will eventually feature pins from all over the country. MHW Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer Meisha Duckford says the map is important for all patients and visitors to see because it generates respect and curiosity. "We have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women come from as far as the Northern Territory to be cared for here," Meisha says. "This map makes the place more welcoming; it helps people develop connections."

Maintaining their connection to land is incredibly important to Sophie and her own mum,

Mother-to-be Sophie Issamael may be a born-and-bred city girl but her heart and history lie north with her mob, the Yorta Yorta people of the land on either side of the Murray River. "It's a beautiful place where a lot of our elders are buried," she says.

Simone, whose family history goes back a long way. "My mother's great, great, great grandfather was a tracker for the police; he was the one who found Burke and Wills' remains," Simone says.

Having grown up to listening family stories like these, Sophie is keen to pass on the knowledge to her baby Kamaiah, who is due on 15

February. "I want to share our culture," Sophie says. "I want her to grow up knowing her elders."

Sophie is also happy to know Kamaiah will be welcomed into the world by her Mercy Health family and the Aboriginal Programs team. "I feel so supported here," she says. "You can talk like you've known each other for years."



Sophie and her sister Rihanna, who was also born at Mercy Hospital for Women

Christmas message

from the Group CEO

As a Catholic service, Christmas is a time of peace, hope and love as we remember the birth of Christ. It is also a time for everyone at Mercy Health to celebrate the many wonders that have occurred in our hospitals, homes and services all year round. Families who are celebrating their first festive season with a healthy baby, like Danielle and James Maas, or people like 97-year-old Connie Goode who are giving back to others while supported by our Home & Community Care services — there are so many reasons to celebrate this Christmas.

Another cause for celebration is the addition of Southern Cross Care (Vic) to the Mercy Health Group as of 1 July 2017. In this year of great change across the organisation, the merger with Southern Cross Care (Vic) is among the most momentous. United by a shared Christian heritage and a common mission to serve those in need, these two organisations have come together with remarkable ease and bright hopes for the future. I thank all residents, clients, families and staff for their effort and support of this exciting new venture, which makes Mercy Health one of the biggest not-for-profit aged care providers in Australia and as such better placed to meet the needs of those we serve in an ever-changing landscape.

The merger means that now, more than 8,500 staff across the country are contributing to the Mercy Health mission to serve those in need every day. It should not go without notice that many of these people will be sacrificing time with their own families and loved ones to care for others this Christmas. This is not always easy, however I know from experience that when the sun rises on Christmas morning, as with every day, our amazing, passionate and committed staff are focused on just one thing: providing care first!

On behalf of the Mercy Health Executive and Board, I wish everyone a safe, happy and peaceful Christmas. May the year ahead be filled with light, hope and love.

Stephen Cornelissen

**Group Chief
Executive Officer**



Your feedback...

We hope you've enjoyed the summer edition of *Our Voice*, Mercy Health's groupwide newsletter.

Please send your feedback and stories via the details below:

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Mercy Health acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the first Australians. We acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous Australia. We respectfully recognise Elders past, present and emerging. This report was produced on Wurundjeri Country.



Our Voice will be back in March with our autumn edition. In the meantime you can keep up to date with current Mercy Health news at mercyhealth.com.au

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