

Our Voice

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Mercy Health
Care first

Path to hope

Artist Leesa Gray gifts the Mercy Palliative Care team with a painting in appreciation of their support

Soothing the senses
Mercy Place Fernhill's new sensory wellness room for resident relaxation

Coming full circle
Recently retired Mercy Hospital for Women Professor of Midwifery Sue McDonald reflects on her lifelong connection with the Sisters of Mercy



Leesa Gray suffered more than two years of harrowing grief following the death of her firstborn daughter, Star. For a long time, she did not know how to thank Mercy Palliative Care Psychologist Cheryl Remedios for the myriad ways she had supported Leesa and her family through this painful season. Then one day, Leesa, a professional artist, picked up a brush and started to paint.

“I just had an idea that the only way I could really thank Cheryl was to paint her a painting,” Leesa says.

It was in late 2015 that Leesa’s daughter, Star, became very unwell, suffering unrelenting pain. Investigations by doctors

found a tumour and Star was treated for pancreatic cancer. The cancer was very aggressive and quickly spread to her arms, spine, neck and hips.

A stunningly beautiful, vivacious and caring girl, Star was no stranger to pain. She had

battled Crohn’s Disease and Hashimoto’s thyroiditis (an autoimmune condition) for most of her young life. “I think that was why we didn’t pick up the cancer earlier. She was used to just getting on with it. She would just soldier on,” says Leesa.

The family was referred to Mercy Palliative Care in January 2016, so Star could be cared for in the comfort of her home. The team included medical, nursing and pastoral care staff. They assisted Star in managing her pain and other distressing symptoms, while Cheryl came on board as part of the counselling team to



Clockwise from above: Leesa is a professional artist and finds painting wonderfully therapeutic; Leesa’s memorial painting of daughter Star, who lost her battle with cancer at just 20 years of age; Leesa with her youngest daughter, Kiki, and Millie the dog.



“

The painting is about hope and surviving through grief.”

provide emotional support to Star, Leesa and her family. “The team from Mercy Palliative Care were a huge help, especially the counselling from Cheryl. She was there from the start and there was a music therapist too who was great for my youngest daughter, Kiki,” Leesa says.

Sadly, Star passed away on 6 March 2016 at just 20 years of age. “All she wanted was to celebrate her 21st birthday. We were trying to celebrate it earlier but it wasn’t meant to be. It was a very tough time,” Leesa says.

Following Star’s death, Cheryl met with Leesa and her family regularly to accompany them through their emotional pain and provide practical support where it was needed. This support is part of Mercy Palliative Care’s Bereavement Service, offered to all bereaved carers.

“Grief is an individual process for everyone,” Cheryl says. “I think the main thing is to have someone there to support you in that journey.”

On Leesa’s journey, Cheryl became not just a support

but a confidante to her and her family, compassionately guiding them to a place of healing and hope. Ultimately, that is what Leesa’s painting is all about.

“The blue represents the beautiful ocean in Bali — my healing place,” says Leesa. “The purple butterflies represent Star, because that was her favourite colour, and the stars sprinkled over the canvas are also in memory of her. The painting is about hope and surviving through grief.”

About Our Voice

Our Voice is the quarterly newsletter of Mercy Health, an Australian Catholic organisation founded by the Sisters of Mercy. Each year, we provide care for approximately 100,000 people in health services, 3,000 people in our 35 aged care homes and 8,500 people in their own homes or in the community. Each season in *Our Voice*, we share inspiring

and thought-provoking stories from the people we serve and the 9,000-plus people who work for Mercy Health. These stories demonstrate the Mercy Health values of Compassion, Hospitality, Respect, Innovation, Stewardship and Teamwork. To share your own story or provide feedback, contact:

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Every single one of Mercy Health's 35 aged care homes is a veritable jewellery box of treasures, overflowing with people whose lives have been — and still are — lived with faith, purpose and joy. One such shining example is 86-year-old Mercy Place Rice Village resident and talented pianist Joan Heckman.

“

Joan's joy when she plays the piano is infectious — it really lifts our spirits.”

Born blind, Joan was introduced to music when she enrolled at what was then the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind on St Kilda Road, Melbourne. They had just opened a nursery and she was a tiny little girl just two years of age; their first female student.

“They taught me music at a very early age and gave me the help I needed to develop in that area,” Joan says.

After finishing high school, Joan went on to complete a Bachelor of Music at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music (University of Melbourne), majoring in piano and organ. This launched a richly rewarding career as a piano teacher for visually impaired children, notably at St Lucy's School in Wahroonga, Sydney, which caters for students with disabilities.

“I loved teaching,” Joan says. “Some of my students have done very well and made a career in music. But I was happy as long as they learned to just love and enjoy it — that's what I was interested in.”

When the school gates closed at the end of the day, Joan would often be playing into the night at various social events in Sydney. She also played the organ for Sunday Mass at St Brigid's Catholic Church in Marrickville, where there was a large Italian congregation.



“Playing for the Italians was lovely because I had a chance to learn their language and music,” Joan says. “They were so wonderful and kind to me and also introduced me to all sorts of good wine!”

In April 2018, Joan moved into Mercy Place Rice Village, where she is close to her sister Brenda who resides in one of the independent living units. Joan continues to play the piano every day and organ at Mass every fortnight. “I love it when the whole congregation joins in,” Joan says.

The residents love it too. “Joan's music brings so much joy to other residents,” says Mercy Place Rice Village Pastoral Carer

Geraldine Malady. “When she plays the piano, everyone comes out of their rooms to gather around her. Joan's joy when she plays the piano is infectious — it really lifts our spirits.”

Music has been a faithful companion throughout Joan's life, providing a constant source of joy and an avenue for many wonderful friendships and experiences. Music, she says, has given her “a lot of happy things, a lot of wonderful experiences and a lot of joy.”

Opposite page: After a lifetime of playing and teaching the piano, Joan has a wide repertoire of songs. Top: Music has given Joan “a lot of happy things...” Above left: Joan and her devoted sister, Brenda. Above right: Joan's music brings joy to all the residents at Mercy Place Rice Village.



A career beginning and ending with Mercy

“Life is funny with how connections come and go,” says Professor Sue McDonald as she reflects on her career.

Sue, who retired from her position as Professor of Midwifery at Mercy Hospital for Women in December 2018, has had a long association with the Sisters of Mercy. Her mother Laurel was taken in by the Sisters when she was just four years old, not long after her mother (Sue’s grandmother) died in childbirth. “Mum had a very long and caring relationship with the Sisters of Mercy — they really took care of her and looked out for her until she finished school and decided to start nursing,” says Sue.

Later, when Sue’s mother married and had children, Sue and her sister Denise were educated by the Mercy nuns

at Mercedes College in Perth. The Sisters of Mercy were a constant presence in her childhood and teenage years. “We often had Mercy nuns visiting our homes, coming for dinner or joining us for outings. I was very familiar and comfortable with them when I was growing up,” says Sue.

Sue followed in her mother’s footsteps to become a nurse and has built a distinguished career in nursing, midwifery, clinical education and academia, holding the position of Professor of Midwifery at La Trobe University from 2000–05, a joint appointment with the Royal Women’s Hospital. “Midwifery became my absolute passion, really.

And I don’t say that word ‘passion’ very lightly. Midwifery is something that you get very involved with and you have the privilege of working with like-minded people.”

When Sue joined Mercy Hospital for Women in 2006 as Professor of Midwifery, she said it was like coming full circle, back to where it all started. “The minute I started working with Mercy, it felt like coming home. I had never felt happier in my career,” she says.

During Sue’s 12 years at Mercy Health, she worked tirelessly to raise the profile of nursing and midwifery research and increase development opportunities for staff.



“Midwifery became my absolute passion.”

“We are so grateful to Sue for the many years of hard work and dedication she put in to create an academic and research centre for nurses and midwives at Mercy Hospital for Women,” says Mercy Health Chief Executive Health Services Adjunct Professor Linda Mellors.

Sue says: “When I first started at Mercy, there were very few midwives who had reached a masters-level qualification, but now there is a significant number who do. It is wonderful to see how staff have progressed to midwifery, clinical research consultant positions and managerial roles. Watching

them constantly grow in their careers and reach new heights is what I’m most proud of.

“I’ve loved every single day that I’ve worked at Mercy Hospital for Women. It has been an absolute pleasure and privilege to have been given that opportunity for 12 years,” says Sue.



Sensory wellness room makes perfect sense for residents

Sr Rosaleen McCaffrey enjoys the tranquillity of Mercy Place Fernhill's sensory wellness room.

Rustling leaves, a trickling stream or stroking the soft petals of flowers are all soothing sensations that many of us experience in nature every day. At Mercy Place Fernhill, the creation of a sensory wellness room has given residents an opportunity to safely explore and stimulate all their senses.



to introduce birds, sounds into the scene and they can even change the season," Josh explains. "It's a wonderfully peaceful, interactive experience."

The sensory wellness room not only has a calming effect, it also positively impacts cognition.

"Cognitive stimulation is really important for all of our residents, so everyone here will benefit from this pretty amazing room," Josh says. "But for people living with dementia, many of whom can have difficulty controlling their behaviours, these sensory wellness rooms also provide a peaceful environment that helps to calm their often overactive and distressed minds."

Mercy Place Fernhill resident Sr Rosaleen McCaffrey is an avid fan of the sensory wellness room.

“It's just so peaceful in here.”

"It's just so peaceful in here and I imagine it would be especially comforting and reassuring for people with dementia," she says. "It's lovely to come down and hear the birds singing and the sound of a stream. And it didn't take long for me to get the hang of using my hands to control the virtual scene on screen either."

"I also enjoy playing videos of birdlife and flowers, and I've even tried Google Earth on the big screen, visiting countries far away while sitting here in the sensory wellness room."

The sensory wellness room was funded via Mercy Health Foundation with a generous grant from the Campbell Edwards Trust, a charitable foundation dedicated to making a real and sustainable difference to people's lives in Australia.

Research indicates that for people with dementia, sensory activities can calm them and help them see things more clearly. Although targeted towards those residents, the room is available to everyone living at the Sandringham residential aged care home.

"Sensory rooms can be used to stimulate the senses and to calm you down," Mercy Place Fernhill's Service Manager Josh Wonder says. "It's such a relaxing environment. The walls are covered with tree wallpaper so it looks like you are in the middle of a forest; there's

flooring made to look like grass; a wall of foliage that residents can touch; and boxes of natural materials, including pine cones and feathers, for our residents to handle."

The most interactive aspect of the room, however, is the

big television screen with The Virtual Forest™ software, which was recommended by Dementia Australia.

"There's a beautiful moving image of a forest and river on the screen that residents control with hand movements



Mercy Place Albury offers choice for all



Sr Kathleen Cudmore in the kitchen of her new home.

Mavis Hallows has always loved to cook, but in most aged care homes this is all done behind closed doors. As one of the first residents to move into an innovative new household at Mercy Place Albury, Mavis is now back in the kitchen where she is happiest.

Four new households opened at Mercy Place Albury last year and two more are scheduled to open in coming months so that residents can live

more independently and continue doing the everyday activities they love, just like Mavis.

Since moving into one of the households — McAuley House — in June last year, Mavis has thrived.

“It’s a wonderful home, where I can do things like cook in our own kitchen, and I’m sure the people who move into the new houses will love it too,” says Mavis.

This new community-centred approach to aged care, where eight residents live in smaller households, complements the traditional wing of the aged care home. It means people looking for aged care in Albury have options.

The new households also have staff who are regularly rostered, meaning they can form meaningful relationships with residents over time.

“This helps our residents to develop greater depth to the relationships that they form,” explains Mercy Health Regional Manager NSW and WA Janelle McFarlane.

“This community-centred approach really is wonderful because it promotes independence, and is a more sociable way of living, which is particularly good for residents with dementia. It has also been shown to reduce the incidence of hospitalisation for residents. Seeing how comfortable and

“This style of community-centred approach to aged care really is wonderful.”

at home our residents feel here, and the reassurance that it offers families too, knowing that their loved ones are living in a safe, modern, caring and stimulating environment, is something I’m very proud of.”

Each new household features its own kitchen, living and dining room and eight ensuite bedrooms. Meanwhile, the redevelopment also includes shared areas and services for all residents, including a grocery

store where residents can order fresh food for their household meal. There is also a cafe, chapel, internal courtyard and beautiful artwork.

“Our home is now designed to suit all resident preferences,” says Janelle.

Mercy Health has been implementing this innovative approach to aged care across the country since April 2016 at Edgewater Mercy Hostel

and Mercy Place Mont Clare in Western Australia. In 2018, we opened our first purpose-built home around this new approach at Mercy Place Ballarat. Work is also underway at Mercy Place Montrose where a similar style development is set to open in April.

Above: The new households in Mercy Place Albury are modern and comfortable for their eight residents.





Inspiring Mercy Health client reaches lofty heights

There is no doubt in Bernard Izabelle's mind that our climate is changing — and if anyone should know, it would be this 90-year-old Mercy Health Home Care Services client.

In 1950, Bernard, a meteorologist from Normandy in France, was part of a nine-man team that worked on Greenland's Eismitte Station as part of the French Polar

Expeditions. The team was sent to carry out refurbishment work on the station, while researching glaciology and atmospheric physics. He later spent a year as the sole weather

observer at Mawson Station, Antarctica, while working for the Australian Antarctic Division. His observations and research are still used today as investigations into climate change continue.

"I was a weatherman," explains Bernard, who worked with many of the world's most notable polar explorers during his career. "I had to take the meteorological observations every three hours over the 15 months we were there. The conditions were terrible and some men lost their lives. It was so, so cold — minus 30 degrees centigrade with wind speeds of up to 150 kilometres per hour.

"We lived through blizzards and freezing temperatures. One time we had a blackout for three weeks after the plane carrying our airdrop of supplies containing fuel, spare parts for our generator, radio equipment and our food crashed.

"It was difficult and lonely work, but even today, I still miss Antarctica."

Although the conditions were harsh, there was a raw and natural beauty to Antarctica that Bernard found compelling.

"Above the Antarctic Circle, there is this row of pine trees," he recalls. "For 11 months of

“... watching the sun rise after six months of darkness ... was spectacular.”

the year they were covered with snow so couldn't be seen, but during that one month, they were visible and very beautiful.

"But my favourite memory was watching the sun rise for the first time after six months of darkness. It was spectacular."

Perhaps even more spectacular was when Bernard had a mountain named after him in 1957.

"Mount Izabelle is in the Prince Charles Mountains, in Antarctica, about 72 degrees latitude," he proudly recalls. "It was a

great honour and I have some wonderful memories of my time there."

Bernard went on to work deep in the jungles of Papua New Guinea recovering lost aircraft once he decided to return to warmer climes. The weather, however, is still his passion and a topic he happily discusses with his Mercy Health Home Care Services workers during every visit.

"I still check the weather every day and take a big interest in what's happening with the climate," he says. "I'm worried about what is happening to the planet and scared for our next generation — for our grandchildren and great grandchildren."

Opposite: Photos of his polar expeditions adorn the walls of Bernard Izabelle's living room. Below: Mount Izabelle, the mountain named after Bernard.



On 1 April 2019, Southern Cross Care (Vic) Home Care Services will transition to Mercy Health Home Care Services. Building on the respected reputation of Southern Cross Care (Vic), and 50 years of service experience, Mercy Health will continue to collaborate with clients and offer flexible services tailored to their specific needs.

We provide services to 8,500 clients in Victoria, NSW, ACT and Queensland and are an approved provider of the Home Care Packages (HCP) program, Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP), and National Disability Scheme (NDIS).

For more information please call 1300 478 776 or visit home-care.mercyhealth.com.au



Hands-on role leads to full-time work

A work placement with Mercy Health helped Belinda Jonkers land her dream job working with Indigenous children.

Belinda was nearing completion of a Diploma of Community Services and had to find a workplace where she could fulfil 200 hours of work placement, so she reached out to one of her relatives who works for Mercy Health.

"She looked into it for me and I was fortunate to be offered work placement positions in two different areas of Mercy Health," Belinda says.

Belinda's first role was with the Werribee Mercy Hospital Social Work Department under Social Work Manager Leanne Foster.

"It was a really interesting area of work and I learned a lot," Belinda explains. "I learned how to do aged care assessments to work out what our patients needed in order to return home. It was a very rewarding job."

Belinda, who is a Gunai-Kurnai, Ngarigo Monaro woman, then joined Mercy Health Aboriginal Programs under Mercy Hospital for Women Senior Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer Joanne Pappas.

"It was wonderful," she enthuses. "I helped find accommodation and food vouchers for some Indigenous clients who were from out



of town and for some other families that needed our help. I found I was able to connect with the families straight away being Indigenous myself. We had a very special connection."

The placements gave Belinda the confidence to go out and find her dream job with the

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

"Working with Mercy Health gave me more confidence in myself and made me realise that I wanted to work in the Aboriginal sector," she says. "I am now doing exactly what I want to be doing in my career."

A tenacious advocate

Motivated to advocate for carers of people accessing mental health services, Marg Knight joined the Mercy Mental Health Voices of Consumer Carers Alliance Link (VOCCAL) when it formed in March 2014 and is now Co-Chair of the group.

VOCCAL Co-Chair Marg Knight.



There is no one more qualified for the role. Marg has been caring for her son, who has an ongoing psychiatric illness, for 20 years, tirelessly navigating the health system to manage his condition.

VOCCAL is the Mercy Mental Health community advisory group established to help consumers (people accessing mental health services) and carers participate meaningfully in decision-making around policy, care and treatment. As well as consumers and carers, the group also includes mental health staff and clinicians who contribute their expertise to improve the care experience.

As a voice for change on VOCCAL, Marg is determined to ease the burden on other carers. "I'm eager to help other carers,

especially those who haven't been doing it for long, and to make the road easier for them by using the experience and knowledge I have gained over the years," Marg says.

One change Marg implemented through VOCCAL was the introduction of a private room at Werribee Mercy Hospital for people accessing mental health services, who present at the Emergency Department. Often these people become distressed while waiting for treatment and ask to go home. The room gives the carer a private space to settle them until a doctor is available. Small measures like this "do a lot to help a potentially life-threatening situation," Marg says.

This is what Marg loves about being part of VOCCAL: bringing

her own or another carer's issues to the table and working towards a solution.

"The most important thing is carers need to be able to have the support and empowerment to say if they are not happy with something. The carer, not just the patient, needs to be considered."

If you would like more information about becoming a Consumer Advisor, please email the Consumer Participation and Experience team at getinvolved@mercy.com.au or phone 03 8416 7872. You can also find out more about becoming a Consumer Advisor on our website: mercyhealth.com.au/our-structure/consumer-engagement/

Become a Mercy Palliative Care volunteer

Our Melbourne-based Mercy Palliative Care volunteers work with patients and their families. They offer support, companionship and timeout for the carer in the patient's own home or in the Gabrielle Jennings Centre inpatient palliative care unit at Werribee Mercy Hospital.

Volunteers also carry out tasks such as transport to medical appointments, delivering small items of medical equipment, or helping out in the office.

Mercy Palliative Care is a community-based palliative care service offering support in the north and west metropolitan region of Melbourne.

"Both patient and carer are always grateful for a visit and encouragement. The carers are so thankful to enjoy a couple of hours of well-earned respite."

— Mercy Palliative Care volunteer Mary



If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, please call 03 9313 5700 for more information.

**For other volunteering opportunities around Australia, visit:
mercyhealth.com.au/our-organisation/volunteering**

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 newsletter was produced on Wurundjeri Country.



Our Voice will be back in June with our winter edition. In the meantime, you can keep up-to-date with current Mercy Health news at mercyhealth.com.au/news

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