

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

From: Catherine Butterfield, Media and Communications Consultant, Mercy Health

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Mercy Place Colac aged care residents pave the way for women

As International Women's Day was celebrated around the world on 8 March, Mercy Place Colac residents Jean Howard and Dulcie 'Scotty' Brooks recalled with pride how they and the females of their generation paved the way for gender equality more than 80 years ago.

As Australia's fit, young men were sent away to war, a generation of fit, young women stood up and filled the roles usually occupied by men. They were tough times, 100-year-old Jean said, but "we just rolled up our sleeves and did it".

"The women had a big role – they kept the country going," she said. "We all did the very best we could, and the city girls, I was worried about them to start with. I lived on a farm and was strong and could lift just about anything but the city girls hadn't had to do that type of thing before. But, they did a mighty job those city girls."

During the war, women were given what were considered 'men's jobs'. Jean worked long, hard and physical hours driving a tractor at a flax mill, soon winning over the men and sidelining their initial scepticism that she would be incapable of doing the tough physical work. Jean stayed on at the mill for 14 years, despite women having to hand over their jobs to returned servicemen or men with families post-war.

"I surprised them all the time," Jean said. "Back then, and even now sometimes, women aren't given a chance. But we've shown that we can do whatever men can do."

Dulcie, who is 96 years young, agreed wholeheartedly.

"I joined the army to be a driver but to start with, they wouldn't let me because I didn't have enough experience," she said. "So I started out as a cook but I showed them and eventually they let me do the driving."

"The women back then showed that they could do whatever had to be done to keep everything going. I think we paved the way for the women of today."

International Women's Day was celebrated across all 34 of Mercy Health's residential aged care homes, its two hospitals, and home care and support services sites. International Women's Day is a global celebration of the social, political, economic and cultural achievements of women and a call to action that promotes gender equality.

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