

7 December 2018

Reach out to seniors this Christmas

As Christmas and the holidays approach, many begin to feel a sense of joy and excitement as they prepare for the festive season. For others who experience social isolation, the holidays highlight feelings of loneliness and anxiety.

A 2016 Lifeline survey found that 60 per cent of respondents "often" felt lonely. The organisation also revealed that 55 per cent of callers to its crisis line lived alone, "often without strong support networks".

Older people in particular are susceptible to social isolation. Research shows that risk increases with age as people experience significant and ongoing life changes like retirement, bereavement, divorce, illness and relocation to aged care.

The health impacts of loneliness are serious and include:

- increased risk of heart disease and stroke;
- mental health and wellbeing issues such as anger, depression, worthlessness, resentment, pessimism and suicidal thoughts; and
- higher risk of cognitive progression towards Alzheimer's disease.

With this in mind, non-profit organisation Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH) is encouraging community members to #reachout and do their bit to help make a positive impact.

VMCH Pastoral Care Services Senior Manager Mary McInerney estimates about a third of VMCH affordable housing residents and 20 per cent of aged care residents are alone over the Christmas period.

"At Christmas time the feelings of loneliness can often be intensified, due to seeing and hearing others' experiences or memories of the past good times that are now not the same – often due to loss of family and friends who have died. Sometimes people do not want to feel a burden on others and lack of transport can be another barrier for people connecting."

Mary said some affordable housing sites put on a pre-Christmas gathering for residents and neighbours kept an eye out for each other over the holidays.

In VMCH aged care residences, more than 350 volunteers play an important part in connecting with older people through social visits.

So what can the community do to help?

'Ageing is everyone's business – a report on social isolation and loneliness among senior Victorians', says: "social contact is an important protective factor against social isolation and loneliness".

While some people choose to be alone and enjoy solitude, there are others who struggle with social connection and therefore are alone, not by choice.

MORE



PAGE TWO

Simple gestures like checking in on a neighbour, saying hello to people in the street, visiting an older relative or friend, taking a Christmas meal to someone in need, or volunteer to visit someone in aged care.

“We can often be caught up in the festive celebrations and it is important that we do not forget those less fortunate in the process,” Mary said.

If you’d like to join the VMCH volunteering team and help make a difference in 2019, call 1800 036 377.

Media enquiries:

Cassie Zlonzak

Communications Adviser

T: 03 9926 2419

M: 0402 422 852

E: cassie.zlonzak@vmch.com.au

W: www.vmch.com.au

About Villa Maria Catholic Homes

Through our passion and commitment to everyday people, Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH) works in partnership with people of all ages and abilities. From all faiths and backgrounds, to achieve their goals, remain connected to their community and maintain independence.

We’re a Catholic not-for-profit organisation, providing services to 7,600 people across Victoria. Ask anyone at VMCH and you’ll find we’re driven by wanting to achieve outcomes that enhance the lives of older Australians, people with disability, families and carers.

We have a long history in listening to what people want and need. By making sure we can deliver services to match those needs, we can offer greater choice and opportunity to our customers. We want to help build compassionate and sustainable communities, so everyone is included.

Today we offer services that cover affordable housing options, residential aged care, retirement living, home community and disability services and specialist education. We’re an agile organisation constantly improving how we do things.

END

