

Media Release

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Innovative dementia care training improves lives

An innovative, in-house dementia care training program is seeing positive outcomes for aged care residents living with dementia, and greater understanding from staff.

Next week (September 18-24) is Dementia Action Week; aimed to reduce stigma and discrimination experienced by people living with dementia, and their carers.

Almost 68% of residents living in residential aged care across Australia have some form of memory loss or dementia. Last month, the Federal Government's Intergenerational Report predicted that by 2062-63, life expectancy for men is projected to be 87 years (currently 81.3), and for women 89.5 (85.2). Clearly, providing dementia support will be an increasingly important service to Australia's ageing community.

This year's Dementia Action Week theme is 'Act Now for a Dementia-Friendly Future'; an idea that for-purpose aged and disability provider VMCH believes it is already making great strides in.

VMCH aligns its dementia support care with the principles of Montessori, encouraging people to be as independent as possible.

VMCH Dementia Services Specialist Elizabeth Baxter co-designed the organisation's Knowing Our People training, alongside Learning and Development Consultant Julia Butler. The interactive program – including how dementia affects the brain, problem solving behaviours of concern, and creating meaningful opportunities through valued roles and activities – is unique in that it is designed by staff, for staff.

"The training is mandatory for all residential aged care staff, from cleaners, hospitality workers, nurses, admin staff and drivers, recognising that each person has a special role to play in facilitating good outcomes for people living with dementia," Ms Baxter says.

"A key aspect of the training is inviting residents using the Montessori catch-phrase 'Would you help me?'. This participation from residents empowers them to feel autonomous and engaged in aspects of their lives that may traditionally be taken away from them when they move into a residential setting. This could be anything from cooking, folding clothes, cleaning, or sorting items.

"If we take every opportunity to invite, engage and interact with our residents, we can maximise their opportunities to maintain personal capabilities and achieve purpose and meaning in their everyday life."

Lifestyle Coordinator Kerrin Curnow is among hundreds of staff who have already completed the training and speaks highly of the outcomes.

"Working in aged care can be extremely busy and you can get bogged down with day-to-day tasks, so it was great to take a step back and have that really meaningful time to spend with residents," Kerrin says.

"Getting to know their life stories helped us inform activities that they enjoyed and gave them purpose. Activities that make them feel worthy, wanted, and useful."

While Kerrin admits caring for residents with dementia can often be challenging, the rewards far outweigh the difficult times.

“I treat each resident as if they were my own grandparent; how I would want them to be looked after and treated with love, respect, and listening ear. It is truly a blessing and joy to be able to give daily to our residents and help them throughout their lives.”

Media enquiries

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About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic, for-purpose organisation, compassion, respect and inclusion aren't just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we've been around for over a century, we're always moving forward. Always staying true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives; providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and passionate teams are with you on your life journey; helping you with a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.

