

Media Release

17 October 2024

Creating bonds that transcend generations

An intergenerational volunteering program is bridging the gap between generations and fostering a sense of family for young and old.

For-purpose aged and disability services organisation [VMCH](#) has partnered with [Mannix College](#), a Catholic residential college affiliated with [Monash University](#), to create a community service program, Mannix Young Hearts.

Since September, seven students have begun visiting VMCH's nearby [Corpus Christi Aged Care Residence](#) in Clayton, taking part in activities such as music, arts and crafts, exercises, technology lessons and pampering days.

The aim of the program is to enhance the lives of both aged care residents and students – meeting both Catholic organisation's respective Missions: to create genuine places of belonging for the vulnerable; and fostering students' desire to make a difference in the world.

And while the huge benefits of intergenerational relationships are not new, the special connection between Mannix students and aged care residents is unique. Both cohorts live in non-traditional family homes, away from loved ones.

Alice Hengel, aged 19, who is studying a Bachelor of Engineering, says living on campus is a great experience, but admits it can be a bit difficult at times.

"You don't get to see family and friends as often as you used to, but it's a really good community, very similar to the aged care resident's community, actually. Both of my grandmothers are about the same age (as Corpus residents). I haven't been able to visit them as much as I used to, so it is good to be able to still have that connection with the older generation. So many residents have had so many different things happen in their lives, and there's just so much that you can learn from them."

Fellow student Grace Burns, who is studying a Bachelor of Arts, says visiting Corpus is the "highlight of her day".

"I joined the program because I personally have seen the positive impact volunteering has made on the lives of aged care residents and I just wanted to be a part of that. Hearing what things were like back then and how that is impacting how things are now is really cool; it's allowed me to open up as a person."

Likewise, VMCH residents are enjoying the company.

"I have all my family all over the place on three continents," Sr. Bernadette Gauthier, aged 86, says. "So, they don't come very often."

Sr. Mary Jenkins, aged 90, adds, "For me, it's sort of like a breath of fresh air. I find young people give you a new life. You feel uplifted that young people are prepared to give their time and their energy to help us. I taught senior students in my tuition career, so I just love having new people around."

Both groups are discovering new skills, passions and appreciation for the other generation.

"One of the marvelous things for me is somebody to help me with my computer, so that's wonderful," Bernadette says.

Mary particularly enjoys the exercises.

"When I came in here the doctors had said I'd never walk again, so the activities are just so important. And having young people come in (to participate) is even better. That's why I like it very much."

VMCH CEO Sonya Smart describes the partnership as "exciting", with both organisations sharing a desire to make a difference in the world, and people's lives.

"We're looking forward to collaborating on other meaningful projects with Mannix College, which will profoundly enrich the lives of residents and clients, students, staff and volunteers, and advance the mission of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne."

India Wright, Mannix College Director of Academics & Employability, says: "At Mannix, we foster a vibrant living and learning community and it has been wonderful to witness how the Mannix Young Hearts program has enriched the lives of all involved through intergenerational learning and storytelling. The program staff have been excellent at matching our students' interests with opportunities to enhance authentic and lasting connections with the residents at VMCH Corpus Christi."

Andrew Swan, Principal of Mannix College, says the program is "creating opportunities to form meaningful relationships at a time when genuine connections can be rare in our busy, digital world".

Media enquiries

Cassie Zlonzak

Communications Manager

M: 0402 422 852

E: cassie.zlonzak@vmch.com.au