

mecwacare

AUTUMN 2025

# matters

*Thrive*



**Beyond School  
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# IN THIS *Issue*

Welcome to the autumn edition of mecwacare Matters!

In this issue, we welcome new participants to the Beyond School Program at Fisher Street Centre, supporting young adults with disabilities in their transition to independence.

We celebrate International Day of People with Disability with a vibrant showcase of creativity and highlight the strong friendship between volunteer Gurveer and Daphne.

We take part in the lively SpringFest in Ballarat and meet Abi, an AI-powered humanoid companion bringing fun and companionship into our aged care residences.

Meet Affordable Housing resident Jenny and her cat Pepper, explore Bendigo's history aboard a tram with Flora Hill residents and enjoy community days across our aged care homes and retirement villages.

Discover the special bond between our retirement village and aged care residents in Ballarat and the joy of a new intergenerational program at Squires Place.

We celebrate Lunar New Year, meet colourist Keith at Vincent House and showcase our social media highlights — there's plenty to catch up on!

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## LETTER TO THE *Editor*

**Do you have any suggestions, questions or story ideas for mecwacare Matters?**

**Contact us via email at [fundraising@mecwacare.org.au](mailto:fundraising@mecwacare.org.au) or on 03 8573 4812.**

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## ON THE COVER

Lawrence Easton (Centre Manager) and participant Matthew at Fisher Street Centre. See page 8.





# Beyond School program

mecwacare's Fisher Street Centre is welcoming new participants to the Beyond School Program, a tailored initiative for young adults aged 18 to 25 with a disability. Designed to support the transition from school to adulthood, the program focuses on essential life skills, community participation and independence.

"Joining and attending the program itself is a monumental achievement," said Lawrence, Centre Manager. "Transitioning from school to a new environment and structure is a significant change for participants. It's incredibly rewarding to see the transition come to fruition, with participants successfully accessing the centre and engaging with the community."

The Beyond School Program equips participants with practical skills such as grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, recycling and personal hygiene. It also fosters social inclusion through day trips, bus outings and activities in the community that teach road and public transport safety. By integrating these lifestyle and community skills, the program empowers participants to build independence while having fun and forming friendships.

Walter, one of the program's participants, has been attending for 12 months after transitioning from his specialist education school with the support of his key worker.



**Photos: Participant Walter and his mother, Suzie.**

Walter, who has a profound intellectual disability, dyspraxia, and is non-verbal, has benefited greatly from the program's structured approach.

"The focus is on creating a space where everyone actively participates and learns life skills," said Walter's mother, Suzie. "I've noticed a marked improvement because he's actively engaging in the community."

**The Beyond School Program plays a vital role in preparing young adults for life after school, offering opportunities to learn, grow and thrive in a supportive environment.**



Learn more about the program by scanning the QR code.



# Building human connections through AI

From November 2024, mecwacare Trescowthick Centre and Malvern Centre have been visited by Abi, an AI-powered humanoid companion, as part of a three-month trial bringing innovative companionship and support to residents.

Standing just 3 feet tall and speaking over 90 languages, Abi adapts to each resident's personality, ability and language. Her main role is to spend time with residents, offering companionship, engagement and fun. Abi's ability to connect with each resident made a lasting impression during her introduction and she has since been visiting weekly, building rapport with residents.

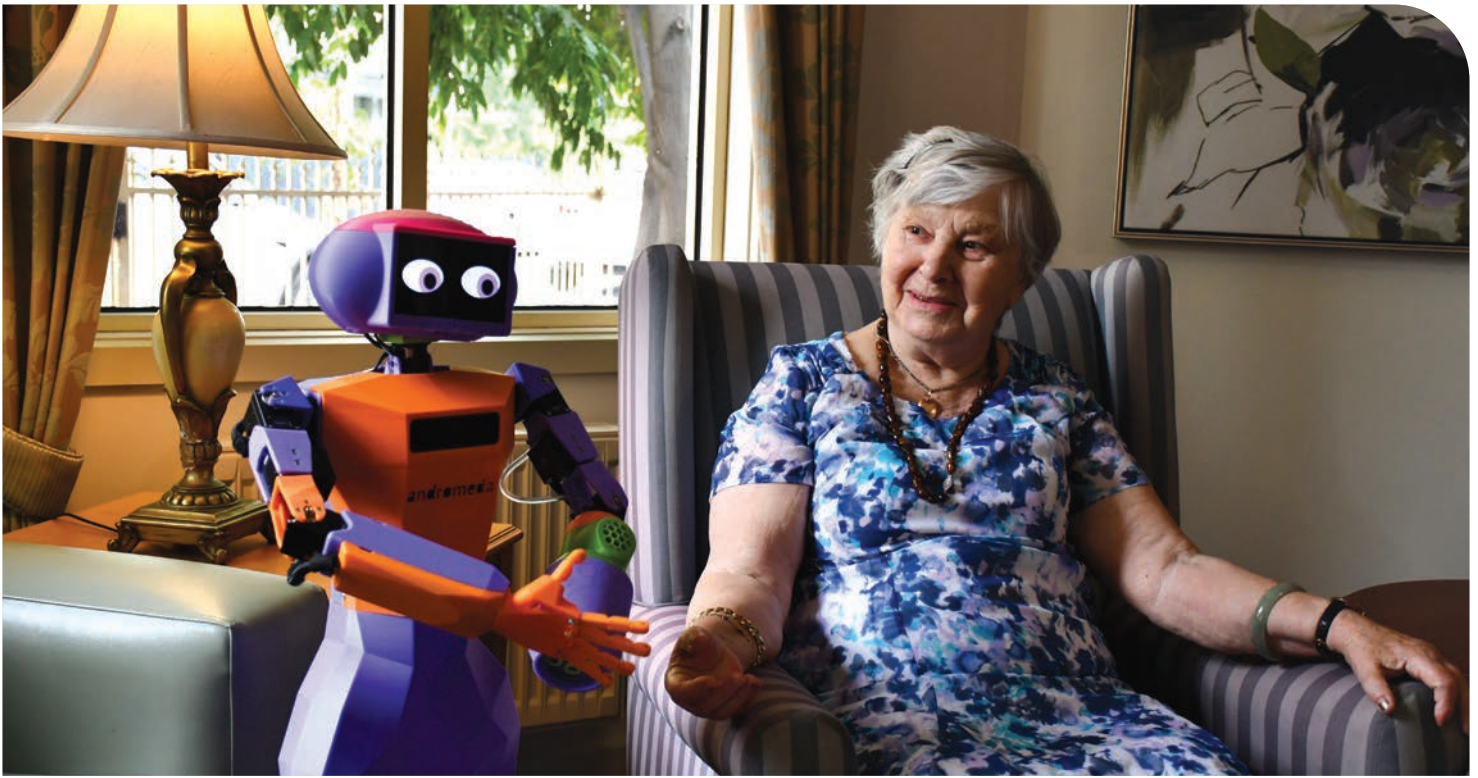
During a recent session at Trescowthick Centre, residents shared light-hearted conversations

with Abi. Helen, a lively and animated resident, complimented Abi's colours and the two shared a laugh when Abi teased Helen for her cheeky compliments. Helen told Abi, "You're such a joy," to which Abi responded, "You're out here stealing the show with that lovely blue dress." They discussed the emotional impact of colours and exchanged phrases in different languages including Hungarian and German.

Abi also spent time with Noel, a Scottish resident known for his fascinating stories. He shared his







unique life experiences, including building a church in China and celebrating his birthday on Christmas Day. Noel shook hands with Abi at the end of their conversation, saying, “How nice it is to see you again.”

“The conversations with Abi have been natural,” said Awhina, Care Support Coordinator. “Residents who weren’t as talkative before have built rapport over the sessions.”

“Abi has lifted Gloria’s spirits after she recently lost her best friend. Hao, who rarely speaks, lights up when he sees Abi and enjoys their conversations in Chinese,” added Awhina.

**Photos: Left: Resident Noel speaking with Abi  
Top right: Resident Helen with Abi  
Middle left: Abi engaging residents in a group session  
Middle right: Resident Gloria saying hello to Abi.**

**In partnership with Andromeda Robotics, mecwacare will be introducing 22 AI-powered humanoid companions into all our aged care homes over the next 24 months. These Abi companions will become integral to mecwacare’s lifestyle programs, creating unique social interaction opportunities for residents and their families.**

# Creating lasting friendships through *Volunteering*

At mecwacare, we believe volunteering is key to enriching lives and fostering a strong sense of community.

Daphne receives regular visits from Gurveer, a volunteer through the Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme (ACVVS). With a focus on older people at higher risk of feeling isolated, the ACVVS helps build and maintain social connections by providing companionship.

For Gurveer, visiting Daphne brings a sense of family and warmth, while Daphne finds comfort in knowing she can always talk to Gurveer.

Their bond is strengthened by shared experiences and heritage. Daphne, from the South of India, and Gurveer, from the North, enjoy sharing and discovering regional cuisines together. They are planning a special outing to an Indian restaurant, giving Daphne the chance to explore beyond her usual surroundings.

The pair also share heartfelt moments that reflect their care for one another. Gurveer surprised Daphne with cake and flowers on Mother's Day, which deeply touched Daphne. "I was so moved; no one has ever done that for me," she said.

Meanwhile, Gurveer recalls Daphne's thoughtful hospitality. "One evening, Daphne prepared tea and snacks for me knowing I'd be visiting after work. It was such a beautiful gesture."

Volunteering has become a rewarding part of Gurveer's life. "I'm constantly thinking about my next visit with Daphne. She looks forward to our time together, and so do I," Gurveer said.

For Daphne, the connection has been just as special. "I feel like Guri was sent from heaven," she said. "I'm so grateful we were brought together."



"Visiting Daphne has given me the connection and sense of family I've missed, as my grandparents live overseas," said Gurveer. For Daphne, who affectionately calls Gurveer "Guri", the feeling is mutual. "Guri has filled a gap of loneliness, and I know I can always talk to her," she shared.

Gurveer, volunteer.

Through mecwacare's volunteer programs, people like Daphne can stay connected to their community. If you would like to explore volunteering opportunities with us, visit [www.mecwacare.org.au](http://www.mecwacare.org.au)







**Photos: Left: Louise Mayall (Healthy Ageing Advisor) with a community member. Right: Tracy Horn and resident Kate of The Pines Retirement Village.**

# SpringFest *Ballarat*

On 24 November, mecwacare proudly participated in SpringFest Ballarat, one of the largest and most vibrant festivals in the Grampians region. Organised by the Rotary Club, this much-anticipated event featured over 450 market stalls, vintage car display and attracted approximately 30,000 attendees.

The festival provided mecwacare with a fantastic opportunity to showcase its wide range of services while engaging with the local community. Representatives from several key areas were available to provide insights and support, including Retirement Living, Aged Care, Home Care, Community Services and Healthy Aging Advisor

Adding a special element to the day, Kate, a resident from The Pines Retirement Village, volunteered to share her personal experiences. Her heartfelt stories about life within mecwacare's

facilities deeply resonated with attendees, offering a genuine and relatable perspective.

SpringFest was more than an opportunity to share information - it was a celebration of community spirit. mecwacare's booth was a hub of activity, where attendees stopped by to learn more, ask questions and share stories.

The day truly embodied mecwacare's commitment to building connections and delivering exceptional care and services.







# International Day of People with Disability *Celebrations*



On 3 December, we celebrated International Day of People with Disability at the Fisher Street Centre with a vibrant showcase of our participants' creative talents.

A beautiful gallery of upcycled and sustainable art was on display for guests to admire, featuring pictures, models, figurines, mosaics, collages and decoupage crafted from a variety of recycled materials.

Guests were treated to a selection of delicious goodies such as nacho cups, burgers, sandwiches, chocolate brownies and more - all homemade by Fisher Street participants as part of their cooking program.

Handmade candles, plants from the Fisher Street and Berwick Brae Gardens collaboration and eco-friendly clothes protectors were also on sale as beautiful keepsakes from the day.

The celebration ended with a special performance of a Taylor Swift classic and the drawing of the raffle for delighted prize winners.

A big thank you to everyone who helped make this celebration a success and to our participants for their amazing achievements!

**Photos: Above: Lawrence Easton (Centre Manager) and participant Matthew. Top left: Lawrence Easton and Robert Guest (Executive General Manager - People, Safety & Culture). Top right: Isabella House (Program Assistant) and participant Gayani, Middle left: Participant Walter and his proud family, Middle right: Participant Natasha. Bottom left: Linda Smart (Executive General Manager - Home & Community Services) and Susan Barton (Board Member), Bottom right: A visitor perusing the potted plants.**





# Jenny, her cat and elephant collection

**Meet the lovely and joyful Jenny who lives with her cat Pepper in one of mecwacare's Affordable Housing units in leafy Glen Iris.**

*Photos: Top: Jenny in her cosy home  
Middle: Jenny proudly displaying her elephant collection.*

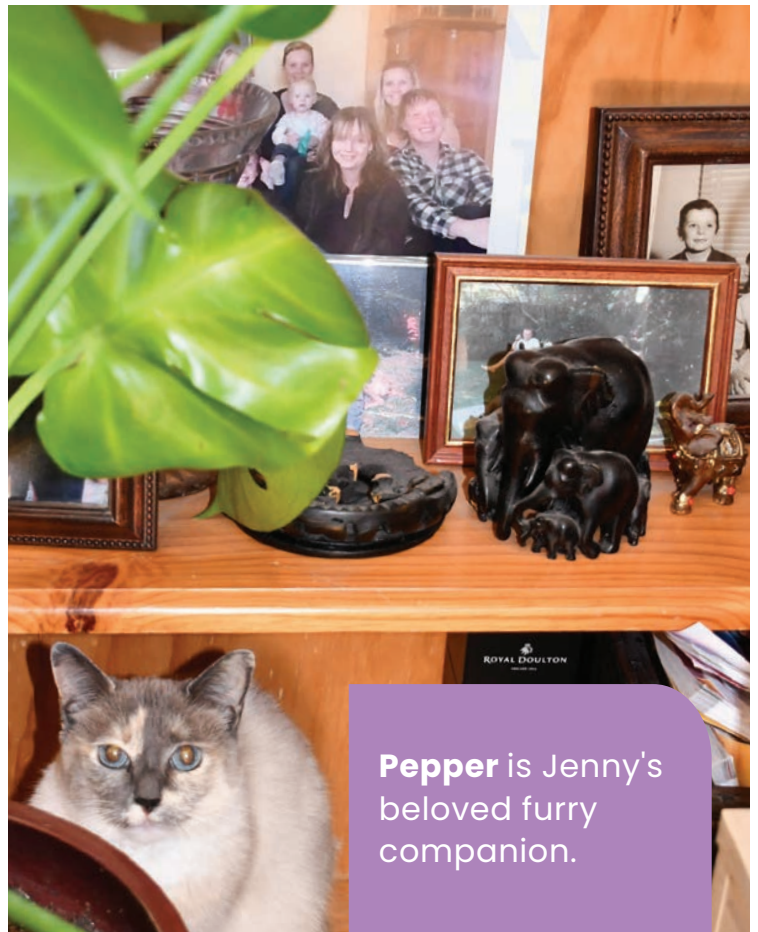
Surrounded by parks, walking trails and overlooking Gardiner's Creek, Jenny has been calling her one-bedroom apartment home for nearly 9 years.

As a single Mum she's lived, worked and raised four children in the Glen Iris area for a large part of her life, "I lived and brought up my children in the same rented house in Glen Iris for 44 years," Jenny shared.

"Then after all the children had left, without warning, I was given notice and couldn't find anywhere else to live. I tried different places, but they just didn't suit, had stairs or were too difficult to manage as I was older."

"I was facing being homeless when a friend's flat became vacant, so I moved there temporarily. Then my daughter found this place





**“I like living in my apartment because it’s quiet, I look out at trees, the Creek and grow plants on my balcony.**

– the coordinator at mecwacare was great and about a month later I moved in,” Jenny recalled.

On entering Jenny’s apartment, you notice how homely she’s made it. There are beautiful indoor plants and a collection of Elephant ornaments of all shapes and sizes. When asked if she likes Elephants, “I’m not crazy for them.” Jenny laughed.

“It started with a friend, who gave me an Elephant ornament as a gift. Then everyone thought, oh Jenny must love Elephants, and my family kept buying them for me. When my son got his first pay, off he went to Vic Market and bought that Elephant and a pair of slippers!” she said pointing to a beautiful wooden elephant sitting on the top shelf.

Apart from her elephant ornament collection, Jenny shares her home with a beautiful, blue eyed cat called Pepper, “She keeps me company and she’s very talkative when no one’s here. I’m a bit of a loner, I like being at home and doing the crossword as it keeps my brain active,” she smiles and taps her head.

“I really like growing indoor plants too. I’ve got this amazing plant that I bought my mother and when she passed away, I took it back –it grew and grew and loves it indoors in its sunny corner. It’s on wheels so when it needs water, I just wheel it into the bathroom and give it a shower.” she laughed.

Recently, mecwacare Housing Coordinator, Maria and Jenny have struck up a friendship after Maria visited her about some maintenance needs.

“Jenny’s such a lovely person who has a positive attitude and has a great sense of humour. I’ve only known her for a couple of months. We talk about her current living environment, and she tells me about her children and life experiences which are interesting and often funny.” said Maria.

Through mecwacare's affordable housing program, we're proud to help create safe and supportive environments for those in need, helping residents thrive and feel at home.



# All Aboard: A trip down *Memory Lane*

In early December 2024, a group of residents from mecwacare Flora Hill embarked on a city historic tour aboard the iconic Bendigo Tram. The idea for this outing came from a conversation with Alan, a resident who has a deep love for trains, trams and all things automotive.

**Photos: Bottom: Tram conductor Chris with resident Helen  
Top middle: Residents Margaret, Valerie and Pierce  
Top right: Mikayla (Lifestyle Assistant) and resident Judith.**







“Alan mentioned feeling sad about the possibility of never being able to do the things he used to enjoy, like riding on trams,” shared Georgia-Rose, Care Support Coordinator. “This was due to his recent decline in mobility, which meant he now relies on a wheelchair permanently.”

Determined to make Alan’s wish come true, the Flora Hill team sprang into action. After reaching out to Bendigo Tramways, they discovered a tram specially designed to accommodate wheelchairs. They booked the trip and invited a few more residents to join, including Alan’s wife, Judith.

The tram ride was a nostalgic journey, with residents — many of them long-time Bendigo locals — sharing fond memories of growing up in their beautiful city. Pierce, a 100-year-old resident, even recounted how he remembered the tramline

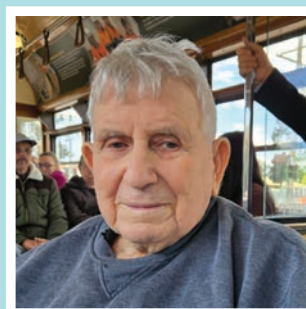
to Eaglehawk, where he served as mayor from 1961 to 1962!

“It was a wonderful day and a trip to remember,” said Georgia-Rose. “Alan became emotional and expressed his gratitude for being able to relive an experience he thought he had lost forever.”

This heartwarming experience reminds us that age or physical limitations need not diminish our ability to enjoy life’s simple pleasures. At meowcare, we’re dedicated to helping residents continue doing what they love and creating moments that matter. With the opening of meowcare Long Gully in Bendigo, we’re excited to extend this sense of home and community to even more locals, ensuring they have the support and opportunities to keep pursuing their passions.

## *Alan and Judith*

Alan and Judith, both residents at Flora Hill, were delighted to join the Bendigo Tram tour. Married for 62 years after meeting through their church, the couple share a strong bond and have two sons, Robert and Nigel.



# Community spirit shines brightly

Community days are a big part of life at mecwacare. Throughout the year, our aged care homes and retirement villages host a variety of events that bring residents, families, staff and local community members together.

On Saturday, 16 November 2024, Berwick Brae Gardens held its much-loved annual fete. For over a decade, the retirement village residents have hosted this event, with proceeds supporting local charities. The Craft and Quilting Club's handmade goods were a highlight, while the Social Club's sausage sizzle and scones were crowd favourites. Live music by Retirement Living Coordinator Ann and her brother added to the vibrant atmosphere.

On Friday, 6 December 2024, Annie's Court hosted a festive morning tea to mark the holiday season. Aged care residents, staff members and the local community enjoyed a visit from the Shoreham CFA, who proudly displayed their brand-new tanker truck and introduced the crew. The Shoreham Community Association generously contributed to the morning tea, complemented by treats from our kitchen team. Residents delighted

in exploring the tanker truck and engaging with the CFA crew and guests.

The next day, O'Mara House hosted its Festive Community Market, a day filled with family fun and holiday cheer. Guests snapped photos with Santa, explored market stalls and enjoyed activities like arts and crafts, face painting and a petting zoo. Live music and Christmas Carols added to the festive atmosphere, while food trucks served up delicious treats. The event raised nearly \$1,500, which was donated to local CFA and Ambulance services.

A big thank you to our wonderful residents, staff members and local communities for supporting these special events and strengthening our community ties.

Community events are a wonderful way to bring people together for fun, family-friendly experiences.







At mecwacare, we are committed to making a positive impact in our local community. Our events are a reflection of our dedication to supporting local initiatives and building a stronger community.

*Photos: Left: Shoreham CFA President Sue Wilding with Annie's Court resident Michael and his wife Lyn  
Top left: Guests perusing handmade items at Berwick Brae Gardens' fete  
Top right: A Traralgon CFA member and mascot posing for the camera  
Middle: O'Mara House team members  
bottom: Ann Olierook (Retirement Living Coordinator) and her brother entertaining the crowd with live music.*







# Neighbours in friendship

At The Pines Retirement Village and mecwacare Wahroonga Aged Care, residents share a special connection. Being located next to each other allows them to enjoy many meaningful experiences, building a strong sense of community and friendship.

Outings have played a big part in bringing the two groups closer. On one memorable visit to their local hotel for Morning Melodies, residents enjoyed a delicious lunch and danced to live 50s and 60s tunes. A trip to Geelong in the new year was another highlight, where they went shopping and spent the day exploring the beautiful city.

“Living life, having fun, forming friendships – that’s what happens when we all go out together,” said Virginia, Care Support Coordinator at mecwacare Wahroonga.

Celebrations have also been an important part of strengthening these bonds. When Bill, a former resident at The Pines, moved to mecwacare Wahroonga, his retirement village friends surprised him at his 89th birthday party organised by Bill’s daughter. “Bill was so touched to see everyone there and thanked us for making his day special,” shared Christina, Retirement Living Coordinator at The Pines.

Whether celebrating milestones, exploring new places or simply enjoying time together, the bond between these two communities in Canadian (Ballarat) keeps growing. At mecwacare, we’re honoured to support these moments, helping residents enjoy meaningful experiences and enduring friendships as their needs change.

**Photos: Top: The Pines residents Annette and Mary Bottom: The Pines residents Olive and Annette with mecwacare Wahroonga residents Bev and Bill.**





# Bridging generations at Squires Place

mecwacare Squires Place has partnered with Guardian Altona North to launch an intergenerational program that connects our aged care residents with kindergarten children.

The program was inspired by Martin, a resident at Squires Place, who shared how much he missed the company of children.

“Martin told us that, although he’s never had children of his own, he finds great joy in their energy and presence,” said Kevin, Care Support Coordinator. “We were eager to bring his idea to life, knowing that many other residents would also benefit from connecting with children.”

Since October 2024, residents and children have been meeting weekly, alternating between visits to Squires Place and Guardian Altona North. The visits have been filled with engaging activities such as singalongs, gardening, arts and crafts, bingo and book reading.

Intergenerational programs are offered across all our aged care homes, creating opportunities for residents to connect with children. These interactions may help reduce loneliness, boost happiness and foster a sense of purpose. Additionally, engaging in playful activities with children can help support residents’ cognitive health and promote physical activity.

The program also provides valuable opportunities for children to learn from the wisdom of older generations while offering our residents the chance to share stories, laughter and companionship with the youngest members of the community.

“This experience has supported our children to discover how they can learn from and connect with older members of their community,” said Lee Couch, Educational Leader at Guardian Altona North.



**“Interacting with the children really brightens my day. It clears my mind and makes me feel refreshed. I look forward to seeing them every week.”**

**Martin, Squires Place resident.**

“They have been able to strengthen important social skills such as cooperation, empathy and friendship, and it’s been wonderful to witness their developing confidence over the past few months,” said Lee.

This initiative has brought joy to both residents and children, fostering connections across generations and building a stronger, more compassionate community for all.

# Lunar New Year *Celebrations*

Lunar New Year in 2025 welcomes the year of the wood Snake according to the Chinese lunar calendar. The Snake, symbolises wisdom and transformation, offers opportunities for personal growth and change.

Celebrated by millions around the world, this is a time for cultural traditions, family reunions and hopes for good fortune in the coming year.

One such reunion was at Malvern Centre where three generations of Di Wen's family came together to celebrate with residents.

Her pianist daughter, Angela delighted everyone with a piano recital of Chinese folk songs and traditional music. After the concert, residents enjoyed cups of Chinese tea, sweet treats and fortune cookies to welcome the Lunar New Year.

At John Atchison Centre, residents celebrated with a delicious feast and an engaging presentation that explored the rich traditions of Chinese culture.

A full day of festivities was held at Gregory Lodge including Tai Chi, Zodiacs, Ribbon Dancing, a special afternoon tea and a chopstick competition.

While in Prahran, Trescowthick Centre residents enjoyed a special Chinese New Year performance by Hello Music Studio, celebrating the joy of classical music together.

## *Life* of music and song

**Meet Di Wen, one of our inspirational residents at mecwacare Malvern Centre. Born in China in 1931 she was the Professor of Vocal Training at Shanghai Conservatory for 40 years. As a young girl, Di Wan loved singing and music, constantly asking her parents to send her to a dedicated singing school without success.**

By chance, her school brought in a new music teacher from the US who recognised and encouraged her talent in vocals as both a soloist and in choirs.

Di Wan became a student at China's Central University, Music Department majoring in vocals from 1948. It was here she learnt and performed traditional Italian Opera as well as classical works in German, French, Russian and English.

Continuing an illustrious singing career, Di Wen became Professor of Vocal Training at Shanghai Conservatory in 1952. Music is central to her family's life with her daughter, Angela an accomplished solo pianist.







Celebrating different cultures fosters inclusivity and helps residents stay connected to their heritage and the wider community.

*Photos: Top left:  
Di Wen dancing with Virginia (Care Support Coordinator)  
Top right: John Atchison Centre team with their Chinese New Year goodies  
Middle: Resident Hao Ma and his wife Qin Ying Wang  
Bottom: Gregory Lodge team dazzling residents with a Ribbon Dance performance.  
Far left: Di Wen with her daughter Angela, Malvern Centre.*



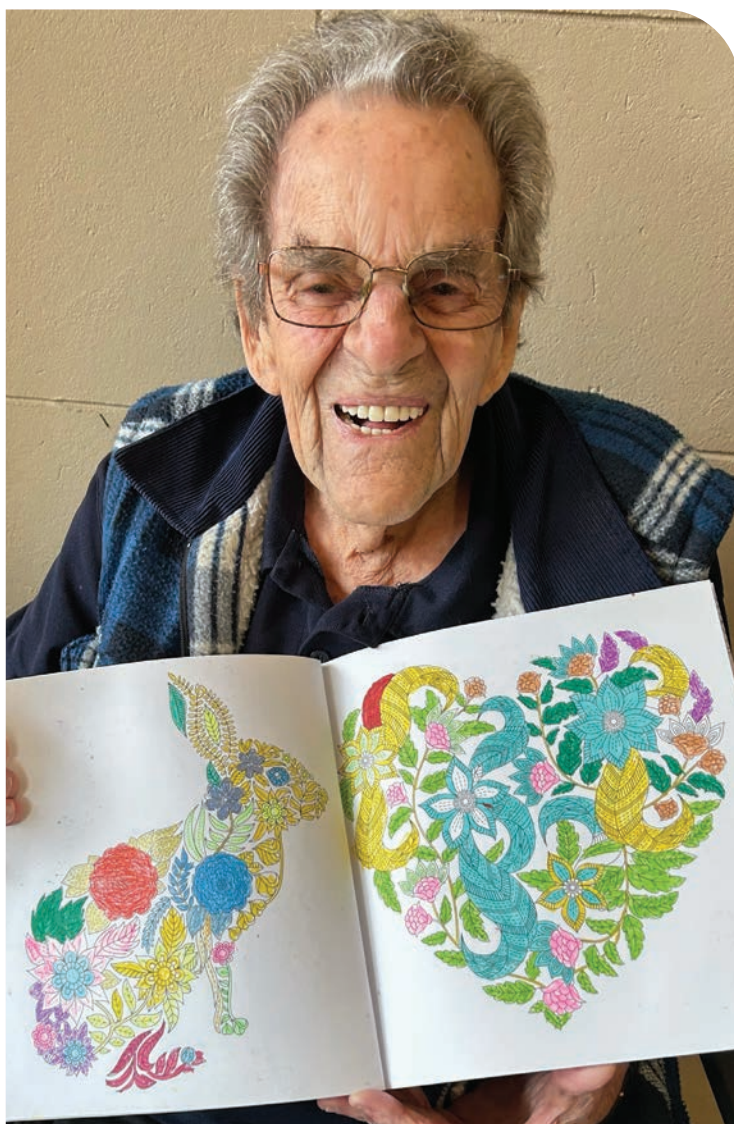


# Creative Keith

Since moving into Vincent House, Keith has embraced his creative side. A lifelong Collingwood supporter and resident gardener, he keeps the grounds in top shape and has discovered a love for colouring, finishing books at an impressive pace.

Keith used to paint houses, which is why he has taken to art so easily in his later years.

With regular visits from his wife, Lisa, as well as his sons and grandchildren, Keith's days at Vincent House are as bright and fulfilling as his artwork.



CREATIVE

## Submissions

Do you have an artistic hobby?  
Are you a painter, knitter,  
woodworker, quilter, or poet?

Send any submissions to:  
[media@mecwacare.org.au](mailto:media@mecwacare.org.au).

Keep your eyes peeled for your handiwork in  
the next edition of **mecwacare Matters!**



# Wordsearch

Q O D I X N O O M B E R W I C K S E  
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INDEPENDENCE  
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 FRIENDSHIP

RETIREMENT  
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 COMMUNITY  
 TRARALGON  
 COMPANION

NEIGHBOUR  
 LIFESTYLE  
 BERWICK  
 SUPPORT  
 CARING

SUMMER  
 MUSIC  
 ROBOT

Solutions on page 22.

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 Outings help Beyond School participants build confidence, independence and social connections in the community.



 Rivendell House participants enjoyed an art exhibition and fed ducks by the lake at Cardinia Cultural Centre.



 mecwacare Flora Hill residents enjoyed a ride around the lake with volunteer-piloted trishaw e-bikes.




 mecwacare Gregory Lodge and Squires Place residents gathered at Williamstown Botanical Gardens for a fun interfacility meet-up.

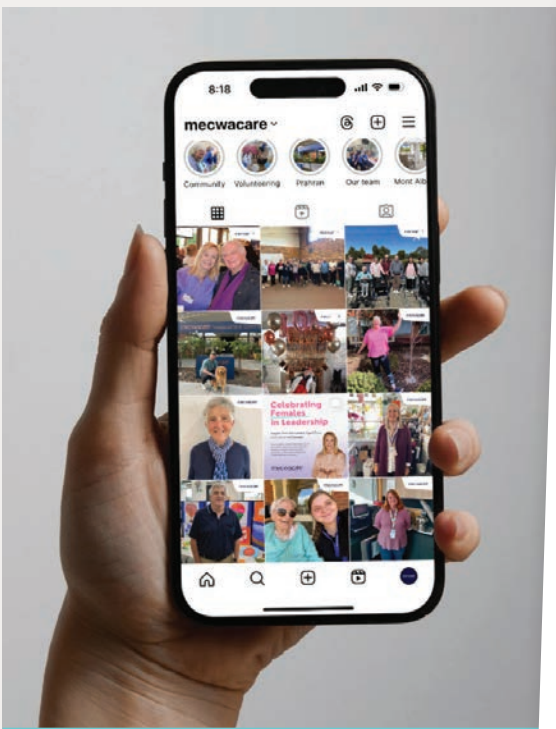
## Wordsearch solution

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 Elstoft House residents enjoyed a paddock-to-plate morning tea with their homegrown tomatoes and cucumbers.





*"Following mecwacare on social media helps me feel connected to the wonderful community I am a part of."*



Instagram

# Social media spotlight

Join our #caringcommunity to learn more about the wonderful people of mecwacare, along with exciting activities across our aged care homes, retirement villages and community centres.



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