

Keystone

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Zest for life

Centennial Lodge resident
Robbie O'Brien breaks down
barriers for the disabled

Community connections

Mount Martha Valley residents
get creative at Bunnings

Giving back

Former school teacher Evie
Cassimatis volunteers her time
and skills at Elizabeth Gardens



Message from our CEO

Dear residents, clients, family and friends,

I am delighted to launch our very first Keystone magazine, a quarterly publication featuring inspiring stories from across our community.

The name Keystone is derived from our logo, which symbolises the way our values and 157-year-old heritage of caring for older Victorians holds together and fortifies, like a keystone, the services that we provide in Residential Aged Care, In-home Support and Independent Living.

In the pages of this magazine, I hope you will be encouraged by the stories from across the organisation that showcase the amazing people in our care and the positive impact our services have on their lives. You will also hear from our staff members about why they love working at Royal Freemasons and the unique contribution they make.

At Royal Freemasons we have so much to reflect on and celebrate. This magazine is an opportunity for you to share and celebrate with us — enjoy!



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A life of spirit, resilience and determination



At Royal Freemasons, we are privileged to care for many people who have lived extraordinary lives, and Robbie O'Brien, a resident at our Centennial Lodge aged care home in Wantirna South, is no exception.

Born with cerebral palsy, Robbie has always had a determined desire for independence, which has driven him to make life-changing modifications for people with disabilities at a time when there was great ignorance and indifference about their lived experience.

In the 1980s, when he sold newspapers in the city, Robbie found the simple act of moving from the road to the pavement near impossible with his scooter as there were few

access points apart from driveways. "I rode on the road. I had no choice," he says.

Rightly frustrated, Robbie lodged a complaint with Melbourne City Council and kept lobbying them until changes were made. As a result, many more kerb cuts were installed in Melbourne city streets to make the transition from road to pavement accessible for people with disabilities. Robbie also successfully advocated for the introduction of portable ramps on trains for people in wheelchairs.

Over the years, Robbie has continued his important advocacy work for people with disabilities, serving on the executive board of committees in numerous organisations.

But Robbie's proudest achievement was marrying the love of his life, Jeanie, in 1978 — the first disabled couple to get married in Australia. The two of them met while they were



residents at Rattray-Wood House. Because of many naysayers and the pressure of societal disapproval, getting to the altar proved to be a fight, but they made it and enjoyed four precious years of married life until Jeanie sadly passed away in the early 1980s.

As Robbie writes in his memoir, "Before we met, Jeanie and I had lived a life defined by acknowledging our limitations and managing our expectations. It was the last thing either of us could have expected, falling in love as we did. It was certainly the last thing anyone around us anticipated, but from that moment on, there were no limitations, and our expectations were only as big as our imagination."



While Robbie's mobility has declined over the years, his zest for life has not. Just ask his good friend Bob who visits him twice a week at Centennial Lodge, "Robbie has a great sense of humour; he's really funny, and he's really determined and relentless," says Bob.

Robbie's determined spirit shines through his own words as he reflects on his great love and life:

"My name is Robert O'Brien...I loved and still love my wife so much that I fought for years for the right to marry her...I have clashed with Melbourne City Council on many acts of supporting the disabled community...I sold literally a million Herald Suns from my street corner... I have sat on the executive board of a number of committees across dozens of organisations. I still attend church every week. Last and most definitely least, I have a disability."

“

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Cooking for comfort



When Centennial Lodge Chef Rene Horton began her career, she never aspired to work in the aged care industry but now, after an impressive ten years of working at Royal Freemasons, she wouldn't dream of doing anything else.

Growing up in South Africa, Rene always knew that she wanted to become a chef because it was so much part of her family culture. "I grew up in a house where we were always baking, pickling things, making chutney, and cooking roasts," she says. "So, it was just part of growing up. I always loved cooking. I tried a few other different things before I became a chef, but I would always come back to it; it was something that was just part of me."

Rene is deeply passionate about creating a satisfying food experience for residents. While most of her time is spent in the kitchen, she relishes the opportunity to meet residents from across the home so she can grasp what they love to eat.

"At lunch times I normally like to go out and have a chat with the residents. I do have an admin day every second week and that is another time when I try to get around the home and talk to people, do surveys and find out what they like to eat."

"I love meeting all the residents, people from all different walks of life, people from India and China. They come with all these different stories, and I love cooking dishes that are familiar to them."

Each seasonal menu is formulated with feedback from these interactions, the food focus group attended by residents and their representatives, as well as input from other chef managers, the executive and a dietician. Different tastes, dietary requirements and texture levels all need to be catered for to create meals that are nutritional, varied, tasty and appealing to the eye.

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I love cooking dishes that are familiar to them.”

While drafting the menu is a complex process, at the end of the day, Rene is passionate about cooking food that is well-loved by residents. "I'm aiming for comfort when I cook. People feel comforted by food that they have grown up with, that they're familiar with," says Rene.

"I had a resident who said, 'I'm never going to have the congee I had when I was growing up.' And I said 'Well, give me the recipe and I can try making it.' She absolutely loved it and her daughter used to bring it in every day from a restaurant but eventually she said, 'Please don't bring the one from the restaurant because I love the one that is being made here.' So, that sort of thing is wonderful."

Among the residents' favourite foods are chops, roasts, curries, fish and chips, and this banana bread recipe, which Rene has kindly shared. We hope you enjoy making it.



Centennial Lodge's favourite banana bread



Ingredients

- 120g butter
- 150g sugar
- 2 eggs
- 4 ripe bananas
- 15ml lemon juice
- 240g of self-raising flour
- 2ml salt
- 5ml bicarb soda
- 30ml milk

Method

Cream the butter and sugar together. Add the eggs and mix well

Mash the bananas with the lemon juice. Add to the butter mixture.

Sift the flour, salt and bicarb soda together. Mix into the butter mixture with the milk to make a batter.

Pour into lined small loaf pan. Bake for approximately one hour at 180 degrees.

Cool in the pan for at least 15 minutes before removing. The flavour will be best when the loaf has completely cooled.

Teaching an older generation



Retired school teacher, Evie, is delighted to be using her skills in her volunteer role at our Elizabeth Gardens home in Burwood, where she holds art classes for the residents every Tuesday afternoon.

With her mum, Nellie, in care at Elizabeth Gardens, Evie felt compelled to contribute her time and skills for the benefit of other residents. “I had just retired as a school teacher when we put mum into care here and I felt it was important to give back to the community. I also wanted to encourage mum to get involved in activities,” says Evie.

Evie organises a range of creative activities for the residents, including watercolours, creating paper lanterns and weaving activities — easy, engaging activities for all abilities that can be enjoyed by many.

“As a primary school teacher, whatever I used to do with the students is what I do with the residents as well. I create simple and enjoyable activities for them.”

“I just hope they get some enjoyment out of the art classes, and they also get the opportunity to talk to the other residents as well.”

The residents look forward to the chance to get creative each week. As resident Syliva says: “I love painting. I come to the group every week and look forward to it.”

Evie loves her volunteering work and finds the process of planning the art session and getting to know the residents very rewarding.

“I get a lot of enjoyment from planning the arts and craft sessions for residents. I just find it very rewarding. It’s nice to know that you’re helping people and it’s lovely to get to know them too — many of them have had very interesting lives,” she says.

Because she is at the home most days visiting her mum, Evie also helps with bingo on Wednesdays and anything else the Lifestyle team needs assistance with.

If you would like to become a volunteer, scan the QR code to register your interest.



Evie is just one of our army of more than 40 volunteers who work across our Residential Aged Care homes giving support and companionship to those in our care. She has been volunteering at Elizabeth Gardens for three years and would recommend it to anyone.

“I would highly recommend volunteering in aged care. It is rewarding and you get to meet interesting people beyond your own age group who have a lot of interesting stories to tell. It also gives you a sense of purpose and it’s great to give back to the community.”





Monash Gardens Christmas Carol evening



Residents and families enjoy Christmas celebrations



Footscray resident, Tra, celebrates his 102nd birthday



Horse therapy at Coppin Centre



Elizabeth Gardens residents enjoy an armchair trip to Kenya



Lunar New Year celebrations at Footscray



Magic show at Springtime

Planting joy in residents' hearts



In the lead up to Christmas, residents from our Mount Martha Valley home in Safety Beach paid a special visit to Rosebud Bunnings to get creative and reconnect with the things they love to do — craft and gardening.

Under the expert guidance of Bunnings Activities Organiser, Marlene, the residents quickly got busy painting terracotta pots and bejewelling them with a generous dose of sparkly glitter.

Marlene says, “The workshop is part of our community programs. We run various community workshops during the week, and we also go out to different community groups and not-for-profit organisations to paint, plant or build.”

While giving the pots a chance to dry, the residents tucked in to a festive feast of cupcakes and mince pies, then it was time to plant the pots with velvety crimson and green poinsettias.

Resident Pam took charge of planting out all the pots. A keen gardener her whole life, Pam also has a little green patch at Mount Matha Valley which she works in regularly. “I love gardening. I’ve really enjoyed today,” she says.

Resident Jean was so overwhelmed by the beauty of her finished pot that she burst into tears. “I’m so glad I came — I’ve had a marvellous time. I’m crying because I’m so happy,” she says.



The outing is just one of many events organised by Mount Martha Valley’s Lifestyle team, which includes trips to the beach for fish and chips, the Mornington Botanical Rose Gardens, rides on



the Arthur’s Seat Eagle cable car and monthly kindergarten visits. Outings are organised for four days of the week, giving residents every opportunity to get out and about in the community.



It’s maintaining the connection to community that makes these events so important. As Mount Martha Valley Resident Wellbeing Assistant, Gessica, says, “These outings keep the residents in contact with everyday life and give them a chance to interact with and bump into old friends in the community as well as making new connections. It gives them the opportunity to do something different or something that they used to do, like gardening. Importantly, these outings remind residents that they remain a valued part of the community.”

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Staying happy at home

When Maree returned home from hospital after breaking her shoulder, it was Royal Freemasons who gave her the In-home Support she needed to cope with everyday living after her operation.

That was more than ten years ago and Maree, now 84, is still living independently at home with the help of our team. They are an integral part of her routine, providing support every two weeks with washing, cleaning and making her bed, and assisting with shopping. Maree also receives help with meals.

Now recovering from a recent hip replacement, Maree couldn't live without the help she receives from Royal Freemasons through her Support at

Home package. "It would be difficult for me to cope without the home care," she says. "It has a lot of benefits. Physically it helps me to get things done – getting up and down the stairs when I couldn't use my hip much, and the transport help is very valuable because I wouldn't normally have anyone to take me."

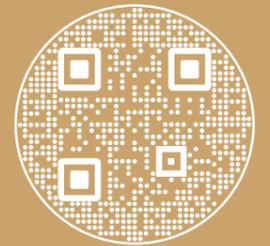
Importantly, the support enables Maree to keep living at home and doing the things she loves like her weekly craft group and playing the keyboard with her music therapist. "I like to be independent," says Maree. "I like to decide what I do with my time."

To Maree, it's not just the practical help she gets from the team that makes a difference but also the emotional support. "The office staff are lovely and Annie, my case manager, is very, very supportive, and I feel as though I have a family again. I do feel I have someone with whom I can chat. The whole service is physically and emotionally helpful."

“ I feel as though I have family again.”

Want to know more about our In-home Support services?

Scan the QR code to register your interest.



Giving gifts of joy to the lonely at Christmas time



While Christmas is now a distant memory, the joy and gratitude felt by those who received gifts in our 2025 Christmas Gift Appeal still remains.

Running for three years, the Christmas Gift appeal is a special fundraiser for people in our care who, through different circumstances, find themselves alone at Christmas time.

We are particularly mindful of these people during the festive season, when feelings of loneliness can be more intense. Our staff do their utmost to make sure they feel cared for and loved, and the Christmas Gift Appeal is a central part of that effort, enabling us to buy them personalised gifts tailored to their particular interests and tastes — gifts to give them joy.



Last year, we were overwhelmed by the generosity of donors and delighted to raise ample funds to purchase generous gifts for more than 80 of our aged care residents and In-home Support clients.

As soon as donations closed for the appeal, our Lifestyle staff got busy shopping for just the right present for each person. Among the thoughtfully chosen gifts were beautiful picture books, watches, jewellery, scarves, hats, and handbags.



Then there was the joy of giving the gifts to each of the residents and seeing their reactions. This is always a priceless moment — filled with smiles, surprise, delight, and even tears — as they realise they have been thought of in such a special way.

Footscray Lifestyle Coordinator, Emma, says “The Christmas Gift Appeal really makes a difference in the residents’ lives. It brings a real sense of connection and belonging. For residents who are on their own, receiving a gift reminds them that they are part of a caring community.”

To those of you who donated, we thank you once again for your compassion and support. Your generosity has brought dignity and happiness to those who needed it most at Christmas.



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From fun daytrips to creative projects, your support will help us deliver activities and programs that make a meaningful difference to the people in our care.



If you would like to donate to Royal Freemasons, please visit royalfreemasons.org.au/donations or snap the QR code.



Do you have a story to tell?

We are always looking for heartwarming and inspiring stories about residents, clients and staff. If you would like to share your story, please email us at marketing@royalfreemasons.org.au



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