

# The Community Visitors Scheme



## 30 Years of Friendship

Funded by the Australian Government

The CVS does make a difference. It brings a smile on their faces and improves the quality of life for the elderly. The CVS, and volunteering, is an avenue for a better community.

I can't think of a better or more worthwhile way to spend an hour or so of my time each week than visiting with this lovely lady and making her smile.

We often underestimate the power of touch, a listening ear, or even a smile.

I believe that we all need to share our lives in doing good to others

Volunteering is not a one-way activity. In my case, my most significant gain is in gaining friendships and having more comprehensive experiences with others.

Go in with an open mind and be a patient person. Everyone is different, be yourself and be courteous and respectful.

one day I'll be old, and I'd like people to treat me with respect and compassion

It is the honour to be able to an active participant in someone's life and hopefully make a difference in their day.

Volunteering has taught me that no act of kindness is too small and that when we help others, we help ourselves too.

I hope my friendship adds value and makes life better and lighter for other people.

I like to think I bring a bit of sparkle to her week, as she most certainly does mine

I love that I can just have reflection time, it is peaceful, and I can go slow when I visit with her.

Volunteering has taught me that no act of kindness is too small and that when we help others, we help ourselves too

I treasure having the opportunity to be a friend to my older friends and providing emotional support where I can

I consider myself fortunate to have met my friend as she has helped fill the void left by my late mother of a wise and strong female presence

## **30 Years of Friendship**

The Community Visitors Scheme is an Australian Government Initiative that commenced in 1992/93. To commemorate and celebrate our 30 years of friendships organisations across the ACT, NSW and Victoria have compiled incredibly heart-warming stories of friendships between volunteer visitors and older people and the difference it has made in the lives of the volunteer visitors and their older friends.

Each story is unique and special in its own way. This program encapsulates all that is good in humankind and reminds us all, that despite what challenges we may face, however busy we might all be, what matters most, is the positive difference, the joy, we can bring to other people's lives with the simple gift of time, patience, and kindness.

Thank you to the thousands of Community Visitors Scheme Volunteers across Australia who visit and spend time with their older friend. Your friendship has ensured that many older people at risk of loneliness and isolation have felt the warmth that your friendship brings.

We hope you enjoy 30 Years of Friendship and ask that you share with friends and family. Maybe you would like to join the Community Visitors Scheme team and contribute like our amazing volunteers? If so, please contact the State Network member in each of your States or Territories <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/community-visitors-scheme-cvs-0/community-visitor-scheme-contacts>

If you would like to watch stories of friendship please visit <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/community-visitors-scheme-cvs-0/community-visitors-scheme-resources>

### **Esis**

Esis Tawfik

CVS State Network Member – ACT, NSW, and Vic.

*Please note – Stories of friendship have been submitted by volunteers, coordinators, and older people. Some stories are told in the first person and others in the third person. They have been kept true to the author's voice.*

*Thank you to the following Organisations for their contribution to this commemorative book celebrating CVS 30 Years of Friendship.*

*Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau  
Anglicare  
Australian Multicultural Community Services  
Australian Red Cross  
Australian-Filipino Community Services  
Belong Blue Mountains Community and Neighbourhood Services  
Catholic Healthcare  
Centacare Bathurst  
Central Bayside Community Health Services  
Chinese Australian Services Society  
Co.As.It.  
Combined Pensioners & Superannuants Association of NSW Inc  
Greek Welfare Centre Community Services  
Hammond Care  
In Great Company  
Inclusee  
JoCare  
Latrobe Community Health Services  
Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury  
Linked Community Services  
Live Better  
Manning Support Services  
Many Rooms  
Melbourne City Mission  
MiCare  
Mosaic  
MS Plus  
Multicultural Care  
Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra  
Northern Health  
NSW Health Sydney Local Health District  
Polish Community Council of Victoria  
Sapphire Coast  
Smile on Seniors  
Southern Migrant & Refugee Centre  
St George Careers Development Centre  
Switchboard  
Sydney Community Services  
Sydney Multicultural Community Services  
The Centre  
United Spanish Latin American Welfare Centre  
Western Sydney MRC  
Whittlesea Community Connections*

# Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau

## **Volunteer Dom and her friend Andrew**

I have been contacting Andrew since June of 2020. Yep, right in the middle of the Covid outbreak.

I was looking for a volunteer opportunity for several reasons, one of which was that I, like the rest of us, was going a little bit crazy at home, and needed human interaction; so, I contacted the VRB and was paired with a wonderful gentleman named Andrew. Very quickly our conversations lengthened with weekly phone calls and included lots of laughter and deep and meaningful conversations thrown in!

Covid was, and still is a tough time for everyone, and it made me realise we all want and need social connection, and simply having a cuppa and chat with someone does this. It can give both parties a sense of well-being and enjoyment. It certainly did for me amid the Covid stresses, and I hope it did the same for Andrew. Andrew lives alone and has lost most of his eyesight so getting out and about in the community is not an option without support. His family live in Melbourne, so he is quite isolated and lonely with care staff his only contacts. COVID made this worse with the restrictions that were in place.



He says that as his visitor, he has been given a lifeline! Before we became friends, during Covid, Andrew had no visitors so our phone calls were important and soon grew to weekly calls lasting anything up to two or three hours chatting about all sorts of things and sharing laughs. They were important to me and it is amazing how quickly the time passes.

When asked about Dom, Andrew said "She has become part of my family. She is "bloody" brilliant. In a nutshell, Dom is my angel. Having her visit or call brightens my day, takes me out of a rut. Not seeing anyone you slowly fall into a rut and do not care so much but having the visit or call revives me, gets me back on top of the world and helps me want to be a part of things again. Having her around gives me a reason to keep kicking goals.

Dom loves iced coffee and Tim Tam biscuits, so I keep a supply just for her in a special spot and she does little things for me that are special like surprising me with rollmops that I had not had since I was a young boy in Holland. She must catch a bus and travel a long way to see me in all sorts of weather and that is special. She is such a lovely person and so caring and means the world to me."



### **Volunteer \*Mary and her friend Josephine**

I came to Australia in 1980 and have been married for forty-two years. I have four children and six grandchildren. Not many people know I am a volunteer for CVS. I don't want to make myself seem special or "show off" that I volunteer. I started in 2017 with another organisation after working for a business for more than fifteen years and then being made redundant, although I worked very hard. I was fifty-five years of age and it made me so upset. I decided I would not work again and because of that Centrelink said I could volunteer. I loved that idea!

In 2018 I started with Anglicare as a volunteer and I was matched to a lovely, beautiful lady, Josephine. I look at her and I say to myself if I had done this with my mother she would have lived longer. Josephine never asks for anything. We laugh and we talk in Maltese. She doesn't remember yesterday but remembers a long time ago. We used to love walks when she could walk and now, I take her in her wheelchair, and we go for a coffee. She smiles at everyone, and I translate for her what they say. She is from Gozo (part of Malta). Sometimes she asks me if we went to school together. I say to her "I was born in Mellieha" and raised there until I turned nineteen and got married and came to Australia. She could see Mellieha from Gozo!

I visit her weekly. I love that I can just have reflection time, it is peaceful, and I can go slow when I visit with her. Life doesn't have to be hectic, and I can be truly present. Everything is always so busy, but I can't hurry with Josephine. I need to be slower, calmer and it makes me feel peaceful. My mum died thirteen years ago in Malta, and I feel sad that I wasn't there for her, and I said to myself when she passed away, if I can make a difference for someone older than I will. My children are grown up and I am busy with my grandchildren but when I am not with them, my time is free and quiet. I can clean the house anytime, but I love visiting Josephine and when she sees me it's like she has seen an angel. She grabs my hand and kisses me and says in Maltese "I am so happy that you are here tell the other people to go away". She is always calmed down when I am there because she sometimes can be grumpy with the staff.

We knit, do hand exercises, we do things that I forget to do for myself but now I do it with Josephine. I remember, at first, when I started, I would come home and cry and my children would aid "don't go if you are getting upset by this" and I had to explain that I am not sad from grief, I am just sad because I feel that the older people are missing out – hard to explain but then I stopped crying except when I think about my mother and I know that if she had been in a nursing home she would have loved the visits. I do this from my heart. It's like Josephine is related although she is not. The other residents say "how is your mum today?" I answer she has passed away and they are surprised because they think Josephine is my mother, we are so close. When we had COVID lock down I was praying for everyone in the nursing home.

This friendship with my dear Josephine gives me inner happiness like you wouldn't believe. My children give me happiness. But when I go and give my time to Josephine (and the other people I've been matched to), I have the most feeling of happiness I ever had.



Australian  
Multicultural  
Community  
Services

### **Volunteer Helen and her friend Gina**

Two and a half years ago, I was hospitalised. I spent a lot of time at home during my recovery and started painting to pass the time, I felt very lonely. I was searching for a hobby that keeps me busy. I always liked working with my hands, and painting has become my new hobby and passion.

I was feeling isolated through long lockdowns. In November 2021, I approached Australian Multicultural Community Services (AMCS) to find me a friend who I can spend a nice time with sharing stories and interests. I was introduced to Helen. Helen has worked for over years as a nurse in an aged care facility. She is retired now, however, her passion of giving her time and showing care to others made me feel that we will become best friends from the moment she visited me!

We started having a chat and telling stories from the first visit, I showed Helen my paintings and she showed interest in seeing more of my artwork. Since then, Helen visits me regularly, she always encourages me to continue even in the days that I feel down, and she brings me canvas when it runs out. I am very grateful to have Helen and cannot wait for the next visit to see her and spend precious time together.



### **Volunteer Jenny and her friend Sara:**

I hit it off with Sara from day one, Sara is ninety-three years old, and it usually starts off with, is it Monday again? Already? How time flies?

We chat a lot about gardening, her roses, my roses, my rather small garden, aphids, and our favourite plants. We talk about her farm when she was married, bringing up a family of six children and getting up early to milk 300 cows every morning and afternoon and getting kids to and from school. Then as years went by, she and her husband sold off land twice, reducing her garden and cows for milking, until she moved to a smaller suburban home after her husband died. But she kept her love of gardening.

We talk about so many things! We talk about how cows have personalities and how funny they can be! About our families and her extensive family of six children, seventeen grandchildren and thirty-seven great grandchildren and their pictures are all on her wall so I can relate to who she is talking about each time. We talk about the old days of her growing up in a family of two older brothers and a younger sister and the struggles of her father finding work during the depression and how they coped and survived. We don't run out of things to talk about as you can see!

Sara is an avid reader and does a lot of word puzzles. I show her my phone with the pictures of the nest of peregrine falcons on the building at 367 Collins St and how the chicks are growing up so fast. How the father of the chicks disappeared, and another male took over parenting duties with the mum. Soon the chicks will be jumping off the ledge and we hope they survive.

I usually take her in some flowers each week, some I get from the shops and this week my roses are blooming, so she got some nice, scented ones,

So why do I volunteer? As you can see, everyone is different, with different backgrounds and different challenges, but I like to see how I can perhaps make their day a little better. They all definitely make my day a little better.

### **Jozef and his volunteer friend Jenny**

Jozef is a man of ninety-six, he's always sitting in the same spot in the dining room, and he was a bit hard to crack, but I think he's used to me now, even though he doesn't remember me at first.

Every week, it's the same conversation. He asks:

Who are you? How do I know you? What's your name? Are you married? Kids? Why are you here asking me all these questions?

I can tell you his story because we have the same conversation every week.

Jozef grew up in Drysdale.

He was in the air force when he was young and when the war was over, he came home a few months after it ended. He had been stationed in New Guinea, another island, and Borneo in the end.

He then worked for Ford for thirty-seven years, twenty-six of those in the tool shop as a tool maker making dies.

After he retired, he and his wife travelled around a lot, all round Australia and then overseas. I asked him once, what was the best place you've ever been to and he said, "home."

He doesn't have any family here, his wife died about five years ago, and his two sons live in Queensland with their families.

He can't see very well, even with his newish glasses. He does the crossword with a lady there every morning and he's known her for thirty years as they went to the same church.

So, I thought, how can I change this up a bit so now we do Wordle together. That was a challenge because I explain the rules to Jozef each time we play. He will then ask, "what's the clue?" And I always reply, "There are no clues, I just have to tell you if we have any of the letters in the right spot and we've got six chances to figure out this five-letter word." Anyway, so far, we've been able to work it out. It's hard when you have trouble seeing but we make do. I'm sure if you were to ask him if he's seen me, he'll say "Who? No, I don't know her" however, he does thank me when I'm leaving every time, for coming in. That is nice. Sometimes, he gets flowers from me too, but we keep them in the dining room.



## Australian Red Cross

### Volunteer Lesley and her friend Joy.

Joy is eighty-nine years old and has always been a great advocate for social programs that bring people together for conversation, engagement, and fun. At the

Parklands Village in Port Macquarie, she began its inaugural weekly games afternoon, sourcing board games, tea and biscuits and the like for residents to come together and enjoy.

She then started up the Christmas party and Easter Hat Parade, also to great success. When Joy left the village after twenty years, she moved to Queensland to be near family, then back to Port Macquarie. With her family a distance away, she missed the social engagement and the chance to catch up with people and have a cup of tea and a chat. Her association with the Red Cross began with the Telecross Program, in which she received a daily phone call to check on her wellbeing. Joy says "Some of them would chat for four or five minutes, others for fifteen-twenty minutes, depending on the person and if they had other things on or not. I always enjoyed the calls."



In October 2021, she became a participant in the Community Visitors Scheme, with fifty-five-year-old Lesley her volunteer visitor. Lesley worked in journalism, publishing, and the public service in Sydney before moving to Port Macquarie, where she pursued her passion working in aged care. Retiring a couple of years later, she really missed this engagement with the community, and decided to sign up with the CVS. "I visit Joy once a week and we have really struck a bond. If I have brought some conversation and social interaction to Joy's life, she's brought so much to mine. I love to hear stories from different times of her life, the ups and downs, the travels, her work as a nurse, her family memories. Joy is wonderful at craft, and I most definitely am not! Despite this, she taught me how to make one of her famed pom-pom cats, which I gifted to my father, who is sadly affected by dementia. He loved the tactile sensations of the pom-poms, and the cat can most often be found sitting on his lap! Joy also taught me how to play Rummikin, and we have great fun playing this during my weekly visits. But sometimes, it's just a cup of tea and a chat about what's happened during the week, a flick through some photo albums and stories of times gone by. I really look forward to my weekly visits with Joy, and I like to think I bring a bit of sparkle to her week, as she most certainly does mine." Shares Lesley.





### **Volunteer Margaret and her friend Audrey**

Audrey will be ninety-nine years old this year, I have been visiting her for five years, Audrey never ceases to amaze me with her wit and her outstanding life. Audrey was one of twelve siblings and has many wonderful memories. Her father died at age 103 so hopefully I will have many years enjoying her wonderful company.



### **Volunteer Carmel and her friend Joan.**

Joan has been my wonderful friend for over three years. Like me, Joan comes from the other side of the world. We love nothing better than a cup of tea something nice with it and a good chat. She has amazed me with her positive humour even during these hard times. I took the attached photo in the centre where Joan lives. She has always loved gardening, and this is her little area she tries to maintain with help.



### **Volunteer Hollie and her friend Joy**

From the moment I was matched to Joy as a part of the volunteer program I just knew I would learn so many priceless life lessons from her. I could tell just how much our little outings meant to her, it warmed my heart seeing how excited she was, getting all dressed up ready to go.

I remember the first trip we had Joy had asked me if I like driving, I knew straight away she had something special in mind, we drove to a cute little town called Uki, we browsed the shops, where I found a beautiful little love heart stone that had 'Joy' engraved, Joy was adamant that she buy this for me so I could keep it as a memory of our time together, she said it was to show our special

friendship. We then sat and had cake and talked for hours, she shared her life stories which always intrigued me, I could sit for hours and hear what an interesting and vibrant life Joy lived.

We had many other special adventures, browsing the markets; sharing a nice meal; watching live music; driving and talking, sharing stories, and even sharing a cheeky wine. I had booked to take Joy to high tea for her birthday and we were both so excited, but unfortunately at this time we went into lock down, I know how much Joy loved the finer things in life so I arranged for a beautiful cheese and wine hamper to be delivered to her, so she could celebrate with her friends.

Joy and I had a very special friendship, even though there were many years between us, I remember one comment she made after I mentioned she lived such a full and interesting life, Joy turned to me and said “You’re still so young, you have so much time to make an interesting life” – this will always stick with me.

Joy has taught me so much without even knowing! The program has made an enormous difference in my life, and it really makes you see how even the little gestures can brighten someone’s day

### **Volunteer Sandra and her friend Frances**

I joined the Community Visitors Scheme in 2018 and was introduced to Frances who was a resident at an aged-care facility called Advantaged Care, Preston Lodge in Southwest Sydney.

Frances was unlike many aged-care residents in that she had made the decision to move into care because of her health issues that impacted on her physical abilities to manage at home rather than age related health issues.

Frances was keen to be an active member of the facility’s community but, also had a great desire to still be in touch with the rest of the world. She was interested to learn how to use a laptop and be able to access what was happening outside of the facility and to maintain some independence.

Frances read an article about a program in an aged-care facility which encouraged residents to knit for charity. She loves to crochet and a few of the other residents she connected with in the facility liked to knit but had no one to knit for. When I came into the picture and started visiting Frances, she told me about what she was inspired to do. I spoke with my CVS Coordinator at Red Cross and after a generous donation of yarn from Red Cross Australia every week when I would visit with Frances, the other residents would join us and in the first year together they knitted 25 blankets which were donated to Ronald McDonald House.

The friendship between Frances and myself has developed in such a strong bond that our friendship has become so important and after four years, it’s like I’ve known Frances my entire life. During COVID when I couldn’t visit, we would always speak on the phone or text each other, this loving friendship is continuously growing from strength to strength. And, through our friendship other residents have come together and inspired by staff and others, the knitting group has become an inspiration to others. Even the CEO of the facility is on board assisting in any way possible for the knitting group to continue being proactive. The

Natty Knitters have raised money and donated to Blue Wren House, a Women's Refuge in their area and other charitable organisations.

The name 'Natty Knitters' came about because the group encourages those who cannot or don't wish to knit can join in the conversations and have some social interaction.

I not only am inspired by Frances but, all the other women in the facility. This has shown me that you can be a formidable woman at any age do what you love and develop great friendships... even living in an Aged Care Facility. Age is but a number and we can continue to enrich lives and develop great friendships even in unfamiliar surroundings.

This is truly a motivational story about two women who met under very unusual circumstances and have built such an inspirational friendship that has lasted the distance and still going strong.

### **Volunteer Catherine and her friend Dawn**

I had the pleasure of meeting Dawn through the Community Visitors Scheme in August 2020, kick-starting an incredibly heart-warming and positive friendship. Dawn is a talented painter, a keen tennis enthusiast, a proud mother, a dedicated wife, a firm friend, and a retired window dresser. While giving me a tour of her house on our first meeting, I pointed to the beautiful landscapes on her hallway



walls, asking where she bought them. "Bought them?", she said. "I painted them!".

Dawn has welcomed me into her life with open arms. We have celebrated the everyday moments, including painting, and playing Rummikub, as well as in the big moments such as birthdays and holiday seasons. Whether we are sitting on the deck outside, on the couch, taking a walk, or visiting a coffee shop, I am always grateful to have found such fantastic company in Dawn. I thoroughly enjoy our cups of tea and pieces of cake together and look forward to the laughter that undoubtedly

emanates from whatever room we are in. I have loved being a part of our mischievous duo and look forward to being Dawn's partner in crime for as long as she'll have me.

CVS has enriched my connection with my local community, and I am grateful for the hard work behind the scenes from staff and volunteers to make it happen. Lastly, dear Dawn – here's to many more years of friendship to come!



### **Volunteer Luzviminda and his friends Jose and Erlinda**

Volunteering as a community visitor helped me to connect with older people and make new friends. I started to build friendships with Mr. Jose and Ms. Erlinda since 2019. I supported them to develop their social connections and reduced their sense of isolation especially during the pandemic.

I can see they are happy and with our friendship as they are always smiling when I visit them.

Volunteering also gives me a sense of purpose and valuable experience that I can treasure for the rest of my life.





### **Volunteer Neville with his friend Keith**

Volunteering is so very important because it facilitates a caring group of people, to provide relevant, needed support to the many in our community who really need it.

I enjoy volunteering because it gives me the opportunity to continue to use the many skills, I learnt in my long work life and in my recent Individual Support (Ageing), Certificate III Course from Kingswood TAFE. I use these skills to help Keith and others in the community. It also means a lot to me to have an important, satisfying job to do in my active retirement.

It means a great deal to my friend to have weekly social contact with someone who understands his background and him personally. Both of us are strong communicators which means our continuing engagement has never weakened over the more than four years we've been together. He has told me he is very grateful for it and really looks forward to our enjoyable, lively, weekly discussions. I really look forward to catching up with him too. We sometimes even give gentle advice to each other in the spirit of kindness.

The thing that means the most to me is the strong relationship we've developed and being able to support him, whenever I can, to help his life to be more enjoyable.



### **Morven Gardens Book club**

In 2007 I was invited to run a Book Club at Morven Gardens in Leura and I have been doing so ever since.

Over the years it has remained a popular event. It has also evolved from a traditional Book Club connected with the local library to now where it is more of a social gathering where members can share what they have been reading, share past experiences, reflect on current, and local events, and enjoy music and video clips.



Between 2007 and the present the changes have reflected the changing acuity levels of residents in Aged Care.

Covid has restricted our activities but with the help of my good friend and Morven volunteer Peter Swindell we have been able to continue sessions online.

Over the years there have been many highlights. Several members have been published authors and read excerpts from their books. One who lived to be 105 asked me a few years ago if I could teach her to speed read! Not so strange as it seems, I guess. Others have had aspects of their life and work archived in the Mitchell Library, in print and online. Prior to Covid monthly visits to the Katoomba Library were eagerly undertaken.

In all this time I have been privileged to share the Book Club with a great many residents representing a wealth of interesting experiences covering a large part of the last century. I hope it can continue.



### **Volunteer Amy and her friend Lorna**

Covid has been one of the biggest challenges to face-to-face visits since 2020. Volunteers like Amy used creative ideas such as getting her nine-year-old daughter involved, to create this lovely drawing of a marmalade Cat. This was keeping in mind Amy's resident Lorna's love for cats and the cat she used to own a few years back. Evidently this opportunity for Amy's daughter to be a part of such a good cause, is priceless at her impressionable age.

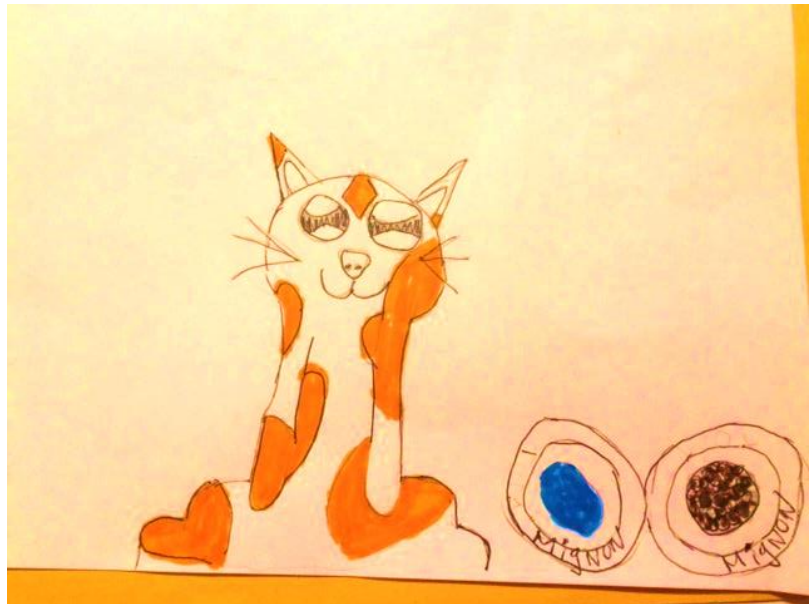
It's unlikely the feelings behind this gesture were missed by Lorna! This is one of the many stories which speaks volumes about the deep care and connections volunteers feel for their residents.

### **Volunteer Fergus and his older friend Pat**

When I see Patricia on Fridays at 12pm, we usually chat over a cup of tea about university, her career in the workforce, her travels and

each of our experiences in Nepal, The Beatles, and much more. Recently, I changed a broken string on her guitar and we both had a play on it after. These visitations are something I look forward to every week, as despite the age gap, Patricia and I have many things in common. It's been a joy and very interesting to meet her and talk with her each week. I hope Patricia feels a similar bond from her end, as her life has changed a lot in the past few years.

I'm keen to come back each week as both Patricia and the nursing home have allowed me to be a part of a space that is both friendly and welcoming. Patricia has been very kind and talkative since the beginning, and it has made visiting each week a joy. The CVS program has been a great opportunity for me to meet Patricia and interact with others in the nursing home. The program should be more widely encouraged, especially for those who are younger and looking to deepen their understanding of those who reside in their community.





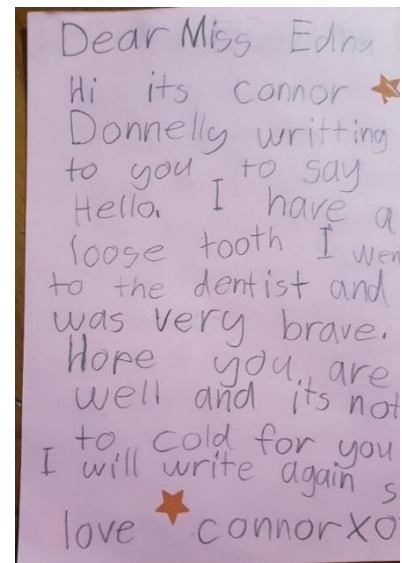
### Volunteers - The Donnelly Family in Dubbo and their friend Edna

My name is Louise and I'm thirty-three years old. As a family we responded to a volunteer opportunity to connect to an older person via writing during the COVID pandemic. We started in March 2021.

This program has really been beneficial and enjoyable for Connor, our nine-year-old, in the sense that it has been calming and relaxing. A natural remedy for his ADHD condition. He considers Edna a bonus Nanny, he often asks can he write a letter to Edna and asks us to send her the colourings that he completes either at school or at home for her.

Wendi-Rose is just under two and while we sit around together as a family to write to 'our' Edna she has developed a real love of drawing and colouring all be it scribble.

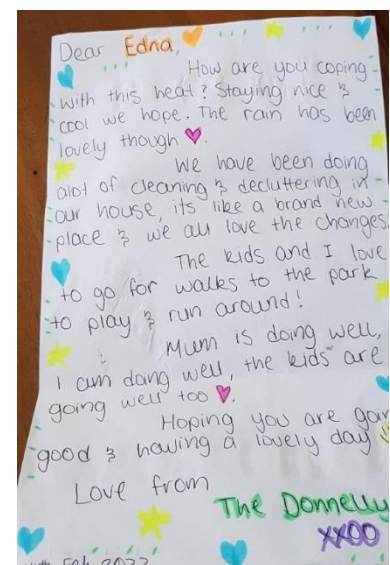
Writing to Edna has been a heart-warming and calming journey. I suffer from anxiety and during this time of colouring and writing letters it has made me feel at ease, calm and relaxed. I really do hope to meet Edna one day. I would love to have a cuppa with her.



For Wendy, my mum, and nanna to Connor and Wendi-Rose, the CVS program has been a saviour in so many ways. At the time Wendy was asked by the lovely Louise Hennessy if she would like to be part of this program. Wendy was just starting her Lung and Breast Cancer journey and at a low ebb and every other emotion that comes with that, and although Wendy jumped at the offer to take part, she was concerned that she would not be able to keep up with it.

Once she did her first letter, Wendy felt a sense of calm, peace and as the letters flowed more frequently, writing to Edna became her happy place. Edna became Wendy's mother figure as her mum had passed away forty years ago. The more Wendy coloured and wrote to Edna, the less despair she felt.

This program has given us as a family joy that we would never have had and having Edna part of our lives has enriched it greatly. It has bought our little family closer as it is something we do together for Edna. I'm so grateful we are part of this beautiful program.







**Volunteer Cathy and her friend Daphne**  
Cathy has been visiting Daphne as a Volunteer Community Visitor for the last seven months. For Daphne, the

Community Visitors Scheme has become invaluable, as is the friendship that the pair have developed “I don’t have any family living nearby and spending time with Cathy helps to fill the gap. I enjoy the opportunity to go out and about with Cathy for walks, and sometimes a

drive around the local area. We love walking along Church Street, looking at all the shops, especially Carla Zampatti! I can really see all the changes that have taken place over the years. Cathy and I are both ex Alfred Hospital Nurses and we enjoy chatting about the old days at the Alfred. We also both really enjoy reading and share our books regularly.



I love a sweet treat with a special favourite being the cakes at the Old Schoolhouse Café where Cathy and I often go for our visits.” Shares Daphne

**Volunteer Julie and her friend Margaret**

When I first signed up to volunteer for CVS, it wasn’t about not having enough to do in my life. My big belief in life is that everybody should have somebody, and I wanted to be someone else’s somebody. I feel very blessed to be a part of such a beautiful program, it helps fill my cup! My older friend Margaret welcomed me not only into her home but also into her life. It was a match made in the stars! We quickly learnt that we shared the same birthday and a love of fish and chips. Margaret is such a beautiful, positive soul and it does me so much good to spend time with her.”



Margaret shares “Julie is like a breath of fresh air; she comes in and is just so happy and you can’t help but be happy in her presence. We have so much fun and laughter when we are together, and I look forward to her phone calls and visits.”

### **Volunteer Kara and her friend Heather**

I met the amazing Heather, eight-two years old, during lockdown in August 2021. It was love at first sight via video call until we were finally allowed to meet in person and go for a socially distanced, masked walk (luckily, we were within each other's 5km zone!) a few months later.

It's funny because if you ask me, I get more from our visits than Heather! But Heather will tell you differently of course! She's cheeky like that!



I decided to volunteer because I wanted to give back to the community and hopefully make someone's day just a little brighter.

It's funny how I ended up making my own days brighter in the process. I lost my Mum in 2016 to cancer. I missed her every day and soon discovered that having someone as beautiful and kind as Heather in my life felt as though I had a Mum again.

I have met all of Heather's family now, her daughters have even called me their honorary sister and Heather now proclaims that she is my surrogate Mum! I can't tell you how special it is for me to be a part of Heather's life and I know she loves having me in hers (she tells me every day!) I'm volunteering my time but what I get in return is truly priceless.

None of our visits are ever the same, I could pop in for a coffee during my lunch breaks or spend an afternoon with Heather at the local shopping centre chasing her around on her scooter and every six weeks, we'd even go and get our nails done at the salon together. We laugh, we cry, we joke! It's very special.

I am so grateful to be a part of this program and can't thank the wonderful team at CBCHS for all that they do for the volunteers and our elderly friends!"



## Chinese Australian Services Society

### Volunteer Lily and her friend Madame Mei-ling

In 2014, I quit my full-time job due to health reasons. Six months later, I had the opportunity to take part in the CVS volunteer training that was organised by the Chinese Australian Services Society (CASS). In September 2014, I began my CVS visiting. I was matched to Madam Mei-ling and to a group of older people. To date, I have visited eleven Chinese-speaking seniors who are aged eighty to over ninety years old. The older people I visit do not speak English, so they rarely communicate with people in aged care facilities. They need someone who can chat with them in Chinese. The older people were incredibly happy when they knew I could speak their mother language and they were eager to share their stories with me. In our visits, I actively listen, ask questions, and I am genuinely interested in their wonderful stories. Apart from chatting, I take with me, Chinese newspapers and magazines and share with them. They enjoy reading very much.

A few years ago, Madam Mei-ling needed to go to Concord Hospital because she was unwell. She needed to go three times a week. I visited her in the hospital during that critical period. Over the years, I have built a close and trusting friendship with my older friends. This service is meaningful and important for those older people whose families and children live far and are unable to visit. I treasure having the opportunity to be a friend to my older friends and providing emotional support where I can. During the COVID lockdown, I could only call, use video chat, write letters and cards to them instead of visiting them myself. It was hard for us. One of the most important things I can do is to let them know they are not alone.





### **Volunteer Eleanor and her friend Margherita**

Helping our elderly in some way was something I had wanted to do after my experiences while visiting my dad in a nursing home for many years. By chance, I visited the Lygon Street Festival in early 2022 and found the CO.AS.IT stand that was requiring volunteers to visit elderly Italian people. It was exactly what I wanted to do after I retired from work.

The personal benefits this program is providing to me is invaluable. It has given me a purpose and the opportunity to help others in some way, even just by listening and having a chat. I can visit someone who has had worldly experiences different to mine, someone that has a very important story to tell, and someone that speaks in a language that I love.

Now, I visit a lovely lady named Margherita at a nursing home in Coburg. She is 92 years old with a very sharp mind and great sense of humour. Fortunately for me, she loves to talk and recount her days at the nursing home with lots of details. She also loves to talk about her family, especially about her dearly departed husband, her past in Egypt and her Italian origins.

It's an absolute joy to visit Margherita and I truly believe that she benefits from a visit from someone on a regular basis. The visits help her in so many ways, like keeping her mind active in recalling what she has done during the week, chatting about things she is interested in, sharing memories of her past and her family.

### **Volunteer Lina and her group of Residents**

Lina joined the Co.As.It. Visitation program over twenty years ago. During this time Lina, has visited elderly Italian residents in aged care facilities across the northern suburbs of Melbourne. Lina's compassion and eagerness to offer companionship to the elderly has fuelled her continued passion of regularly visiting aged care residents. This constant presence and commitment give the residents the assurance that they are not forgotten by the outside community, and Lina has become more than a visitor; she has become their friend.

Reflecting on her many years of service Lina says she has learned the importance of listening. Every person has their own story with their own unique experiences. She says, "People just want to know they are heard, and not forgotten just because they are old or shut away". By providing a listening ear, Lina helps to validate their self-worth.



The lockdown of nursing homes during Covid restrictions across Melbourne saddened Lina as she knew the residents would miss her visits. In fact, when she was finally able to return to visit them, she noted how despondent some of the residents had become due to the lack of outside human contact. This sadness further propelled her to want to continue to visit as she felt their need for human contact was even greater than before.

Despite the lengthy, and often laborious, task of having to test and mask up before even entering an aged care facility, this does not deter Lina from continuing her mission to bring joy and make a difference to the lives of the elderly she visits.

Currently, Lina leads a group of more than ten elderly Italian residents at St. Paul's Hostel. Her visits consist of conducting prayer sessions in the chapel, followed by reading articles from the Italian newspaper, *Il Globo*. The visit concludes with a chat over morning tea. This mix of activities provides the residents with an opportunity to continue with familiar practices they had engaged with in their lives prior to moving to an aged care residence. Taking part in a prayer group, keeping up to date with current affairs in their country by reading *Il Globo* newspaper, and having a coffee with a friend are all things they would have done in the past. Lina's visits help this group of Italians keep their former practices alive and maintain meaning in their lives. As well as conducting group activities, Lina also visits residents that are unable to come out of their rooms or who prefer not to join a group. Lina's unfailing commitment to provide a connection to elderly Italians so that they don't feel forgotten is an inspiration to us all, that one person can make a difference in so many small ways. Lina says that she will continue to volunteer for as long as she can!!



### **Volunteer Mary**

Mary was a most magnificent woman. When I started working for Combined Pensioners in 1999 Mary had been a community visitor and had voluntarily assisted the coordinator for a few years. In the handover notes that I received from the previous Coordinator, Mary was the person to whom I could refer if I had a problem. Mary remained a community visitor until she passed away in 2015. She saw several residents and was committed and dedicated to each person she saw. She was able to relate to each resident in a way that was empathic, respectful, and entertaining.

Beryl, who had been in the same aged care facility for eighteen years, was the last woman that Mary visited. Beryl was a character, and they enjoyed each other's company. Beryl was straightforward and kind, with an excellent memory. Mary, an enormously compassionate person, was always very impressed by Beryl's ability to retain information and her unswerving interest in Mary's family.

With great sadness I learnt of Mary's sudden death from her daughter, Jo. On Mary's death the family wondered what they could do for Beryl. Mel, Mary's granddaughter, visited Beryl once and then Jo took over and became Beryl's community visitor - another successful match. I had the task of telling Beryl that Mary had died but I was able to ameliorate Beryl's grief when I told her that Mel would visit once and then Jo would continue. And so, another chapter began. Jo did not need any introduction to Beryl as she knew all about the family from Mary. Jo was the visitor when Beryl died a short while later. I had to email Jo as she was overseas. Jo wrote "It was such a pleasure to visit her. She was so funny and boy what a memory! Sadly, it's another part of Mum's life gone. Glad to know Beryl went peacefully."

Jo then took a small break and then continued to volunteer as a community visitor until this day. So, community visiting runs in the family. Jo, despite these difficult times has maintained contact with her present older person and taken on another older person.



## **Greek Welfare Centre Community Services Volunteer Malamo and her ninety-five-year-old friend**

My late mother, God rest her soul, often said to me “We don’t do enough to help people.” It is also thanks to my mother that I was first made aware of the Greek Welfare Centre and the fantastic services they provide, especially assisting elderly members of our community stay in their own homes longer and enjoy social support through the CVS programme.

My participation in the Community Visitors Scheme is the best tribute to my mother’s memory, and a way of honouring the values she instilled in me, as well as making a difference to a remarkable ninety-five-year-old woman, with whom I have been matched. My weekly visits to my friend have enriched not only my life, but I’ve noticed her looking forward to my visits too. As I am now such a regular part of her life, that she leaves her front door open for me in anticipation of my arrival. Sometimes when my friend is feeling a little down or lethargic when I arrive for our weekly chats, but I notice she becomes more animated after engaging in conversation on topics ranging from reality television to religious feast days.



We have shared several significant milestones since I began visiting my friend in April 2015, such as the birth of her third great-grandchild and my successful completion of a Diploma of Library and Information Services. I am welcomed into her home with warmth and good humour, and I know I help ease her loneliness during the week.

I consider myself fortunate to have met my friend as she has helped fill the void left by my late mother of a wise and strong female presence. I can’t think of a better or more worthwhile way to spend an hour or so of my time each week than visiting with this lovely lady and making her smile. Through my experience of being a volunteer with the Greek Welfare Centre as part of the CVS programme, I can see the difference that this programme can make in the lives of our elderly.



**Volunteer \*Chris and her friend  
\*Amanda**

During COVID lockdown, I phoned Amanda in my role as a volunteer once a week. Through our calls, I got to know Amanda a little better, and we would talk about her interests, hobbies, and career history. I learned that she is a very intelligent and creative woman, who amongst many things, loves reading, watching movies (we share a love of Star Trek) and card making using pressed leaves and flowers that she sourced from the local bushland areas of the Blue Mountains.

Whilst Amanda now cooks very infrequently for herself (she mainly receives meals on wheels), I discovered that she did like cooking and indeed had kept many of her favourite recipes.

Last year, as Christmas was approaching, I thought it might be a nice idea to do an activity and I came up with baking shortbread. I remember how much we were both looking forward to baking and sharing the biscuits amongst Amanda's neighbours and visitors. Whilst I read out the recipe, Amanda measured out the ingredients, made the mixture, rolled the dough, and then shaped and cut it and kept a watchful eye over the shortbread whilst it turned a lovely golden brown in the oven. I remember the kitchen filling with the aroma of baking biscuits, and it brought a smile to both our faces.

Engaging in this activity brought back many memories for Amanda and prompted her to dig out some of her favourite Christmas baking recipes. She had one cake recipe in mind that she planned to make for her neighbours and had started a shopping list of ingredients. Whilst she didn't end up making the cakes, it nonetheless raised her enthusiasm, built motivation, and rekindled some dormant creative skills.

With COVID lockdown coming back into play early this year, our communication was again limited to weekly phone calls. I again wanted to find an activity that we could connect through and engage with and provide some mental stimulation. I remembered that Amanda had been a member of a local book club, and I thought it may be a good idea to read a short story each week and talk about it during our phone sessions. I raised this idea with Amanda, and she was very keen to proceed with the readings. Amanda and I would take turns in picking the story each week.

I had completed a shared reading course and was aware that literature can be a powerful medium through which one can share thoughts, feelings, and memories. Through our weekly readings, we reminisced about events in our childhoods, and shared many of our life experiences.

I have a health background and am aware of how powerful the arts (music, art, craft, literature etc) can be in bringing joy and happiness, promoting health, restoring self-confidence, and generally improving one's quality of life. It is my experience working as a volunteer with Hammond Care that gave me the impetus to enrol in the Diploma of Creative Arts and Health and pursue a career as an arts therapist.



# IN GREAT COMPANY

And the NSW ACSA Award for Volunteer of The Year 2021 goes to In Great Company's CVS Volunteer Bruce McNamara!



## **Volunteer Bruce and his friend John**

When Bruce James joined as a CVS community volunteer to fill a gap in his calendar, he did not expect his contribution to be life changing for those he walked alongside.

In October 2020, Bruce's plans to caravan around Australia were halted by COVID. Motivated by his observation that a lot of

people at the residential facility his mother-in-law resided at had no visitors, he always knew he wanted to give back by visiting lonely people. Bruce thought he would utilise his technical background to support older people understand and safely use technology and the internet – it felt like a good fit.

Bruce began visiting John, who is seventy-eight years old in December 2020 and Victor, 100 years old in January 2021. Bruce discovered he had so much more to give than digital skills, he gave the gift of friendship.

John felt isolated, depressed, and found communication very difficult due to his Cerebral Palsy. He needed someone who would take the time to be with him to understand him well. Bruce's kind nature, patience, active listening, and genuine interest in John, made a real difference to John's moods and motivation. John transformed through his friendship with Bruce and is now a passionate disability advocate having re-found his purpose.

In a recent visit, John showed Bruce a briefcase with his initials on it. Inside was a medal, a tie pin, and some old photos of John; it turns out he was a highly influential disability advocate in the 1970's, attending Parliament House to receive an OAM for his work. Bruce now spends his time helping John make a difference by sending emails to different Commissions and organisations. He is also getting him set up with better phones, email and internet, a laptop and mobile phone.

Looking over the photos, Bruce commented, "look you have hair!". John roared with laughter, which was something Bruce had not seen before. Knowing from John's carer that John had

never shown anyone the briefcase before and hearing that true belly laugh, Bruce felt privileged and acknowledges this as the point he realised they were true friends.

Bruce also visited Victor who was living with dementia. Sensitive to individual needs, sometimes their time together is just spent listening to Victor's stories or enjoying a cuppa and a biscuit and taking in the wonderful rural scenery from the balcony. Bruce states, "I feel a deep sense of joy that I have made a real difference to his day".

Bruce's approach and tips for volunteering sums him up nicely:

"Go in with an open mind and be a patient person. Everyone is different, be yourself and be courteous and respectful. It is important to remember that it's their visit not yours. Lastly, don't be afraid of silence, sometimes saying nothing is fine, just being present is enough."

### **Volunteer Carol and her friend**

I first met my friend about three years ago in her home. We clicked from the first meeting. We shared similar interests, sense of humour and love of nature. She loves to feel the wind through her hair and seeing the birds flying around in the trees and garden.

Unfortunately, my friend needs 24-hour care and has lived in a residential facility for over three years and still manages to have a terrific sense of humour. We can always manage to have a laugh and I keep her stocked with chocolates. Prior to covid, once a month, my husband and I would take my special person out for lunch in Milton. We would walk her down in her wheelchair and after lunch and window shopping, we would have cake and coffee before returning home. The three of us miss those lunches very much.

During lockdown, we have faceted, talked on the telephone and I have sent letters and cards. My friend has enriched my life and I found it difficult not being able to have our special hugs, share a coffee or a joke face to face because of covid. I hope I have made my special person as happy as she has made me and enriched my life.



### **Volunteer Judy**

I was very blessed to have wonderful parents, a large loving family and a wonderful Mum who lived until she was 98 years old and passed away around two and half years ago. I started to

think about older people who do not have family around. I imagined how lonely that would be for them and I wanted to be able to help however I could, to lessen that loneliness for someone, so I decided to look for a volunteering opportunity that would allow me to help in that way.



Both people I visit in-home have dementia, so we have our good visits and not so good visits where they may not remember who I am, but they are lovely visits all the same. During the visits they can remember my name, and again, even if they forget in between that we have had the visit together that they can recall it on the next visit.

We chat about everything from gardening to family and activities. Whilst they may forget the visit - in the moment we have the joy, connection, and presence instead of the loneliness and isolation.

CVS is important program because people need connection and in person connection. Otherwise, it is a lonely life sitting at home, unable to get out and sleeping in a chair.

### **Volunteer Greg**

I have been volunteering with Inclusee for about four years now. I used to own my own business and when I finished with it, I decided I could not just sit at home all day. I wanted to be able to help or do something and a friend suggested that I volunteer in a nursing home.

Volunteering with Inclusee and volunteering in general, has help me personally. I used to be a very shy person but visiting older people has helped me come out of my shell. I also like being able to put a smile on their faces as apart from myself, they do not have anyone else who visits them.



All the older people look forward to my visits - they light up when I arrive! Sometimes I stay for up to three hours visiting, we chat and laugh, and it is just a positive experience.

A number of years ago, I was nominated for a volunteer of the year award. I did not win but I was runner up. It felt good to be nominated and appreciated, although, I visit the older people because I like to help and make people feel good and laugh, so, I am just doing what I love to do, not for the recognition.



### **Volunteer Piero and his friend Ian**

#### **Piero's story through the eyes of his partner Noelle.**

I saw an article in the Stonnington News which featured a JoCare volunteer who was supporting a local resident. As we were both looking for an opportunity for community involvement, this program seemed interesting and worth the investment of a few hours weekly. Piero had recently retired from a very busy career in hospitality, so I encouraged him to get involved and he agreed it was a worthwhile use of his free time. While Piero is not a regular church goer, he demonstrates 'humanity in action' living his values with continual kindness and generosity to others.

Piero (on the right) originally matched him with an older Italian man and later another, which gave Piero the chance to utilise his native language to help both men swap stories and memories. Piero was next linked very successfully with Ian who is ill with Parkinson's, and Piero offered emotional support and regular companionship. Their shared interests have since led to a very close and mutual friendship. Indeed, their relationship has gone full circle as it is now Piero who is ill with wonderful support returned by Ian and his lovely wife Jill.



#### **Ian's CVS journey**

My wife Jill found out about JoCare and followed up to request a match. I was diagnosed with Parkinson's about 5 years ago. All my mates were still working, my wife was busy working, and my sons were away, so I was lonely and stressed about my condition.

Then Piero came into my life; he was a true 'Godsend'! From the first time we met, we just talked easily about our lives and experiences. Although we come from different backgrounds, we have a lot in common: we are both divorced and we're both interested in sailing. We just get on so well with each other! Congratulations Kerri Anne on your skilful matching! Our wives get on well too, Noelle is a very lovely lady.

Every week we've met for coffee 2 or 3 times at our favourite haunt, Officine Zero, the Italian Café in Hawksburn. There we'd just sit and chat so now we've met most of the people in Hawksburn Village. It so nice to get old with a friend who has the time to spend with me. Piero is very gregarious, and like me is also he's interested in racing cars, good food, fashion and of course women (well he's Italian!)

Piero never offends, he's always courteous and friendly to everyone. The waitresses love him; the locals love him. He doesn't care about a person's nationality or background and treats them all with the same respect.

2021 was a terrible year for me and I was often very depressed. In addition to my illness, I lost 5 very important people in my life, including my son who died aged 43. Piero saved me on so many occasions – he always there for me and knew what to say and when to say it. It

was comforting because he understood. I'm now so sad that he is ill, and I'll miss him terribly.

Piero sadly passed away in May 2022 following a brief illness, it's such a devastating loss for his family and friends. I'll miss him terribly but forever grateful in having known him and so fortunate to have had him as a friend.

### **Volunteer John and his friend Syd**

I met Syd when his wife Eileen was dying of cancer. Syd was then about eighty-five years old and quite a few years older than Eileen. His plan was that he would die first. As it was; this wasn't to be.

Following Eileen's death; Syd went home to Armadale and lived a quiet life; reading and grieving mostly. I tried giving him cooking lessons but that didn't work; so, I think he mostly went out for a meal.

I used to visit Syd every week for an hour or two and I'd check in on him regularly on the phone. The phone wasn't too successful as Syd's hearing was poor and he couldn't master using a mobile.



We used to go out regularly for a meal or a short walk. Grieving continued to be a dominant issue in Syd's life – I guess it still is in a way as Eileen is always in his thoughts.

One evening I tried to contact Syd half a dozen times without getting a response; I tried again early in the morning with no luck. I rang his next-door neighbour who had a key to his house. She found him unconscious on the floor. An ambulance was called, and Syd was admitted to Hospital for a couple of weeks. Syd was probably eighty-eight years old at the time, he recovered well and was soon up and walking about. After the fall, the Doctors were reluctant to let him go home and eventually Syd agreed to go into an aged care facility.

Syd moved into an aged care home and has been there for nearly four years. His health is better today, aged ninety-two than it was when he moved into Aged Care. However, his walking has deteriorated, and he now uses a frame, but his mind and his sense of humour are still very sharp.

Syd's an interesting guy, he's an Irishman from Belfast and has travelled extensively, he's remarkably well read and highly intelligent; his memory is excellent both long and short term. He's extremely sociable and can talk and laugh with anyone.

I visit Syd once a week and we always have a good chat and plenty of laughs. He's not keen on going out these days, probably too much effort. He calls me his link to the outside world.



### **Volunteer Angel and her friends Joan and Helen**

When I started volunteering with Latrobe Community Health in December 2021, I had two goals in mind. To meet new friends and to put myself in others' shoes.



With more free time during the pandemic, and as someone who enjoys hearing stories from others, I thought becoming a community visitor was the perfect fit. Being a volunteer means giving something to others. I feel being a volunteer is satisfying. I also did not think that a visit can make someone happy, but it does.

I visit Joan and Helen every fortnight, starting each visit with some small talk and a catch-up. Some days, we might do some arts and craft together, while others are simply spent chatting. When I first met Joan, she was so shy but after a few sessions, she

remembers me and welcomes me on my visits.

Recently, we started to talk about hobbies, and she stated she used to do crochet. On the following visit, I brought her some yarn and a crochet hook, and she was happy to do that. I am so happy that we are bonding, and she is willing to maintain our friendship.

If you are considering volunteering – you won't regret, it! It is something rewarding and worth doing.



### **Volunteer Brigitta and her friend Dulcie**

I have been Dulcie's friend since June 2021. I volunteer on the phones at Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury and I saw an ad for the CVS on their website. For a while I had been wanting to contribute some of my time to working with older people. I had come to see that society can be quite dismissive of older people and I thought "one day I'll be old, and I'd like people to treat me with respect and compassion'. I also wanted to teach my kids that older people have worth and things to contribute to their lives.

Meeting Dulcie and getting to know her has been a joyful experience for us both. We first met over Zoom while we were all in Lockdown, so initially I sent nice cards and we spoke on the phone. But once we could finally meet up, Dulcie and I had a celebration Yum Cha lunch together! We have also been out for a few coffees, and it has been great spending time with her and getting to know her. She has had an interesting life and is warm, kind and very funny. We have formed a loving; close friendship and it gives me pleasure to be company and support for her. I often take her flowers or chocolate but this week I had a more practical gift.



Dulcie had shown me that the staff place her toilet rolls on top of her bathroom cupboard and she must stretch up on tippy toes to reach them. Often the roll falls on the floor, bumping her head on the way down! So, on Monday I took Dulcie a toilet roll stand that can sit next to her toilet and enable easy access for her to replace her toilet rolls! It was a small thing for me, but I like to think it makes Dulcie's day to day life a bit easier.

On occasion, Dulcie gets angry at her memory because she can sometimes forget what she wanted to say to me. But Dulcie is ninety-two years old, and she is as sharp as a tack! She also has a wicked sense of humour and doesn't take life too seriously. I tell Dulcie that I hope if I make it to ninety-two, I'm as sharp

and funny as she is. She has enhanced my life and I hope I enhance hers. We have a good time together and she gives fantastic hugs. She is a great person to spend time with.

### **Volunteer Jann and her friend Pam**

When I retired, I knew I would have to do something to add structure to my days, so I googled volunteering. I am not one for chatting so initially I only drove lovely older ladies to their appointments. Then I met Pam. She was aged in her late nineties but active and still living in her own home by herself.



We started having coffee and chatting after her weekly hairdresser appointments. It was refreshing listening to Pam's numerous entertaining stories about her life, both here in Australia and the UK. She has done so much and travelled to so many places. Pam is still a member of Soroptimists and once owned her own business.

Pam has a terrific sense of humour. Her observations and droll responses make for lively conversations. We spend our time together chatting, laughing, drinking coffee and shopping for clothes.

There have been a couple of health scares along the way with Pam in hospital with a broken hip and again for a pacemaker. After her hip operation she went from using a stick to using a walker.

Then COVID came...

Pam was able to celebrate her 100<sup>th</sup> with fifty people including myself and she received cards from the Queen, Governor General, Prime Minister, Federal Member, and the Mayor. Her apartment was overflowing with cards and flowers.

At the height of COVID we stayed connected via phone and email. Pam got her first computer at ninety-six and she does very well. She has attended Zoom meetings, weddings, and funerals, virtually. However, she admits her emails sometimes go "missing."

Pam touches everyone she meets in a positive way. She is kind and thoughtful. She was a feminist before the word was invented but was not ashamed to use her feminine wiles to get what she wanted (in the best possible way!).

Pam is currently learning Scrabble with me. Explaining the rules and why you can do some things and not others (like putting a word down in reverse order) is entertaining, to say the least.

Volunteering is not a one-way street. I thought I would be the one giving my time and energy supporting someone. I have discovered; however, I also receive so much in return. Meeting Pam has helped us both not to feel alone. I really value the time we spend together, the companionship and true friendship. I am looking forward to celebrating Pam's 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday later this year!



### **Volunteer Philip and his friend Jock**

Jock has been a Lifeline H2H CVS visitor for three years. An advocate for mental health, Jock was drawn to the CVS by its focus on improving recipient's emotional, mental, and general wellbeing, by building relationships between likeminded people.

Jock was matched to Philip just over two and a half years ago. Philip and Jock share the love of movies and good coffee. The COVID lockdowns have been a challenge, preventing them from continuing their regular outings to the local shops and cinema. However, they stayed connected via the phone when they were not able to meet face to face.

Jock celebrated his Engagement during COVID and was one of the fortunate couples to be able to celebrate, surrounded by family and friends. A key guest at Jock's Engagement party was his friend Philip. Jock arranged everything, including the Uber. Philip loved meeting Jock's family and friends and was thrilled to be part of the happy celebration. For Jock, there was no question of his friend missing out, and he worked tirelessly to ensure the support of Philip's family and the aged care facility.



Each volunteer brings their own personal touch to the CVS program and Jock is a perfect example of this. An incredibly caring individual, with a phenomenal sense of community and a great sense of humour. Jock has approached volunteering with selfless dedication and enthusiasm.

### **Volunteer Francis and her friend Marina**

My journey to the CVS was quite unexpected. I have been a Lifeline Telephone Counsellor for over twelve years, and I was not looking to take on any more volunteer work. When COVID hit, I was unable to continue my shifts at the Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury office as I was caring for my husband and could not afford to run the COVID risk. What to do? A Lifelineh2h newsletter arrived seeking CVS volunteers - there was my answer! I could continue my work from home and still feel connected the Lifeline family. Support Line was my first step – supporting a person regularly by phone. Then as things opened, I was asked to take on a regular visit to an elderly lady in her home.



It has been the most uplifting experience for me. Having emigrated to Australia more than thirty years ago, I have had little contact with the older generation, as I left my mother and all her friends behind. Compared to my friendships here with people of my own age and younger, my friendship with Francis has been a quite different and unique experience.

I have been visiting Francis for just over two years, she will be turning ninety-nine in April. She lives alone in her home of fifty years, losing her sight and hearing, but is still very sharp and has the most incredible memory. She will tell me stories about her childhood in Tasmania and over her life. I know about her children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and her friends, who she has mostly outlived.

We talk about the meaning of her having lived for so long and what faces her in the time to come – staying where she is or moving to a place of aged care. Francis is incredibly happy in her own home. It is full of her memories and history and is so familiar to her. She enjoys gardening and takes herself off around the block on her own with her walking frame. In short, she never ceases to amaze me with her determination and her ability to just get on with things.

Francis has a very loving and supportive extended family, but day to day, during the weekdays, she is very alone. This is where I come in. I call her at the beginning of the week to set up a time and day to visit. I hear the joy in her voice when I say, “Hello Francis, it’s Marina here” and I know my visits mean so very much to her. She is always so thrilled to see me which makes it so special. This last week she said to me “I count you as a friend” – that made it for me.

### **Volunteer Remy and her friend Diane**

When I started studying social work, I quickly realised the importance of community involvement. I wanted to find a way to use my newfound skills and passion for helping others to make a difference in my community. I was lucky enough to stumble across an advertisement for Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury's Community Volunteer Scheme and in a matter of hours had set up my first meeting with my local Lifeline team. A few weeks later I met Diane, a talented opera singer, cat lover and a new friend for life.

While Diane and I have a fifty plus age difference, our common interests and similar styles of humour have meant we have formed a friendship full of singing, laughs and regular catchups.



Volunteering has taught me that no act of kindness is too small and that when we help others, we help ourselves too.

"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." - Leo Buscaglia

### **Volunteer Eva and her friend Jay**

I joined Lifeline H2H as a CVS Volunteer to visit the elderly early in 2021. The welcome from the Lifeline staff, made it so easy and friendly. I completed training and was matched with a gentleman named Jay who lived in an aged care facility.

Jay is a true gentleman and that word "gentle" describes him to a T and his Buddhist characteristics reverberate through him. He reminds me of my father. The first time I saw Jay I gasped at the similarity. Somewhere in the universe, someone wanted me to visit my father. I left my home very early in life for faraway shores and away from my family. My father lived to 100 years of age, and I visited him every two years for a long time until having my own family made this more difficult. I come from a large family, and in large families the love and care get diluted, but love is always there. Jay too lives for his family, and he is very lucky that his daughter visits him often. He is so peaceful and happy.



Jay and I talk about his homeland and the beautiful places he visited there. We discuss current affairs and world events as Jay likes to watch the news on TV. He is very interested in my opinion. He tells me very often, that he has just turned 93 and tells me the date of his birthday, so I cannot forget it. He is justifiably very proud of his age.

Jay is quite well for his years and uses a frame to walk to the dining room for his meals. One day I met him at his dining table, as lunch was not yet served, and he was enjoying a glass of red wine - how lovely.

Jay has enriched my life and I am so grateful to be able to visit him face to face and call him during COVID restrictions.

## **Volunteer Peter and his friends Margaret and Peter**

I joined Lifeline H2H's Community Visitors Scheme as a volunteer in April last year. I have also been a Pastoral Care volunteer with Catholic Healthcare and St Vincent de Paul since 2014.



Close to my retirement in 2014, I was aware of the imminent lifestyle changes. Research highlights that older people are at risk of isolation and the lack of social interaction may impact their mental wellbeing as well as their quality of life.

Over the years I notice my regular visits make a difference and the exchange has been two-way. I have learnt the diversities in our community and inspiring real-life stories.

Peter was born in Britain and arrived in Australia when he was seventeen. Margaret was born in Hong Kong and migrated to Sydney in the nineties. I was also born in Hong Kong and came to Sydney in early eighties. Before retirement, Peter was a miner, Margaret was a volunteer, and I was an engineer. Our backgrounds quite often lead to interesting discussions in my visits. I was inspired by the extensive volunteering work carried out by Margaret.

Peter loves playing chess. We now play two or three games of chess when we meet. Peter also reads extensively, particularly *Cosmology*. I can see the excitement on Peter's face with the fascination and counter-intuitive behaviours shown in quantum particles.

When I mentioned to Margaret and Peter that Lifeline would like us to write a short story on the CVS, Peter sent me a short note: "You are a great chess player and a great friend. We both share an interest in *Cosmology*. We live a healthy life. I look forward to your next visit."





### **Volunteer Helen and her friend**

This year, Helen commemorates twenty years of service with the Community Visitors Scheme that happens to coincide with our thirty-year anniversary. Helen was honoured and applauded at our combined thirty-year anniversary and National

Volunteers Week aboard the stunning Port Adventure Cruises for a spectacular Sunset River Cruise on the majestic Hastings River in Port Macquarie.

Helen commenced in 2002 and was matched to Julia at a Nursing Home Port Macquarie. Helen was working full time when she befriended Julia in 2002 at Garden Lodge Nursing Home. Julia was only a year older than Helen at the time of meeting each other but become great friends and although was asked to meet on a fortnight basis, Helen would go in for weekly visits. Helen remembers fondly helping Julia write letters to her daughter and family in America.

Julia was accessing a Community Visitor before befriending Helen who had moved out of the area but continued to keep in contact by way of letters. Julia and Helen continued their friendship for over 8 years.



Helen was working part time when she befriended Patricia in 2010 at St Agnes Hostel in Port Macquarie. Pat and Helen continued their friendship for six years. Helen moved to Mary Knoll Hostel in Port Macquarie during 2016 where she was asked to help with group sessions of games, puzzles, craft, and colouring books. Helen remains at Mary Knoll Hostel today helping residents on Tuesday and Saturday morning bingo sessions, Helen not only visits residents at Mary Knoll Hostel but gives her time to meet with Maria who is a Home Care recipient residing at Garden Village in Port Macquarie every Sunday morning since mid-2019.

Helen's commitment to her Community Visitor Volunteer role never wavered during unprecedented and challenging times and was tenacious in reducing friends' feelings of isolation, anxiety, fear, and loneliness by being their continuous support with communication and exchanges by other ways when face to face visits were impossible.

Helen goes about her Community Visitor role with minimum fuss or praise and has made a difference to so many older people.



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community services

**Joan and her volunteer friend Kath**

Kath has been my volunteer friend for about the last five years. Right from the first visit we had a special connection. I just knew we were going to have a special relationship. We just clicked from the word go. We have so many things in common. Both love our area we live in, our families, our animals

and our most loved interest is our craft. We meet weekly, going out for coffee and of course we both love our Spotlight shop. We often text each other and we have just started zooming each other as well on our tablets. We just love showing off our things that we are making. Kath is such a special amazing lady. She even feeds my fish when I go away to see my family. I wish she were in my life earlier. A match in heaven I would say.

**Volunteer Lorraine and her friend Esther**

I have been visiting Esther once a week in her home since 2006. This program was known as Neighbour Aid. At the age of 101, Esther moved into care. This was when I became part of the Community Visitors Scheme. I visited on a weekly basis on Tuesdays. For the last two years, with lockdowns visitations became less, but I always managed to give Esther a weekly phone call.

What amazed me about Esther was her resilience, and stamina to cope with life in general especially looking after her son who is living with a disability. She was cheerful and always happy to see me when I visited. She always had something new to tell me about her family. I enjoyed my time very much with Esther and over the years we became good friends. It was a match in heaven.

I became involved with the program as I wanted to help older people and become part of a program that offered visiting, friendship and companionship. Forming a relationship with Esther has been very therapeutic for me. Forming a bond from the very start has made a huge difference in our lives having lots of fun and laughs, stories to tell, creating lots of lovely memories.



I enjoyed my time very much with Esther. In early 2022, Esther passed away peacefully. She was a little shy of 104 years of age. Esther enriched my life, and I will not forget her.



**Manning Support Services**  
**Volunteer Lynne and her friend Ming**  
**The Surfer and his Saint**

A referral was received from a local aged care facility for a older person who had lost his wife and had no contact with relatives or friends. He was isolated and lonely.

It was mentioned that the older person may have been a surfer back in the day at Bell's Beach in VIC. His visiting request was simple 'I would like to go to the beach and watch the waves'. I already had an idea of who I would match the resident with, so that was a good start.

Looking back now it was probably the best pairing I ever made between a visitor and recipient. After a bit of research, I found out that the resident was a chap named George 'Ming' Smith. He **was** a surfer, and a brief history is shown below.

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**Newspaper of the day**

Bell's Beach VIC

**George (Ming) Smith** an 'excitable' character put up some good performances on the board during the early fifties. He won the Club marathon board paddle- Torquay to Breamlee- in 1953, was third in the State Title in '54 and second in '55. 'Ming' has been credited with winning the first ever prize money at a board rally, when in 1961 at 'Bell's' he was awarded one pound (\$2.00) for riding 'the wave of the day'. The very first Rip Curl Pro Classic).



Since 1939 surfers have made the once hazardous trip to Bells Beach from Torquay riding along the cliff tops on motorbikes. It was mostly abandoned until the late 1950's due to accessibility. In 1960 a keen local surfer and a former Olympic wrestler named Joe Sweeney cleared the way for a road by hiring a bulldozer to make a track that is now part of the Anglesea to Torquay walking track. Over the years it proved to indeed be a rallying point for the hottest surfers in the nation and eventually the world, turning full pro in 1973 with the help of a jeans company, Amco, and a growing local surf shop and wetsuit business, Rip Curl.

I printed all the info out that I could find and presented it to Ming's new visitor who was a lovely lady called Lynne. Well, they hit it off immediately! The friendship lasted almost five years with Ming's health failing in 2021. Lynne loved the beach just as much as Ming and they would drive from Ming's' home to watch the sets roll in, whale watch, take walks on the break wall and enjoy coffee or ice cream from Maccas on the way home. 5 amazing years of friendship between Ming and Lynne!



### **Volunteer Siew and her friend**

I have been a Community Visitor with Many Rooms since 2019. I have had four (and currently still three) friends since then. I joined the CVS program because I realise isolation and loneliness is a big problem especially amongst older people in our community. The pandemic, with the many lockdowns, has exacerbated this problem of

loneliness. This made me realise the impact a volunteer with CVS can make in the lives of our care recipients. Most of my contacts live in aged care facilities. Even in 'normal' times they say they are so lonely, and during lockdowns it makes the loneliness almost unbearable, and a feeling of despondency prevails. To be able to get a visit (I was privileged to be allowed in even when relatives were shut out!) was a highlight of their week.

Very often I sit and listen to them tell me the same things, which has trained me in the discipline of patience! I do bring my ukulele on some of my visits and sing all the old songs my friends are familiar with, and it brings me joy to see them either sing along with me or mouth the words.



On days when it is cloudy and grey, I often sing, "You Are My Sunshine" to my friend to let her know she makes me happy when I see her. Another song I sing is, "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" which is the song her first love sang to her. "Daisy Bell" is another song that my friend living with dementia often request as they remember the words. Those songs are short and bring back memories. It lifts their spirits and mine too.

So, what reward do I get in being a CVS volunteer? Certainly not monetary but of far more worth is the realisation that I have been a friend to my older friends. One of my friends often says that nobody seems to care about her and that she is scared that one day she will die alone. But one day she said to me, "thank you for being a good and faithful friend". This is so affirming that my visits to her have made a difference in her life and that she knows for whatever days she has left on this earth, she has at least someone who cares—a friend.

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### **Volunteer Carole and her dogs Dixie and Abbie**

Carole has been a volunteer with the MCM CVS since 2008. She began visiting a gentleman in an Aged Care Facility in the west, and decided to one day take her precious, professionally trained dog Dixie (pictured) to visit this person. This interaction led to others wanting to pet Dixie and were excited that she would visit weekly.



Sadly, after seven years her dear friend passed away. Carole did not want to stop visiting the other recipients living at the home, and denying them the opportunity of petting Dixie, so she continued her weekly visits and card game. Dixie soon became the much-loved pet of the home.

Unfortunately, last year Dixie became unwell and passed away peacefully. Dixie had been visiting at the home for many years and it was a sad time for the recipients, staff and families who looked forward to Dixie coming. Carole's family decided to buy her a new fur baby, and she named her Abbie.

Abbie has also been trained and has recently begun her aged care visiting journey. The impact this is having, has really shown to improve the well-being of residents through these weekly visits. In addition to providing comfort, happiness and relief to people experiencing illness, ageing and loneliness, Abbie's visits provide so much more.

Abbie (pictured) and Carole provide stress relief, respite, and support to not only recipients but visiting family and facility staff, who often work in very challenging environments. A hug or a moment spent connecting with an animal can act as a circuit breaker, bringing a calming effect. Not everyone can have a pet, particularly those living in residential care, so Carole fills that void, by sharing the love of her precious pooch.





### **Volunteer Christiane and her friend Heidi.**

I always had the desire to volunteer, but there was never the right chance. I was born and raised in Germany, moved to Singapore in 2017 and finally touched down in Australia in February 2021.

When I arrived in Australia the perfect opportunity for volunteering arose. Being from Germany, it didn't take me long to come across MiCare and its cultural diversity. I enrolled in the CVS program and since then have been regularly visiting Heidi, an elderly lady from Germany, in an aged care home. We have lovely chats, read German newspapers and every now and then we even do a beauty day and I paint her fingernails. She is so grateful which is extremely rewarding.

After a few weeks as CVS volunteer a job opportunity with MiCare came up as they were looking for a Social Support Coordinator for the Volunteer Coordination Team. I was lucky and got the job! Liaising with clients, volunteers, and colleagues from all around the world, learning about different cultures, traditions, and hearing their life stories is something I really enjoy.

I'm looking forward to continuing my visits with Heidi and many exciting experiences working with MiCare.

The CVS program truly changed my life and helped me so much to settle here in Australia.





### **Volunteer John**

My friends call me Joop, and I was born in the Netherlands and moved to Australia in 1967. I have volunteered for the Dutch and other CALD communities in the Hunter area for many years. My personal aspiration is to install a love of mankind, a desire of continually learning about life and people, to promote an understanding in my personal respect for every person regardless of culture or racial background.

I commenced with Northern Settlement Services (Now Mosaic Multicultural Connections) in 2004 and have visited many older people over the years and have formed wonderful friendships full of joyous laughter, generosity, and warmth. I speak English, Dutch and German so some of the older people I have visited have enjoyed and appreciated being able to speak to someone in their mother tongue. They light up when they see me coming and that makes me so happy.

CVS has given me an opportunity to fulfill my aspiration. I believe that we all need to share our lives in doing good to others. The feeling of creating a better world by personal example is one of the nicest gifts we can give to those that have less.





### **Volunteer – Rahman**

#### **Volunteer since 1991 (pilot year)**

Whoever I visit, I have one mission only and that is to give quality time.

In the early eighties when I arrived in Australia, the local newspaper, The Leader, was a great resource for finding out about events and opportunities in the neighbourhood. In 1991, I saw the advertisement 'Volunteers needed, Friends for Older People Program'. I called up and spoke with Jill Marshall, my first program coordinator, who explained the program to me.



In making new friends there can be challenges. We are all unique and have different characteristics. Some of my friends have had dementia, low hearing, are a little unresponsive, like more rest or are demanding, but in a positive way.

Throughout my own life journey of scouting student, trade union leader, military service, civilian career, marriage, children, job changes — volunteering has been a constant. Volunteering in Australia is the centre of gravity of the values of our society of respect, care, empathy, and citizen rights. It gives action to social justice issues.

I have learnt many skills in my thirty years as a Community Visitor. My listening capacity has increased. In listening to my friends, my personal empathy for individuals, for our country, our society has grown. I have heard inspiring stories of life experiences, career advancements and achievements of teachers, singers, farmers, seamen, aeroplane pilots and family matriarchs.

Since joining I have had the pleasure of making eight friends. I do not like to use the word resident or recipient — we are friends. The Community Visitors Scheme (CVS) aligns with my value of 'we can all play a part in making a positive difference to another person, in making someone's day a better one'.

Whoever I visit, I have one mission only and that is to give quality time. That has looked different for each person.

There have been many memorable friendships and moments I can reflect upon, some happy and some not so happy. I have even had a marriage proposal. A ninety-five-years-old, former catholic primary school teacher claimed she 'wants to marry me'. We shared a laugh.

One lady I visited needed more rest. If I arrived and she was asleep, my mission was to keep company. I was there. If she woke, I was present to talk and to listen. My purpose is to be there.

I remember the farmer from Cobram, a true-blue chap who proudly showed me above his bed his certificate of graduation from Grade six in 1916. A Seaman, who had travelled all over the world who had learnt the language and something of the culture of every port he stopped. He was a forty-five-year-old man with MS on his own in Australia when we became friends.

I will never forget the time I had my six-month-old daughter Emma visiting with me and sitting together was a mother and son. For over 30 minutes the lady of European descent, speaking in her mother tongue spoke with my daughter. They did not have to be speaking the same language to connect. They communicated with facial expressions, touch and feeling. The son thanked me for the pleasure my daughter gave to his mother who was isolated because of the language barrier.



Some of the friends I have visited over the years have shared their resentment and frustration of being in an aged care home, their wish to return to their own home, their desire to live a normal life. On these occasions I like to listen rather than respond. To give the opportunity for the person to talk and express their feelings. I listen and nod with them. As friends we share stories of life, all the colours and emotions of joy and sadness.

In the thirty years of being a Community Visitor, each friend that has died has remained with me. There are moments in time when they pop up and are with you – on holidays, at work, at home, in the car, on public transport. The memory of that person comes to you. In many ways the friends you make become a book with you and their precious life is remembered.

My current friend, Hans and I have been matched since 2005. Initially a friend but now more like a family member. We share everything. He knows my family, my wife and daughters by name and asks after each one. We discuss music, poetry, cultures, spirituality, social issues, the environment, climate, sport (footy, cricket, tennis), local and world politics, childhood memories and food. Hans' favourite food is a McDonald's apple pie.

I arrive on each visit with a cappuccino, and we sit and talk over coffee as friends do. He is a creative soul, a singer, poet, song writer, a visionary, an intellectual with a great sense of humour and my dear friend.

I am thankful for all my friends, for the time shared, for inspiring me. In my 30 years with the CVS, I have always felt I have gained more than I have given. The power of friendship is that we give and receive abundantly.

## **Volunteer Mel and his friends Morrie and Elizabeth**

### **A Golden Experience**

My dad lived in Mansfield and enjoyed the company of a Community Visitor. When I would go to visit Dad every fortnight, he would talk about his visitor. He looked forward to the visits, I could see they were important in his life and had a positive impact on him.

When Dad died, I decided to become a Community Visitor as a remembrance of my dad, and because I knew that I could also help someone else.

I recall feeling quite nervous initially, as you do when you start a new job. I was walking into uncharted waters. I carried a sense of trepidation and wondered how things would work out. Nervously asking myself, how would things pan out?

I was first matched with Morrie. A former train driver and very intelligent man. He had a wealth of records, newspaper articles, photos which spanned forty years, giving a wonderful and rich snapshot of his years working with the Victorian Railways. He started driving steam trains, then diesel and finally electric. It was an immense privilege to be introduced to his life. The nerves did not last for long as we shared stories.

Morrie passed away in his nineties, it was an honour knowing him on a personal level. I felt a sense that he was from a generation that has moved on. It was deeply rewarding for me. My next match was, Elizabeth. She had not long been in the Aged Care Home and had dementia. For me this came with unique challenges, an ongoing learning experience. Elizabeth was unsettled in her new environment, wanted out and saw the staff as the enemy. I was wearing my MS badge and because of this Elizabeth thought I was one of them, as she fondly called the staff. The day I decided to not arrive wearing my badge was the day Elizabeth dropped all barriers. It was a golden experience. We were now friends. Elizabeth's dementia progressively worsened to the point that any kind of communication was a struggle. A memorable moment was when we would go for a walk together and I would make a point of singing the old songs and Elizabeth would join in. It was so joyful for me and for Elizabeth. A treasured moment and a breakthrough in how we would continue to enjoy time together.

As a volunteer, I was not expecting that I would build relationships with the residential staff, the family, the other residents, but I did. There is much to be learnt from these relationships.

My role as a CVS volunteer has taught me that everyone has a story - a unique life experience. It is a privilege to be taken into that life. It has been my experience with volunteering that you get more out of it than you put in.

COVID has created so much disruption to our lives. Time moves on and it is a precious thing to be able to give back to volunteer. A Golden Experience.



### **Volunteer Linda and her friend Mr Ibrahim**

I got involved with Multicultural Care's Community Visitors Scheme because I have always loved helping people. I had also recently completed a Diploma in Community Services and wanted an opportunity to use the skills I had learnt.

I was first introduced to Mr Ibrahim about two years ago. While he is Egyptian and I am Assyrian, we both grew up in Arabic cultures and speak the language as our mother tongue.

My first impression was that Mr Ibrahim was a kind, intelligent and independent man who loved spending time in his garden, going to church and caring for his dog, Mesho. As we got to know each other better over time, I learned what a rich and fascinating life he has led. Mr Ibrahim was born in Egypt where he grew up in a Coptic Christian family. He studied Civil Engineering at University and was sent on a scholarship to study in Germany. He then went on to start his own successful business working back home in Egypt and Iraq. In 1990, Mr Ibrahim migrated with his family to Australia in search of a better life. Sadly, he lost his wife to cancer ten years later.

When I visit Mr Ibrahim, we enjoy talking about the history of Iraq, Egypt, and the great empires of the Middle East. We also listen to Arabic classical music and talk about the music and movies of the fifties, sixties, and seventies. He knows a lot about the music and actors. We both enjoy spending time in his beautiful garden full of trees and flowers, which he takes very good care of.

Since losing his wife, Mr Ibrahim has cooked for himself and has become quite a good chef. Sometimes, he'll ask me how to make something and we'll cook together. One day he said to me "I make horrible rice, can you show me how to cook it," so I helped him with that. During the COVID lockdowns I couldn't visit Mr Ibrahim, but I called him every week over that period to check in on him, make sure he was okay and was up to date on all the latest health information.

One time I was a little late calling him due to an unexpected event. When I went to call him half an hour later, I noticed I had missed calls and messages from him checking that I was okay, I was really touched by that.

I think the CVS is important for people like Mr Ibrahim. So, many older people are living by themselves, and they need people to visit them and talk to them. It keeps them stay connected to their communities and the world outside. It's also important for their mental health, as loneliness can often lead to stress and depression.

I've got just as much out of the CVS as Mr Ibrahim. I really enjoy his company, and I've learned so much from him. I've become more confident and developed the skills to be able to help older people.



### **Lilli, Rosa, and Carmel**

Lilli, Rosa, and Carmel are three amiche (friends) in their seventies that knew each other for a very long time and a little bit over a year ago decided getting involved with community visitors scheme and giving something back to the community.

MCCI CVS program had a great connection with the local aged care facility, predominantly supporting residents of Italian background, and the match worked perfectly.

New to the field, the volunteers decided they would try to visit the facility together for a start. The staff organised to get the Italian residents together for morning tea and the volunteers had a great time meeting everyone and sharing stories with a cuppa and biscotti.

Sometimes when getting the fifteen residents together was not possible, the volunteers would go and meet them separately in their rooms or in the living areas. The residents started to love this connection/visits and would really look forward for them to come back all the time. It also brought the residents closer together as they spend more and more time with each other.

COVID really impacted ability of volunteers to visit more often, so at Christmas time one of the volunteers took the initiative of preparing at Italian Christmas lunch for the residents.

She cooked everything nicely fresh and brought it to the residents to share. They all sit around the table, shared beautiful meals prepared and served by the volunteers, and enjoyed some Italian music.

The residents were so happy that morning, smiling and enjoying each other's company. Even the ones who never leave their room, stayed till the end and were very emotional when we had to say goodbye and Merry Christmas. Staff reported that some of them haven't spoken much for ages and were all smiles and talking happily to the group.

The volunteers have also reported that being able to give back to these people, has made such a positive impact in their wellbeing, even at times where they were not feeling so well and had health issues of their own. They look forward to seeing the residents every time and feel truly honoured to be part of such great initiative.





## Northern Health

### Volunteer Pauline

Pauline has spent the past sixteen years building relationships with several residents from Villa Maria and Grace Villa. Pauline enjoys spending time with residents chatting about the past, current issues and just seeing the joy it brings to others.

Pauline originally started visiting others when she was twelve years old in Singapore and has continued this throughout her life in Australia. She gets great joy out of offering her time to others and feels that a simple chat with someone and listening to their story can really make an impact.





Health  
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### **Volunteer Christoph and his friend Liane**

I was introduced to Liane in September 2017, soon after I began volunteering with Community Visitors Scheme. Liane had just moved to a residential aged care facility a few months before we met. I was lucky enough to be paired with Liane because of our German speaking backgrounds. Liane is from Austria, and I am from Switzerland.



From the beginning, I was very impressed with Liane's positive attitude to life. She has a great sense of humour and is a wonderful storyteller. She enjoys talking about her life and her childhood memories of growing up in Vienna, Austria, and England. Liane has told me many funny stories about her life in Australia, her children's adventures, getting in all sorts of mischief. And, about her beloved dogs, one of which came to fame as he frequently escaped from home. Once she found him in a shopping centre and another time the Burwood Police Station called as they found him roaming in Burwood after catching the train from the upper north shore!

Thanks to modern technology I have been able to show Liane the quarter in Vienna where she grew up and, to her surprise, the apartment block where she spent her childhood years still looks the same. Liane has a remarkable memory and can recite the many German poems she once learnt. And of course, her German is still fantastic. What an achievement considering she left her home in Austria more than eighty years ago!

Liane enjoys her life at the aged care facility and always makes a point of saying that she is so happy not to have to run a household anymore and having all the time in the world to do a lot of reading and indulging in drawing and creating wonderful cards and pictures. It looks to me that Liane is never bored. She just gets on with life and keeps herself very busy and active. She also actively takes part in the in-house discussion group which is led by a young scholar who does a fantastic job engaging with active residents like Liane.

Through my regular visits I have introduced my wife to Liane, and we quite often visit her together, bringing our dog Rosie with us. Many of the residents love to stop by and say hello to Rosie, who is always happy to accept a pat and some kind words. I have been fortunate to meet three of Liane's four grown-up children and their families, her brother-in-law, and other friends. It is good to see that she is surrounded by people she loves in a truly caring and comfortable facility. My visits to Liane are as fulfilling for me as I hope they are for her and it has now become a nice Saturday afternoon routine for us, which I hope goes on for many years to come.



### Volunteer Jadwiga

During the last two years we all faced the lockdowns and isolation because of pandemic COVID19. At that time my thoughts often were with elderly ladies that I used to visit at Polish Old Age home in Bayswater. The pandemic regulations put stop to visits. For some time before that I was going there every Tuesday or Wednesday for just approximately two hours in the morning until lunch time. Morning hours after breakfast the resident ladies shared in communal room, mostly in silence while sitting and watching TV. I was there to change their routine if possible. Some ladies accepted my invitation to walk through the garden. The smooth levelled path was safe enough for walk with me when I held the ladies under the arm.

When I was not there, they were happy to watch TV. Maybe they were afraid to walk without assistance. So, I felt needed, I helped them to catch the breath of fresh air in a garden and exchange a few words with me. It was an exercise for leg as well as for their lungs. Shouldn't we speak at least 2000 words every day to maintain good lungs? One of the ladies, decades ago when young, was a singer, the wedding singer. She remembered those songs. When we were together in a garden she sung aloud. However, she did not remember which table she regularly occupied in the dining room, when I led her indoors at lunch time. Most of the ladies I spent time with during the visits were silent, happy to be left alone. Every time it took a bit of persuasion to get them off the armchair and lead them to walk around the block. Sometimes I had my kelpie dog with me, on the leash hooked up to the tree in a shade. I was taking the ladies out to show them the dog. They enjoyed touching him and they smiled.



In time of lockdowns, I often thought of "my ladies", how do they feel, are they still alive? We all know well that movement is life, that's why I was so keen to keep on helping them to charge their inner batteries and walk, walk, walk with me at least once a week. Beside my genuine attempts to organize a small group to do knitting, art, or crochet there, nothing come out of it. The ladies were too apathetic to do anything. Once I invited one lady to dance with me and she was happy. The gentle shuffle to the music from a radio was a good fun and good exercise.

I always introduced myself to each lady, but mostly I had to do it every time we've met. In retrospect - I am sure that the time spent with old ladies was mutually beneficial. I had an opportunity to help some of them with such basic exercise like the walk in a garden and to show them warm personal attention, encourage song and dance when possible. This service to old people is making their days brighter.

### **Volunteer Justyna**

I am very grateful for having an opportunity to be a part of Community Visitor Scheme Program run by the Polish Community Council of Victoria.



Working for Polish community has given me a chance to look at seniors and the challenges they face daily. One of them, and the toughest one, is loneliness. Nothing can replace face-to-face contact with another person. Being a volunteer has given me a wider view on world issues, a deeper understanding of people's needs and more gratitude for all the things that I have. This experience has taught me to be more sensitive to other people's needs, to be more patient and be a better listener. I discovered that visiting an older person was of mutual benefit. For me, spending time with the elderly enriched my knowledge and opened my horizons. For people whom I visited, my time gave them company, opportunity to speak in their mother language and good fun too.

I would like to thank Sr Elizabeth for involving me to this program. I hope the CVS Program continues supporting older people living in Australia, alleviating their sense of loneliness, and giving them happiness.

### **Volunteer Maria**

In the past, I thought of volunteering as the domain of rich, bored women. I remember whenever I was asked about my plans for retirement, I would reply "I'll think about volunteering, maybe I'll visit people in residential facilities..." One day, Sister Elzbieta – CVS coordinator – suggested that I start visiting women in residential care homes. I'll try – I answered quickly. I felt both joy and anxiety about whether I'd be able to find myself in a new situation. Whether I'd disappoint those entrusted to me. Would my good intentions be enough, because I had no real knowledge and, I had never worked with elderly people.

I visit my ladies once a week and I really like that day – it is a Wednesday. I listen carefully to what they have to say today and let them speak even if they've discussed the topic five or ten times. I bring them colourful magazines to look through. The colourful photos evoke memories and enrich our conversations.



I am grateful to Ms. Magda, the owner of 'Wisła', for collecting Polish newspapers for me. Each of the ladies is unique – with different intellectual capabilities – but their emotional and spiritual needs are the same. They both need love, warmth, attention, and someone who will make them feel loved and important.

Thank God for volunteering. Volunteering is God's hand on earth.



### **Volunteer Jim**

Jim has been a volunteer for thirteen years, making a real difference to the friends he visits. Jim visits with his highly trained companion dog, Yolanda, who adds a special highlight to every visit, attracting more than her fair share of attention, cuddles, and treats.

Jim says the program has helped him to grow in confidence and to see things from new perspectives. It has given him purpose and sees it as a real privilege to build friendships with older people in his community.

Yolanda too, makes a real difference, soaking up the attention and giving back plenty of love. She is Jim's second companion dog and always seems to know when a friend needs that extra friendship, fixing them with her loyal gaze and extending her paw in friendship.



### **Volunteer Geraldine**

This amazing volunteer started with CVS when it first began in the Bega Valley over twenty years ago. She had earlier volunteered in the hospital but made the move to CVS so she could stay in touch with people who had moved into an Aged Care Facility near her home. Geraldine "absolutely loves" the program, making many new friends along the way. She fondly recalls outings to concerts, luncheons and coffee shops that really made a difference to residents who were otherwise lonely and unable to get out. Geraldine's secret to her longevity as a volunteer is to be committed. Even after all this time, she makes it a priority to visit weekly, revolving her week around her CVS commitment. She is a special lady that has found her niche in our special program on the Sapphire Coast.



### **Volunteer Jamie and her friend Jean**

My friendship with Jean started during lockdowns in 2021 when I was not able to visit Jean so only involved short phone calls. I first met Jean towards the end of the 2021 year and it was so nice to be able to see her face-to-face. I was inspired by how mobile and lively she is for her age. Since then, I visit Jean every 2 weeks if I can otherwise, I give her a call. We sit downstairs and have a tea and chat about our weeks. Jean is so friendly, always introducing me to people at the home. I was able to meet Jean's daughter, grandson, and friends for her ninety-second birthday tea in June which was very special to be able to meet her loved ones. I love visiting Jean, spending time catching up and getting to know her, and showing her photos of my dogs, or bringing my mum to the home to meet Jean. As my grandmothers live in South Africa, I always tell Jean she is my Australian Granny. I am looking forward to many more years of friendship with Jean.





**Volunteer Vivienne and her friends Elena, Caterina, Olga, and Giovanna**

I started volunteering in 2011 where one of my friends was already volunteering for SMRC.

She asked me to join, saying that SMRC was in much need of Italian speaking volunteers. I wanted to do something for my community, and in some way give back a little. This was the perfect opportunity. I visited four residents at Calvary St Judes Aged Care Home, Elena, Caterina, Olga, and Giovanna. It has been both challenging and rewarding for me in many ways. I enjoy seeing how the residents react when I start speaking to them in their own language because in many cases, they have little English language skills. They are so appreciative of my visit, I feel a sense of accomplishment to help, support, give back to my community and if I can bring a smile to their faces its beautiful and rewarding.

We talk about their life experiences, places they have travelled, their families, talked about photos that are displayed in their rooms. They all have such individual stories, and they happily share them with me, I love listening to each one of them.

It's been so difficult the last two years with the uncertainty and challenges of Covid and all the restrictions, policies, and protocols in nursing homes with no visitors allowed for such a long time.



For me to be able to continue visiting, I have been tripled vaccinated, I wear a mask and face shield, sign-in and have a temperature check before entering the facility. Of course, I don't mind because visiting face to face is very important to support older people coping with loneliness and emotional distress. I encourage them to talk and to distract them from the pain that they may be feeling.

During my time with SMRC I have worked with Community Support Program, Positive Aging Program and currently with Community Visitors Scheme. It is a wonderful organisation to be involved with, as they provide training and support to volunteers. SMRC also provides social outings with other volunteers which has been a great way to get to know other volunteers on a social level.

What I have enjoyed the most with CVS is having the opportunity to meet wonderful older Italian residents who still have lots of great stories to share.



### **Volunteer Ederlynn and her friend Anastasia.**

I have been volunteering for over five years. The reason why I started volunteering for CVS is because I love people. I love connecting with them and hearing their stories. I also like to share great recipes with my clients. All these things have contributed to the fact that I've volunteered for over fourteen years.

Helping people is rewarding, especially those who are elderly migrants. I love understanding them and feeling connected to other cultures and communities. It makes a positive impact not only on my clients, but also for my own mind. It has kept me going to volunteer for fourteen years.

We often underestimate the power of touch, a listening ear, or even a smile. I had a friend, Anastasia, who was ninety years old, and she was not eating. I thought if I sing to her perhaps it will uplift her spirits. From the moment I sang while beside her, she ate for the first time in days.



We need to remember that we are the same blood, all of us have red blood. Not white, not blue, not yellow. We are really all the same.

### **Volunteer Karima and her friend Nabia**

I have been volunteering for just over a year and I have not looked back ever since. Before I started volunteering a year ago, I was a student at SMRC's homework club program. I was looking for a job, but I had no experience. I was eager to start somewhere, so I started to volunteer under the Community Visitors Scheme at SMRC.

I found the experience interesting. I like to help people and enjoy speaking with them about all kinds of things. Some time ago I was matched with an Afghanistan elderly lady, Nabia, who experienced a lot of pain in her body. I managed to get in touch with SMRC's Positive Aging Coordinator, and I connected her to the program and encouraged her to go to the gym. She found her strength and confidence, while feeling less pain.

I found that being a part of CVS connected me with community, and I learned to connect and engage more with the elderly community.



## Volunteer Claudia, and memories of her older friend, Janice

Every time I think about Janice, I feel

happy and sad. She passed away at about the same time as my mother; they were a similar age, both being in their early eighties.

The happy thoughts I remember are that she liked to read books and sometimes she would re-read the same book she liked. I made a bookmark for her, and she was very happy with it.

She also loved flowers, especially wattle - the colour yellow was her favourite colour. When I had time, I would buy flowers for her. Sometimes if I was very busy, I would pick some flowers from the garden instead: she was still happy with that. She would show me where the vases were in the kitchen. I remember that she would say, "Claudia, would you put some sugar instead of just water, and put the flowers in there".

Every time when I visited her, she would show me lots of different things. So, she would open the wardrobe and show me, "Look Claudia, I have this tee shirt; and that one; and have all these comfortable shoes". But she could not walk – she relied on the wheelchair.



She would tell me stories about her brother and sister. She happily got on with her siblings; especially her brother who had a very close relationship with her. He was a musician: he was good at playing instruments and a good singer. But Janice would say, "I am a good listener!"

Janice was single all her life. She lived with two dogs. She loved her relationship with her dogs very much. She didn't have anything like an iPhone – she relied on books, or magazines, or TV.

COVID meant it was much harder to visit and that situation was very bad. Everyone had the same problem – we relied on contact via the phone or letters and cards. Janice was quite low key. Janice said about residing in the aged care facility, "I have some friends here, but I only talk to you".

Special memories about a special friend.



### Volunteer Javier and his friend Graeme

I have long admired the value of the stories of our elders. When I met Graeme, we hit it off immediately. Graeme's love for music, for life was on par with mine. He instantly shared his stories of meeting Annie Lennox and Chrissie Hynd with me, and we both laughed as he enjoyed the reminiscing as much as I enjoyed the stories.

Our friendship formed fast but also grew. What I discovered is that he indeed lived a full life. A life through times that I had only read about. Graeme lived in an aged care home surrounded as he said by people, he had nothing in common with. I attempted to take Graeme back out into the world that he once lived within. Graeme was in his prime deeply involved with the Drag Culture. As part of Switchboard's events, we participated in the Midsummer Pride March in January 2020. After the March I was keen for him to experience the visual spectacle of our beautiful community. I sighted a spectacular Drag Queen and pushed his wheelchair as close to her as I could. They met eyes and then to my surprise they both instantly recognised each other. They had been friends that had lost touch over the decades and due to this chance meeting a reconnection was reborn. Throughout the years I took him to many Drag shows and in many especially the older performers I learnt they all knew him. Here were the stories firsthand I was privileged to hear of a time when this culture wasn't as accepted as it is now. The bravery, the courage, and the comradeship. These experiences gave Graeme new life igniting memories and colouring his days as he continually shared photos and stories. Unfortunately like many others the next two years were fogged by the pandemic with restrictions. We kept the momentum as best we could with phone calls and each phone call, I learnt something new. It was of mutual benefit as him talking about then sparked him up and gave me great pleasure to be able to hear them.



Graeme passed away suddenly in January 2022.

So, to answer what does CVS mean to me? It is the honour to be able to be an active participant in someone's life and hopefully make a difference in their day. The opportunity that Switchboard gives us to do this is a privilege and an honour to be a part of filling a much-needed gap in our community.



# Sydney Community Services

## **Volunteer Emma and her older friends**

My first friend was a laugh and a half. She lived in residential aged care but was not an old person. She would wait by the front door for me to arrive on Friday mornings so that we could go out in search of the best iced coffee and cake in town – well, at least in the local area. We would laugh and laugh as mates do as we toured Top Ryde or Gladesville shops for her weekly needs – usually lollies! The pleasure she and I both derived from this experience of friendship, beginning to end, was indescribable and I would not swap it for the world.

My lovely current friend is also in aged care and not an older person. She is living with mental illness and is scared to leave her room. It has taken considerable time for her to trust me, but now that she does, we share a close friendship and bond. Coffee and cake are the order of the day. She is very alone in the world, so she relies on our friendship. She is a smart, witty, wonderful lady who smiles and improves visibly when we see each other. She engages with me, and I find I can take her mind off her worries for the time we are together. We laugh and enjoy our time together. It is such a rewarding experience for me and a plus for her. Win win!





SETTLEMENT | INCLUSION | AGED CARE

## Volunteer Farid and his friend Patricia

I am a sixty-five-year-old Engineer, Egyptian-born. I have been living in Australia for the past thirty-eight years. Our professional life has demanded time and given a little left for family or friends.

Having recently retired, I found myself with much time to pursue everything I would have liked to do earlier but couldn't. Without having a good purpose in life, life becomes meaningless, monotonous, and empty. I felt that it was time to give back and volunteer. This decision was easy for me as I come from a family of volunteers. I volunteer in different areas – some with the big organisations, or other activities are a simple offer of assistance to anyone who requires it. One of my experiences in volunteering is with Sydney Multicultural Community Services, where they are running a CVS program (among their other programs). CVS or Community Visitors Scheme is a government-funded program for visiting the elderly, providing companionship and friendship.

**CVS volunteer, Farid and the recipient, Patricia on her birthday**



I was matched to a lovely lady, Patricia. We have been regularly staying in touch, chatting, and finding areas of common interest to keep the communication going. From the first phone call we had, I felt I was the lucky one to be her acquaintance.

Patricia is an eight-five old Canadian-born lady. She has many accomplishments in life, not least of which she published her own book about her life story. Her book *Why God Hates Me* is catching. I read her book in almost no time and felt as if I have known her all my life. We found many things in common to chat about every week and in between. Patricia is a mother, a grandmother, a model, a beauty queen, a photographer, an author, and a pleasant friend to be around with. My visitation times with Patricia go by so fast, our conversation moving from one topic to another. I could also confide in her with my own issues and seek her wisdom and advice at times.

Volunteering is not a one-way activity. Far from it, it is reciprocal. We gain new insights and experiences, broaden our horizons, and invest our time towards a cause that we believe in. In my case, my most significant gain is in gaining friendships and having more comprehensive experiences with others.



### **Volunteer Lena and her friend Gladys**

I've been involved in the Community Visitors Scheme, in a way, before it existed! I've been visiting people for more than thirty years with a service that commenced at Glanville Village because of a real need identified by the person in charge at the time, Bev Stapleton. So, over the years I have made many older friends and for me that has made a huge positive difference in my life.

Currently I'm visiting Gladys. We talk about anything and everything. She tells me about her week, her family and it goes from there. She has a little garden outside her room, and she loves her little plot. She gets very involved in the aged care home outings. For a ninety-two-year-old, she is a real little miracle. I couldn't find her one day, but I finally found her at the piano, playing classical music beautifully. It was such a wonder as I didn't know she could play.

There is always something new and sometimes, if I'm feeling a little down, visiting Gladys really uplifts me. It lets me forget any concerns I have and when I go back to it all, everything is in a more positive light and reminds me to leave it with God.

Don't judge a book by its cover. Sometimes, you can look at a persona and think "they are a bit funny, or odd, or old and not much use" I would never have known that someone at ninety-two years of age would still be working in the garden (a lovely veggie garden) and that she would be bothered to do that, and the piano playing and enjoy outings. She has a great sense of humour, and we have lots of laughs. We can go through every emotion in our visits!

I think it is wonderful way to get over bumps in your own life and realise that there are people out there that can make your day and you make their day brighter!



SPANISH LATIN AMERICAN WELFARE CENTRE



### **Volunteer Astrid and her friend Ana**

I am fifty-two years old, Colombian international student, living in Melbourne since 2017. Since I arrived in Australia, I have had the desire to contribute in a purposely, conscious, and meaningful way to the community. This opportunity came to me, in October 2021, when Marcela Aponte, volunteers' coordinator from UNITED, contacted me and offered what I was hoping for.

For those individuals who are living in age care nursing homes, communicating in their mother tongue is fundamental. Since last November 2021, I have had the privilege of being matched to Ana who is from Chile; Spends time visiting Mrs Ana, has been an amazing experience. Mrs Ana strongly motivate me to fulfil my life of purpose. She is a living example of strength, boldness, and courage; she is a role model, and she is an inspiration. I am learning from her, the way to keep a healthy relationship with adult children. I admire her amazing sense of humour, her wisdom and I am discovering through her eyes, new cosmovision, of my own Hispanic Latin American roots, history, diversity, and richness.

Every single visit that I pay to Mrs Ana, is an opportunity to have meaningful conversations in our mother tongue and share perspectives. It constitutes a truly evolving transgenerational dialogue. At the end of each visit, it will be difficult to differentiate who of us, is the most delighted with the encounter. This volunteer opportunity gives me the opportunity to offer what I value the most, my time. From my personal perspective, time is life, that is how I understand love, as sharing time, laughing, and growing together. Thank to UNITED, for offering to this opportunity.

### **Volunteer Mara and her friend Dolores**

This experience has been enriching both on a personal level for me and as a community. On a personal level with the older people, I have been matched with, bonds of friendship are established. This may take a short time or sometimes it may take a little longer; but this can mean great learning in our life depending on which perspective it is viewed; in my case this experience has been extraordinary.

As sociable human beings, we need the company of other people. In the case of people from our community who arrived in Australia in the sixties, they are now in a special stage of their life, where tranquillity and family's presence are required and, on many occasions, and for different reasons, it can't happen for them and the social contact with friends and family is weak. CVS provides an opportunity to reduce loneliness and give them the opportunity to interact in their own mother tongue.

It has also been a great challenge for me to come into someone's life at a time when they are vulnerable, meet them without expectations, just with a positive attitude and desire to make a difference.

During my visits with Dolores and others, we play games, read, walk, or just chat, we have a lot of time to share memories and they narrate their stories and experiences. Likewise, this reminds us that one day we will reach that stage of our life, and just as we celebrate our fifteenth birthday if we are lucky, we will celebrate our ninety-fifth birthday or more.

In this beautiful program, I have had the opportunity to give love and listen to people share their stories. I perceive love in the sparkle of their eyes when the person sees me arrive or I appear on the screen. It has been an honour to be part of this program and participate actively with my community.

### **Volunteer Jeannette and her friends Jemita and Josefa**

I came to this beautiful country three years ago. I could not imagine I will share my time with people from my community, helping them and giving them my love and company. Someone told me about United and the opportunity to be part of the volunteer team through CVS. I went to United, and they did not hesitate to give me the opportunity to help and give love to older people.

It is a blessing to be able to be friends with older people from our community. I visit Jemita at her home she needs a lot of love and care because she has dialysis three times a week.

Our relationship is based on understanding and empathy, we respect each other and share good times together. Despite Jemita's chronic condition, she is very happy and gives me an example of strength and resilience.

My darling Josefa lives in a nursing home. It has been an enriching experience seeing them smile - is the biggest payment, they are happy with a hug or a word. She is very kind, and I am connected to her through our culture and language. We share life experiences and stories from our families and friends.

In my country Chile, I have never seen this concern for older people. This is a great example for our Latin community, promoting friendship and giving time and commitment to them.

When I wake up in the morning, I always think about them, wondering how they are. During the pandemic, I was afraid to lose them because they were the most vulnerable people in this situation. We could not see them face to face during the pandemic time just calling and sending letters to them, we could not see each other and have coffee or tea for almost two years. The telephone and the letters were our only means to maintain contact and our friendship.

I love my volunteering role. It is a reciprocal relationship where you give but also receive and that is worth a lot to me.

### **Volunteer Cindy and her friend Sunta**

A few months ago, I decided to share my time with Sunta. Sunta is eighty-seven years old, born in Uruguay, and an Australian citizen for forty-five years. Teresa tells me about her experiences in Melbourne, as a migrant and I can identify with her story, feelings, and love and gratitude for Australia.



Each of us has our own story. Some stories are more difficult than others. I hope my friendship adds value and makes life better and lighter for other people. I am not just a giver, I also receive their love, company and they also make my life easier and lighter. Sunta also lifts my spirits and encourages me to keep going.

Days ago, Sunta and I were sitting having a coffee and I shared a concern I had with her. With the wisdom of her years, Sunta suggested a solution. I tried it, and it worked well. It helped me to value her experience and recognized our important our older people are in the community.

I am immensely proud to be part of the UNITED volunteer team in Australia. For me, being a volunteer is about an altruistic commitment where I can help contribute to improving the quality of life of others.

The Community Visitors Scheme has helped me understand this period of my life better and have more compassion for others. It enriches me as a person and strengthens my values such as empathy, patience, kindness, humility, and solidarity.

In the future, when I become older, I will be on the same journey. I am learning so much from Sunta and this program and it is preparing me for my old age! Behind each person, there is a life full of stories to learn from.

### **Volunteer Alejandra and her friends Isidora, Hellen, Cornelia, and Ana**

Volunteering for the CVS for my Spanish-speaking Community is a privilege for me. I have no doubt that it is an experience of love and light in each visit I make to my elderly friends Isadora, Ana, Cornelia, and Helen.

Every encounter with them is a full and total connection. We reminisce and tell so many stories of life experience in their mother tongue.

For me it has been heart-warming to provide an opportunity for my older friends to have someone who can speak their language to talk with. I can see the difference it makes to them.

Some of my older friends are surrounded by other people but they do not speak their language. This increases their anxiety and feeling of loneliness and social isolation. That is why the visits are so important for them because it allows them to speak with a friend in their own language and culture. I have noticed that this helps them to be calmer and happier.

It is such a privilege for me to be allowed into their lives. They share their joys, sorrows, life achievements and fears. They trust me and our time together flies past, and they always look forward to the next visit, as do I.



**Volunteer Maria and her friend Jorge**

Prior to Covid, Jorge, a resident at Bossley Park from Opal HealthCare enjoyed a meaningful friendship with Maria, a Spanish volunteer from Western Sydney MRC; their conversations always brightened Jorge's day. Maria hasn't been able to visit Jorge for some time due to COVID, but this hasn't tarnished their flourishing friendship. They ensure they spend time together, sharing heart-warming conversations over Zoom.



**Volunteer Sandra and her friend Nino**

When I first met Nino, he admitted to me that he's not a good talker because he doesn't like to talk. Despite this, every time I have a call with him on zoom, we never run out of things to say. We have conversations about food, soccer, the weather, his peers and his family, and the list just continues. Something to commend about Nino is his continuous gratitude towards everyone who takes care of him, his willingness to share his memories and life experiences, as well as his persistent hope to someday walk again.



### **Volunteer ROSY and her friend Maria**

Rosy responded to an ad on Seek to volunteer with Whittlesea Community Connections to be a companion as part of the Community Visitors Scheme in September 2021. Since then, Rosy, introduced to Maria, have shared great conversations, important events such as Rosy's wedding, dog plays, TV soapies, pokie plays, food and singing. Rosy loves the relationship she has with Maria – they speak nearly every day on the phone and enjoy spending time together.

Rosy believes that time is the most precious thing in life and wants to spend that time sharing beautiful moments having a positive impact on people's lives by volunteering. Growing up on a farm in Italy Rosy was surrounded by a family of fifteen and many neighbors from the village. Money was scarce and that experience grounds Rosy who places more importance on connecting and caring for others. Rosy's family say they can hear her before they see her as she is always laughing and loud – always happy, enjoyable to be with – remarkable on people's lives.



The value of volunteering was ingrained in Rosy as she saw her family helping others. She has a deep desire to bring happiness and joy to people and believes this is her life's mission – not being a social media influencer but an influencer of good vibes to people who really need it.

The relationship with Maria has taught Rosy that it is so important to share the positives of life – talk about the good moments – a lot of people complain and talk about the past – it



seems to be human nature. Rosy says, "If I am not able to be positive and good for myself, I can't be there for others. It's the little things that have an impact on others – if someone is sad, their day can evolve differently to being happy. We have control over how we are feeling and if we can be nice to others - we can make their day."

## The Visitors

In celebration of the Community Visitors Scheme 1992 – 2022



The flowers this week are poppies  
A silent door drop  
Pivoting with the times  
they waltz around the vase  
gowns swirling  
filling the room with golden light  
Like that first visit  
thirty years ago

Pilots then to a greater cause  
Companions to those who came before  
The Rosemary Generation

Memory Keepers  
their Secrets tucked  
between books  
hidden in drawers-  
lucky pennies  
locks of hair  
A Flanders petal  
that first kiss -  
released  
on the breath  
of a well-chosen question  
Trailblazers  
Enduring across three decades  
Finding comfort within words  
and the silences in between  
the now weekly visitors  
old and new  
shift from strangers in a foreign land  
to stalwarts of friendship

Treasured steadfast and true  
Like the poppy  
pressed between  
leather-bound pages  
on the mantel piece

Katherine Crichton-Gadsden, MS Plus CVS Program Coordinator

**Thank you to all the CVS Auspices, Program Coordinators, Volunteers, and older people who have contributed stories of friendship. This collection is only a handful of the many thousands of beautiful inter-generational friendships developed over the last 30 years through the Community Visitors Scheme.**

**If you would like to be involved in this program, please contact your State Network Member**

**<https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/community-visitors-scheme-cvs-0/community-visitor-scheme-contacts>**



**30 years of friendship  
1992 - 2022**

**This e-book has been edited and compiled by Esis Tawfik, CVS State Network Member  
ACT, NSW, and Victoria.  
2022**