

Quarterly Newsletter

SPRING 2021 EDITION



MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

To our valued community,

It is pleasing to see the Victorian community respond to the Vaccination targets, as set by the Government. As we move closer to a double vaccination dose of 90% of the eligible population, it is an important step in ensuring the safety of our most vulnerable community members, our priority throughout this pandemic.

However, as the Victorian community has begun to open up, the Disability sector has had to be patient in waiting for a roadmap out of lockdown from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH). This has been frustrating for families, who are wanting their family members to return onsite as soon as possible, so that their lives can return to some kind of normality.

The Government announced the directions for the operation of disability day support services on 3 November and we have been

working with families to ensure a smooth transition back on site for Day Services at 773 and in our hubs, while working with the additional consideration of supporting both participants who have been vaccinated, and those who have not.

This will add some complexity to support arrangements, and we are grateful to our families for their patience as we work through this next phase of COVIDsafe guidelines. You can read more about our services and care guidelines on page 3.

We are also grateful for our staff and their continued commitment to providing a continuity of care to participants during this uncertain time. It was a blessing to be able to recognise our staff at our Annual General Meeting on 27 October, both through our annual awards ceremony and our AGM video.

You can read more about the AGM overleaf and view the video online.

The continued encouragement, support and connections provided over the past 18 months from our members, families, partners and wider community is also appreciated and valued and we look forward to continuing this relationship.

Therese Desmond

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 71st Annual General Meeting was held online on Wednesday 27 October, 2021.

The theme of this AGM was **Connection** – a fitting tribute to the relationships, bonds and engagement with the community formed by OC Connections participants and families, board members, staff, volunteers, partners and members of the community throughout the year.

We thank Tricia Malowney OAM, for being the guest speaker. Tricia is a disability rights and inclusion advocate working in the health, justice and family violence sectors. Tricia also chairs the OC Connections' Participant Reference Group, a forum in which participant representatives can discuss important issues, concerns and insights that inform OCC services, programs and policies.

Tricia discussed the importance of connection for people with disability, especially in times such as the pandemic and how the disability sector is one sector that has successfully worked together to ensure that people living with disability are supported, heard and feel safe in a time of disruption and uncertainty.

“The disability community said ‘what can we do to support each other?’ because it’s not about an individual organisation - it’s about what’s best for people with disabilities, generally,” said Tricia.

In celebration of the connections made during the pandemic, a video was presented to guests, which recognised and embraced the resilience, commitment and focus on participant safety throughout the pandemic. You can watch the OCC AGM Video on our home page, under news.

The theme of Connection was also reflected in the 2020/2021 OC Connections Annual Report, which was presented to the Board and Members at the AGM.

ANNUAL REPORT

You can obtain a hard copy of the 2020/21 Annual Report by calling (03) 9569 0603 or view it online at:

www.occonnections.org/annual-report



SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

As Melbourne moves out of lockdown and into a new COVIDSafe operating environment, the disability sector remains under the care directives as set by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH). OCC is obliged to adhere to these directions when it supplies service.

To operate the day support programs, we must continue to maintain density limits, including workers, of one person per two square metres in both indoor and outdoor areas.

Service providers must maintain COVIDSafe plans and should:

- strongly encourage all participants and visitors to be fully vaccinated
- ensure everyone wears a mask when indoors, unless they have an exemption
- encourage participants to wear a mask outdoors if they cannot physically distance
- all workers must always wear a face mask indoors, and outdoors if they cannot physically distance

COVID-19 vaccination

All workers, including volunteers, must be vaccinated in line with Chief Health Officer Mandatory Vaccination Directions. Services may be provided to participants if they are unvaccinated, or partly vaccinated, in some cases where we can do so safely.

Unvaccinated or partially vaccinated individuals (noting that vaccination exemptions may apply), can receive essential services with flexible options for safe service delivery, where possible, including:

- online or individual service delivery
- minimising group interactions unless participants are from the same household
- minimising contact between vaccinated and unvaccinated or partially vaccinated individuals.

Our Day Support team are currently working with family members on participant return.

ACCESSING YOUR COVID-VACCINATION CERTIFICATE

It is important to be aware of the different options for accessing your proof of COVID-19 vaccination.

This will be especially important when you need to gain entry to a variety of businesses and services that will be re-opening across Victoria.

Learn how to add your COVID-19 certificate to the Service Victoria app and other ways to access your digital certificate at www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au.



OC CONNECTIONS

SUPPORTING PARTICIPANTS IN LOCKDOWN

The metropolitan lockdown from August - October impacted both OCC residents and day support participants, with restrictions limiting onsite support, visitors and activities.

Despite these limitations, our staff rose to the occasion to ensure participants were supported, remained engaged and connected with peers, family members and the community. The following stories are just a few of the ways in which participants were supported during this time.

SUPPORTING PARTICIPANTS TO BECOME ACTIVE CITIZENS

While on his daily park walk, OCC Day Support participant, Matthew came across a misplaced trolley, which caused him some concern.

Disability Support Worker Anna assisted Matthew to call the Monash City Council to make a report about the trolley. Matthew was proud of his achievement and was delighted that Simon from the Council followed up to thank him and let him know that the trolley had been recovered.



Thank you Matthew for being an active citizen within the community; and thank you to Anna for supporting Matthew to contribute to the community where he was able to be heard, valued and treated with respect - a great example of putting the OC Co-Achieve model into practise.

CREATIVITY FLOURISHING IN LEAD UP TO CHRISTMAS

With the excitement of some lockdown restrictions coming to an end, OCC residents had a new lease on life and have been super busy creating decorations for festivities over the coming months.

Disability Support Workers Jo and Val organised a selection of art supplies and supported the entire household to get involved.

Residents rolled their sleeves up and got busy preparing a range of decorations for Christmas whilst developing their teamwork skills and expanding their creative sides.



NURTURING RESIDENT'S GARDENING SKILLS



Residents, Deb and Greg, have been tending to their vegetable garden, grown by seedlings that were kindly donated by Bunnings Chadstone. Their fellow residents are delighted that they are now able to harvest the vegetables for their meals.

Deb recently prepared a BBQ dinner for the residents accompanied by a healthy fresh salad with vegetables straight from the garden.

By recognising the interests of our community living residents, our support staff can help to find opportunities like this where residents can nurture their skills and develop connections over a shared passion.

ODD SOCK DAY

OCC residents supported Odd Socks Day on October 8, an initiative from GROW Australia to raise awareness and reduce the stigma surrounding mental ill-health, while having some fun.

Residents Greg, Lorraine and Deb got involved and in the process developed new skills to create a colourful Odd Sock Day poster that displayed the household's diverse sock collection.

Disability Support Worker Joanne knows that these residents especially love doing hands-on creative activities so she was keen to support them in an area of interest. The residents were equally delighted, being able to add the poster creation to their crafting repertoire.



FOOTY SEASON CELEBRATION

OCC Community Living residents Carolyn, Erica, David, Greg and Vlada enjoyed a day of footy activities to celebrate the AFL Grand Final day in September.

Disability Support Workers Ajia and Adriana supported the residents to create and hang some colourful footy decorations and assisted residents to prepare a footy feast for lunch as well as make a cake for later.

Staff in our supported living accommodation focus on responding to the needs and interests of residents so they can participate in activities that are of interest to them and that they enjoy.



OC CONNECTIONS

VALE MARGARET BLANDEN

Margaret Blenden was a long-time contributor and passionate supporter of OC Connections (OCC).

Margaret has been involved in one form or another with OC Connections since 1976 when it was known as the Oakleigh Centre.



In the late 1980s, as the Chadstone Community Health Centre Healthcare Nurse, Margaret conducted health and fitness classes for residents. In 1997, she joined the Accommodation Committee, taking on the position of Convenor.

Margaret joined the OC Connections' Committee of Management, a position she held for 15 years, and was also involved in the OCC redevelopment project which closed the Allen Street congregate care facility and resulted in the building of new, smaller community homes.

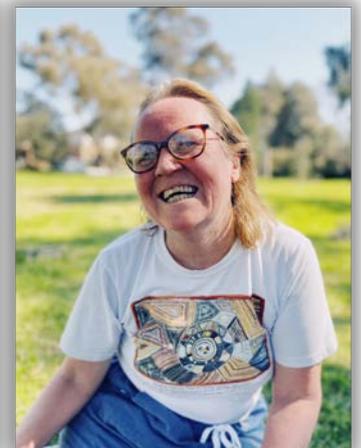
Throughout the years Margaret was also a regular volunteer at the Mother's Club, OC Connections Annual Christmas Tree Festival and Charity Golf Days.

Therese Desmond remembers Margaret and her contribution fondly;

"Margaret's service to the OC Connections was lengthy and exceptional. Her warmth, patience and dedication contributed to enhancing the quality of life for people living with an intellectual disability. We are grateful for Margaret's commitment to making a positive contribution to the outcomes of people living with an intellectual disability."

Margaret passed away in August 2021. Our thoughts are with her family.

These photographs of Sarah and Mary were taken by Disability Support Worker Elizabeth and capture perfectly the joy a day out at the park during lockdown can bring.



RECOGNISING A LIFELONG CONTRIBUTION - ALASTAIR MCDONALD

Alastair McDonald is a life member and patron of OC Connections. He has been involved with OC Connections since the 1970s when, as an MBA student at The University of Melbourne, he was approached by the Head of the Business School, John King - also a parent of a participant at the Oakleigh Centre and chair of the board - to assist him and the board to work on a plan to expand the centre from a family-run self-help group to an organisation with a robust business plan and a drive towards taking advantage of government funding.



Alastair recalls that at the time there weren't many opportunities for children with disabilities after they finished school, so their focus was to develop programs for young people. These programs are what we know today as the OCC Day Support program, with Community Hubs throughout South East Melbourne and attended regularly by more than 150 adults with intellectual disability. Other programs initiated were a community housing program, recreation and sporting activities and a high demand hostel facility.

Alastair also saw the establishment of Oakleigh Centre Industries, now known as OC Connections Enterprises.

Alastair's long involvement with OCC includes his time as chair of the board between 1990 and 1993 and then again from 2005 to 2010. Alastair said a highlight of his involvement with OCC was ***"being part of an evolving organisation and seeing it develop and grow as the needs of people with disability changed."***

Alastair continues to show his support of OCC via way of a donation towards an annual bursary, which aids in the provision of regular professional training for senior staff.

"I've always been passionate about ensuring that the organisation provide senior staff with training in management skills in important areas such as strategy, policy and risk management. I saw training as an important need as the organisation developed. The challenge was to ensure that OC Connections was well managed and an important aspect of that was to put in place appropriate training programs for managers."

In 2021/22, the bursary will go towards audit and mental health first aid training for managers. Support such as Alastair's is an important component to the development of OC Connections.

As a not-for-profit organisation, we rely on the goodwill of supporters like Alastair to assist us in training our staff, providing supports for participants not funded by NDIS, and undertaking projects such as our Community Living homes.

Thank you, Alastair, for your continued support and contribution.

CANCELLATION OF OUR CHRISTMAS TREE FUNDRAISER

2021 has proven to be another extraordinary year for all of Victoria and especially our staff, participants and their families. We've continued to work hard and adapt to the continual changes that COVID-19 has caused to ensure the safety of our OCC community and we will continue to do so for as long as we are faced with this virus.

Even as restrictions ease, we will be faced with new challenges to the safety of our community. It is for this reason, that we have once again made the difficult decision to not run our annual Christmas Tree fundraiser this year.

You can still purchase your fresh Christmas Trees from our supplier, Dandenong Christmas Tree Farm, and we encourage you to do this in order to support a business who has supported us over many years. Our houses will receive a tree from the farm in early December.

At the start of this year, the farm donated a significant amount of money from their 2020 tree sales to OCC, which provided a much needed boost to our fundraising efforts and one that we were extremely grateful for. You can purchase your tree online, or visit the farm. You can find out more:

www.dandenongchristmastreefarm.com.au

You can also spread the Christmas cheer by donating online at:
www.occonnections.org/get-involved/donate



DECEMBER - JANUARY CLOSEDOWN

OC Connections will be closed over the Christmas period during the following dates:

Saturday 25 December, 2021 - Tuesday 4 January 2022

OCC onsite Day Support, Corporate office and OCCE will be closed during this time. Our Support Coordination service will operate on Wednesday 29 Friday 31 December and will resume business as usual from Wednesday 5 January.

Community Living will continue to operate throughout this time.

