PARO gets mecwacare's seal of approval

Throughout February and March mecwacare had a cuddly little visitor – PARO the baby harp seal!

PARO is not just cute, it is also an eighth-generation interactive animal-therapy robot which can help people with dementia who may be showing agitated behaviours.

Professor Takanori Shibata, from Japan’s National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology, began developing the concept for PARO in 1993. This special robot has been used in hospitals and care facilities all over the world since 2004.

Professor Shibata demonstrated PARO’s therapeutic capabilities in stress and behaviour management to a group of staff and a family member of one of our residents at the Sir Donald and Lady Trescowthick Centre in January.

PARO is especially suited to environments where conventional animal therapies may be difficult, including in certain areas within residential facilities.

A number of different sensors means PARO responds to touch and voice as if alive, turning its face towards the person holding it and responding to the voice with blinking and vocalisations recorded from a real baby seal. PARO can even remember the preferred behaviour of an individual, providing a personalised experience.

Throughout February and March we had a trial of PARO at our five residential facilities, as well as with some of our Community Services and Home Care Packages clients. The results were very positive, with residents and clients feeling very relaxed with PARO. Family members shared that having PARO around helped them connect with their loved ones better, with one person saying she had the best conversation with her mother in years.

Staff in our Community Services were also overjoyed to see one of our clients with an acquired brain injury, who is normally silent, react with excitement when he met PARO. This left quite a few of our staff members in tears as this small response meant so much to them and the client.
Welcome to the mecwacare matters summer edition. With government changes to the aged-care and disability sector, we have been focusing on our growth agenda as the Board of Directors draws closer to implementing our new five-year strategic plan.

In February we celebrated the fifth birthday of the mecwacare Malvern Centre with a giant cake and a delicious afternoon tea. It gave me the chance to say a few words about not only the construction of the centre back in the late 2000s, but to speak about the wonderful sense of family and community that has sprung up there over the last five years. Our residents and staff also enjoyed the opportunity to share stories and laughs about their time with us. The full story is on page 4.

In March we held our Annual Charity Golf Day which is traditionally our biggest fundraising event of the year. The generosity of our many sponsors and donors spurred us onto a very successful day. Read more on page 6.

The other big news for mecwacare is that we are moving our Corporate Services, Home Care Packages and Home Nursing and Care Services South East Metro offices after purchasing a new site in Malvern. Page 7 has the full story and pictures of the site in its current state before we refurbish.

Please read on as we have a number of stories on other developments within the organisation, and thank you for supporting mecwacare.

Michele Lewis
Chief Executive

mecwacare has secured 106 new consumer-directed-care packages as part of the 2014 Aged Care Approvals Round announced late last year - the fourth most packages awarded in the state of Victoria.

Most were level 3 and 4, attracting higher levels of care for clients. The Department of Social Services received over 100,000 applications for just 6,653 places.

These packages add to the 118 we secured in the last round. The Home Care Packages team is very busy, and has expanded significantly with the addition of four coordinators.

We now have 41 packages in Melbourne's north, 80 in the south, 80 in the east and 23 in the west.
What does a typical day at mecwa care involve for you?

My job is to make sure the programs we hold each day at the Bowen Street Centre run smoothly - ensuring transport has been arranged for our clients, making sure we have staff on hand and food deliveries have been made for clients' morning and afternoon teas and lunches. I also attend meetings with potential clients and their families or carers, and undertake client assessments for specific programs we offer.

What’s one favourite moment you have had since starting with mecwa care?

My favourite achievement since being here at mecwa care is setting up the carers' support group at the Bowen Street Centre. The group gives carers in the local area a chance to talk about things that matter to them, and it has a great sense of community about it. When we have our monthly meetings I have a huge smile on my face, I just love it. I am also very proud of setting up the dementia support program at Bowen Street which is now open for clients.

What do you enjoy most about your work at mecwa care?

I really enjoy the interaction with clients and carers in my role - knowing we do make a difference to people's lives is a huge satisfaction. We can assist in making someone's life better, and getting that feedback is the best satisfaction.

The staff and volunteers here at Bowen Street are marvellous too. They really see the value in the work they do, and I love that.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I don’t have much spare time at the moment but I enjoy spending time catching up with my family and friends, going to restaurants or into the city to walk around the beautiful gardens.

My daughter has just had her wedding so I have also been very busy helping with the preparations over the last 12 months leading up to the big day.

Bowen Street dementia program begins

mecwa care’s Bowen Street Community Centre in Malvern East has recently begun offering a support program which assists people with dementia in staying engaged, stimulated and connected to their local community.

The program meets on Tuesdays and provides a safe and caring environment to a small group of clients.

The group engages in socialisation, outings, memory and sensory activities, as well as a two-course lunch.

These activities provide respite for family members who act as primary carers and need to take some time out of their day to work, do other tasks like shopping or to simply relax.
Five-year celebration at Malvern Centre

On Monday 2 February we held an afternoon tea in celebration of the fifth birthday of the mecwacare Malvern Centre.

A crowd of 40 people gathered to look back on the wonderful experiences shared at the centre since 2010, and to celebrate the future at the facility.

The Malvern Centre’s first-ever resident Ivy Syme was in attendance, happily helping to cut the cake.

In congratulating the residents and staff on achieving this milestone, Chief Executive Michele Lewis spoke about the sense of family and community that has sprung up at the centre over the last five years.

At mecwacare we believe that our facilities provide a safe and happy home and a stimulating environment for our residents. The sense of community that grows around these places is something we are very proud of. In fact, many of our residents are old friends from school days or playing sport together at clubs in the area.

mecwacare Malvern Centre is fortunate to have fantastic residents and committed staff who have helped to make the last five years so positive.

We look forward to the next five years as our Malvern community continues to grow.
Cabrini joins us on palliative care project

mecwacare recently received funding to develop a sustainable best-practice model to provide the highest-quality end-of-life care services across residential and community-care settings.

The Palliative Care Project is a partnership with Cabrini Health Palliative Care Services. Sally Howe, Cabrini’s Director of Business and Service Development, said the project will be all-encompassing.

“Through our palliative care partnerships project, we aim to provide a fulfilling palliative care experience for each client and their loved ones at a time of greatest need,” she said.

“We will do this by providing specialised care and practical support that addresses the person’s physical, emotional, spiritual and cultural needs and preferences, as well as those of their loved ones.”

This care and support will be achieved through a range of strategies including enhancing the skills and expertise of nursing and care staff, optimising communication pathways and refining assessment and care-planning processes.

mecwacare is aiming to grow our indigenous client base in the south-eastern suburbs by forging strong partnerships with the Department of Health Southern Melbourne Regional Office, Dandenong and District Aboriginal Co-Operative Limited (DDACL), the City of Greater Dandenong and the City of Casey.

These partnerships are part of the South East Melbourne Aboriginal Engagement Project, an initiative to provide better Home and Community Care (HACC) services - including nursing, delivered meals and social interaction - to Aboriginal people in Melbourne’s south-east growth corridor.

This project also aligns with mecwacare’s commitments to Cultural and Linguistic Diversity and to providing culturally-specific care to our multicultural clients.

The project commenced last year with three key outcomes in mind:

• enhanced HACC service delivery to Aboriginal people in the south-east Melbourne region

• enhanced understanding and partnership development between the agencies involved

• development of a resource to further enhance service delivery and the key partnerships

Upon conclusion of the project, scheduled for the middle of this year, the aim is to deliver:

• staff training on cultural awareness as a professional development opportunity

• an educational video for HACC workers which will provide real life examples and practical communication tips for working respectfully with Aboriginal clients

• a brochure detailing what mecwacare, DDACL, City of Casey and City of Greater Dandenong each provide with HACC services

• community engagement sessions promoting services incorporated into key community events

Stay tuned for further updates in an upcoming edition of mecwacare matters.

The ‘Palliative Care Partnerships’ project will receive $80,000 over 12 months as part of a Decision Assist Palliative Care and Aged Care Services Linkages Project grant from Queensland University of Technology, supported by the Australian Government.

A project steering group with representation from mecwacare and Cabrini is governing the project. A project manager is responsible for developing the project plan, while our General Manager Residential Services Lisa Reynoldson is overseeing the project.

Indigenous services expand in south east
Charity Golf Day hits the sweet spot

On Monday 16 March we held mecwacare’s Annual Charity Golf Day at the Peninsula Kingswood Country Golf Club’s North Course in Frankston.

The day is our biggest fundraising event on the calendar, and this year was no exception. A crisp clear morning warmed into a mild and sunny day, making perfect conditions for the players on the course. With a record-breaking 96 players and 130 attendees the day marked a great success.

Special mentions must go to our generous gold sponsor ‘Medirest’, Gary Crompton’s winning team on the day from AON Insurance (below right), and the winner of our putting competition Andrew Sudholtz from Moores Legal (below left).

The funds raised will go towards refurbishing the mecwacare Richmond Hill facility and purchasing our very own PARO the robot seal (see front page for more on PARO).
Malvern move awaits Corporate Services

There has been a very exciting development at mecwacare’s Corporate Services in recent weeks – our head office will be moving!

We have purchased a spacious and light-filled new home at 1287 Malvern Road, Malvern, the former site of Clive Peeters’ showroom and retail space. The location is less than 200 metres from the mecwacare Malvern Centre.

The deal was negotiated with the vendor Michael King, head of electrical-appliance retailer Michael King (Hawthorn) Pty Limited, a subsidiary of Clive Peeters Limited.

Michael personally met with Chief Executive Michele Lewis after the purchase as a gesture of good will and support of mecwacare in the community.

With a 1,265 m² open-plan layout and an 18-metre frontage onto buzzing Malvern Road, it represents a significant step for our Corporate Services into the heart of the Stonnington community.

Over the coming months we will complete a full fit-out to make the property ready for our growing team, so stay tuned for more information on this next step for mecwacare.
On Monday 23 March the Noel Miller Centre held a wonderful celebration for one of our very special residents.

Iris Nankivell turned 102, a fantastic achievement and a very impressive one as she continues to power on past the century milestone she reached in 2013.

Residents and staff turned out for a cake and a sing-along, all of them wishing Iris well. One of the attendees was our personal care attendant Sue, who first met Iris when they worked in the same accounting firm many years ago. Reunited at Noel Miller Centre, Sue was very excited to be there for such a special moment.

Iris assured the crowd (after a second rendition of Happy Birthday) the secret to long life and health is a little bit of romance, something for all of us to keep in mind!