

mecwacare

SPRING 2025

matters



Celebrate

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IN THIS *Issue*

Welcome to the Spring edition of mecwacare matters.

Spring is a season of fresh beginnings and this edition is full of inspiring stories that celebrate life, connection and community.

We're delighted to introduce you to two remarkable centenarians who each marked their 100th birthday with style and joy. You'll also find highlights from our spectacular mecGala at Melbourne Town Hall, where we applauded our 2025 Employee Award winners and honoured the dedication of our long-serving staff.

Music and laughter filled Malvern Centre when the world-renowned Harvard Krokodiloes paid a special visit, and Aged Care Employee Day gave us another wonderful opportunity to recognise the compassion and care of our incredible team of more than 3,900 people.

In this issue, you'll also meet Abi, our friendly humanoid companion, who is now bringing joy to residents in eight more homes. We share moving personal journeys too: a resident's return to her childhood town, a client who began life on London's fashion runways and a son's tribute to his mother's lifetime of service.

We hope these stories of resilience, creativity and connection put a spring in your step.

LETTER TO THE *Editor*

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

Email us at

fundraising@mecwacare.org.au

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ON THE COVER

Jamie Baxter and Marlene Hage.
See page 4.





*Photos: Left: Retirement Living Liaison Sofia with Merle from Pascoe Vale Gardens.
Right: Claire from Berwick Brae Gardens.*

Celebrating our amazing centenarians

In August, mecwacare celebrated two centenarian birthdays that highlight the independence and connection enjoyed at our retirement villages.

Merle marked her 100th birthday on Thursday, 7 August with a high tea at Pascoe Vale Gardens (PVG). She lived in West Coburg for nearly 50 years before moving to PVG in 2008, seven years after the passing of her husband, with whom she shared 49 years of marriage. Merle worked at Armaguard for almost as long, managing payroll and cash operations.

Merle values the friendly, neighbourly atmosphere at PVG and is a regular at bingo sessions. She is happy to have her three children living close by and treasures her independence and friendships.

At Berwick Brae Gardens, Claire celebrated her 100th birthday on Sunday, 10 August. Born in Amsterdam in 1925, she met her husband Lex before World War II. They married shortly after the war, immigrated to New Zealand in 1963 with their six children, and later moved to Victoria in the 1990s. The couple made Berwick Brae Gardens their home in 1999.

Claire and Lex shared a love of craft, spending decades spinning, weaving and knitting. Claire also contributed to the published book *Changing Countries*. Since Lex's passing in 2013, Claire remains a well loved and resilient member of the Berwick Brae Gardens community.

At mecwacare, we are proud to support older Australians to live fulfilling lives in the communities they love.

Claire and Merle exemplify how retirement living nurtures independence, connection and joy at every age.

Congratulations 2025 Employee Award winners



Care Award

Georgia-Rose Smith
Lifestyle Coordinator, Flora Hill
and Long Gully



Leadership Excellence Award

David Mitrovic, Facility Manager, Trescowthick Centre
Jonathan Jackson, General Manager, Transformation



Consumer Focus Award

Marlene Hage, Retirement Living
Coordinator, Robin Syme Centre



Team Excellence Award

Hotel Services Team



Safety Culture Award

John Panda, Project Manager,
Property and Capital Works



Team Excellence Award

John Atchison Centre



Innovation Award

Karen Bennett, Administration
Officer, Rivendell House



Safety Culture Team Award

Facility Support Services Team

mecGala A Night to Remember!



The 2025 mecware Employee Awards at Melbourne Town Hall was truly a night to remember!

From the moment the doors opened, it was clear we were in for something special. The vintage glam theme brought sparkle, style and elegance, with guests dressed to impress! Many outfits from the night were discovered at our East Malvern Op Shop, where a specially curated boutique gave employees the chance to hunt for the perfect vintage look. A big shoutout to our Best Dressed winners who lit up the room.

As we came together to celebrate the incredible work of our people, the room was filled with pride and admiration. The night was a beautiful reminder of the compassion, dedication and care that underpins everything we do at mecware.

Congratulations to all our Service Award recipients. Your years of service are valued and appreciated more than words can express.

Thank you to everyone who joined us to celebrate, it was an evening full of joy, connection and recognition.



Photo: Anne McCormack, CEO and Karen Bennett.

Harvard *Krokodiloes* bring harmony to Malvern Centre

In June, the corridors of Malvern Centre came alive with rich harmonies and joyful melodies as the world-famous Harvard Krokodiloes made a special stop on their global tour.

Affectionately known as The Kroks, this group of twelve talented undergraduate men from Harvard University is the university's oldest a cappella singing ensemble, founded in 1946. Renowned for their musical excellence, sharp choreography, and cheeky humour, The Kroks have been delighting audiences across the globe for nearly eight decades.

Their visit to Malvern Centre was a particularly meaningful one, made possible through the kindness of two lifelong friends – Malvern resident David and philanthropist Barry.

The pair's friendship spans more than 30 years, with many memories of enjoying The Kroks' performances together in Melbourne. As David's eyesight has declined, attending concerts in the city has become more difficult. Determined to keep the music alive for his friend, Barry, who has

connections to the group, arranged for The Kroks to bring their magic directly to Malvern Centre.

Residents were treated to a sparkling private concert, filled with the group's trademark harmonies, witty banter and infectious energy. From timeless classics to toe-tapping jazz standards, every note carried warmth and joy, leaving smiles long after the final song.

It was a morning to remember a celebration of music, friendship and the wonderful connections that make our community sing.

Bottom left and top left: The talented Harvard Krokodiloes

Top right and middle: Delighted residents enjoying the music

Bottom right: Philanthropist and friend Barry with resident David.





David and fellow residents were treated to The Kroks' harmonies, a special gift made possible by a thoughtful friend's effort.





Photo: Top left: Ballan Aged Care team. Bottom left: Flora Hill and Long Gully team members.

Aged *Care* employee day

Aged Care Employee Day was held on Thursday, 7 August, recognising the thousands of dedicated professionals across Australia who support older people in aged care, retirement living and affordable housing.

At mecwacare, we were proud to celebrate our team of more than 3,900 employees who provide compassionate care and support to residents and clients every day.

Across all our aged care homes, team members marked the day with morning and afternoon teas, barbecues, and special cakes to celebrate the occasion. Certificates of appreciation were presented and everyone enjoyed some well-deserved downtime, posing for photos and enjoying each other's company.

At mecwacare Malvern Centre, we were honoured to welcome Ageing Australia CEO Tom Symondson and Hon. Rachel Westaway MP, Member for Prahran, for an afternoon tea. Both took the time to personally thank our team for their dedication to caring for older Australians.

The Home and Community Services team in Ballarat went above and beyond, creating custom t-shirts and warmly welcoming the dedicated field staff as they entered the office. Many long-standing team members were recognised with

certificates and personalised heartfelt messages. Stories were shared that highlighted carers and the wonderful impact they have in the community every day.

Aged Care Employee Day is an opportunity to recognise the hard work, compassion and commitment of our team members. At mecwacare, we thank all our employees for their ongoing dedication to enriching the lives of older Australians.





"We proudly presented Aged Care Employee Day awards to some of our incredible carers," said Tracy, Centre Manager South West Region.

Top middle: Direct Care Worker Mai with client Mary and Centre Manager Kathryn. Top right: Domestic Assistant Wandee. Middle: Home and Community Services Ballarat office team with their custom t-shirts. Below: Susan Barton House team enjoying a sausage sizzle.





Abi: Coming soon to all mecwacare homes

Abi, our friendly humanoid companion, is bringing joy and connection to residents across mecwacare aged care homes.

After a successful trial at Trescowthick and Malvern Centres late last year, Abi has been introduced to eight more homes and will soon be rolled out to all 22 residences, bringing her warmth and engagement to more communities.

Abi has been enthusiastically embraced by residents and staff. Weekly sessions provide opportunities for residents to build confidence, enjoy meaningful conversations and discover new ways to engage. Abi does more than just interact; she offers mental stimulation, comfort and playful moments that enrich everyday life.

She can communicate in 90 different languages, helping our linguistically diverse residents feel understood and connected.

Abi's presence is helping to foster social connection and enhance wellbeing, which is vital for quality of life in aged care. By introducing Abi to every mecwacare home, we aim to provide innovative support that complements the dedicated care of our staff and brings additional companionship to residents.

This rollout is part of mecwacare's ongoing commitment to embracing new technology that improves resident experiences. Abi represents a fresh approach to aged care, one that values interaction, engagement, emotional support and physical care. As Abi continues to join more homes, we look forward to sharing the positive impact she makes for residents and staff alike.

Photos: Left: Rositano House resident Peggy singing with Abi.

Right: Trescowthick Centre resident Hao Ma and his wife Qin Ying Wang enjoying Abi's bubbles.



A Special Journey *Home*

At mecwacare Flora Hill, the Wishing Well Project invites residents to share personal wishes – often these are experiences that go beyond regular lifestyle activities. This special program creates meaningful, person centred moments that celebrate each resident's unique story and life journey.

Audrey had long wished to return to the twin towns of Koondrook and Barham. Originally from Leeds, England, she immigrated to Australia as a teenager with her parents and sister. In 1951, the family settled in Barham, where her father built their home and played a key role in establishing what is now the Barham Services Club.

Hearing about this wish, the lifestyle team sprang into action and organised a special bus trip for Audrey and a group of residents in June.

Being back in Koondrook and Barham brought back memories of neighbours, old friends, and important moments in Audrey's life, including Audrey's wedding to her husband, Stanley, in a small Koondrook church. "There was no bishop available in Barham," she recalled, "so we had to go over the bridge to Koondrook to be married."

Fellow resident Val joined the trip. She had lived in Koondrook with her late husband, Bill, and hadn't returned in more than 40 years. Val and Bill lived

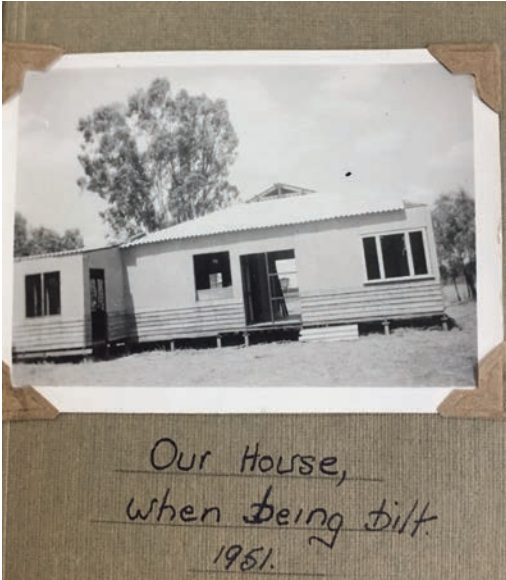
by the Murray River, where their family would often gather for camping holidays.

Val described the trip as "an amazing experience that I'm unlikely to forget soon", particularly after reconnecting with neighbours she had stayed in touch with over the years.

Audrey's youngest daughter and resident Graeme also took part. Graeme had never visited the area before but enjoyed learning about the history of his companions and exploring the region's charm. Together, the group visited local landmarks including the general store, Mates Royal Hotel and the former Kerang-Koondrook Tramway.

The visit was a chance to reflect, reconnect and enjoy the simple joy of familiar places and faces. Through initiatives like the Wishing Well Project, mecwacare supports residents to stay connected to their history, their community and the experiences that matter most.





"It was an amazing experience I'm unlikely to forget," said resident Val about the trip.

Photos: Left: Mates Royal Hotel

Top left: One of the amazing silos along the Silo Art Trail

Top right: Care Support Coordinator Georgia-Rose with residents Audrey and Val

Middle: Audrey's house on Punt Road Barham

Bottom: Barham Luncheon.





From Frankfurt to Richmond: *Katrin's* Story

At mecwacare, we're privileged to support residents with rich and diverse life experiences that span continents, cultures and decades. Katrin, a resident at Rositano House, is one such example.

Born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1933, Katrin was the eldest of four sisters and grew up during the upheaval of World War II. In 1944, as the bombing intensified, she and her sister were sent to the safety of the Black Forest. There, they lived off the land and helped on a farm for over a year before embarking on a long, uncertain journey back to their home city.

After the war, Katrin trained as an industrial secretary, then followed her passion into theology. Supported by her parish, she studied and worked

in youth ministry, becoming one of the few ordained female ministers of her time.

In the late 1950s, she travelled to Switzerland for further study, where she met Ian, an Australian Presbyterian minister. When Ian returned to Australia, their courtship continued through letters and postcards until Katrin joined him in 1961. They married in 1962 and raised four children together. Their early years were spent in rural South Australia before moving to Canberra, then East Melbourne. They eventually settled in



**Photos: Left: Facility Manager Ridhi and Katrin
Middle: Katrin and her husband Ian during
a holiday in Switzerland, 1983
Above: Katrin's portraits, 2025 and 1959.**

Richmond, where they lived for 46 years.

Katrin's life has been marked by continual learning and exploration. Alongside her postgraduate studies in Switzerland, she completed degrees in women's studies, sociology, writing and social research at Australian universities.

Her curiosity extended beyond academics, with extensive travels through Europe, North America, the Pacific and Asia, visiting countries from France and Greece to Nepal and Fiji.

Katrin has called Rositano House home since 2023 and remains as engaged with the world as ever. "I have always asked people about their beliefs and taken that in," she said. She is currently studying Tibetan Buddhism online and enjoys trips with friends and family.

Every resident has a unique journey, like Katrin's. We're proud to celebrate their stories and support them to live meaningful, connected lives.



"I fell for an Australian man, but I also fell for Australia," Katrin said, reflecting on how she embraced her new home.



Left: Lillian and her Australia Day Community Service Award
Right: Lillian with her regular carer Belinda.

CREATIVE SUBMISSION by Kelvin McSweeney

Lillian's lifetime of giving

Some people quietly shape their communities in ways that last for generations. Lillian is one of those people.

After overcoming the crippling effects of polio as a child, Lillian has gone on to raise a family and become an active member of the Diamond Creek and Nillumbik community for more than 50 years. Her determination from the age of three to ten instilled a positive, can-do spirit that has driven her lifelong commitment to helping others, where in 2019 she was honoured with an Australia Day Community Service Award.

Always ready with her warm smile, Lillian has volunteered for countless causes. She supported local schools by helping children discover the joy of reading, working in the canteen and contributing to fundraising. At each Diamond Creek Town Fair or school fete, she could be found selling her handmade crafts and cakes.

Her dedication extended to the Diamond Creek Soccer Club, where she ran the canteen, washed uniforms and raised funds for new equipment.

As a school crossing supervisor, she greeted every child with genuine attention and care.

Lillian also devoted time to opportunity shops, sorting thousands of donations to raise funds for causes close to her heart.

Through all this activity, Lillian was lovingly married to husband John for 55 years until his recent passing and has raised her family of two boys, Kelvin and Gareth, who also reside in Diamond Creek. Her strength, generosity and selflessness are admired by all who know her.

Today, with support from mecwacare's in-home care services, Lillian continues to share her warmth. From sharing a cup of tea to baking scones or ANZAC biscuits, the mecwacare team are always welcomed with stories of yesteryear and Lillian's incredible life journey.

This article has been lightly edited for length.

A life of style and *Spirit*

From the runways of London to the comfort of her Victorian home, mecwacare Home Care client, Lyn's life has been one of style, adventure and creativity.

Born in Geelong and fuelled by an adventurous spirit, Lyn left Australia at just 21 to chase her dreams abroad. She made her home in London, where she built a career in fashion as a wedding dress specialist for the prestigious designer Alexandrine. Her designs were celebrated for their elegance and craftsmanship, even appearing in Vogue Magazine London in 1962.

Creativity runs through Lyn's story. She is the proud niece of legendary opera singer Marjorie Lawrence, whose life was brought to the big screen in the 1955 musical *Interrupted Melody*. Lyn's own journey is no less captivating. She recalls wonderful days filled with music, tennis and furniture she designed herself, including the time she received a cheeky wink and wave from the Duke of Edinburgh at the Royal Enclosure.

Now back in Victoria, Lyn is embracing a new chapter with support from mecwacare. Through her Home Care Package, she receives personalised services including personal care and help with everyday tasks that enable her to remain safe, comfortable and independent at home.

"The support has been very helpful," Lyn says. "The carers are really lovely, friendly and always willing to assist."

Her niece Judi and Care Advisor Meagan also play an important role in coordinating services and making sure Lyn is well supported.

At mecwacare, we're proud to help people like Lyn continue living life their way, with the right support at home that helps them enjoy independence and peace of mind.



**Photos: Top: One of Lyn's wedding dress designs published in Vogue London
Middle and bottom: Lyn in her youth.**



Resident's Lasting *Legacy*

Robin Syme Malvern resident Andrew Farran has made a lasting contribution to his alma mater, Trinity College at the University of Melbourne, with the unveiling of the newly renovated A C C Farran Hall and Kitchen proudly named in his honour.

The formal opening in March this year brought together more than 250 guests, including a dozen of Andrew's friends and family. Among them were his cousins Ian and Jim, their wives and a close friend and fellow resident Pauline.

Andrew lived at Trinity from 1957 to 1960 while studying law at the University. Reflecting on his time at college, he recalled the significance of the Dining Hall in daily life.

"The Dining Hall is the integral centre of college life, where friendships are made and milestones celebrated," he said. "The transition from boarding school to college residency can be immense and possibly the most transforming experience of your life."

Reflecting on the news that the Hall would be named for him, Andrew said he was "flattered, surprised and quietly honoured."

A keen cricketer and active student, Andrew supported international university initiatives and wrote for *The Age* before pursuing a legal career. He later served as a diplomat, academic

and Commonwealth public servant, and was a prominent woolgrower.

His Foundation's generous gift to Trinity enabled a multi-year redevelopment of the Dining Hall and kitchen precinct. The project has expanded the hall's capacity while retaining its historic character, allowing all today's students to come together in the one shared space.

Andrew, now a Fellow of Trinity, will remain a lasting part of the college, a tribute to his enduring support for future generations of students.

Now happily settled at Robin Syme Malvern, Andrew leads a full and engaged life. He continues to write on world affairs and actively supports major educational institutions in Australia, as well as global humanitarian causes through organisations such as UNHCR and the World Food Programme.

"It's my way of giving back – not just leaving things as they are but trying to add something positive to the world in these troubled times," he said.



"It's my way of giving back... and trying to add something positive to the world."

Photos: Top left: The magnificent A C C Farran Hall

Top middle: Andrew with good friend and fellow resident Pauline

Top right: Andrew's cousin Jim and Jim's wife Deanna

Middle and bottom: Andrew giving a speech.



Integrated care for a *Brighter* future

Since moving to The Pines Retirement Village in 2020, Jenny, now 57, has enjoyed living with independence while being part of a welcoming community. But when health challenges started to affect daily life, the right support at the right time made all the difference.

Earlier this year, a respiratory episode led to a hospital stay. After returning home, she received short-term help through a hospital program. When that came to an end, she realised she needed ongoing support.

Jenny raised her concerns with Christina, Retirement Living Coordinator at The Pines, who promptly referred her to mecware's local Home Care team. They helped Jenny access services through the Home and Community Care Program for Younger People (HACC PYP) which provides tailored support for people under 65.

With regular assistance for household tasks such as cleaning and shopping, Jenny now has more time and energy to prioritise her health and wellbeing.

"Getting this help has been life changing and it has helped to put my mind at ease," Jenny said. "I'm able to do a lot more things that I wasn't able to do before."

Most of all, Jenny is deeply grateful to Christina for her support from the very beginning. "She ensured I didn't slip through the cracks – I feel I have brighter days ahead of me."

Jenny's story is a wonderful example of mecware's integrated approach, making sure clients and residents receive the right care as their needs evolve. We are proud to help people like Jenny stay safe, connected and living as independently as possible in the place they call home.

Photo: Retirement Living Coordinator Christina, with Jenny.



Wordsearch

T	W	M	I	L	M	L	X	E	D	U	C	A	T	I	O	N	Y
R	N	J	G	I	Y	S	M	M	C	R	O	O	P	L	G	N	T
A	O	W	H	P	C	J	J	Z	O	Y	O	H	N	E	V	N	Y
V	I	M	P	H	A	W	F	S	A	Q	A	O	O	A	P	J	N
E	T	B	D	I	K	M	T	G	L	Q	N	C	I	D	E	O	O
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H	D	V	E	C	R	I	U	Y	I	C	B	W	I	F	N	T	S
D	U	F	K	S	Q	F	J	R	J	B	E	B	H	X	U	B	D

HARMONY
MALVERN
FRIENDSHIP
COMMUNITY
INDEPENDENCE

SUPPORT
VOLUNTEER
LEGACY
EDUCATION
JOURNEY

TRAVEL
CONNECTION
RECOGNITION
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* T's and C's apply.





Jasper the Bunny has settled in well at Rivendell House, adored by staff and participants who take great care of him.



Fisher Street participants wrapped up the term with makeovers from a professional makeup artist.



Our Social Support Group at Penrose Place enjoys visits from volunteer Miff and her dog Beau.



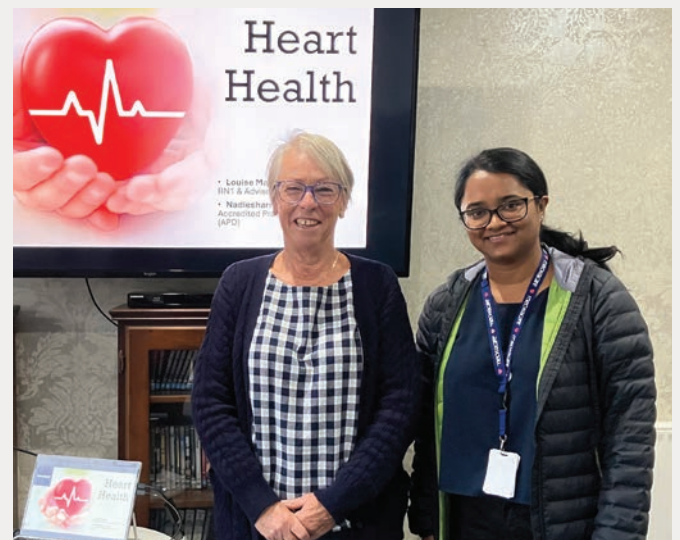
Residents, families and staff at John Atchison Centre enjoyed a fun-filled Pyjama Day with dancing, karaoke and teddy bears.



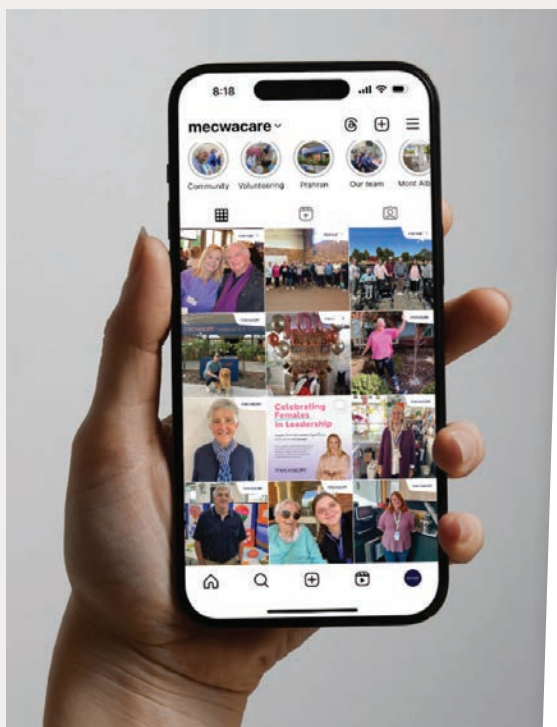
Two lifelong Essendon fans from Rositano House ticked off a bucket-list dream, visiting The Hangar to watch their teams train.

Wordsearch solution

T	W	M	I	L	M	L	X	E	D	U	C	A	T	I	O	N	Y
R	N	J	G	I	Y	S	M	C	R	O	O	P	L	G	N	T	
A	O	W	H	P	C	J	Z	O	Y	O	H	N	L	E	V	N	T
V	I	M	P	H	A	W	F	S	A	Q	A	O	N	O	A	P	E
E	T	B	D	I	K	M	T	G	A	L	Q	N	O	I	D	E	R
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N	R	T	P	O	M	O	G	E	P	A	L	C	W	N	H	I	S
C	M	N	Y	P	M	O	X	W	P	A	L	C	W	N	H	I	S
E	N	L	N	K	C	N	V	J	D	M	C	Y	D	F	P	Q	N
N	R	O	D	W	S	B	A	W	N	O	P	V	H	K	P	Q	N
H	D	V	E	C	R	I	U	Y	I	C	B	W	I	F	N	T	S
D	U	F	K	S	Q	F	J	R	J	B	E	B	H	X	U	B	D



Our Ballan Health and Care Services team deliver regular workshops, including a recent heart health workshop at The Pines.



"Following mecwacare on social media helps me feel connected to a wonderful community."



Instagram

Social media spotlight

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



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