

Age Old Problems: New Aged Care



A podcast by *Helping Hand*



Episode Four

The Joy of Volunteering

13 minutes

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Helping Hand

00:00:00 Kate

Welcome to *Age Old Problems: New Aged Care*, a podcast by Helping Hand that offers information and advice to help you find and access the right aged care services. This podcast was recorded on Kaurna land.

00:00:23 Kate

Hello and thanks for listening in to our podcast. I'm your host, Kate Holland, and in this episode we're going to focus on volunteering. Not only are they incredibly valuable to the organisations they support, but being a volunteer can bring valuable life experiences too. So joining me for this chat is Rachel Carson, Lifestyle Coordinator for Helping Hand in Golden Grove, and Kaye, who volunteers here herself. Welcome, ladies.

00:00:40 Kaye

Hello.

00:00:41 Rachel

Hello. Thank you for having us.

00:00:41 Kate

So, Rachel, let's start with you. Can you explain a little bit about your role and your involvement with the volunteers here for helping hand?

00:00:56 Rachel

So I'm a Lifestyle Coordinator, so my main role here is implementing and coordinating activities for the residents here at Golden Grove. But also a huge part of my role is the management and training and recruitment of volunteers. So I'm their number one contact. So they are basically, they travel the journey of volunteering with me and my team.

00:01:11 Kate

How important are volunteers in the day-to-day running of the care home?

00:01:14 Rachel

The importance honestly can't be measured. It sounds a bit cliche, but it really can't. Because our Lifestyle teams here are somewhat small, volunteers are pivotal for our day to day. They allow us to be able to offer more activities to residents and also do the really important one-on-one social visits for residents who don't want to come out to activities - they still get that opportunity to be social and have visits from people as well, so they are a pivotal role every day.

00:01:40 Kate

And what kind of things are they doing? What sort of activities?

00:01:41 Rachel

So we have volunteers that help like Kaye, with activities. And they also do one-on-one visits, we have volunteers that help in our cafe, they help with admin work as well. So they can actually help with other areas, not just lifestyles, but the main volunteers we have here are our lifestyle volunteers. So they help run activities from craft, to exercise class, to church, to birthday special celebrations.

00:02:06 Kate

Are there services that Helping Hand provide that you just simply couldn't do if you didn't have the support of volunteers?

00:02:11 Rachel

Literally all of them. Volunteers are absolutely pivotal because they are an extension of us. So yeah, I couldn't speak highly of them and we couldn't do what we could do without them.

00:02:19 Kate

Is there a particular activity or person or exchange that you've seen with the volunteer in action that springs to mind as a very special example?

00:02:27 Rachel

This sounds very cliche, but she's sitting next to me. OK, so Kaye has been volunteering for four years and Kaye is part of the furniture, part of the family. There are people that volunteer and they volunteer because they feel they need to, and there are some people that volunteer because they were made to do it, if that doesn't sound weird. She is the most friendly, outgoing person. The residents, every Monday and Tuesday here, they look out and look forward to seeing her. If she's not there one day they notice, which is a big thing, and she's just perfect for the role. She just brings this warmth, this passion. It's not forced. It's so natural. And she really is part of the team here. We couldn't imagine not having her here. And every day she's here is like, a very a special time for her. She does wonderful things.

00:03:14 Kate

We can't not come and talk to you now Kaye, that's so wonderful. Can you tell us about how you came to Helping Hand and sort of what you're involved with now?

00:03:20 Kaye

I was actually caring for my mum and dad who were in their 90s, and they both passed away within about six months of each other and I feel a bit lost. And I was told that I either had to get a job or do volunteering to keep getting my pension, my carers pension. And I hadn't worked for such a long time that I thought I don't think I could do that. So they told me to go into the op shop or something like the hospital. You can volunteer in the hospital. And because I cared for my mum and dad, I just loved being around them. So that came to mind. My family said to me, are you crazy? And I said no. I think I could do it. So I got in touch with Golden Grove and came in, and that was four years ago and I just love it. The people here just make me feel so welcome. The team are fantastic to me. They treat me like part of their team. And the residents – I get hugs and they're all saying to me all the time 'Ohh, you do so much for us.' They do so much for me. I just love it. I look forward to Mondays and Tuesdays.

00:04:36 Kate

So yeah, every Monday and Tuesday.

00:04:39 Kaye

Yes all day. I find that easier because once I get into something, it's better to just stay here and finish it, than say a few hours here or a few hours there. I just prefer to be here all day, and it's like my getaway from my home life and my family and enjoying my time for a couple of days.

00:04:58 Kate

And do you do a variety of activities?

00:05:00 Kaye

Yes, whatever needs to be done, some days are different, but my main thing is we go walking on a Monday morning, we take the residents out, and that is great. They love getting out into the sunshine and we chitchat, which we do a lot of. Then on Monday afternoons, we do carpet bowls. And during that time, I help bring the residents down. That's a big thing. We go up and remind them of what the activity is, and assist them to come down to the hall. Then I do books. I take around some library books to make sure everyone's got something to do if they don't come down to an activity. Tuesdays, we do Jeopardy in the morning and we do bingo in the afternoon. And bingo is a very popular activity with lots of laughs, and we have a great time in bingo.

00:06:01 Kate

Now obviously there was specific reasons for why you came and were a volunteer, and I know Rachel, it's getting harder and harder to get people to volunteer.

00:06:15 Rachel

Yes, for various reasons.

00:06:16 Kate

I remember hearing the radio story about the fact that, you know, sometimes a lot of people just can't retire as early as they want. So it's trickier for them to then give their time. But when people do have this space, it's a really purposeful thing for people to do, isn't it?

00:06:24 Rachel

It is. I mean, there's no minimum or maximum amount of hours for volunteering, especially here. Any little bit of time anyone can give is really appreciated. And especially with our residents, they know everyone's very time poor, so it's probably – out of a lot of industries – you volunteer in aged care, probably they are the most appreciative of just a little bit of time. So anything someone can give is what we love, and we will openly take. And as I said some people aren't group type people either. So we have some volunteers here that they prefer the one-on-one volunteering. They're not big for group activities like residents, and we understand that. So they're more than happy just to do visiting for a few hours a day, visiting multiple residents. Not so much joining in the activities. Or we've got some, as I said, that are very admin focused, so they prefer to be in the back of the office, not really people people, which is totally fine, but there's always a role for them as well. So we're very lucky. We're sort of open to a lot of areas.

00:07:14 Kate

Within our industry, do you find that people can bring skills from their working life and then apply them here? Do you have any examples of that?

00:07:21 Rachel

Yes certainly. So we've got a lot of people that have worked in aged care or nursing before, so they've done it before. They might have retired or close to retirement, so they use those transferable skills over. So they've already got that basic empathy and understanding of the elderly. So that's a big thing. But anyone you know, customer service role. Same thing dealing with people. Anything really.

00:07:39 Kate

What about things like, if you're a carpenter or a musician?

00:07:43 Rachel

I think, well, we have a men's shed. So they actually have a lot of volunteers as well, they love to build things, so we have people that come from a building, cabinetry background that come and help our gentleman with the men's shed. We have artists who do painting with our residents as well. We've got beauticians that come and do our nails every Thursday and hand pampering, so many areas that you can use and transfer over to aged care because what we do is so diverse. Anyone from any background, because we basically do every activity you could imagine. Literally everyone has a skill to bring here. There's not one that you'd go 'oh no', we use everything. Truck drivers, they love to share their one-on-one time on the road with other truck drivers here, because residents here as well come from such diverse backgrounds in their lives, anything could be made transferable here.

00:08:29 Kate

And that's the great thing about aged care as well, and I just want to make the point, if you don't have specific qualifications or a skill, you're still welcome, aren't you, you can adapt?

00:08:36 Rachel

The only thing really that volunteers need is what we call an NDIS clearance, because we're working with vulnerable people, so that clearance is for, you know, children and the elderly. But other than that? That's all they need. So if you have no qualifications whatsoever, you're just as valuable as someone that has university qualifications. You're exactly the same. You're an even keel here.

00:08:52 Kate

Do you get the sense that the people that choose to volunteer have similar values? Do they tend to align?

00:08:59 Rachel

They do. They're either a bit like Kaye, they've either looked after their family members or they've worked in the industry, or they just have, I guess, that simple empathy and understanding of elderly people and just want to make their lives brighter. As we kind of say working here, you're sort of getting back towards the end of someone's life and it's such a rewarding experience. So most of those people have either experienced it themselves, and they want to give back in some sort of way. So they definitely all match our values perfectly.

00:09:27 Kate

And Kaye, it sounds like you enjoy every second that you're here, which is wonderful for you and the residents, but is there a standout moment that you've had in your experience over the last four years?

00:09:35 Kaye

There has been lots. At the moment there's a lady that never left her room, and I would go in and visit her and we would talk and she would tell me all her stories. Some of the people here have got amazing stories. So in the end, I convinced her to come to bingo with me – only for half the bingo. So I would leave at half time and go and get her, and she'd be sitting on her bed waiting for me, and I would bring her down. And now she laughs and she's waiting for me to come and get her for bingo. And now I take her on walks as well. And yeah, she's a special person, I think she's a lovely, lovely lady. But I just noticed that she is a lot happier now. It really made me feel good to know that I got her out to an activity, and yeah, she loves it.

00:10:30 Kate

Would I be right in saying that you're much happier in your life too for this experience?

00:10:34 Kaye

Most definitely. At home, my family say there's work Kaye and there's home Kaye. And work Kaye is much happier.

00:10:43 Kate

They get the best do they?

00:10:46 Kaye

I give my best here, and my family get the rest.

00:10:50 Kate

Well, I think you're a pretty fabulous example of why volunteering is a really good thing to do and make sure – I'm hoping people, whether it's at Helping Hand or anywhere else – listen to this and thank volunteering sounds like a great idea. If they want to volunteer at Helping Hand what should they do?

00:11:02 Rachel

So there is a website you can go onto, the Helping Hand website, through the career section; or you can pop on to Seek website as well, which is where all our vacancies are advertised; and there will be a number as well, you can call for people who don't like online.

00:11:13 Kate

That's fine. We will have the number at the end of this podcast and we'll have all these details in our show notes as well. Now I like to finish the episodes where we can with a piece of advice that you'd like someone who'd listen to this, to take away and maybe to share at home. Is there something in particular that you think is really valuable for people to know about volunteering, Rachel?

00:11:32 Rachel

It is for everyone and when I mean everyone, I mean everyone and anyone. Please don't undervalue your skills or your background. A lot of people going into any job or volunteering think 'oh I'm not good enough' or 'I don't have enough to offer' that is completely incorrect and especially with aged care, everyone has anything to offer. And as I said, there is nothing – you're not too boring, or your life is not exciting enough – trust me, it is. Because the residents appreciate everything, and so do we as staff. So no one can be undervalued here. It's great. So whatever you think, please think the opposite and know that volunteering can definitely be for you, wherever you come from.

00:12:05 Kate

That's wonderful. What about you Kaye?

00:12:07 Kaye

I certainly do not regret the day that I walked in here. I was really nervous when I was standing outside and I thought I've never done anything like this before, but I came in, and it's just been so wonderful. And it just makes you feel good. It really does. And I would tell anybody, please just give it a go. You'll find that you will absolutely love it.

00:12:31 Kate

That's great. Well, you're clearly both doing a wonderful job and enjoying it. And thank you so much for joining us to explain the benefits of volunteering.

00:12:38 Rachel

Thank you for having us.

00:12:44 Kate

For more information on Helping Hand and their services please head to www.helpinghand.org.au or call Helping Hand directly on 1300 653 600.