

MEDIA RELEASE

Mental health program makes a difference in Gippsland aged care

26 November 2021

Watching Bill Parker ride his motor scooter through the streets of Drouin, with his piano accordion strapped to the back of it, is a sight for sore eyes for staff at Lyrebird Village Aged Care facility.

It wasn't too long ago that Bill had no desire to do much at all; illness and COVID-19 had finally taken its toll.

After self-referring to the Mental Health in Aged Care (MHiAC) program, Bill has his spark back. He has returned to busking outside the local supermarket, chatting to friends who pass by and entertaining residents at the Drouin facility with his accordion and piano playing.

"Everything came to a head," he recalled. "A bout of pneumonia left me ill, my fingers stiffened and I couldn't walk. COVID-19 just made everything worse with little or no contact with the outside world."

That's when he saw a brochure about the MHiAC program, being delivered by Wellways across Gippsland with funding from Gippsland Primary Health Network (Gippsland PHN). He discussed it with staff who encouraged him to find out more and then he self-referred.

That was the start of a partnership with his Wellways' mental health and Wellbeing worker, Japhet Lagat, that has not only seen Bill's mental health improve but also a healthy respect and friendship between the two.

Japhet has helped Bill reconnect with the things he loves and cherishes – especially his music. Each MHiAC participant has different needs and every interaction is different.

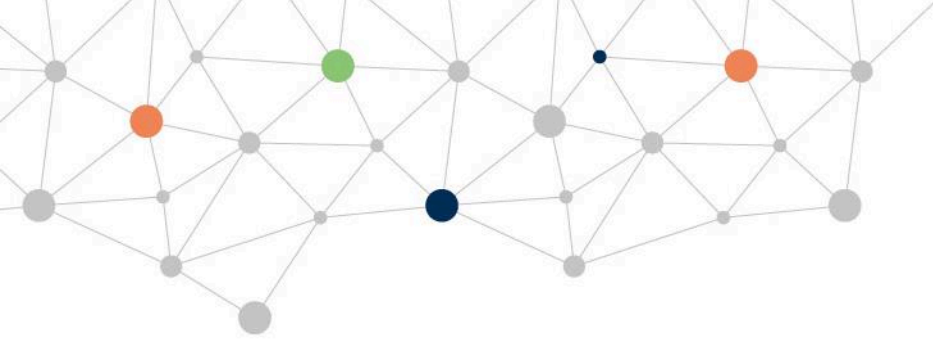
"We work together to develop strategies and coping mechanisms," Japhet said. "We also looked back at Bill's life and encourage him cherish his many achievements. Your story doesn't stop when you go into care...it continues."

Japhet discovered that Bill grew up on a local dairy farm and had spent a large part of his life working for various local charities. In fact he was presented with many awards and certificates, acknowledging his valued work. These are now proudly displayed in a glass fronted cabinet outside his room, together with some much-loved possessions such as a whip, which he demonstrates how to crack.

Japhet also captured Bill's musical talents on video to share with the MHiAC program participants in Bairnsdale. The feedback he received still makes him smile.

Gippsland PHN Chief Executive Officer, Amanda Proposch, said the feedback from residents like Bill showed what a difference this program made to their lives.

"Outcomes are so important to our community, to the service provider and most importantly, to the individual," Ms Proposch said. "Hearing such a positive outcome for Bill is wonderful."



Lyrebird's Chief Executive Officer, Bill Baker, said MHiAC provided residents with the opportunity to share the experience, challenges and adapt to living in a community setting in residential aged care.

He said introduction to residential care for most residents was a confronting move from independence in most situations to a community environment of sharing a living and dining experience.

"MHiAC offers independent counsellors to discuss in confidence the new environment and provide on-going support and guidance to assist with living in a residential setting," he said. "We have witnessed the positive impact of the program on residents with renewed confidence in residents' interaction with fellow residents, staff and management."

Wellways Gippsland Manager, Beth Fogerty, encouraged health professionals, aged care facilities, residents and their families to learn more about the MHiAC.

"We are thrilled that Mr Parker has now joined our MHiAC Steering Group with his lived experience so important to the growth of this program," she said. "We are now delivering this MHiAC in 21 facilities across Gippsland."

From Bill's perspective, his advice to others is simple; moving into residential aged care is not the end of your life, just the start of a new chapter.

About MHiAC:

Mental Health in Aged Care aims to support residents living in or transitioning to residential aged care across Gippsland. Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs) can engage with in-reach mild to moderate mental health support for their residents through the Gippsland PHN Mental Health in Aged Care program.

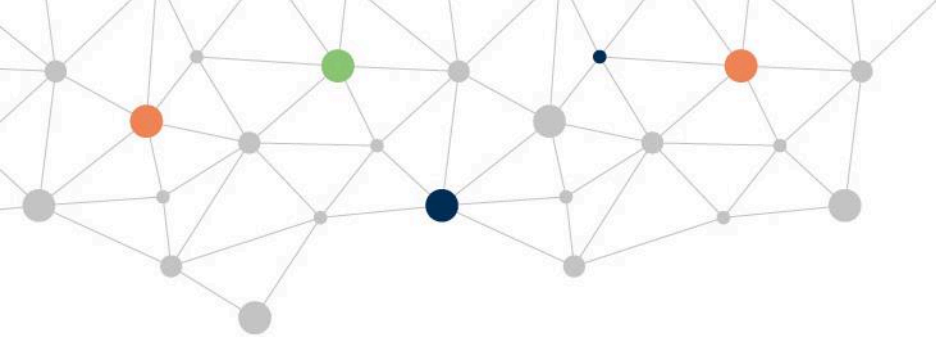
It has been identified that residents both transitioning into residential aged care, and those currently living in residential aged care facilities have high rates of common mental illness with mild to moderate depression. The aim of the program is to provide an emotional wellbeing model for low intensity psychological in-reach services.

To access a referral to this service through Wellways or to seek further information, contact: MHiACGippsland@wellways.org or call (03) 5622 4140

Caption 1: Aged care resident Bill Parker plays his accordion for Wellways' mental health and Wellbeing worker, Japhet Lagat. Mr Parker is part of the Mental Health in Aged Care project being delivered across the region by Wellways and supported by Gippsland PHN.

Caption 2: Aged care resident Bill Parker proudly displays the awards he received for his years of supporting local charities.

Caption 3: Aged care resident Bill Parker on his scooter, ready to head out busking in Drouin.



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For more information, contact Lynne Smith on 0437 918 234 or lynne.smith@gphn.org.au