



ISSUE 29 / SPRING 2010

# VILLANNEWS

The symbolic balloon release at the official opening of Austin Street

## The start of a brighter future

**Villa Maria's four year vision to transform the lives of young people with high level, complex care needs has been realised.**

The Austin Street project in Alphington is Victoria's first purpose-specific residence for ten young people who have an Acquired Brain Injury resulting in high and complex medical and physical support needs, who were living in or at risk of living in aged care nursing homes.

Around 100 people gathered to celebrate the launch of the home on August 18, including Professor David de Kretser, AC, Governor of Victoria and Mrs Jan de Kretser, Patrons-in-Chief of Villa Maria; The Hon Lisa Neville, MP Minister for Mental Health, Senior Victorians and Community Services; and The Hon Bill Shorten, MP Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services.

In his address to the crowd, Professor de Kretser congratulated Villa Maria on a "truly remarkable building".

"The work that you have done is really of immense importance and Jan and I are truly proud to be here as your Patrons-in-Chief to share with you this significant day. You've shown that yours is an organisation truly committed to the types of services that particular groups of people require, and this is vital."

Mr Shorten said it was hard to believe that just 16 months ago, he had stood in the same place for the 'turning of the soil' ceremony on a vacant block of land.

"The impressions I had when I came in here today was that this was a place which hadn't been built for people to fit in, it was a place built around the needs of people, and to me that's an incredibly remarkable achievement."

The new and exciting development features cutting edge technology, including automatic doors to rooms, to give the residents more independence and space, and other

technology features aim to increase the amount of control and choice each resident will have over their environment.

These features include automatic blinds, televisions, air conditioning, light switches and radios that will be connected to a console enabling each resident to operate the items from within their bed or chair in their room. Each bedroom has an adjacent living space and kitchenette, ensuring the young people and their family members and friends feel welcome and at home.

Andrew Macready-Bryan, whose son James, aged 23, is now a resident of Austin Street, shared his personal view of the home at the launch.

"One of the things that's often forgotten in situations where somebody's life changes dramatically is that their circle of friends often finds it a very threatening situation," Mr Macready-Bryan said.

*(continued page 5)*



## How your valued contribution can change lives

Did you know about 34 per cent of Australia's adult population, or 5.4 million people, volunteer?

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the top reason for volunteering (57 per cent of people) was 'helping others or the community'.

Villa Maria was founded by volunteers in 1907, and today, more than 300 volunteers still play a crucial role in achieving our vision of creating choices and building inclusive, sustainable and compassionate communities.

The value of getting involved with community organisations like Villa Maria through volunteering your time, services, contributing financially or even just by communicating with others, should not be underestimated.

No matter on what scale, these actions can make a huge difference to people's lives and add enormous benefit to your own. Volunteering can boost self confidence, make you feel more valued, and feel connected to something bigger than yourself. And contributing much-needed funds can see fantastic results and real outcomes achieved for people in your community.

Amazing things can be achieved when people band together to work towards a common goal.

One of the proudest achievements in Villa Maria's history has been the August opening of Austin Street – Victoria's first purpose-specific residence for ten young people

with an Acquired Brain Injury, who were living in or at risk of living in aged care nursing homes.

And while Villa Maria contributed \$3.75 million of its own funds towards the project, alongside \$1.3 million from the Department of Human Services, the project may not have come to fruition without generous contributions from philanthropic trusts and community donations totalling over \$790,000.

About \$56,000 of the funds were raised through Villa Maria's 2009 Charity Golf Day. On again in October, this event is a chance for people to give back to their community in a fun and sociable way.

Austin Street and its vision to transform the lives of its ten new residents touched the hearts of many people; none perhaps more so than a Villa Maria supporter who recently made an incredibly generous donation of \$50,000. Her own daughter had an acquired brain injury and lived in a nursing home for 30 years before she passed away. She recognised the potential of what Austin Street could provide to young people: a better chance to achieve their personal goals and dreams. We are inspired by this lady's generosity of spirit and thank her most sincerely.

And while we are very grateful for all the donations we receive, it is not the only way to become involved.

Having identified that people are increasingly turning towards online social networking sites to connect and engage, Villa Maria has established its own Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages.

Through these avenues we hope to engage with as many people as possible to build stronger communities. I encourage you to send a housewarming eCard to Austin Street residents, as explained inside this edition of Villa News, to make them feel welcome and at home.

Another way to get involved with Villa Maria and the people we support is through national campaigns such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and The Campaign for Care of Older Australians, called The Grand Plan. Updates on the progress of these vital campaigns aimed to address chronic government funding shortages are on page five.

Getting involved with Villa Maria, no matter in what form, is your chance to get involved with life.

The possibilities of what can be achieved when we work together are endless. Together, we can build stronger communities.

Please visit our website [www.villamaria.com.au](http://www.villamaria.com.au) to find out more.

**Valerie J Lyons**  
Chief Executive Officer



*Pic of (left to right) Tina Dimitriadis Villa Maria Senior HR Consultant, Martin Pakula MLC Minister for Public Transport and Industrial Relations, Libby O'Connor Senior Adviser Working Families Program, Helen McPhee Villa Maria General Manager - People Services and Darren Mannix Villa Maria Manager Human Resources.*

## Villa Maria leads the way in providing fair and flexible work practices

Villa Maria's status as a leading organisation for providing best practice, fair and flexible working conditions has been cemented after winning its second consecutive Fair and Flexible Employer Recognition award on June 23.

The prestigious annual Victorian Government awards honour organisations deemed "corporate role models" for introducing initiatives to help working families.

As a values-based organisation providing quality services and life enhancing opportunities for older people and people with a disability, Villa Maria has never been afraid to challenge the status quo or raise the bar to achieve the best possible outcomes for the people it

supports, as well as its 950 employees across 42 locations.

CEO Valerie Lyons said she was "extremely proud" to be one of 20 Victorian organisations to take out the award, and one of only seven to be recognised in both 2009 and 2010.

"Villa Maria has long recognised and understood the need to create a flexible, supportive and innovative workplace for our valued staff through arrangements including 48/52 leave arrangements, job sharing, learning and development opportunities and flexible start and finish times.

"My thanks go to Tina Dimitriadis, Senior HR Consultant who spent many hours preparing our submission, Darren Mannix, HR Manager and Helen McPhee, General Manager People Services.

"Villa Maria continually works toward being an employer of choice

and we have a passionate Equal Employment Opportunity Committee dedicated to promoting diversity and equality across our workplaces."

Ms Lyons said Villa Maria was constantly looking to further its commitment to being a fair and flexible workplace with future initiatives to be introduced including a Stay in Touch maternity leave initiative allowing staff on leave to keep their work relationship alive to make the transition back to work more supported and comfortable, breast feeding facilities, and new parent/expectant parent kits.

Business Solutions Team member Lachlan Bakewell said taking advantage of Villa Maria's 48/52 leave options had freed up valuable time to spend with his young family.

"I have also been granted time to participate in fire and emergency with the CFA as a volunteer. To me, this has demonstrated a genuine commitment by Villa Maria to not only support me but the Victorian community in times of need."

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## Villa Maria's St Paul's College students connect with their peers at Xavier College

Villa Maria understands the importance of community inclusion for people with disabilities and assists them to get involved and be recognised as valued members of society.

The successful inclusion of young people with a disability, in particular among their peers, is often talked about but difficult to implement.

However with huge commitment and perseverance, an unbreakable bond between students of Villa Maria's St Paul's College and year 7 and 8 students of Xavier College has been formed over the past ten years.

Through weekly bowling outings, joint masses, and an annual school dance hosted by Xavier College for the St Paul's community, students from both schools have gained invaluable tools to help build their self-esteem,

confidence, social awareness and social skills.

On July 31, students gave their bowling shoes a rest for the week and joined together to celebrate St Ignatius Day at Xavier's Burke Hall with activities including basketball, football, and dancing.

St Paul's teacher Justin McFarlane said the celebration, in honour of the founder of the Jesuits, was a great example of the camaraderie between the two schools.

The Xavier students also attended a Mass at St Paul's on August 13.

"It is wonderful to see the increasing confidence and ease as the Xavier students develop familiarity and understanding of our students and their individual needs as they voluntarily come back week after week," Mr McFarlane said.



"For our students, it's great to be able to socialise with peers their own age and just to develop a feeling of acceptance for being part of the community and socialise and do mainstream activities."

Xavier's Youth Minister Peter Ryan said his students had learned "total acceptance of other people" through their weekly interactions.

"They learn how to care and be nurturing, and also to appreciate how fortunate they are in many respects."

One year 8 student said spending time with St Paul's students made him feel "useful and needed".

"I love spending time with them and helping them to have fun that they otherwise may not have."

## Villa Maria looking towards the future

Villa Maria is about to embark on its first major retirement village development.

In conjunction with LU Simon Builders – one of Victoria's leading builders – Villa Maria will soon commence construction of Athelstan Camberwell.

Alongside the proposed independent living development at Wantirna, Athelstan is an integral part of Villa Maria's strategic plan which will enable the organisation to enhance the range of care and support services it provides to the broader Villa Maria community.

Athelstan will comprise 66 contemporary and elegantly designed independent living apartments on four levels, complimented by a comprehensive suite of community facilities and services, including a coffee lounge and bar, restaurant and private dining room, library, cards rooms, internet area, wellness and fitness centre, and movie theatre.

Situated on the corner of Athelstan and Camberwell Roads, the apartments are in an ideal location, only a short walk to Camberwell's well known Burke Road shopping precinct and close to public transport.



Athelstan Camberwell

For more information call Dianne Lane on 1800 799 087, or feel free to visit the display suite at 391 Camberwell Road, open Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm.

## Advocacy

### National Disability Insurance Scheme campaign update

Villa Maria has been continuing to advocate strongly alongside other not-for-profit organisations to see the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) become a reality.

The tax-payer funded scheme would provide cover to everyone who has or acquires a significant disability to help cover costs of essential care, support, therapy, equipment, etc.

Villa Maria was one of hundreds of organisations and individuals to make a submission to the Productivity Commission's Issues Paper on Disability Care and Support, investigating questions including who will be eligible for the scheme and how it will be funded and implemented, in the lead up to the election.

Before the August 21 election, all three major parties (ALP, Coalition and Greens) confirmed they would commit to major reform of the disability sector in their next term if elected, including supporting the introduction of a National Disability Insurance Scheme.

It is hoped that the ALP will deliver on its promise following the Independents backing of Julia Gillard as PM earlier this month. To show your support visit: [www.ndis.org.au](http://www.ndis.org.au)

### Grand Plan

In the lead up to last month's election Villa Maria joined The Campaign for Care of Older Australians Group to actively support and help launch a national campaign called The Grand Plan.

The campaign is aimed to unite Australians to help solve the issues facing aged care, such as government underfunding and the need to attract and retain care workers.

Its vision: "That every older Australian is able to live with dignity and independence in a place of their choosing with a choice of appropriate and affordable support and care services as and when they need them."

Villa Maria staff and clients have been helping to make as much noise as possible to get aged care on the election agenda by sending online postcards to an older person they thought was "grand" (also automatically set to their local MP) and expressing their support through social networking such as Facebook and Twitter.

Hopefully by working together, Villa Maria, its staff, supporters and other not-for-profit organisations can apply pressure on the government to address chronic underfunding of community and residential aged care. For more information visit: [www.thegrandplan.com.au](http://www.thegrandplan.com.au)

## The start of a brighter future (Austin Street cont.)

"So having somewhere like this where people can come in, watch a bit of TV, make a cup of coffee, and just sit quietly with their friend, will make a lot of difference and we're looking forward to enjoying that with James' friends and him in the future."

Austin Street manager Jenni Williams said she and fellow staff members felt "very excited and privileged" to be able to provide a beautiful home for these young people.

"The team at Villa Maria has been absolutely committed to working closely with therapists and families to develop the knowledge of each person's individual personality and their unique care and clinical needs," Ms Williams said.

Villa Maria's Chief Executive Officer Ms Valerie Lyons said she hoped Austin Street would act as a catalyst for the establishment of similar homes in the future, with aged care and disability services providers now having a leading archetype to model from.

Villa Maria has done an enormous amount of work to see the facility come to fruition since it was successful in tendering for government funding under the 'my future my choice' initiative in 2007.

To undertake construction, Villa Maria contributed \$3.75 million of its own funds to the project (including the site valued at \$1.85 million). A further \$1.3 million was provided by the Department of Human Services and over

\$790,000 has been raised to date, through philanthropic trusts and community donations.

As a way of welcoming new residents to Austin Street, we're encouraging everyone in the community to send a Villa Maria housewarming eCard. Not only will the gesture be a show of support for the young people and their families, it will also send a vital message to politicians that more funding is desperately needed to see similar homes built. Visit [www.facebook.com/villamariavic](http://www.facebook.com/villamariavic) and go to the eCard tab.

To view a video of the launch event please visit: <http://www.youtube.com/user/VillaMariaSociety>

## Villa Maria connects older people, and itself, to the online world!

Learning new skills and staying connected to the wider community are vital activities for older people.

Villa Maria will offer people aged 50 and over the chance to do both with the launch of an Internet Kiosk at the Villa Maria Rehabilitation Centre in Wantirna from the end of September.

The kiosk, made possible under the Federal Government's Broadband for Seniors Initiative in conjunction with NEC Australia, will teach seniors how to operate a computer and how to use the internet and email, among other things, free of charge.

Villa Maria carer support worker Tony Nossek said interest had already been sparked among existing Villa Maria service users, although the kiosk would also be open to the wider community.

"It's hoped the kiosk will help combat loneliness and isolation for people and to provide them with a service that's accessible and free," Tony said.

"If people are able to utilise their computers through things like email and Skype, it really puts them more in touch with people not just in their neighbourhood but the outside world. It can also help connect them



*Seniors brush up on their computer skills*

to the younger generation and encourage communication with their grandchildren etc."

People interested in accessing the kiosk can call Tony on 9538 4319.

In other great technology news, Villa Maria has joined the social media revolution.

Recognising the rapid growth of social networking and the importance of having an on-line presence, Villa Maria has established its own Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages.

The Facebook page features details about upcoming events, encourages feedback, and generally keeps people informed. Visitors can also

access free eCards, featuring artworks from Villa Maria artists, to email to friends with personalised greetings and messages.

Villa Maria now also features on YouTube with its latest video clip called Get Involved.

With your help, Villa Maria hopes to create a flourishing on-line community that everyone can be proud of and happy to participate in.

So help spread the word and get everyone you know connected to Villa Maria. Visit Villa Maria's Facebook fan page:  
<http://www.facebook.com/VillaMariaVic>

## Art and creativity flourish at Villa Maria

Villa Maria will host its second annual Art Calendar launch and exhibition on September 22.

The event is a celebration of artistic talent and creativity, showcasing inspiring works by Villa Maria staff, volunteers, people who access our services, and supporters.

All proceeds from sales of the calendar and auction will go towards supporting Villa Maria's art therapy programs.

The launch will be held at the George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne from 6.30-8.30pm.

For further information or to attend the launch, please contact Veronica Lyons on 9855 7639.

Calendars will be available for purchase after September 22 via [www.villamaria.com.au](http://www.villamaria.com.au) or phone order on 9855 7641.





Ben is a regular visitor to Outer Encounters

## Fun encounters in the north east to continue

A vital after school care and holiday program in Mt Evelyn – giving parents the opportunity to continue to work – has been given funding to operate for another three years.

Villa Maria's Outer Encounters program has been supporting children with a disability aged six to 18 each weekday afternoon and on holidays since it was established in late 2008.

Program coordinator Susan Muller said a recent grant from the Australian Government's Outside School Hours Care for Teenagers with Disability initiative was "fantastic news".

"This service is vitally important to families," Susan said. "We have many parents that, until Outer Encounters started, couldn't work because they had to be available to look after their children. This has now enabled many people to explore a variety of employment options that may not have previously been possible. While obviously there are financial benefits, having a job helps their self esteem and sense of being their own person. We've had

very strong feedback from the parents that they really value the program."

Susan said the parents weren't the only happy ones, with children attending the program enjoying the chance to socialise among their peers and staff and participate in fun activities such as ball games, dancing, cooking and crafts.

"What we've really tried to instil is that this is after school care and when kids come home from school they all have their own individual needs. Some want to really engage and have fun while others want to relax and have some quiet time, so we try to meet those needs. The main aim is that they have a really enjoyable, enriching experience here."

Belgrave mum Megan Brown, whose eight-year-old son Devon attends Outer Encounters three days a week, said she would probably need to apply for more respite care or be forced to leave her job without the service.

"I think it's really essential for parents of children with disabilities to have access to an after-hours care service. The caring is so much more intensified for a child with special needs and you need that sort of outlet in terms of getting back to work – whether it's for financial reasons or for the mental and social stimulation. We were extremely lucky in Mt Evelyn to have that service but I know a lot of parents in the Eastern region are struggling and have limited choices."

Megan said Devon "loved" the time spent at Outer Encounters.

"The staff are very caring. They always have something extremely positive to say about him when I pick him up and they seem to love and appreciate him as a little individual."

To find out more about Outer Encounters call 9809 6823.

## Acknowledgements

### Celebration Mass for Feast of St Paul

Auspiced by Villa Maria, St Paul's College is an independent Catholic School supported by the Catholic Education Office as their sole specialist school for students with physical and complex disabilities.

Staying connected to this spiritual dimension is important to St Paul's, which prides itself on being a faith community built on love and welcoming and respecting children and families of all faiths.

A highlight of this dedication was the celebration mass of the Feast of St Paul, the school's patron saint, on June 23.

Attended to by Bishop Christopher Prowse, Fr Malcolm Crawford, Fr Michael Ryan and Fr David Ryan, about 80 students, families, volunteers and staff gathered in the school gymnasium and connecting chapel to hear about St Paul and his role in the church.



St Paul's students celebrate

RE coordinator Justin McFarlane said the mass, one of four each year, was a community event with about 15 members of the Burke Hall Choir coming to join in the festivities.

"They really enjoyed it and it was a great inclusion process for them to come and see our students and our school."

### Christmas hampers – can you help?

Over many years, Villa Maria has provided hundreds of festive hampers for disadvantaged people who receive services from us across metropolitan and regional Victoria.

Villa Maria, through its staff giving fund, contributes towards the cost of filling the hampers but as the numbers grow, we need support from the wider community to bring much needed Christmas cheer to people who are financially and socially disadvantaged.

Your contribution will make a tremendous difference and help ease the pressure felt by many families this Christmas Day.

If you can help by way of donating funds or nonperishable, in-date goods, please contact Sally Karambetsos on 9855 7629 or email: [sally.karambetsos@villamaria.com.au](mailto:sally.karambetsos@villamaria.com.au) before December 8.



Golfers arrive for last year's tournament

### Make your drive count

Villa Maria will host its second annual Charity Golf Day at Southern Golf Club, Keysborough on Monday 25 October 2010.

Over \$56,000 was raised at last year's inaugural event and this year we're aiming to raise \$70,000.

To reach this goal we need your support, as a player or a sponsor, to help Villa Maria create a brighter future for older people and people with a disability.

Proceeds from this year's golf day will go towards two very important services:

- The 'my future my choice' initiative at Austin Street, Alphington – a purpose-specific home for young people with high level complex care needs (including Acquired Brain Injury) who would otherwise be living in an aged care nursing home; and
- Villa Maria's children's respite services, which provide safe, fun and enjoyable experiences for children with a disability aged 6 to 18 and support for their families.

Get a team of four together with your friends or business colleagues and join us for a fun day of Ambrose golf on one of Victoria's premier golf course. Registration is \$250 per person.

For more information visit [www.villamaria.com.au/events](http://www.villamaria.com.au/events) or call Sharon on 9855 7641.

Villa Maria Society  
Registered Office: 6 Studley Park Road Kew Victoria 3101  
Private Bag 20 Kew Victoria 3101  
T: (03) 9855 7600 Freecall 1800 036 377 F: (03) 9855 7899  
E: [villamaria@villamaria.com.au](mailto:villamaria@villamaria.com.au) W: [www.villamaria.com.au](http://www.villamaria.com.au)

Villa News:  
We welcome your feedback and contributions to Villa News. Contact Cassie Maher on (03) 9855 7600 or email [cassie.maher@villamaria.com.au](mailto:cassie.maher@villamaria.com.au)