

Media Release

Friday 8 May 2009

Virtue of volunteering is its own reward

Celebrating National Volunteer Week 2009

With National Volunteer Week 2009 (11-17 May) just around the corner, Catholic Healthcare is encouraging more people to consider putting their hands up to make a genuine difference to the lives of people within the community – and to their own lives in the process.

Catholic Healthcare is the largest Catholic provider of residential and community aged services in Australia and also operates three hospitals. According to Managing Director Chris Rigby, Catholic Healthcare is indebted to its volunteers who work tirelessly to enhance the quality of life of the aged care residents, Community Services clients and hospital patients served by the organisation.

“With 3,500 employees and around 1,000 volunteers, more than 20 per cent of the time and energy Catholic Healthcare devotes to those in our care comes straight from the hearts of our volunteers,” Mr Rigby said.

“As a not-for-profit organisation, we simply could not do all we do to enhance the lives of those we care for and support without the dedication and generous spirits of our volunteers.

“National Volunteer Week 2009 is a wonderful opportunity for all us to take the time to truly acknowledge the efforts of everyone we know who puts up their hand to volunteer...and to perhaps also put some thought to giving of our own time to support one of the many worthy causes that exist within our community.”

‘Everyday people, extraordinary contribution’

The theme of this year’s National Volunteer Week is ‘Everyday people, extraordinary contribution’. One of the many stories which will be shared and celebrated during the week which encapsulates the theme is that of 15-year Catholic Healthcare volunteer, 76-year-old Margaret Knowlden.

On her first day as a volunteer visiting a residential aged care service in 1993, a then-nervous Mrs Knowlden took along a scrabble board in case she couldn’t think of anything to talk about with Joan Trollope, the resident she was to about to meet.

“We did play scrabble – but not until years later. We always had so much to talk about,” said Mrs Knowlden, who visited Mrs Trollope on an almost weekly basis for 14 years, as part of Catholic Healthcare’s Community Visitors Scheme.

From her first visit to her last before Mrs Trollope's death in 2008 at age 86, Mrs Knowlden's volunteering experience led to a genuine, lasting friendship and even an artistic collaboration: Mrs Knowlden was able to use her desktop publishing skills to produce five books of Mrs Trollope's poetry.

Mrs Knowlden, 76, was recently presented with a 15 Year Service Award for her volunteering efforts by Catholic Healthcare Community Services Volunteer Manager Kerry Lovell, and will be further honoured at a special volunteer event during National Volunteer Week.

"The current trend is for volunteers to give 2.5 years to a charity or service, and then move onto something else. We're very lucky at Catholic Healthcare to have many volunteers like Margaret who have been with us for extraordinary lengths of time," Mrs Lovell said.

"It just shows the level of Margaret's commitment and passion and it is so important that we celebrate achievements like Margaret's."

Mrs Knowlden said that while honoured to have received her 15 Year Service Award, the bond she developed with Mrs Trollope was its own reward.

"I can honestly say to see the lovely smile appear on Joan's face each time I visited provided me with all the recognition I needed over the 14 years," Mrs Knowlden said. "It was a privilege to be associated with Joan and I am proud to call her 'my friend'. I miss her sadly.

"To get the most of volunteering, you do need to be dedicated and prepared to build relationships with the people you are helping. But you gain as much as you give. You are so enriched for the experience."

Expressions of interest in volunteering in Catholic Healthcare's residential aged care services, Community Services and hospitals can be made by phoning Catholic Healthcare on 02 8876 2100 or emailing volunteer@chcs.com.au

Photo file name: Catholic_Healthcare_volunteer_Margaret_Knowlden.jpg

Photo caption: Fifteen years not of labour, but love...Catholic Healthcare volunteer of 15 years, Margaret Knowlden.

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About Catholic Healthcare

Established in 1994, Catholic Healthcare provides aged, healthcare and community services across New South Wales and south-east Queensland. With a vision of creating sustainable and vibrant ministries of care, Catholic Healthcare supports sick, frail, elderly and marginalised people in residential aged care, seniors living, hospitals and through a diverse range of Community Services.