

Victoria on Song to Greater Wellbeing

Pioneering Arts Health Program Launches Generational Unity at Victoria Grange

Goodbye Lady Gaga, hello Andrews Sisters. A group of Victorian primary school students will learn songs from a bygone era as they team up with new 'buddies' in a Melbourne aged care facility to form the Sing Out Loud Together Choir, a new initiative to build community connections for both generations.

The Sing Out Loud Together pilot program, run by national not for profit organisation Arts Health Institute, is being trialled for the first time in Victoria at Australian Unity's Victoria Grange retirement village in Vermont South with students from The Knox School. The 8-week course, culminating in a concert at the school, is designed to improve the wellbeing of the residents in aged care and to give the students a greater understanding of a different generation, while forming firm friendships along the way.

Arts Health Institute hopes the Victoria Grange pilot, based on a successful program run throughout Sydney over the last 18 months, will lead to a broader rollout across Victoria. Australian Unity Retirement Living welcomes the pilot program in one of its facilities as part of a broader commitment to improving the wellbeing of both its residents and the broader community.

The CEO of Australian Unity Retirement Living, Mr Derek McMillan, explains that Australian Unity models itself on building meaningful connections between staff, clients and the community and is proud to be the first aged care provider in Victoria to pilot this educational program.

"We offer a broad range of care and accommodation services that older Australians can choose to support their wellbeing and their independence. This program allows staff and residents to welcome students into our community and to contribute towards their education.

"Sing Out Loud Together is one example of the variety of activities residents can choose from at Victoria Grange, to not only achieve the lifestyle they desire, but to also remain connected to younger members within their own community," Mr McMillan says.

Students will participate in weekly sessions with their 'buddies', learning songs from another era, the history of the music and interact with their buddies through interview and research tasks. The course culminates with a choir performance at the school, along with a student led project showcasing what they have learned about their buddies and the era they grew up in.

The Arts Health Institute, CEO, Dr Maggie Haertsch, believes the Sing Out Loud Together program has several benefits for both residents and students by connecting in a meaningful way through music and song.

"This pioneering program uses the unique power of music to promote social engagement, elicit positive emotional and behavioural responses; whilst stimulating cognitive functioning in both healthy elderly and people living with dementia through engaging with young people.

"Together they are showcasing the power of this program to help reduce loneliness and improve the self-esteem of our elders and foster friendships with the students. The students benefit from learning from the elders about their long and full lives, the important stories of their history and most of all develop respect and compassion for our older generation. This program is where

potential meets experience,” she says.

Sing Out Loud Together, while fun and engaging, is a structured, therapeutic, cognitively stimulating, group-based session with primary school students held weekly in Victoria Grange's Aged Care facility in Vermont South. It requires the active participation of the elderly and students together and whilst it is within a group, individual needs, strengths and musical preferences are a key part of the program's design.

Principal of The Knox School, Mrs Suzanne McChesney, is proud of their students' involvement in the program that reflects their school's core values of being part of a community, which fosters a love of learning and an appreciation of individual achievement.

“One of the basic premises on which we build our education at The Knox School is a clear understanding of social justice and the willingness to engage with the community to ensure our children understand that from a position of privilege comes a responsibility to assist others. We are delighted to be the first school in Victoria to take part in this scheme and we know that our young people will benefit from it greatly. We hope that many will follow us to bring this wonderful initiative to those in our midst who need it most,” she says.

Sing Out Loud has been the subject of a longitudinal study and is partly funded by the Department of Health and Ageing.

For more information, photographs or to arrange an interview with The CEO of Australian Unity Retirement Living, Mr Derek McMillan, The Arts Health Institute, CEO, Dr Maggie Haertsch, or the Principal of The Knox School, Mrs Suzanne McChesney please contact:

Wendy McWilliams

WMC Public Relations

03 9803 2588 / wendy@wmcpr.com.au