

## RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE



MALDON HOSPITAL

Partnering with the Community

RESIDENTIAL CARE AND KIDS

NANA'S MOVED INTO A NURSING HOME...

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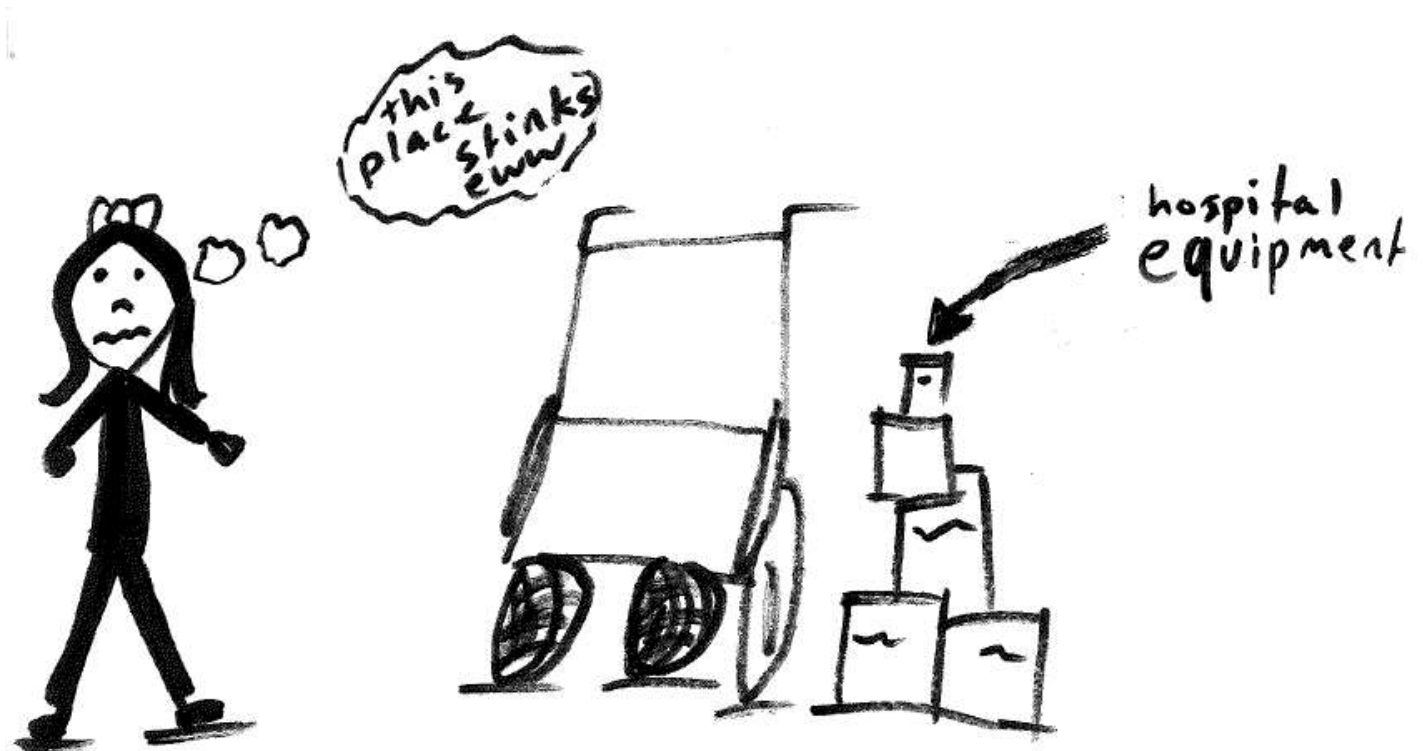
## VISITING A LOVED ONE IN RESIDENTIAL CARE

### IT'S ALL NEW TO US

You might love visiting your grandparent's place. Everything's familiar – the photos of your mum or dad as a kid hanging on the walls, the furniture, maybe a pet. There's a drawer full of art and craft supplies, a shelf of your mum or dad's children's books, a jar of lollies you can help yourself to when your parents aren't around. Of course, your grandparent is always happy to see you, warm and cuddly.

But what happens when they get sick, or forgetful, and life becomes too hard for them to live at home anymore? What does it mean when they have to move into residential aged care (sometimes called a nursing home or hostel)? Has everything changed? And can you even visit them anymore?

Well, yes, some things have changed. But that doesn't mean you can't visit your grandpa or your great-nanna or favourite older auntie anymore. Of course you can – it's just that some things will be different, and take some getting used to.



*"My family recently decided to move my Grandpa to aged care. My first impression when I walked in was there were many unfamiliar and unpleasant smells. It also looked very 'hospitally'."*

It's true – residential care can look a bit like a hospital at first. There are people in uniforms, lots of signs, wheelchairs and unfamiliar shiny equipment. But look again, and you'll see bookcases and armchairs, lamps and framed pictures. In your loved one's room there'll be familiar photos and furniture. And yes, there can be a few smells. Bathroom smells and cleaning smells. But our homes can have those smells sometimes too, and residential aged care is a home, lots of people's home.

Because it's your loved one's home, it's good to become familiar with it. You're very welcome in some parts, like your family member's particular room, and the shared areas, like lounge rooms or gardens. These are usually where you will spend time with your family. But it's also home for other people too, and each of them has a room that's theirs alone. Some people like their privacy and like to keep their door shut; some people are happy to have their door open – either way it's best not to enter their rooms. In this way it is pretty different from where your family member used to live.

It's also different because where your loved one now lives is also people's workplace. There are offices and desk areas, and equipment like wheelchairs and trolleys. These places and things need to be kept clean and tidy all the time, and the staff that work there are very busy – it's best to steer clear. Besides, they're not very interesting places!



## WHAT CAN I DO?

*"It can be boring sometimes. It's better if you bring something along to do, some colouring or books."*

Maybe you can't run around the backyard, or cuddle her cat, or kick the footy when you visit Nanna now. And maybe Pop doesn't say or move much anymore. But there is still lots you can do together. Here are some ideas:

- \* look at photo albums together
- \* watch a well-loved DVD
- \* read a book together or listen to a talking book
- \* share a meal time together
- \* show school work, awards you've been given or something you've made
- \* do a jigsaw or play games or cards together
- \* help decorate or tidy their room
- \* assist with personal grooming – brush their hair, paint their nails, moisturise their hands
- \* bring a well-behaved pet to visit (if allowed)
- \* play music – either yourself or recorded
- \* spend time outside
- \* bring the outside in – flowers, autumn leaves, shells, interesting stones
- \* sit by a window together and talk about what you can see
- \* share homemade food or treats (if appropriate)
- \* look at an iPad together – photos, games or videos
- \* do craft together – colouring, watercolour, leaf rubbings, collage
- \* bring an activity bag, with construction blocks, pens and paper, maybe a special treat
- \* and don't forget to give them a kiss and cuddle and tell them how much you love them!

*"I think it's a good idea if aged care places make it more interesting for kids – give them something to do. Maybe some activities for kids in the corner of the lounge area – games and art and craft maybe – and an activity sheet in the resident newsletter."*

All residential aged care units welcome good ideas, so if you have an idea as to how to make residential care more welcoming for kids and families, let them know! Write your idea down, and give it to a staff member.

*"She doesn't even know who I am. She just sits there and doesn't say anything."*

## WHAT IS DEMENTIA?

While people move into residential care for all sorts of reasons, one of the main reasons is that they have a form of dementia. Dementia is a disease that affects the brain. There are different kinds of dementia, and they affect people in different ways. Some people become more forgetful. Some people find it difficult to speak or move or eat. If this is happening to your loved one, this can be confusing and upsetting. It's important to realise they are still the person you've always known and loved. But it can be hard at first to know what to say or what to do with them.

Many of the activity ideas above are still good things to do with your family member who is living with dementia. But you might also need to keep in mind the following:

- \* Your loved one can't help or control what they do.
- \* Focus on the things your loved one can do or still remembers.
- \* Be patient. Sometimes people need time to understand what you've said. If after a little while they don't respond, gently repeat what you've said.
- \* Understand they may say the same thing repeatedly, or ask you the same question again and again. Try not to get frustrated – smile and nod. Answer their question – even if you have to do it a lot. Remember – when you were little, you might have done the same thing with your mum or dad!



- \* It can be upsetting when they don't remember you. Gently hold their hand, smile comfortingly, talk slowly and reassuringly – even if they don't remember your name, they will know you are someone important to them, with whom they feel safe and loved
- \* One of the hardest things to understand about dementia is the way it sometimes seems to change your family member's personality or mood. Ask an adult you trust about these changes.
- \* Another difficult thing is when your loved one wants to "go home". While the above points can be helpful, you can also reassure your loved one they are safe and you will visit again. Perhaps suggest one of the activities listed above. Don't disagree or try to reason with them about wanting to go home.

*"Sometimes he says or does things that confuse me. I think, 'How can you say that?' And the other residents – they sometimes act in ways you don't expect."*

The most important thing to remember is that people living in residential care are unwell in different ways. They can't help how they are and may need different sorts of assistance. While some people can walk around by themselves, sometimes with a four-wheel walking frame, others are lying in mobile beds. While some people feed themselves, others need help. While you might understand what one person says, another person may not be able to say anything at all. While it might be obvious that some people are unwell, it may be less obvious with others. Pain or medication can make people behave in unpredictable or surprising ways – they may be grumpy, teary or sleepy or make loud or sudden noises. And even though you are there to visit your family member, you may come across other residents in the shared areas, such as the lounges or dining rooms. Their behaviour may seem strange, upsetting and hard to deal with ... at least at first.



## NOW I UNDERSTAND

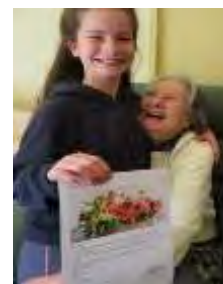
*"I've learnt to talk slower and to smile when they repeat themselves, and it makes me happy when they smile."*

If someone says something to you that doesn't make sense, smile and say things like "okay" or "that's interesting". Don't go into other resident's rooms uninvited and without parental supervision – they need their privacy, and they may be too unwell to say they don't want company. But many residents are delighted to see children and young people who are there to visit family, and will want to say hello to you.

*"I really enjoyed getting taught to play on the keyboard by one of the residents, and listening to some of their stories."*

Visiting family members in residential care can feel unfamiliar and strange at first. But as you and your loved ones get used to it, it can become an enjoyable, everyday part of life. You and your loved one still have lots of opportunities to learn from each other and share memories, stories and love.

*"After school I come and read out loud. I know she really enjoys it, so do I"*



*Written by Danni Moore, the author would like to thank the young people who contributed so much time and energy to this project.*