

## MEDIA RELEASE

### My Care Runs Deep

This month, Cathy Strachan celebrates three years as Catholic Healthcare's Pastoral Care Coordinator supporting clients in the community in the Northern Sydney region. She is passionate about caring for seniors and loves her role, which is both purpose-driven and intensely rewarding.

Cathy began her career as an optometrist in South Africa. When she moved to Australia, Cathy wanted to work with the elderly so became a volunteer in a residential aged care home. She did this until she secured the role of Volunteer Coordinator. During this time, Cathy obtained a degree in Dementia Care from the University of Tasmania, followed by a Diploma in Pastoral Care through Chaplaincy Australia. The home then employed Cathy as their Pastoral Carer, where she worked for five years before joining Catholic Healthcare.

Cathy is passionate about working with seniors from all walks of life. "I have a passion for senior care," says Cathy. "I feel they are a sector of our population who are often vulnerable and marginalised. I have been in Australia for nine years and knew even before I came here that I wanted to work with the elderly. In my role as Pastoral Care Coordinator, I have a special interest in palliative care in the sense of being there for people when they are at their most vulnerable and helping them have a peaceful end," she adds.

"I feel very strongly about people not dying alone, and I want to be able to help with this transition. I have done grief counselling, palliative care and end of life care. I have worked with families, residents and clients. My role is about caring for the person. That's what I do. My care runs deep."

Cathy says the essence of pastoral care is being present for the person you are supporting. "For the most part, you sit and actively listen. It's not counselling where you are driving somebody to a destination. It's allowing people to explore their feelings and thoughts. With regards to spirituality, it doesn't have anything to do with religion; it is about finding meaning in life. It can be religious, but it doesn't have to be. Everybody goes through grief, and everybody goes through loneliness. It's a universal thing."

Cathy feels her role is incredibly rewarding. "For me, the most fulfilling aspect of my role is supporting people who are lonely or isolated; people who don't have family or whose only connection is with their carers. I have many clients who are alone, including clients whose children live overseas or are not in the picture. Being present for my clients has a positive impact on them. It allows me to make a real difference in their life and helps me understand the genuine value of social connectedness."

Cathy gives an example of how her care runs deep. "I had a female client who was isolated and lonely, with poor mobility. She hadn't left her apartment for some time. When I came to visit her, she was sad and miserable. I remembered she grew up in the country. So I said, how about next time I come and take you to the beach? You can sit and stare at the sea; you don't have to talk to me; you just get to leave your apartment. My client burst into tears. For her, it was very emotional. When I went to pick her up, she was dressed and ready to go. My client was so excited that she cried all the way to the beach. She was thrilled to see the water and touch the sand. For us, it's an everyday experience, but for my

clients, it's monumental - they don't have the ability to do that for themselves anymore. It's those little things that make a huge difference."

During these uncertain times, Cathy had to change her approach with clients and become very innovative. "When I couldn't meet with my clients face to face, I began writing weekly letters of encouragement and support to my clients filled with jokes, poems and helpful hints. I made sure I was contacting every single one of my clients. I was also making regular phone calls to them. I would also go to the shops to buy flowers, muffins, newspapers and all sorts of goodies for my clients that I knew they were missing and drop them off at their front door. It was my way to keep more connected with my clients."

The biggest challenges Cathy's faces in her role are dealing with her clients' traumas. These range from illness to death, both physical and emotional traumas. Cathy is well supported by Catholic Healthcare to help manage her role. She meets with Chaplaincy Australia once a month for a professional debrief and is also fortunate to have a strong support network around her.

Cathy is proud of the meaningful work she does in the community. She also praises Catholic Healthcare for playing its part. "Catholic Healthcare offered pastoral care in the community and residential aged care well before it became part of the Aged Care Quality Standards.

"It's an emotional role," says Cathy. "It's emotional because I care. My clients talk to me because there is sometimes nobody else.

"Pastoral care caters for the whole person. As Pastoral Carers, we provide holistic care to ensure our clients are fully supported emotionally, spiritually, socially, physically and medically. It's what makes us special. It's part of our Mission.

"I have the most amazing role. I love it. I love it!"

*Catholic Healthcare provides dedicated pastoral care coordinators who offer spiritual and emotional care to anyone who would like support, regardless of background, faith or belief system. You can access this service as part of a Government funded package. Our pastoral care team includes coordinators and volunteers, specifically trained to help you. Call us on 1800 225 474 if you need to talk to one our trained coordinators or volunteers.*

Pictured is Cathy Strachan

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