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## Silver lining of living in a nursing home during COVID19: lifestyle activities haven't stopped

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Our seniors living in residential aged care homes haven't been short of entertainment nor struggled to find something to do over this COVID19 pandemic period.

It's a strange silver lining.

While the rest of Australia was bulk buying puzzles, exercise equipment and binge watching TV shows, things remained pretty normal for seniors in FronDitha Care's residential facilities.

At FronDitha Care, the not-for-profit aged care provider that looks after mainly Greek speaking seniors, life for those in its care has remained largely unchanged.

Its five residential aged care facilities had to restrict visitation with exemptions for exceptional circumstances (ie palliative care situations).

It meant they couldn't see their loved ones for a period of time, much like the rest of the population.

EGM of Residential Services, Jim Scantsonihas, said these measures were necessary to limit the risk of a COVID19 outbreak and to protect our residents, who like all over the age of 65, are considered one of the most vulnerable groups in this pandemic.

"Residents couldn't see their loved ones, our volunteer program was suspended and incursions and excursions were cancelled, so we knew we had to step in and increase our lifestyle and activity program to maintain socialisation and connectedness during this time," Mr Scantsonihas says.

The organisation immediately increased the hours of operation of the lifestyle program, adding a full program on weekends and more hours in the evening.

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An amazing by-product of this meant that the residents were able to mark occasions in groups - something that most Australians had to give up.

FronDitha Care's largest residential aged care facility in Clayton has 150 bed capacity so celebrations had quite the audience.

"We've done a lot of things that we ourselves haven't been able to do at home," Support Services Coordinator Vivi Michailidou says.

"We got to decorate and take the Epitaphio out for Easter and have a full Easter Sunday feast."

She says some staff volunteered their time and came in to share the occasion with residents and ensure Greek Easter was still special for them.

"We're a family here too, so it was fitting that we could mark such an important celebration together," Ms Michailidou says.

FronDitha Care's Clayton facility was awarded the Victorian ACSA Innovation Award for their lifestyle program in 2019, and they have continued to innovate during the pandemic period.

Technology has played a big part by linking the residents to the outside world. They've connected with family members over Skype and Facetime, while FronDitha Care volunteers also call in regularly.

Birthdays were celebrated with the other residents and catering was provided by the amazing chefs in the facility.

Residents have attended in-house live plays with the team putting on a karagiozi shadow puppet show through their custom-made theatre.

Music continues to be a massive influence in the facility, with regular dance parties and Greek music filling the hallways.

Outside of Clayton, FronDitha Care's leisure and lifestyle teams have also been trialling new activities.

At its Thornbury residential facility the residents have been playing charades and making lots of crafts, while in Newcastle, the team has invented 'armchair travel' where everyone is given a passport and VIP 'boarding' and the team picks a country to focus on.

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Now, as measures ease, the leisure and lifestyle teams are keeping the creative momentum going with new activity ideas.

FronDitha Care now coordinates restricted visitation at its facilities. Each resident is allowed two visits a day. Visitors must be above 16 years old and all visitors must have the flu vaccine to enter the facility as per the current state directives.

To date, FronDitha Care has not had any cases of coronavirus reported amongst its consumers and staff. It continues to grow its workforce and is hiring.

To read more about how FronDitha Care has managed to keep life as normal as possible during the COVID19 pandemic and to see the activities in action visit <https://www.facebook.com/FronDithaCareOfficial/>

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