

Vintage Goddess - Spirit of our Heritage  
“Something Old – Something New”

**Allison Ferguson**

## DTA Award for Excellence 2016.

Arcare aged care facility at Hope Island aims to foster and support relationships between community members that heighten a sense of purpose and significance for residents, families and staff, by actively promoting continuity, belonging, security and fulfilment. As the Lifestyle coordinator at Arcare Hope Island and to assist in achieving these aims, I wanted to find opportunities where residents were able to contribute, participate and have a sense of purpose within the local community. The result being the creation of the Community Connect Program which was established in 2013. The Community Connect Program is run by myself with the assistance of care staff, volunteers, community contacts and most importantly residents and their families. The program has grown in leaps and bounds since its creation and the benefits include the sense of pride, achievement & accomplishment felt by all involved. The evaluation process is always evolving, group discussions are held to ensure the residents and their families’ voices are heard in regards to their specific interests. As result participation satisfaction is increased and all involved speak of the enjoyment, laughter and fulfilment they feel from being involved in such a great program.

The Community Connect Project that I will be highlighting is by our Our Vintage Crafters Group. The project has been a yearlong from April 2015 – April 2016 creating the Vintage Goddess - Spirit of our Heritage “Something Old – Something New”

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Our Vintage Crafters Group have been honoured with a letter written by the Lady in Waiting on the behalf of her Majesty the Queen.

An extract from the letter.

"Her Majesty was very interested to hear about the meticulous and skill involved in the transformation of the dress, and to learn of your wonderful individual talents which combined so well over the course of many hours.

The Queen was touched to know of your dedication to your work, and understand how inspirational it has proved to be, with the involvement of family and other residents.

Lesley Forbes one of our talented volunteers who work on the project felt so passionate about it she put pen to paper and wrote to the Her Majesty the Queen.

Below is a part of the extract from her letter.

Her Majesty the Queen  
Buckingham Palace  
London SW1A 1AA

**SPIRIT OF OUR HERITAGE WEDDING DRESS**

Madame,

I wish to tell Your Majesty about the most amazing accomplishment of several wonderfully talented elderly ladies.

My name is Lesley Forbes and I am a craft and embroidery volunteer at an aged care residence on the Gold Coast in Australia.

Last year, our "Vintage Craft Club" crocheted and knitted beautiful poppies, which

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were sent to Gallipoli for ANZAC day. Their talented crochet work was so beautiful, that it was a waste not to showcase it.

Along with the residents, the lifestyle coordinator and myself, we decided to make a “Spirit of Our Heritage” wedding dress. It has taken a year to make, involving thousands of hours of work.

The base of the wedding dress is a \$5.00 silk dress, bought at a Salvation Army Store. The back was removed and a flesh colored arm added. Each flower, of which there are over 1000, was hand crocheted, gathered, stiffened, and hand beaded. Diamantes were attached, and then the individual flowers were hand sewn to the dress.

The process of assessment, activity provision, goal creation and evaluation

Wearable Art: April 2016 – April 2015

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Vintage Crafters Group:

Over the past year, four residents, a talented volunteer and I drew on our past work and life experiences to create a masterpiece. This masterpiece was a hand crafted “Vintage Wedding dress”.

Our inspiration was to give new life to an ancient and intricate craft that began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The art of doily making was passed down through generations and now is almost lost. We collected doilies from our residents, family, friends and the community and we then created three dimensional flowers bringing a new life to our

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100 year old doilies now each flower has a story to be told which a powerful reminder of our heritage.

Our complete ensemble is a dress that “Recalls the Past “our heritage.

With French knitted lacing, head piece and veil, brooch bouquet, crocheted covered shoes with pearls and flowers.

“Something Old” was created by layering antique doilies and shaped them into large heirloom flowers to be the feature of our dress.

“Something New” came to life by hand crocheting and embellishing approximately 1000 flowers made from different shades to enhance our creation.

“Something Borrowed” to enhance our head piece one of residents has given a beautiful heirloom brooch that her three sons gave to as present when they were very young and living in England.

“Something Blue” hand crocheted grater creation with flowers.

Each flower had a 5 step process - crocheting – gathering – stiffening – hand sewn pearls and glued diamantes.

One of our crafters from our Sensitive Care unit (dementia) joined the team every Tuesday and Thursday were she chose to sew the pearls onto the flowers, she stated that she enjoyed being with other crafters as she loved talking about her passion for quilting, sewing and designing, she stated it takes her back to her happy place, and at the end of our project she didn't want to see other pearl.

The Vintage Goddess - will be proudly displayed in our front foyer to accompany her we have made a photo collage album to share the journey from conception to completion.

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The continual benefits of our creations has had such a flow on aspect it has become such a topic of conversation and many social friendships have been formed. After discussing the dress with two residents who chose to stay in their room's they had a mutual interest in crocheting now come to different activities and they family members join them.

Our creation has been accepted into the Gold Coast Show 2016, in the creative art section, winning 1<sup>st</sup> place for Residential Aged Care – Group Section and Best Piece - People Choice Award.

This show cases that just because an individual has moved into an aged care facility your life doesn't have to stop. The Vintage Goddess dress is now also the inspiration behind improving the Wearable Art section at the EKA (Brisbane Show) in 2017 and the dress will be showcased during this event.

The dresses creation has created a talking point that has reached beyond Arcare's doors into the community. A family member whom had just returned from holidays in the Kimberly's, stated that he was sitting around a camp fire with fellow grey nomads, when one of the ladies was showing photos on her iPad and to his amazement there was our Vintage Goddess dress. The lady explained that she lived next door to Arcare and had been amazed by the dress and how it became to be. This is a prime example of what we are trying to achieve here at the facility.

Vintage Crafters Group: aged between 56 – 91 years – age has no barriers.

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Staff: Allison Ferguson: Lifestyle coordinator The Community Connect Program

Where to from here: Thinking outside the box to ensure residents have a sense of achievement, empowerment and purpose our yearlong leisure project is now completed. The impact on myself has been one of great pride and satisfaction to see the continual benefits for the residents. Our Vintage Goddess proudly stands in our front foyer and is a constant reminder that anything is possible.

Rita Petersons: Joined the Arcare the family on 26/11/14 and is an active member of the Vintage crafter group participating in all the Community projects.

Rita learnt to knit and crochet at school, she took this activity up during war time in Latvia but wool was very scarce. However, she continued to teach herself by referring to books. Rita made all knitted items for herself, husband, children and grandchildren and her love of creating things grew from this.

The project: Allison encouraged Rita to become involved in the project after making the ANZAC poppies. Rita stated “when I saw the design of the vintage wedding dress, I thought I’ll be surely challenged and it looked so exciting. I enjoyed being a part of the project because of the flexibility and I could do this in my own time or in the group sessions and as the dress was evolving we had many group discussions. I really loved sitting in my room to focus and reflect as the project was coming to the end”. Rita was one of two who made over 1000 large flowers for the dress and 120 small flowers for the veil and arm band. After many discussions with the group on the shoe design, Rita threw away the patterns and created her own and the end result speaks for itself. Rita migrated from Latvia in 1949 and has loved living Australia for

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67 years. Throughout her life some of the things that she enjoyed were Crocheting, knitting, cooking, decorating her home, gardening, dancing, holidays, travelling with family, going to the movies and musicals.

Evaluation: Rita stated that she was really surprised in what she had accomplished when the project was finished and that she was a part of this amazing creation. Her daughter and family are extremely proud of her.

Patricia Winnell: Joined the Arcare the family on 9/4/14 and is an active member of the Vintage crafter group. Patricia started knitting at an early age and it was very expensive to buy woollen items, they lived near the wool mill and was able to purchase wool from there. She states “I started to crochet while I was preparing for my glory box to ensure I had beautiful items for my home. After I was married I created many items for my family I loved knitting”.

The project: “Allison asked if I would like to join the project but as I was only new to Arcare I was reluctant, soon after however I saw the group working on the project and I decided to join them. From there I was hooked”. Patricia was one of two who made over 1000 large flowers and was also the main patriciate who assisted in sewing on all the flowers on the dress and veil. Patricia also helped in creating the three dimensional flowers from old doilies.

Evaluation: Patricia stated that being involved in the project has given her a purpose and great satisfaction in seeing our creation finished, her son is extremely proud of her achievements.

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Throughout her life some of the things that she enjoyed were going to dances, the cinema and she also loved to go motorbike riding, play tennis and golf. Patricia's most memorable education experiences was her enjoying doing craft at school. Patricia very first job was in a Newsagency other occupations she had throughout her life were: sewing, convenience store and working in coffee bar.

Airlie Meiklejohn: Joined the Arcare the family on 19/2/15 and was an active member of the Vintage crafter group.

The project: Lesley introduced Airlie into to group. Airlie stated that "it seems I have done very little but I am very happy with outcome". Airlie hand stitched all the back of the flowers to bring them together Airlie "stated it seemed insignificant to her but we explained to her it was a very important part of the process.

Evaluation: Airlie stated that she is very happy with the end result  
Airlie's favourite subjects at school were English & Sport, her first job was a Nurse then she went on to become (RN) she loved nursing.

Airlie learnt to knit from her Aunt and after she was married she had lots of time to become creative and knitted lots bears & toys for her children she taught herself to crochet during war times.

Carole Smart: Joined the Arcare family on 12/4/14 and was an active member of the Vintage crafter group participating in all the Community projects.

The project: "Allison asked if I would like to join the project because we shared the passion of crafting. When Carole joined the group she chose to sew the pearls onto



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the flowers, she stated that she enjoyed being with other crafters as she loved talking about her passion for quilting, sewing and designing.

Evaluation: Carole stated it takes her back to her happy place, and at the end of our project she didn't want to see other pearl.

Carole transferred to Arcare Caboolture to be closer to her family and continues her crafts.

Over the years Carole was an Avon Area Manager, an Administration officer and operated her own Soft furnishing business. Carole's passion was her craft and enjoyed knitting, crocheting embroidery, scrapbooking, painting and quilting. Carole made quilts for the NSW Bushfire relief team and enjoyed making many projects for her family.

Volunteer: Lesley Forbes is one of our talented volunteers who shares her skills and passion. She was an embroidery and craft teacher and has been with Arcare since August 2014. Lesley had no idea of the adventure that awaited her.

The project: Lesley came up the idea of make the wedding dress for The World Wearable Art Competition and with consultation Allison and the Vintage crafter group it was decided the dress would consist of crocheted flowers and making flowers from old doilies to create a master piece. “Something old – Something new”. Lesley eagerly looked forward to every class to share her knowledge and assist important fiddly tasks and family member are also eager to participate.

Evaluation: Lesley stated that she met some wonderfully intelligent, creative, artistic and extremely humorous people, all with individual talent.

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Allison Ferguson: Lifestyle/Community Co-ordinator. Certificate IV in Leisure &  
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