

DRTA 2017 Award for Excellence.



Hosting a Themed Year in the Workplace

In this report I hope to share about the how and why we run a theme years in our residential aged care facility.

So what does this look like?

We started running themed years at Wesley Vickery Sylvania in 2013. It is a way to add continuity to the flow of our activity delivery throughout the year. It has allowed us to plan and prepare ahead and have extra ideas up our sleeves that we can call on when required or directed to by unforeseen change. Over the 1st 2 years it had evolved into something much more, as seen by the start of 2015.

The culture of our home has become more inclusive, relational, and talkative about life in general. People are sharing their un-met desires. We have found that the generation of elders we are serving were so busy living through war, hard times and the like, that their personal goals and dreams in life had often gone on hold. This had led to despair and feelings of hopelessness in the hearts of some people. Some shared regrets. Some shared how they sacrificed their needs and dreams to help a partner reach theirs, "as that's just what you did". However later in life and now found on their own. They are sad in some ways about what they hadn't been able or been allowed to do. This we wanted to help with. That's where the idea of assisting people with end of life resolve came in. We decided that if we could just do one thing in each person's heart and soul to help them, then we had achieved a great thing for them. We were aware that we could not help all and even make all requests happen, but we did decide to get as close to the request as possible for each person that wanted to have a go at reaching a dream. We decided through the use of themed years we could help meet some of those in some very realistic ways. We were able to offer a multi-faceted approach to the delivery of leisure and life style this way as well. Sometimes allowing us to meet a few different needs, in different ways, at the same time. Hence we began to realise our residents were gaining a greater appreciation for life at this stage of their life, they were achieving goals. They were planning new goals and getting excited about life and what was ahead. What was to come was giving residents purpose and something to look forward to. Perhaps something to live for. Some residents have expressed this approach has helped to change their lives in a positive and exciting way. That alone has kept us going on this path. The reaching of some life goals is the sheer gold, the bonus. It's been a true privilege to journey with some of our residents in this way.

Below ive listed the previous themed years and listed one highlight or the sub theme from that month. Please be aware there was so much more to what we achieved and did. It can't all be shown here.

2013 – A year of “let’s start something new”.

So I decided at the end of 2012 that a new approach to planning in activities was needed. We had a team of a few great RAO'S and to create a theme was going to help keep us all on the same page with our leisure and lifestyle delivery. I wanted to see the team be all about the residents and their needs and this seemed like a great way to bring their needs into the forefront and be the middle or the core of what we do and keep our personal choices out of the mix. We had become a unified team. Infact this year we named ourselves "The A Team" short for "The Activities Team"

2013 was approaching and so I thought ok let's start changing some stigmas and show new thinking is possible. Doing something new is achievable. We tried to set up the idea that 13 could be a lucky number. We wanted to break the stigma of it being an unlucky number and so we decided to create a new outlook and thus 2013 a year of starting or trying something new. The plan was that 13 was going to be a good number.

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- **January;** we started the year with a New Year new beginning celebration. Asking people to write down 13 new things they wish to try, do or regain this year. It was a new year's resolution list in essence. A page of dreams really. It also told us instantly what activities our residents wanted for the year. So it was a great tool for gathering information that helped us to develop relevant programming and it also left us with a paper trail for accreditation teams. Some of those requests were to; Swim in a pool again. Play tennis on a tennis court. Enter an art competition. Enter a community charity event. Create a choir. Every new thing we started came off that list and involved the person that chose it, in the planning of it. A lot of things were achieved in this 1st year.
- **February;** in choosing to enter the relay for life. We began the walking for wellness program. Encouraging longer group walks every week. Building into the fitness and stability and core strength and balance of the residents. It became training for "the relay for life" and continues to this day.
- **March;** we started a community choir called rainbows and lollipops. This title came from a song we liked to sing as a choir, "Sunshine, lollipops and rainbows" by Lesley Gore. Our uniform and activity area has a rainbow theme so this tied in well for us as a community. It had an inclusive, community building feel.
- **April;** we started "the speakers corner". We used Anzac Day, time as the kick off for this idea and we had a resident talking about some incredible war tales. These were so popular that the session became known as "true tales from John" and even his wife and family would come in and sit and hear things for the 1st time during these sessions. In this forum his stories had true meaning and the tales needed to be told.
- **May;** this month we entered the Relay for life as a team of residents, relatives, staff, family and friends. This is a 24 hour community relay event that raises money and awareness for cancer. We relayed for 24 hours and raised just under \$1000.00 for the cancer council. We still enter this every year.
- **June;** we purchased a tether tennis set to begin a training and ball hitting program for those that wished to have a hit. It created a lot of fun. And a great place to hit out some frustration.
- **July;** with Wimbledon having been on. We held our own tennis comp. it was however indoor. We made a court out of masking tape and a tennis net in a very large room. It was close to a full size tennis court. The resident that requested to play on a court, said it was just like the real thing to her. It was the best choice for her mobility. Her husband won the competition.
- **August;** we started some new writers groups. And these have been maintained over the years and evolved into new things when and as needed.
- **September;** we started a residents v/s the kids day in the school holidays. A day of challenges across the generations that involved the kids of resident's families and staff. We shot nerf guns and used new technology for the 1st time. We sat and ate lunch together. This also continues on a given day every school holidays.
- **October;** we entered an art competition for the 1st time. It was a breast cancer pink painting competition. Held at our local mall. We have entered others since as well.
- **November;** we went swimming with the lady that requested to do so. The once was enough for her she said.
- **December;** the choir had its 1st public performances at 2 Christmas parties and also with various school children's groups.

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2014 – The year to “feel good about life.”

Seasons of Life are to be lived and loved. There is good all around us we need to stop and see it. Embrace it. Stop and smell the roses. Grab a hug to feel good bear.

- **January:** It's a new year. “All things new and wonderful.”
- **February:** “Loving Life”
- **March:** “everyone loves the Irish”
- **April:** “the greatest sacrifices”
- **May:** “A Mothers Love”
- **June:** “It's a small world after all”
- **July:** “The wonder of Winter”
- **August:** “Friends are Forever”
- **September:** “Time for a Spring Clean”
- **October:** “A Time of Hope”
- **November:** “A time to build Faith”
- **December:** “Love never Fails”

2015 – “Around the World in 12 Months.”

We had identified that we had many residents living with us that had wanted to travel to overseas and hadn't been able to do so. We also had a handful that had done a lot of travel. They were happy to give us some travelling tales and reminisce their journeys. As well as visit new places. So we created a program for the year that saw us visit a different part of the world each month. We picked the locations based on some key things that happen in those places in that month. So we were traveling for a purpose. That programme or our social calendar as we like to call it, took us around the world on a cultural and sensory way. Together, each month we saw new and old places, ate different foods, listened to music, learnt some key language words, created art and craft of the visiting place, had guest speakers, had travel books out around the building, had special reading sessions on places, google earthed locations, looked at travel methods today, had “show and share” sessions to reminisce trips, tried new sport and exercise ideas from different places. We had themed entertainment to match, watched movies with travel and the visiting countries theme in the story line. The highlight was Travis the travelling bear a giant bear. Our Ex “Grab a hug to feel good bear” Travis came to every location with us and was dressed up in the national clothing of that place each month. Some months Travis was a Tina. A bit of a cross dresser the residents said. His outfit became very interesting, definitely a talking point and an interactive contribution each month from both residents and staff. He sat in a diorama area we created that also changed with the theme each month. There were various places in the building that had the flavour of the month displayed for all to see as well. We planned our outings to fit the theme and lunches out to try other food as well. We hosted themed social nights for families to attend with the residents as well. It was an exciting and contagious year of travel. Our residents at the end of it expressed they had truly been to see places and do things they had only dreamed of. They expressed that their desire to have visited the places had been met to a high degree. We could not get there in person but the experiences we shared together were both realistic and valuable. We do believe this year also enhanced the lives of those exposed to it. We feel that the residents gained some very happy memories and some valuable end of life resolve. They remained engaged in the theme for the whole year and we were all a little sad when it ended. A bit like how you feel when you come home after a good holiday. Below will list the areas we visited each month.

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- **January**; Australia and New Zealand
- **February**; Asia
- **March**; South America
- **April**; Middle East
- **May**; Russian States
- **June**; Pacific Islands
- **July**; North America and Canada
- **August**; Africa
- **September**; Pole to Pole, North to south
- **October**; India and Nepal
- **November**; UK and Europe
- **December**; Scandinavia, so we could visit Santa for Christmas.

2016 – “A year of Remembering When.”

The focus of the year “was back in the good old days.” Taking those words we hear so often in our work and bringing them to life. This was a year spent reminiscing the good things in life. Some sad stuff did naturally come up as well, but we tried to focus on positive reminiscing. We related the monthly themes to fit in with the traditional and general flavour of that calendar month. Picking up on key things in the month and then fleshing out the activities accordingly around that. There was a lot of reminiscing, discussions, accidental counselling, personal resolve, human connection and relationship building this year. This theme strengthened the sense of connection between residents, family and staff. We also found that it helped strengthen our community culture here. Everyone loves to belong and to remember when.

- **January**; All things Australiana. Australia day focus and Australia in the heyday.
- **February**; Love life. We celebrated love and relationship. Our wedding days and those we have lost along the road of life.
- **March**; A country life. Looking at the farming, outback and country lifestyle. Easter show focus with our own Easter show or country fair as we called it.
- **April**; Remembering and respecting the sacrifice of war.
- **May**; A month of music. Dance hall days. The classics. The instruments we used to play.
- **June**; A royal time. We looked at the royal families over the years and the influence they had on us and the world. The queens visit to Australia years back as well.
- **July**; The winter life. A look at winter holidays in the snow etc. How we got through winter and all winter brought to life.
- **August**; This sporting life. The Olympics were on so we focused on sport and also hosted our own Olympic decathlon. With a sport held every day for 10 days. Our closing ceremony was a Rio themed social dance party.
- **September**; It's a windy world. Traditionally being a windy month. We built and flew kites. Went to the festival of the winds. Looked at and made many things involving wind. Instruments, wind charms and socks. etc.
- **October**; Life in the Garden. We planted seeds and seedlings both outdoor and indoor. Visited many gardens. Shared childhood garden fun.
- **November**; it's all about the Men. We dedicated this month to the men in our lives growing up. We also had a moustache “grow your Mo” competition. Lots of Movember fun. Milk moustache making fun for the girls too.
- **December**; Christmas's for when. Christmas came to life in an old fashioned and traditional way. Lead by the resident's desires and memories.

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2017 – “A year of Good Wellbeing.”

First we met and looked at what wellbeing meant to us in this community and formed our own domains of wellbeing in alignment with what is out there as wellness domain standard. We decided on 10 domains that would enhance our lives and set the year out based on that. With our year of Good Wellbeing we have tried to continue to build into the lives of our residents in a holistic way, with the use of journeying through the 10 domains of wellbeing, in a year. The desire for this to be enhancing every aspect of their health and wellbeing with the use of recreational and leisure activities. We hope to see our residents gain new knowledge, or be reminded of old knowledge, to enhance a broader sense of ownership and stewardship over their bodies, health and overall wellbeing choices. After learning and experiencing new things we hope to see our residents empowered and confident to know that even small changes in lifestyle, can make big impacts in their health and wellbeing. We believe we will see opportunity through the use of this year's theme and activities for further end of life resolve in people, if needed and an increased building of resilience in the lives of our residents as well. Our theme this year will cross over into staff areas and hopefully have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the staff at Wesley Vickery lodge as well.

Below will list the domains of wellbeing in this year's plan.

- **January:** 1. Wellbeing of rest - “Selah - a month of rest.” A time of reflection on life. A time to slow down and enjoy the summer and breathe in the goodness of life after the busy Christmas season. A time to be thankful for what we have in life and explore our hearts our thoughts and our desires for the year ahead.
- **February:** 2. Wellbeing of the Heart and Soul - “A month to awaken the dreams within.” A month to plan, dream, visualise and set goals. To realise we are never too old to set a new goal in life.
- **March:** 3. Wellbeing of our emotions - “A month to explore Mental health.” We explore emotions, feelings, our resilience, and our personal strengths and add a lot more laughter to our lives. Being self-aware.
- **April:** 4. Wellbeing of the spirit – “A month of Spirituality.” We look at what spirituality is and what it means to us. We looked at different religions from around the world. We looked at the ways to create your unique happy spiritual place in your own life.
- **May:** 5. Wellbeing of the Mind – “A month of exploring Brain Power.” We explored new ways to activate the brain. We took on new technology to learn. Ramped up the puzzle and quiz levels. Amongst other cognitive related activities.
- **June:** 6. Wellbeing of the Body – “ A month of looking at things that impact and enhance the body.” We felt this was a big topic and so spread it over 2 months June and July. We were able to look at sleep patterns, the need for sunshine, diet, exercise, falls prevention, medication use, and chemical intake. And more.
- **July:** 6. Wellbeing of the Body – “ A month of looking at things that impact and enhance the body.”
- **August:** 7. Wellbeing of the environment – “A month of our environment matters.” We have looked at how the environment impacts our wellbeing. Where are the places we go that make us feel better. We have looked at ways we can better steward the environment. We have done so re arranging and de cluttering to better our need s and health. We hope to enhance our living areas here.
- **September:** 8. Wellbeing of relationships – “A month of social and friendship enhancement.” We plan to have more social gatherings. Look at family friendships and social connections. Perhaps track down lost friends or family. We are not meant to live alone in life.
- **October:** 9. Wellbeing of being in a community -“A month of community connection.” We plan to connect on a deeper level with the greater community in which we live. Get out into the greater

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community more than we do. We hope to break some stigma about what we can and cannot do in aging.

- **November**; 10. Wellbeing of giving back – “A month to make a difference in our greater community. Be an extension of good to a local cause and a global cause. It’s good to help something bigger than ourselves in life.
- **December**; Are we well yet? “A Month of reflection and evaluation of our journey this year and our wellbeing.

Documentation:

See attached activity plan.

Research and Evaluation process:

See attached evaluation plan.

Qualitative Research; was gathered from approx. 50 to 60 of our 69 residents at varying times. This was done in observation, discussion groups and via individually talking to and interviewing the residents, staff and families over the last 4 to 5 years. Most recently in July. We have always asked for feedback from our residents and families here at Wesley Vickery Sylvania. It is an ongoing part of what we do here to be checking in with our clients need and outcomes on a regular and constant basis. We do this both during and after recreational and leisure activities. We have found there to be some common trends in behaviour, thinking and verbal expression from the residents in regards to the use of themed years; these are listed below.

- They are gaining or achieving things they hoped for.
- They have a purpose in what they are doing on a daily basis.
- They have things to look forward to being a part of.
- They feel a sense of purpose.
- They are learning new things and gaining new skills.
- They enjoy reminiscing.
- They feel empowered.
- They have stronger friendships.
- They know more about the people they live with.
- They enjoy learning about each other and the staff.
- They feel they are living at home.
- They are settled.
- We don’t have problematic behaviour at the sun downing time of the afternoon.
- People tell us they feel safe.
- The staff in activities are trusted.
- A reduction in observed anxiety levels.
- Peaceful body language.
- Ownership over the space in which they live.
- They feel listened to and respected.
- Growth in engagement during activity process.

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- People willingly come to activities.
- A positive sense of anticipation is in the environment.
- Our living community is strengthened.
- We are well connected to the greater community of the shire.
- Staff well included in what's happening.
- Staff have been learning new skills.
- Staff feel they know the residents on a deeper level.

Quantitative Research: as we have been doing themed years for quite some time now. We did not do a pre themed years survey as such. But we have done 2 surveys that focus on the use of themed years since beginning them. We surveyed 40 of the 69 residents on both occasions. One at the completion of 2015 and one in July 2017. The results are below and show an improvement in the thoughts and feelings of the residents as well as an improved observed difference in people's behaviour and the environment in which they reside.

We also have our general every 6 month activities surveys that show excellent reports of what our residents get to participate in and enjoy. Where possible and willing close to all 69 residents are surveyed with this particular survey.

Survey results of a travel theme year.

1; Have you found that having a themed year gives you something to look forward to each month?

Yes 35 No 2 Unsure 3

2; Have you found that you have learnt some new things about other places in the world?

Yes 36 No 0 Unsure 4

3; Have you found the activities content interesting in the last 12 months? In regards to getting to know this world more?

Yes 36 No 1 Unsure 3

4; Do you feel the theme of travel helps you to feel better?

Yes 36 No 1 Unsure 3

5; Has the content in the activities programme been of interest to you in the last 12 months?

Yes 35 No 1 Unsure 4

6; Have you found the reading material, in newsletters, handouts and travel booklets to be of interest to you this during the last 12 months ?

Yes 36 No 1 Unsure 3

7; As we finish this year, do you feel better now than at the start of the year, in regards to fulfilling some of your own travel dreams and hopes?

Yes 35 No 2 Unsure 3

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Survey results of a year of good wellbeing theme year.

1; Have you found that having a themed year gives you something to look forward to each month?

Yes 37 No 1 Unsure 2

2; Have you found that you have learnt some new things about taking better care of your general wellbeing in the last 6 months ?

Yes 38 No 0 Unsure 2

3; Have you found the activities content interesting in the last 6 months? In regards to general wellbeing?

Yes 38 No 0 Unsure 2

4; Do you feel the theme of wellbeing helps you to take better care of yourself?

Yes 37 No 1 Unsure 2

5; Has the content in the activities programme been of interest to you in the last 6 months?

Yes 38 No 0 Unsure 2

6; Have you found the reading material, in newsletters, handouts and wellbeing booklets to be of interest to you this during the last 6 months?

Yes 36 No 2 Unsure 2

7; As we enter the 2nd half of the year do you feel any better in yourself and in regards to your own general wellbeing than you did at the start of the year?

Yes 38 No 0 Unsure 2

The Quantitative research aligns with the qualitative research well.

We do believe that the use of themed years in activities has led to a greater sense of purpose in people lives, as well as a greater level of engagement in activities.

We have seen our residents become calmer and at peace with where life is at.

Thus suggesting that there is some end of life resolve taking place in their lives.

We have seen them enjoy learning new things and teaching others of their wisdom of years.

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Reference to underpinning theory model:

Below are just some articles and models we looked at to determine what sorts of things would benefit our residents this year in a year of good wellbeing.



Benefits of Having Friends in Older Ages: Differential Effects of Informal Social Activities on Well-Being in Middle-Aged and Older Adults

Oliver Huxhold
Martina Miche
Benjamin Schüz

The Journals of Gerontology: Series B, Volume 69, Issue 3, 1 May 2014, Pages 366–375,

<https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbt029>

<https://academic.oup.com/psychsocgerontology/article/69/3/366/624176/Benefits-of-Having-Friends-in-Older-Ages>

Effects of Volunteering on the Well-Being of Older Adults

Nancy Morrow-Howell,
Jim Hinterlong
Philip A. Rozario
Fengyan Tang

The Journals of Gerontology: Series B, Volume 58, Issue 3, 1 May 2003, Pages S137–S145,

<https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/58.3.S137> Published: 01 May 2003

<https://academic.oup.com/psychsocgerontology/article/58/3/S137/583366/Effects-of-Volunteering-on-the-Well-Being-of-Older>

Health Service Framework for Older People 2009–2016 Improving Health and Wellbeing Together

Government of South Australia 2009

<http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/cd478e804278955d8b07ab182b8de443/hsframeworkoldepeople09-16-clinicalnetworks-sahealth-0905.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=cd478e804278955d8b07ab182b8de443>

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The Benefits of Frequent Positive Affect: Does Happiness Lead to Success?

Lyubomirsky, Sonja King, Laura Diener, Ed

Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The Benefits of Frequent Positive Affect: Does Happiness Lead to Success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 131(6), 803-855.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.131.6.803>

<http://psycnet.apa.org/record/2005-15687-001>

Final Discussion:

Our themed years have continued to enhance the lives of our residents in a productive and positive way. We have found that a deep richness has been added to the lives of many, via the delivery of varied leisure and lifestyle activities linked to the use of a themed year.

We have found that our residents have a high level of engagement and involvement.

They have become a major part of the planning and driving force of various activities. Making what we do with them very client focussed and client driven.

A year theme encourages residents to have things to look forward to. It motivates them to be involved and remain healthy in order to engage with others in strength and not miss out on the great things planned ahead for them, to enjoy.

Having a themed year builds into the community spirit in which they live.

With the aid of our recreational activities programs we have been able to build into and shape a unique culture that is fun, accepting, inclusive and healthy for all.

We feel that having a themed year does build great expectation in the residents and the staff.

We have continued to build into the community spirit of our home with themed years.

We are currently traveling on our 5th year of running themed years in our activity programs.

Testimonies from the Management, other staff and stakeholders;

Corlette Todd Centre manager of Wesley Vickery.

Each year since its inception, the 'themed year' concept implemented by the Recreational Activity staff at Wesley Vickery has grown and flourished. The use of twelve monthly sub-themes to complement an annual focus theme has provided a continual stream of meaningful activity and a great sense of community for our residential aged care residents.

The Activities staff develop each year's theme in close consultation with our residents, through individual sharing of ideas and energetic group discussion. Each month our residents are immersed in their chosen theme through the use of food, music, stories, outings, artwork, and most importantly the sharing of life experience.

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The 'themed year' in its nature encourages and motivates the involvement of our Wesley Vickery staff members. They are provided with increased opportunity to engage with our residents in a social context, creating a culture of excitement, energy and unity. Each activity is adapted and individualised to ensure the needs, wants and abilities of each resident are accommodated and respected.

After starting something new, travelling the world and enhancing our wellbeing, I look forward to seeing where our next 'themed year' will take us.

Kind Regards,

Corlette Todd | Centre Manager, Wesley Vickery Sylvania | (02) 9522 2997 | 0457 537 462

Wesley Mission | 101 Port Hacking Road, Sylvania NSW 2224 | Fax: (02) 9544 8486

Sandra Gray DT and Previous Wesley mission "A team" member;

It has been such a pleasure to be a part of something as wonderful as the themed years at Wesley Vickery. My experience was mostly in the year which saw us travelling around the world in 2015. It was a year of fun and exploration as we got to know our residents on a deeper level while exploring aspects of culture within their own lives as we valued greatly their input in our activity planning. It was exciting to many residents when they realised that they had something to offer in the way of knowledge, experience or memories of their own travels. To be able to share experiences of their cultural background, their own travels or even of different cultures that have married into their families gave the residents a purpose and excitement for the activities we were facilitating. The residents also had the opportunity to get to know staff members on a deeper level too as there was a wealth of knowledge that staff were able to share, this brought a cohesiveness within the facility that I had not seen before. Another noticeable benefit was the interaction between residents as they strengthened friendships through similar experiences and through learning and interest into each other's lives. Every month saw us in a different region of the world and allowed us to explore many traditional components of a particular culture. Residents enjoyed the process of learning a new art or craft and many others had new talking points with the displayed artwork. Guest musical performers visited the centre to showcase some traditional music or dance which had us all dancing and tapping away together. Residents provided feedback about recipes from their childhood that we cooked together and shared with many, this added a reminiscing aspect to the activity. Alongside our group activities were individual activities in our newsletter information pieces, with books to borrow from the library or movies and music to be enjoyed at the resident's leisure. This is just a snapshot of the scope we were able to enjoy in our year of travelling. The themed year has the potential to grow and change depending on resident's needs, wants and ability levels. The outworking of a themed year within our facility changed the culture and mood amongst residents and staff as each month brought something new and fun to look forward to and share together.

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Gallery of Fame

