



Residents and Representatives
The Salvation Army Aged Care
Residential Aged Care Centres

Friday 17 April 2020

Dear all,

For the past two months the Salvation Army Aged Care has been continuing to allow visitors to come into our Centres, albeit under certain limitations, and for our residents (except in Queensland and South Australia) to freely travel outside of their Centre. This decision has certainly left us out of step with the majority of providers and facilities that have had these restrictions in place in some instances for over six weeks. We wanted to continue to offer that for as long as possible while maintaining a safe living environment for our residents.

It is therefore with a heavy heart that I wish to advise you that as of Thursday 23rd April we will not be permitting visitors to enter our Centres unless they are visiting a loved one who is in final stage palliative care. We will also not be allowing our residents to exit the premises unless they are doing so for a medical or dental appointment or to visit a close family member who is also palliating.

This is not a decision that we have taken lightly as the entire team are very mindful of the importance of connection for our residents and their families and friends. It is now clearer from statistics out this week from Western Europe and the United Kingdom just how high the mortality rate is for those infected with COVID-19 and living in a residential aged care centre. In addition we have seen an increasing emergence of hotspots in a number of locations around the country. Our overriding aim is to provide a safe and caring environment for you, our residents, and to try and do that in a manner that does not impede the way you wish to live the fullness of your life. The decision to no longer permit visitors in the current context is driven by that goal and to continue to keep you well and safe.

Naturally we will continue to monitor and evaluate that decision and where appropriate and prudent change our risk assessment.

So how are we going to ensure that our residents and their families stay connected and how are we going to improve the support we are giving our residents:-

- In the coming days in each of our locations we are going to set up a “visit window” which is a location where a resident can sit inside at a window and we will have a bench outside for their family or friends. Using a phone the resident will both be able to see their visitors, albeit through the glass, as well as talk to them;
- Several days ago we launched our VSee technology platform which enables residents and families to video chat regardless of where that family member or friend is located in the world;
- To support these new ways of connecting we have created the position of **Connections Co-ordinator** which is a full time role dedicated to helping organise



these different ways of staying in touch and helping our residents navigate potentially new or unfamiliar technology;

- Naturally if a family member wishes to drop off a residents' favourite chocolate or treats, or an item of clothing which they have handwashed, we want to allow for this, and will be setting up a system to make that work smoothly;
- We are also now reaching out to local schools to see if they would be interested in setting up a pen pal arrangement with our residents where their pupils or a class can write letters or send messages to a specific resident or the whole Centre;
- For those families who would like, aside from the contact points above, to have a regular update on their loved one, we would encourage you to have a conversation about this with your Centre Manager;
- Allied health workers and GPs will still be able to visit and provide services to our residents;
- We are also sourcing additional chaplains who will support our existing group of wonderful chaplains and provide some extra pastoral care and engagement;
- We have also increased the number of hours of our lifestyle / activities team to ensure that we have extra resources to cater for a different environment for our residents;
- We have formalised a national group for all our activities co-ordinators who will meet and share great ideas and activities that they have found work successfully in their Centre;
- Finally we are ensuring that we are sourcing and deploying new resources that have been developed in the arena of mental health and wellbeing for the elderly and those suffering from dementia.

We continue to strengthen our monitoring of the health of our staff and they have for the past fortnight been temperature screened on arrival for their shift. This will continue and we have introduced a new process that also requires the shift leader or a manager to personally certify that they have checked the wellbeing of the staff on that shift. This will apply whether or not the person is our staff member or an agency staff member.

You may recall that we ensured that all our workforce went through mandatory training in infection control and hand hygiene in mid March. We have just gone out with a set of new training videos in these critical areas produced by the Department of Health and these have also been made mandatory for all staff.

As you can see we are continually evolving and adapting to how we can better support our residents and we will continue to do so during and beyond this pandemic.

This has not been a step that we have taken lightly and I am sure that you will understand that it is taken with a genuine desire to ensure that our residents remain well and safe.

Naturally we will continue communicating regularly with you via letter and video and the question and answer sessions for residents and family members are now locked into my calendar for every fortnight.



Understanding that some people prefer to listen to a message rather than read one, I have also recorded a video which you can access by either typing the following URL into your browser:- <https://youtu.be/vKqn27bmP1o>

If you have any feedback, please feel free to send me an email at Richard.deHaast@salvationarmy.org.au.

Best regards

Richard

Richard de Haast
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The Salvation Army Aged Care