

## Language, kindness and patience - the art of connecting

When Vicky started volunteering at MannaCare in late 2018, she asked herself, “What value can I bring in just two hours a week?”

Working full time and only being able to spare a couple of hours a week, Vicky was unsure how she could make a contribution. In her first week she met Athena at Cassia House.

Vicky describes Athena as a “beautiful Greek lady” who although she had been at MannaCare for 12 months, had rarely left her room. Family and staff had encouraged her to explore her surroundings. However, her preference was solitude “to sit alone and have her meals in her room”, revealed Vicky.

Understanding the value of human connections and the importance for emotional and physical health, Vicky wanted to support Athena in the best way possible and encourage her to leave her room to interact with others.

Vicky began by “sitting with Athena; listening to her life story. Amongst other things, I learnt that Athena was born in Greece in 1929, migrated to Australia aged 14 and loved knitting.”

As they began to talk, Vicky noted that Athena “enjoying talking” and slowly Athena began to “build her trust in me. With this trust, she allowed me to take her onto the balcony to enjoy the sun. I then introduced her to another Greek resident and then she agreed to join the Greek Club (a weekly coffee group for Greek residents to chat and reminisce).”

Gradually Athena began to venture out of her room, join other residents in the lounge and now enjoys her meals with others.

With the connection of language, her kindness and patience, Vicky has been able to transform the experience of one resident. So, now when she asks herself what value can I bring in just a couple of hours a week, her answer is clear, “I smile thinking about Athena’s new found confidence and social interactions.”

Thank you Vicky for sharing your story!

