



A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON HEALTH & WELLBEING

Media Release

Film festival award winner captures fresh perspective on dementia care

A piece made as part of a filmmaker's quest to help foster awareness and reduce the stigma associated with dementia, has won the Your Voice category at the 2014 Reel Health International Short Film Festival.

Presented to Fire Films producer Corinne Maunder in Melbourne on 21 October 2014, the award recognises short film, *Finding the Why*.

The film shares the story of UnitingCare Ageing's Starrett Lodge and the ways in which staff give real meaning and purpose to the lives of residents, many of whom are living with dementia.

Ms Maunder said Starrett Lodge has a unique approach to enabling active participation in life for aged care residents, which presented an ideal opportunity to create a thought provoking piece about dementia.

"This award is both a tribute to the film produced by Corinne and to the distinctive spirit, care and community created by Colin (McDonnell) and the team at Starrett Lodge," said Steve Teulan, Director, UnitingCare Ageing.

"The 'how' it's done is not as important as the 'why'. Why should I still be alive? Why should I still want to stay here? The 'why' is so important, the will to live and the will to do things. And we have to inspire people to feel that in aged care (because) you're not dead until you're dead. So you've got to live, until you die," said Colin McDonnell, Care Service Manager, Starrett Lodge.

Since its completion earlier this year, the film has been used in universities, professional forums and care facilities around the world to educate people on best-practice care.

"The beautiful thing about this film is that the creative process was very organic. There was no script, no marketing department, no one telling me what message to push. I was free to capture and present everything just as I saw it," said Ms Maunder.

The 16 minute film was shot almost entirely in one day, and features interviews with staff and residents, along with photographs and video footage of the day-to-day life of residents at Starrett Lodge. Activities featured include intergenerational and music programs, a karaoke night and a family fun day complete with farm animals.

American sociologist and social photographer, Professor Cathy Greenblat, co-produced *Finding the Why* and provided all of the professional still images that feature throughout the film.

"People living with dementia may not later remember the details of an activity but through their mood and behaviour we can often observe that they are aware they have had a joyous experience," Dr Greenblat explained.

Starrett Lodge also supplied photos and videos of residents ticking items off their bucket lists, like Allen Rigby 'soaring' as he skydives.

"Allen is 86, he was in the Second World War, and that was his wish (to go skydiving). He had the capacity to make that decision so we enabled him to go and make that parachute jump.

“One of the (negative) things in aged care is that people are risk averse. Even to come into a beautiful environment like (Starrett Lodge’s dementia-friendly garden) people think it’s dangerous because someone might fall over and you can’t see them. But it’s better than sitting inside all day and not having a reason to live. Risk is a normal part of life,” said Mr McDonnell.

Alzheimer’s Australia Vic, which supported Ms Maunder’s 2013 documentary *Love, Loss and Laughter: Living with Dementia*, remains a strong supporter of her work.

“Life doesn’t stop with a diagnosis of dementia,” said Maree McCabe, CEO, Alzheimer’s Australia Vic. “This is a wonderful film and will help to share the message globally that people living with dementia continue to have needs around social interaction and engagement, just as we all do.”

“It’s my hope that through this film people can see a unique, compassionate and positive portrayal of people living with dementia,” Ms Maunder said.

To view the film go to <https://vimeo.com/93313791>.

Details of the 2014-2015 screening dates around Australia will be published on the [Reel Health website](#) when available.

The footage from this film, along with Ms Maunder’s footage from Arcare’s Helensvale Community in Brisbane and other communities in the USA and Canada, will form part of Dr Greenblat’s upcoming multimedia project, ‘Side by Side: Love and Joy in Long Term Dementia Care’, which will showcase inspirational dementia care from around the world.

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