

Partnership

Ties that bind us together

A Uniting Communities social support program is bringing older people together for a worthy cause

There are many risks to our health as we age but one that should be of greatest concern isn't a physical disease or illness but rather a social condition – isolation. Studies show that prolonged loneliness has the same negative impact upon our health as does smoking 15 cigarettes a day – making it even more dangerous than obesity.

But, while Covid has exacerbated conditions for those living alone

over the past 2½ years, it has also encouraged many to find their voice.

“Covid has helped people to realise that human connection is really a powerful thing,” says Jacqui Barnden, Uniting Communities social support co-ordinator, home and community aged care. “With the government recognising it plays a huge part in the decline of health and wellbeing, people feel more confident now to say, ‘Well, actually, I am a bit lonely’. Because they can label it, it gives them a focus.”



June Appleby and Denise Kirk have become firm friends since meeting five years ago at the monthly Cosy Club run by Uniting Communities.

That focus came to light in a recent survey in which Uniting Communities clients revealed a strong desire for stronger social and community connections. “We had a lot of response for small group outings and for people to meet together over a meal,” Barnden says.

For the past 20 years, Uniting Communities’ Cosy Club knitting group has been another vital source of community support and connection. Held on the last Tuesday of every month, it brings together

keen knitters to engage in good conversation for a good cause. The club, which originally sold tea cosies to support women with acquired brain injuries, now knits blankets for aged care residents and items for other not-for-profit organisations.

“We went from making tea cosies to rugs to children’s clothing to all sorts of beanies, scarfs, gloves and more,” says 81-year-old June Appleby, whose mother was one of the club’s original founders. “We give to about three different charities a year.”

Denise Kirk, 72, joined the group five years ago and has formed a fast friendship with Appleby. As well as their monthly knitting meet-ups, the duo enjoy regular catch-ups for shopping, dining, driving trips and other activities. “I’m very lucky to have a friend like June,” she says. “I have the joy of Cosy Club, the fulfillment of doing something good and a wonderful friendship.”

Accessed through My Aged Care, Uniting Communities’ range of social support programs also include volunteer visitors, small outing groups and a pet visiting scheme.

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