

MEDIA RELEASE

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Tales from Isolation

2020 has been a year unlike any other. A year where the need to innovate, reach out and build a 'care community' has plunged us into a space we have come to describe as "the new normal".

For service providers like Your Side, delivering care to older people, people living with a disability, or those with mental health challenges can't just stop because of a pandemic. They have had to respond.

"As COVID-19 was emerging, the team immediately designed and redesigned services with the client at the centre of it, by asking our clients what it was they actually needed and what their main concerns were. With that information, we were able to build new services types - both online and offline," says CEO Your Side Australia, Danielle Ballantine.

Essential services at home such as personal care, cleaning, shopping and mobility assistance were still required on a daily basis, but what changed at Your Side was growth in delivering bespoke services to maintain connection and social activities in isolation – and it happened at a rapid rate.

"We usually go out on buses to a variety of destinations, but developing online events was a great decision during lockdown - online meetings with different themes. We have acquired new skills, shared a few laughs and enjoyed social connection during these online activities. I've also learnt more about those involved with my group - things I wouldn't have otherwise," says DARTS¹ client with Your Side, Loren Lembke.

Your Side empowered their clients to approach them about what services, supports and social connection activities they needed during lockdown. For example, they have a group of clients who are knitting for a cause making pouches for joey kangaroos in response to the bushfires, as well as a group who are making face masks for elderly people.

"Options for clients to engage include online sessions like chair yoga, Spanish classes, trivia, evening choir or rate my plate cooking sessions as well as our more analogue Postcard Pen Pals program and regular phone check ins. No one is left behind and our team spend lots of time coaching our clients on how to use the technology and stay engaged and connected," says Ms Ballantine.

"I love *Mindfulness* and *Spanish* through the online social support sessions. I'm also learning new dance moves from the dance group online on a Tuesday afternoon. I'm very grateful to Your Side for putting on these online events at such a low cost which has been really, really helpful in a hard time. We laugh a lot as well!" says social support client, Helen.

In response to this ever changing Covid-19 landscape or the "new normal", Your Side is clear that building online communities is going to become a permanent part of the business of delivering effective community care. And they plan to celebrate that!

¹ DARTS provides recreational and social outings including the door to door transport to get there for adults in wheelchairs.

“I’ve been really surprised by the way our clients are able to demonstrate their extraordinary talents, particularly in our online community. We have had clients showing their amazing cooking skills, incredible singing talents, and even their art. One of our clients, who has a disability, was able to show other clients a tour of her home that had artwork that was shown for the Japanese Winter Olympics in Nagano,” said Ms Ballantine.

For our elderly parents or grand-parents they have long been told by younger generations that it is too late for them to learn this new complicated technology, but the truth is that it has never been easier and maybe we have just been too impatient and busy to teach them. As they age, becoming more frail, less mobile and with more serious medical conditions, technology may become a permanent and safe way for them to remain engaged, connected, keep exercising, and continue socialising.

“I really appreciate Your Side adapting their social support online because we are seniors and we need to be active in our life, our brain, and our bodies. Even though it’s COVID-19 and we have to stay home - we still have this purpose and ability to interact. Now we have a social online calendar we are connecting and laughing, doing gentle exercise like yoga and stretching – I love it and we can safely stay at home and still have all of this fun. Trivia and Spanish classes help with the brain strengthening and exercise with coordination. Yoga is excellent because as I am getting older I am getting frailer and this has really improved my balance. We really have fun here in the Your Side social support group,” says 80-year-old social support client Cecelia Kwong.

To ease social isolation during these times, Your Side have delivered a fun care package filled with meaningful activities to their clients which includes puzzles, recipe books and a packet of seeds to inspire gardening and new growth coming into Spring – all aiming to keep brains active and engaged.

“I do a puzzle every night so that will come in most handy and the cookbook will give me new ideas for my dinners,” says 87-year-old Jean Wilkinson.

You can find out what’s on in the latest Social Support Calendar by clicking [HERE](#) or for more information or to book a Social Support activity, contact Jennifer on **1300 134 332** or email customercare@yourside.org.au

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To view video about “Delivering Care during COVID” [CLICK HERE](#)

CONTACT

Abby Edwards – Marketing & Communications
T: 0417 808 107
E: abbye@yourside.org.au

Available to interview

- Danielle Ballantine – CEO, Your Side
- Your Side Clients