



Savvy seniors embrace virtual connection

One of the major silver-linings through COVID-19 has been the ability of seniors to transition to digital socialising, as Joe McDonough finds out.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly isolating for the elderly, with virtual socialising replacing the face-to-face interaction they generally relied on.

In the case of 87-year-old local Barbara Robertson, her computer literacy was almost non-existent before the coronavirus outbreak.

"[My computer literacy] was very poor... All I could do was email, no sending photos or video or any of that. Definitely no idea what Zoom even was!" Barbara tells *North Shore Living*.

As a client of Your Side Australia, Barbara benefitted from the service provider's quick response.

"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," explains CEO Your Side, Danielle Ballantine.

And what Barbara needed was help

improving her digital skills, so Your Side sent an IT expert over to her place to set up Zoom and train her to use it.

Now, she considers herself "reasonably proficient", saying the whole process was "great and really quite simple".

It has improved her mental wellbeing so much; Barbara now refers friends and family that are also feeling isolated during this unprecedented time.

"I have met new people and now my sister-in-law and some of her friends have joined the online groups," Barbara continues.

"We all love cooking together and sharing recipes online, and we have all become quite friendly and have plenty of laughs. Your Side has done a wonderful job bringing people together!"

Aside from the social connection

that digital upskilling and online classes provides seniors, Your Side has also taken the opportunity to give its members worthwhile projects.

Lynette Nicholls (76) tells *North Shore Living* that she's involved in groups that have been knitting pouches for joeys in response to the Black Summer bushfires and sending them to WIRES; as well as face masks for the vulnerable.

"I love volunteering and have been a volunteer for 49 years in some way, shape or form," says Lynette.

"I am passionate about helping people, being involved, connected and giving back to the community... It also

takes your mind off what's happening in the world when you are focused on projects you love."

Lynette felt she needed to "brush up" on her computer skills to avoid being left isolated by tightening restrictions. She openly admits she would have felt "very lost and disconnected" if not for her classes, which include cooking and personal training.

Ms Ballantine says building online communities is going to become a permanent part of the business of delivering effective community care, and her clients' ability to adapt has made that transition easier.

"I've been really surprised by the way our clients are able to demonstrate their extraordinary talents, particularly in our online community," she says.

"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." **N**

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