

40 STORIES IN 40 YEARS



Lyn Armistead Volunteer, Anam Cara Colac

(Pictured Lyn (R) with a hospice guest)

How did you get involved as a palliative care volunteer?

Di Wright told me about her dream for Anam Cara and I listened, and I got so involved in her story that I thought, I must be a part of it. The property came up for sale where Anam Cara stands, I went to the first meeting that was held for Anam Cara Colac and I felt that I still wanted to be involved. I did not know what I was in for, but it was about giving back, and I felt my time was right.

What does your volunteer role include?

Initially I volunteered 1.5 days a week and found it so enjoyable. At that time, we were doing the housekeeping too, vacuuming, doing the washing, but it was all quite rewarding. It has changed a lot since those early days, they have a housekeeper. I now volunteer once a week on the weekend and help guests and staff with whatever the care requirements are on the day, talking with guests, supporting, and helping them.

What are some of the highlights volunteering in palliative care?

I think there are many highlights in volunteering. It is the many guests that you sit with and have the privilege of making a cup of tea for or help them in other ways. Because this is such a special place, and it is homelike, it is not like a hospital which is what Diane wanted. There was so much involvement from the community, and it is a wonderful achievement. I think overall though a lot that comes to mind in terms of highlights are the guests, especially some of the guests that were there in the early stages.

Is there a person or patient that stands out for you?

Probably the original hospice manager, Deb, because that was my introduction to the role and she provided support. We would have a lot of ups and downs and I would be able to go to her for advice. Some people were very against the hospice at first, I still found that a shock and I was very much involved with the community. Comments like "oh you work up there" and asking questions like "who gets paid". I would talk to Deb about how to respond without getting angry and Deb would say just encourage people to visit and have a look around for themselves. Do not get angry just invite them in. My whole demeanour changed, she helped me do that which was lovely.

What has been your most memorable volunteering moment or experience?

There was a lady who was from interstate. Her family had brought her in for respite and she was quite agitated, angry, and outspoken. I went in a couple of times to see her and she is curled up in the bed asleep and I thought I would leave her sleep. Later she was sitting on the edge of the bed. "Are you here to help me" and I said, "Oh yes, I suppose". Over the course of the afternoon, I was able to build a relationship with her and we had the most gorgeous time. I did her hair, and she became calmer and talked of her family. She was rather sad and lonely. We made a special effort with her lunch. After her stay she wrote a lovely note to staff saying "what a remarkable team you are". I enjoy listening to the life stories the guests have to tell.

Can you share a positive change in palliative care in the last 40 years?

The knowledge, the learning, educating people is important. I know I learnt so much in one night in a meeting. You can be very community minded in a town. I think it is educating people and being inclusive and trying to bring people into the circle. If they are open for change, experiences can shape their feelings towards palliative care.

What is your advice for someone thinking about volunteering in palliative care?

I do not think you just take everyone who wants to be a volunteer. A volunteer can be there for many reasons. People need to be volunteering for the right reasons. In their heart they may want to volunteer but they need to be open to learning about the role and why they are there, it is not about their own needs. Volunteers and nurses are both human beings and there should be respect on both levels. Volunteers need to be clear on what the expectations are of a volunteer and that guests are central to it.

What do you think is the secret to a good life?

Happy positive, family, communicating, community minded and encouraging others to do so. Trying to keep your body healthy, brain healthy and whatever is right for you. If you like giving your time or if you are a people person, I think that is important to pursue and if you are a person that just likes gardening and doing you own thing, that is okay tool. It is about knowing who you are. I guess it is learning to love yourself a little bit too, but you learn that through living life.