

A Village for all



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In 2013 NSW aged care provider Scalabrini was presented with an opportunity to build a new residential aged care facility, and we were determined to create something extraordinary. Our goal was to prioritise residents' needs in all aspects of the building and care model, basing all decisions on evidence. The Village by Scalabrini, as it is called, opened in the inner-west Sydney suburb of Drummoyne in February 2018. In this article we share some of its key features and the thinking that supports its design and operation.

Background

In recent years, two significant developments have set our course as an organisation. In 2012, our board articulated a clear, strategic vision for Scalabrini. It aligned our focus on the delivery of excellence in residential aged care through enabling environments and strong, person-centred care, with an emphasis on specialised dementia care and palliative care. The plan recognised changing consumer expectations, forecasts for a substantial increase in the number of people living with dementia in the community, and a changing, more difficult legislative and commercial landscape.

The other significant development was the 2016 roll-out of our person-centred care

model, named 'Sono Io' in Italian, meaning 'This is me' (and reflecting Scalabrini's Italian heritage). This major cultural change program is a work in progress, designed to help staff focus on the person's individual needs, choice and decision making. Sono Io is about small things, such as knocking and waiting before entering someone's bedroom, and bigger things, such as asking residents what time they would like to get up, or whether they prefer to have showers in the morning or later. Sono Io's momentum is still building, but we are seeing clear benefits from the nurturing of more respectful and equal relationships and the empowerment of residents in setting the rhythm of their day.

Social model of care

Many people in the aged care sector now acknowledge that a medical model of care has not been the best fit for people living with dementia. In terms of residential aged care design, hospital-type environments, with their long, bland corridors, rotating staff, lack of privacy and an absence of meaningful stimulation, have proven to be almost the antithesis of what is needed.

The Village by Scalabrini (referred to as 'The Village' in this article) is the embodiment of a strategic vision and a social model of care that combines person-centred care with a holistic view of wellbeing. The four-storey property has a total of 126 aged care beds and 16 independent living luxury apartments on a 9898m² block, located in a residential suburb.

explain how The Village, Scalabrini's newly opened \$90 million aged care facility in Sydney designed specifically for the care and enablement of people with dementia, delivers for residents, staff and visitors

In designing the building and developing the model of care, we took inspiration from the world's most innovative aged care providers, such as the De Hogeweyk dementia village in the Netherlands, as well as input from Australian experts, including environmental design education provided by the former Dementia Training Study Centres, and then Dementia Training Australia, our own staff, families and a mountain of research. We concluded that environmental design is critical to the care model. Get it wrong and it can stifle and dictate. Get it right and a building can itself be enabling.

While design is crucial, a beautiful, well-designed building is not enough on its own. The staffing model is also important and, like the building, this has been rethought from the ground up. Every decision in terms of the care model had to deliver in terms of the holistic wellbeing of residents. Consequently, we have rewritten job descriptions and changed internal reporting lines. These changes are described in more detail later in this article.



Visitors at the café during an Aged Care Expo held at The Village to coincide with its opening in February. Photos courtesy Scalabrini

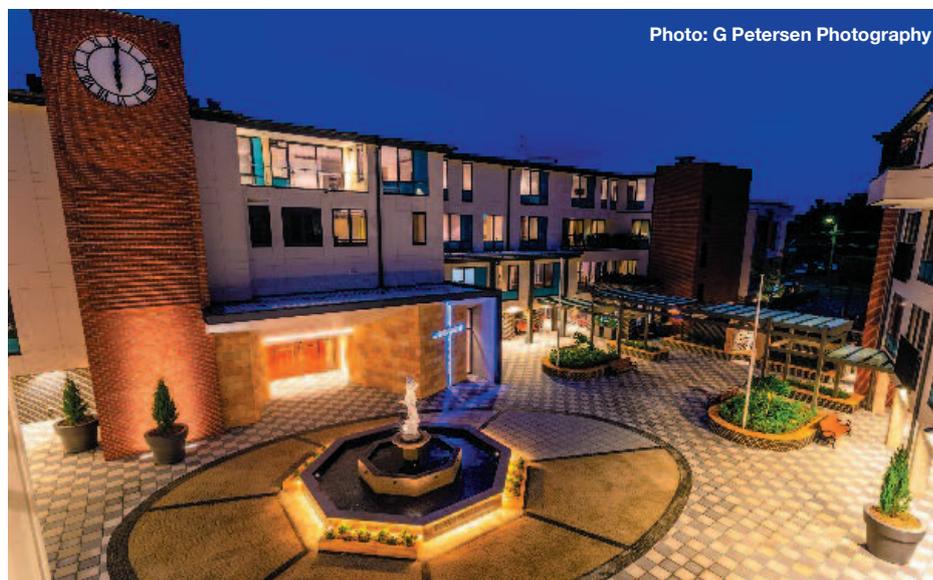


Photo: G Petersen Photography

The environment

A core principle at The Village is to preserve normalcy in environment and lifestyle. For a person living with dementia, a familiar environment reduces stress and anxiety. For this reason, we abandoned wings or wards and created 10 shared group homes. Each group home houses between six and 14 residents and is assigned a designated pool of staff.

Each home, which we call a 'casa' to reflect Scalabrini's Italian heritage, includes a large, fully-equipped domestic kitchen, dining and lounge areas, a balcony, and private bedrooms and bathrooms for each resident. The rooms are a similar size to a family home.

The casás have been fitted out in such a way as to protect dignity, promote choice, and independence, and minimise common difficulties for people living with dementia, such as wayfinding and confusion. For example, unnecessary clutter has been removed, each resident's bedroom door has its own distinct colour, pattern and handle shape, residents can see their toilet from their bed, and social areas are visible from every bedroom door.

Flooring was an important consideration. Most staff preferred vinyl for ease of maintenance, but when we considered what was most normal and home-like for residents, the consensus was that carpet was the answer. Carpet is also quieter, doesn't reflect glare from windows, is less slippery and marginally more forgiving of falls.

The Village wraps around a beautiful, spacious outdoor piazza. This communal area features trees, bench seating, a fountain, café/pizzeria, general store, chapel and a covered gallery that leads to a Wellness Hall and theatre, hair salon and barber, medical clinic, a garden, chicken enclosure, garage and exercise equipment. Residents can move everywhere without encountering trip hazards.

Above the piazza and the casás, 16 luxury apartments occupy the top floor, known as The Palazzo. These apartments are for couples where one partner is living with dementia or has complex health care needs, or for single people with a care need. Co-located with The Village, The Palazzo is accessed via a private foyer and secure reception area, but residents have full access to the communal village areas and activities too. A range of personal care services are also available together with a Palazzo Concierge for daily support.

Meaningful lifestyles

The design of the casás is intended to promote meaningful lifestyles and

improve independence. During the course of each day, residents may choose to be part of typical household activities, such as setting the table, polishing shoes, folding towels and cooking. Casa residents dine together in a family dining room. The food, cooked from fresh ingredients in an on-site commercial kitchen before being delivered to the casa kitchens, is served in terrines, enabling residents to choose what and how much they eat.

The design also facilitates social interaction and normal life activities. Just as our residents used to go outdoors, to their vegie patches or down the street to the shops and parks, The Village's communal spaces provide similar opportunities for stimulation and social interaction. Residents can buy ingredients at the general store, supported by casa staff if need be, and return to their casa to cook. They can enjoy music, dancing, yoga and other activities in the hall, or sit and have a coffee in the café in the company of others.

During the design process, we debated the degree to which residents should be exposed to the elements, such as sunshine, wind, heat and rain, in the piazza. Experiencing the day, the weather and the seasons is a part of quality of life and essential to wellbeing, so our design provides some shade, but not total protection. To go to the general store, a resident goes out their front door and walks through the piazza, just as they would have walked down the street to the corner store. Having access to this sunny, light-filled space supports residents' physical health by nurturing their vitamin D stores, lifting mood and aiding circadian rhythms for normal sleep patterns.

A wellbeing framework

Scalabrini's social model of care is an extension of the casa living. It is about preserving the normal rhythm of life, where you do domestic activities in your home and go out for more exciting or special experiences, such as shopping, concerts and worship.

Pulling these multifaceted strands of wellbeing together are our staff, and the teams of casa staff in particular. We have a staff to resident ratio of 1-to-6, and have recognised the need for dedicated staff in each casa. This allows our carers to get to know residents well – their backgrounds, preferences, personalities, strengths and desires. We know from experience that small things can make a big difference, so knowing that someone likes to start their day with a cup of tea, have the window open, or enjoys listening to music makes



The Village has its own chapel, located on the ground floor just off the piazza

the day better. A designated team for each casa allows us to build stronger relationships with families as they are such an important part of our residents' support network.

In prioritising environment and holistic wellbeing, we have rethought clinical care. Given our mission to promote person-centred care, clinical spaces are located out of sight of resident living areas, though only a few metres away, behind concealed doors into the casás. Nurses' stations don't need to be in sight of residents as they go about their day. Even so, clinical staff are on hand at every moment, delivering a high standard of physical care as needed.

Our reporting lines ensure a balanced approach to the support of residents' overall wellbeing and the maintaining of identity and independence. The Village has created a senior role known as Wellbeing Manager. The purpose of this role is to lead on our delivery of holistic wellbeing, be that emotional, psychological or spiritual, and to put these elements on an equal footing with physical care. Casa staff, via Casa Coordinators, report to the Wellbeing Manager, while clinical staff report to our Clinical Care Manager.

Our Wellbeing Program seeks to help residents mix with people of different ages (children from local schools, various local community groups, visiting neighbours) out in the piazza and in the Wellbeing Hall. This builds on research that shows it takes about 150 people to generate a genuine community. We plan to invite local community groups to use our facilities and enjoy our social spaces as our guests, further developing an authentic sense of community. This gives residents the opportunity for social engagement and purposeful activity both in the casa and outside in the piazza.

Wellbeing is not just for residents and families, but also staff and volunteers. The Village, in this respect, is drawing on the beautiful, award-winning Open Heart Program co-created by Sister Maria



Instead of a traditional, formal uniform, staff can choose from a range of casual clothes in varied styles, colours and prints

Elena Figueroa working with the nuns, residents, families, volunteers and staff at Scalabrini Chipping Norton. Sr Maria Elena believes we should look after staff just as they look after our residents. This includes nurturing self-esteem, and also providing care during the grieving process. When a resident passes away, staff too can suffer loss and grief.

A new culture

Our Wellbeing Manager has helped rewrite job descriptions for carers, reflecting our company-wide determination to put residents before clocks and tasks. Staff can sit and have a cup of tea, play a game of cards and do domestic activities with residents.

This kind of relationship is different from what we've seen in the past, which is why we had to change our minds about uniforms, after weighing up the research in this field. We found that not having a uniform should improve the quality of life for residents because it changes the dynamic in the relationship with staff. As the mental health sector long ago discovered, uniforms are a barrier to a therapeutic relationship because they create a power dynamic. Ultimately, we decided that formal uniforms were a visual archetype from aged care in the past and discordant with a home environment. Instead, our casa staff get to choose a working wardrobe of smart-casual clothes from a selection of trousers, tops, skirts, jeans and chinos, with varied styles, colours and prints.

Our night staff wear medical scrubs featuring playful prints, much like pyjamas. Again, it's about trying to create an environment that is as home-like as possible; before coming into aged care, if our residents were unsettled in the night it was likely they were assisted by a family member wearing pyjamas.

Recruiting staff

Given our emphasis on close relationships between carers and residents, finding the right staff is critical. From 280 applicants earlier this year, we

selected 16 to be our initial casa carers and coordinators. These exceptional people have impressed us with their compassion, flexibility and desire to be part of something new.

Before the February opening, our network's Dementia Excellence Team and the Wellbeing Manager oversaw staff training, building expertise in understanding dementia and in how to provide an environment which fosters positive living and meets the needs of residents and families.

We are encouraging staff with skills such as painting or music to share their talents in the Wellness Hall, perhaps providing classes. They can also participate in classes on site, such as meditation or dancing. If we look after our staff, they will be happier and stay longer. Reduced staff turnover is in the interests of residents.

Technology at work

Technology solves problems and unlocks opportunities at The Village. It delivers more in terms of freedom, privacy, agency and safety for residents and results in staff spending more time with residents rather than checking that fridges are running to the right temperature.

Commercial reality and community objectives dictated that The Village has at least 120 beds, and on our site this meant having to build upwards. The challenge was how to ensure residents could access communal outdoor spaces freely, without being dependent on someone having to take them there. The solution is a dedicated lift in each casa, connecting residents directly to the piazza.

In much the same way as new cars have keyless entry, our lifts use a Real Time Location System and small remote access devices. The remotes can be embedded into jewellery, a watch, clothing or shoes, whichever is most comfortable and familiar for each resident.

When a resident from an upper level casa wants to go outside, the simple act of standing near the lift summons it. Once inside, the lift automatically goes to the ground floor piazza and the person is free to go anywhere on the property. When ready to return home, it is the same process in reverse. The access device also unlocks a resident's own bedroom, but no others. This simple feature minimises the chance of other residents entering the room and associated confusion, agitation and distress.

Sensor flooring in bedrooms delivers other benefits. It shows movement within

the room, but more importantly can distinguish a fall, sending an alert to the android phones carried by every carer. The technology allows staff to monitor the safety of each resident without needing to compromise their privacy. This instantaneous notification of significant incidents means staff can respond more quickly while also reducing noise – because call bells have gone.

Building upon our Italian heritage

Scalabrini's Italian heritage has informed our understanding of the needs of all culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including an appreciation of the importance of language, food, rituals, spiritual needs and other components of identity. It is critical that staff know what is important to each individual resident because they will be more at ease and comfortable if their environment feels familiar. Common language, familiar food and respect of cultural practices are essential.

This has demanded sensitivity in our decisions about design, décor, staffing and operational matters. The Village has an Italian flavour, from the piazza space to the pizza oven in the café and 'Nonna's Kitchen' (communal cooking area), but we think our focus on a social model of care gives us the flexibility to serve and reflect the needs of all our residents. A multicultural society demands a flexible approach and deep understanding of each person's individual needs, such as individualisation of their own rooms, food choices and spiritual needs.

Scalabrini has signed a memorandum of understanding with Dementia Training Australia to evaluate the model of care, environmental design and tailored training being provided at The Village. ■

■ Scalabrini is a not-for-profit aged care provider with seven residential villages across metropolitan and rural NSW. Elaine Griffin is Chief Executive Officer at Scalabrini. Contact her at (02) 8876 6800; Fiona Kendall is General Manager at The Village by Scalabrini. Contact her at 1300 266 813.



The staff-to-resident ratio is 1-to-6, with a dedicated staff team assigned to each casa