



Australian  
Multicultural  
Community  
Services

# Celebration

*December 2020*

In this issue:



Coping with hay  
fever



Care and hygiene  
packs



Pen Pal Project in  
the media



Centre-based  
Respite Program

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We care, we support, **we empower**

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Happy Holidays • Buone Feste • Среќни Празници • Frohe Feiertage

Maligayang Pagdiriwang • İyi bayramlar • Gëzuar Festat • Καλές Γιορτές • 节日快乐

Wesołych Wakałji • Срећни празници • Felices Fiestas • أعياد سعيدة

## Message from Chief Executive Officer

I am pleased to introduce the AMCS December newsletter. I hope you enjoy the content, with a summer and holiday season focus.

In the last few months, the easing of restrictions have allowed us to start seeing more of our loved ones, family and friends. We are happy for the opportunities to experience more of what our community has to offer. I assure you, we will start arranging group gatherings as soon as possible and staff are already planning activities in a Covid-safe way.

We hope you enjoy your summer season and wish you all the best for the upcoming New Year.

As always, we are here to care and support you in the best way we can.



Elizabeth Drozd  
Chief Executive Officer,  
AMCS

## Nurse's corner – How to keep your hay fever under control

Summer brings sunshine, warmth and colour to our world. But for all its beauty, the season still has pollen lingering from spring, a common trigger for seasonal allergies, also known as allergic rhinitis or hay fever. Symptoms often include sneezing, itchy eyes and a stuffy nose, especially on windy days when pollen and grass blow in the breeze.

The best way to prevent an allergic reaction is to avoid the substance causing allergies, although not always easy or practical.

Here are our top tips on how to keep your hay fever under control:

- Check weather reports and stay indoors when the pollen count is high.
- Avoid drying clothes and bedding outside when the pollen count is high.
- Wear wraparound sunglasses to protect your eyes.
- Keep doors and windows shut whenever possible.

## Client profile

### Meet Audette Helou

Audette was born in Lebanon in 1946 where she did not attend school due to the war and the country's complex political problems.

'But through my life experience, I learnt to speak Arabic, English and French,' she recalls.

#### Family ties

Audette married at nineteen and then raised four kids as a single mum. However, tragedy struck when her eleven-year-old son was shot in the head during Lebanon's war. Her child's death, 'caused a scar in the heart and pain even now.'

She continued to work hard in various roles to support her two sons and her daughter, including building her own business as a beautician for many years.

#### Coming to Australia

'When the children grew up, one of my sons and my daughter moved to Europe,' explains Audette. 'My other son went to Australia to follow his dreams and commitments. He married and had children.'

In 1998, he brought her to Australia under a Visitor visa and after a long process, she finally received her permanent residency and then her citizenship.



Sadly, Audette lost him a few years ago. Even though she was consumed with grief and sadness, 'I received love and support from my friends, keeping me strong.'

#### Iron chef

During this pandemic, she often practised her favourite hobby — cooking. Everyone who knows her, cannot wait to eat her delicious Lebanese baklava again. When she's not preparing food, she says, 'communicating with my children and grandchildren overseas brings me lots of joy.'

#### AMCS experience

After being with multiple Aged Care providers, Audette joined AMCS in May 2020.

'AMCS changed my life. It lifted me from my loneliness and isolation to be more open to life, knowing someone is always there to hear me and provide me with support. They're able to understand and respect my culture and communicate in my language,' tells Audette. 'AMCS is part of my family!'

- Shower and change your clothes after venturing outside.
- Avoid grassy areas, such as parks and fields, particularly in the early morning, evening or night, when the pollen count is highest.
- Ask someone else to mow your lawn (if you could be so lucky).

With these tips, hopefully you can still enjoy the sun on your face, the salty smell of the sea and the endless blue skies.





## AMCS Pen Pal Project featured in the media

With support from the RACV Community Foundation, we organised the SWAMIH Pen Pal Project to reduce social isolation among culturally and linguistically diverse seniors during the coronavirus pandemic. Our project was featured in The Age, Brisbane Times, WA Today and The Sydney Morning Herald.

For those who missed the story, we are pleased to provide The Age's full article below:

Like many older people Zygmunt Swistak has felt loneliness through months of lockdown, but what makes his experience that little bit harder is that English is not his first language.

As coronavirus restrictions have sparked a surge in virtual electronic communication globally, the 96-year-old has found connections through a relic of the past: the handwritten letter.

Through a program designed to connect elderly Victorians from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Polish-born Mr Swistak has been trading letters with local children with the same heritage.

"For me, it's my heart, it's good for me. At the age of 96, I still feel useful for something," he says.

The letters to children aged between seven and 14 years are written in Polish and cover many topics, but mostly Mr Swistak answers their queries about life - such as whether it's OK as a little girl to slam a door on a family member.

"No, it's not nice to slam the door on anyone," he tells his young correspondent.

The intergenerational letter exchange program was launched by Australian Multicultural Community Services during the pandemic as a part of its Seniors Wisdom and the Mobile Information Hub project (SWAMIH).

Mr Swistak said the letters are one way - he also paints, writes poetry and composes music - to stay mentally healthy.



"People do not prepare themselves for old age, it's essential they become interested in something. Some of those people don't even know they have the ability or talent to do something because they've never tried," he says.

The stay-at-home lockdown restrictions have exacerbated the loneliness for many elderly Victorians, particularly for those culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD).

At the age of 20, Mr Swistak moved to Australia in the wake of World War II having survived the Dachau concentration camp where he was imprisoned as a member of the Polish resistance. His father and brother were killed at the camp.

"I came to Australia and started to feel very lonely, I was told not to speak Polish, no one could understand me, so I had to learn English. I also wanted to belong to something," he says.

Project officer Ewa Lenartowicz says the letter program aims to engage and reduce social isolation for CALD seniors.

"Establishing a connection and belonging to the local cultural community is important for the wellbeing of seniors," she says.

The program connects seniors with children, mostly born in Australia, who are learning to speak their parents' language. With more than 55 seniors and 66 volunteers, the program offers more than 10 languages, such

as English, Polish, Arabic, Macedonian, Sri Lankan and Indonesian.

Mrs Lenartowicz says language barriers and cultural differences can be challenging for many cultural and linguistic diverse seniors.

"They migrated to Australia because of various life circumstances. Very often their relatives and loved ones live in other countries and as they age they lose their English-language abilities. Some of the CALD seniors never have a chance to learn English," she says.

According to the Australian Institute of Health, one in three Australians aged over 65 were born overseas, with a majority born in non-English-speaking countries.

The interim findings of the 2019 Royal Commission into Aged Care revealed that aged care facilities had not been meeting the requirements of culturally and linguistically diverse seniors.

Mother of nine-year-old twins Eren and Deniz, Magdalena Sahingoez, says her children were introduced to the letter program through Edmund Strzelecki Melbourne Polish School.

"I think it's beautiful. At the Polish school they learn about the culture, tradition and the language, and this is an additional experience for them.

"They started learning how to write a letter, how to address it, because these days it's not something regular they learn at school," she says.

Deniz says the elderly have become more isolated during the pandemic and these letters are important to them.

"People can't visit them that often, I know that the elderly people really need someone to talk to because they are alone," he says.

Eren says he was the first student to receive a letter back from one of the seniors.

"I thought, 'Yay, I got the letter.' I waited so long, I usually don't get mail from anybody," he says.



## Community Connectors Program

Even in a pandemic, you still need to stay social to reduce isolation. Which is why we initiated, 'Community Connectors - Friendship Cafes and Window Talks for Seniors' with a range of easily accessible Zoom workshops. CALD seniors and carers are invited to our weekly online social and friendship cafés to meet new friends, learn new skills and share knowledge with like-minded people.

We offer:

- Knitting Café –  
Wednesdays, 10:30 – 11:30am  
Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/j/97803659049>
- Art and Craft Café –  
Thursdays, 10:30 – 11:30am  
Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/j/94148517035>
- Friendship Café and Gardening –  
Fridays, 10:30 – 11:30am  
Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/j/98375022186>
- IT Support Café –  
Thursdays, 2:00 – 3:00pm  
Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/j/99169837240>

To join any of our weekly sessions, please contact our Project Officer, Tinatin Panchvidze, on [Tinatin.Panchvidze@amcservices.org.au](mailto:Tinatin.Panchvidze@amcservices.org.au) or 0412 418 596.



## AMCS centre-based and flexible in-home Respite Program

The AMCS centre-based and flexible in-home Respite Program gives carers a break to take care of their own health and wellbeing, with the comfort of knowing their dependants are looked after.



### Services

We have many initiatives specifically for people from different backgrounds to keep them connected to their language and culture. In partnership with Uniting Vic.Tas, the Respite Program is tailored towards participants from an Eastern European background.

With the current pandemic, seniors and their carers are more of a priority than ever. We offer flexible in-home Respite support: one-on-one home support, online activities, exercise groups and Care Pack deliveries.

When the restrictions ease, we will organise transport, food and group activities in a safe environment again depending on our program members' interests and capabilities. For example: craft, light exercises, breathing techniques, singing and playing small percussion instruments, guest speakers, outings, trivia and games.

### Eligibility

Participants can access this service if:

- aged over 65 years
- from an Eastern European background
- based in Northern or Eastern Metro Region.

### Costs

A small weekly fee applies for program participation.

### Where do we meet?

Our centre-based respite groups take place in Pascoe Vale and Wantirna South.

For more information, please contact:

Elina Nowak for Pascoe Vale on 0416 299 637, [Elina.Nowak@amcservices.org.au](mailto:Elina.Nowak@amcservices.org.au)

or

Marek Smalec for Wantirna South on 0424 139 729, [Marek.Smalec@amcservices.org.au](mailto:Marek.Smalec@amcservices.org.au)

## Staff profile

### Emer Stevens

#### 1. How long have you been working at AMCS?

I commenced in April 2019.

#### 2. Tell us about your role at AMCS.

I am a Care Coordinator. I create and manage rosters for our team of support workers, ensuring the individual needs and support goals of our clients are maintained e.g. personal care, home care, transport, respite, shopping and companionship. It is a busy role, but very fulfilling, knowing I am a big part of our clients receiving the care and assistance they require and deserve.

#### 3. What motivated you to work at AMCS?

I have been working in the Aged Care sector for many years now, with my last job being a support worker. I was keen to see what it was like to be on the administrative side, but still be able to interact with clients.

#### 4. What do you like about working at AMCS?

I enjoy collaborating with my team who are very supportive and a wonderful group of people to work with. Our staff are culturally diverse. You can learn so much from everyone.

#### 5. Tell us a bit about yourself.

I was born in Ireland and came to Australia when I was four. I was fortunate to marry my wonderful husband, three days before Melbourne went into COVID-19 lockdown in



March this year! We met in Vietnam six years ago while teaching English. I love to travel and explore new places and be around my loved ones.

#### 6. What do you like doing in your spare time?

I have recently taken up photography. I enjoy walking, bike riding and love to watch horror movies!

## And the winners are...

We loved receiving your entries for the Seniors' Winter Garden Show and Tell Competition. The three winners had the most likes on our Facebook page and each received a basket of spring flower seedlings and herbs.

Tamara Grycuk with 104 likes

Ewa Spasińska with 83 likes

Sideris Pritsis with 71 likes

Our Seniors' Spring Garden Show and Tell Competition recently closed on 30 November. We will announce the winners in our next newsletter.





# Supporting our community

## Delivering Care and Hygiene Packs

During lockdown, we prepared and delivered Care Packs to seniors, volunteers and members of the community affected by the pandemic. Care Packs contain daily essentials such as canned food, long-life milk, laundry powder, toothpaste and soap. Pick up a Care Pack or frozen food every Monday, 2:00 – 3:00pm at:

Millennium House  
296 Nicholson St  
FOOTSCRAY VIC 3011

For a Care Pack delivery or to learn more about how AMCS can support you, please contact reception on (03) 9689 9170.



## Staff and volunteers' anniversaries — October to December 2020

Thank you to our staff and volunteers for their incredible dedication and support to the seniors in our communities. Many of them have reached anniversary milestones with us during the months of October to December.

### Staff

Kosmas, Matina	5 years in November
Uliasz, Alice	10 years in November

Krupinski, Barbara	12 years in November
Macquet, Glenda	1 year in November
Manojlovic, Verica	1 year in November
Michalski, Wanda	9 years in December
Nawrot, Danuta	1 year in November
Shenouda, Sophie	1 year in November
Tadros, Gihan	7 years in November
Warren, Gregory	3 years in November

### Volunteers

Besio, Laura	2 years in October
Cano Londono, Andrea	2 years in October
Contreras, Elsa	1 year in December
Czulij, Marianna	6 years in November
Definski, Frank	3 years in November
Hristovska, Zaklins	1 year in November
Jaskulska, Iwona	2 years in November

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