

CVS celebrates 20 years of friendship

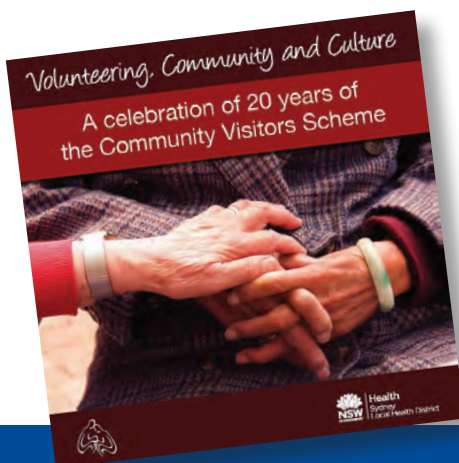


Honoured... Dr John Cullen and NSW Governor Her Excellency Prof Marie Bashir congratulate the volunteers who have been with the scheme for 20 years.

The 20th anniversary of the Community Visitors Scheme was held at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in March, to thank its volunteers for their dedication and devotion to improving the life of the elderly.

A federally funded program, the Community Visitors Scheme provides bi-lingual and multi-lingual volunteers to regularly visit residents with similar cultural backgrounds in aged care homes.

Beginning in 1993 with a team of 26 volunteers visiting 26 residents, Sydney Local Health District's Community Visitors Scheme has grown dramatically to its current pool of 240 volunteers visiting 360 residents throughout Sydney.



Moving into an aged care facility is a major, sometimes traumatic life event, particularly for elderly people without friends or family. Community Visitors assist with the transition, providing ongoing friendship and support that can reconnect them to their culture.

"The scheme helps us provide health and wellbeing for our community in a real and heartfelt way" said the General Manager of Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Ms Deborah Willcox.

"This program makes an immeasurable difference to people's lives."

The guest of honour, the Governor of NSW, Professor Marie Bashir AC, CVO, presented commemorative books to the five volunteers who had been with the program since its beginning. She described the program as a beacon of excellence, and a leading model that will become increasingly important as Australia's aging population grows.

"This is a special encounter that is life enhancing, loving, and brings joy into the lives of our seniors," she said.

"I wish to extend my personal gratitude to all CVS volunteers – the service you provide is priceless."



Ann Ona Kapocius was the first volunteer to join the Community Visitors Scheme, and is its longest serving visitor. She had been visiting Lithuanian speaking residents in nursing homes for several years before staff suggested she join the fledgling program. In her time with the scheme she has visited more than 100 residents.

"I have learnt so much from my friends," she said. "The long talks about life make all my small problems disappear. Life is more fulfilling and is full of joy helping other human beings."



Paul Rowlett began visiting his resident through the scheme a year ago. A recent arrival from Brazil, he joined after seeing an advertisement asking for bi-lingual speakers, and thought it would be a good opportunity to practise his Portuguese.

"I didn't suspect how rewarding the experience would be," he said. "The visits are challenging but extremely worthwhile. Events like this show the sense of friendship and community that exists between the CVS volunteers themselves. It's been a really enjoyable day."