



Avonlea  
CHRISTCHURCH

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224 Lincoln Road  
Christchurch  
8024

Phone/Fax:  
03 338 0202

E-mail:  
om@avonlea.co.nz

Web:  
www.avonlea.co.nz

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# Family Newsletter

## A message from Charisma and Sue

Welcome to spring at Avonlea. It's so nice to see all the blossom in the trees and the spring flowers. We are enjoying our spring activities and recently we took several groups of people on van outings to Hadstock's farm to pick daffodils. Residents had a lot of fun and brought back many buckets of daffodils to share with everyone else. All our little homes looked bright and colourful for several days.

Our activities team has been busy with several ongoing projects. In Mahal we have enjoyed making a little area with a wheelbarrow garden, bridge and gnomes for residents to enjoy.

We have a "Men's Club" up and running with activities aimed at things our men like to do, including painting, gardening, special 'blokey' van outings, walking club and arts and crafts specific to male interests. We always welcome your suggestions.

We have continued to expand our exercise programme with the help of our physiotherapist and encourage residents to engage in "moving", even if sitting in a chair, and have fun at the same time. Please feel free to join in if you are visiting at the time.

In the last couple of weeks we have worked alongside residents, families and staff to turn one of our rooms in Ofa into a "Memory Room". This special room has items from the 50s and 60s for all of us to enjoy. We thank everyone who has



donated items to help bring this room to life. We encourage all families from any home to take your loved one to the room and enjoy a cuppa and share memories together. Just ask staff if you require any help.

We have also been excited to welcome a new team member to Avonlea on Fridays: Merlin the therapy puppy. Merlin makes his way through the homes with wagging tail and joyful hops and skips, bringing smiles to the faces of the residents, vacuuming up any crumbs he can find along the way, and enthusiastically 'washing' any hands and ankles he can reach with his warm tongue. His visits have become a source of much pleasure to many of our residents, prompting reminiscence about loved pets from long ago, as well as animated conversation about Merlin himself, his name, age and training.

We love creating a home for our residents which is comfortable, homely, and welcoming. Thank you all for being part of our Avonlea family.



*You are warmly invited to join us for our  
Christmas Gathering*

*Monday 19th December 2.30-3.30pm – Aroha, Ofa, Rudo  
Tuesday 20th December 2.30- 3.30pm – Awhi Whanai, Hoa Pumau, Mahal*

## Choosing gifts at Christmas time



We are excited to have discovered a source of personalised handmade fabric books and CDs to share on our page.

Des makes each book herself, incorporating images and themes of relevance to each person's interests and life. Alternatively, generic books can be made to suit the needs of the home without adding any personal pictures or references.

Des's husband makes a CD with the person's favourite music and family pictures when someone has passed on as a keepsake of a life well lived.

Once they know what is needed, they quote first and go from there.

Personalised Fabric Books  
Hand made with love  
Life Memory Keep Sake CD

Frank or Desiree

des.nunneley@xtra.co.nz



Members of our Men's Club enjoy a visit to a car sales yard

The tradition of giving a gift at Christmas time can be difficult when your family member or friend has dementia. The Alzheimer's Association has shared the following excellent suggestions for gifts suitable for every level of care. Early stage games and activities should reflect the person's interests and challenge them to exercise their brain as well as their body. Later stage gifts should concentrate on providing comfort while stimulating the senses.

### In the early stages

- a small pocket-sized diary or notebook
- a calendar featuring family photos – write special family occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries
- a clock with the date and time in large type
- an outing to a movie, play or concert, sporting event, museum or possibly an organized holiday shopping trip with friends and family
- favorite musical CDs or CD with compilation of favorite tunes
- VHS/DVD collection of favorite movies
- activities such as scrapbooking or other craft projects

### In the middle to late stages

- scented lotions
- a fluffy bathrobe in a favorite color
- a soft blanket or throw to keep warm
- track pants
- comfortable, easy-care snuggly tops – fleece is excellent
- bed socks with non-slip soles
- shoes with Velcro ties

- wrinkle free nightgowns, nightshirts and robes
- favourite chocolates with soft centres

**Music:** Research shows that music has a positive impact on people who have dementia, bringing them back to good times, increasing stimulation and providing an opportunity to interact with family members. Buy favorite CDs or burn a CD full of musical favorites.

### Framed photographs or a photo collage:

Copy photos of family members and friends at photo centers, insert the names of the people in the photo and put in frames or in a photo album created specifically for that person.

Fiddle aprons, cushions or activity lap pillows also make wonderful gifts, especially if they reflect the interests and preferences of the recipient. If you are not handy enough to make one yourself, they are readily available over the internet, for both men and women.

**Jigsaws:** are also excellent gifts. Age-appropriate jigsaws with large pieces are available on the internet.

Perhaps the most important gift of all is time. Even though a person has dementia and may not remember your name, they will still be happy to see a familiar face and have visitors spend time chatting with them or taking them out for a walk or drive.

Time spent quietly being together is always special, and a good visit will leave you both with a feeling of satisfaction money could never buy.

## Visiting a person with dementia

As the Christmas season approaches, we remind you that although visiting a person with dementia can sometimes be a challenging experience, it doesn't have to be so hard. These strategies may help to ensure the best outcomes for your visit.

### 1. Be aware of common characteristics of the dementia type your loved one has

Being educated may help to relieve any feelings of anxiety that may exist for you.

Be prepared to 'go along' with stories positively, rather than arguing with the person if their story doesn't seem logical or relevant.

Remember that the person may be at another time and place in their mind, and confused about who you are. As hard as this can be to accept, remember that their 'happiness in the moment' is what is important. Keep in mind that their unusual or 'out of character' comments or actions are a symptom of their dementia.

### 2. be self aware

What we are feeling and thinking is often more apparent to the person with dementia than any words we may use. Be in a positive frame of mind when visiting, and be prepared to laugh together!

### 3. Go at the person's pace

People with dementia often need more time to respond. Use slow and gentle motions and make sure you have the person's attention. Sit at eye level with the person, using good

eye contact.

### 4. Communicate with staff

Try calling before your visit. This is a good way to gauge how the person is doing, what time they are most alert and to check they haven't gone out with staff. **Arm yourself with a 'visiting kit' of ideas and activities**

**6. Reminiscing** is one of the most valuable and meaningful activities for a person with dementia, as often their long term memory remains intact. Bringing the family photographs can trigger memory, which in turn empowers and validates the individual.

### 7. Learn to be comfortable with silence and changes of mood

Dementia can cause abrupt changes of mood and difficulty in communicating. Allow time, and be patient.

### 8. Develop an 'end-of-visit routine'

Try to leave at meal times as the person is naturally interested in another activity. Ask a staff member or carer for help. They will be able to divert the person gently when you leave.

### 9. 'Look after you'

Ensure that you have support to help you process your feelings about the changes you are experiencing, and to arm you with knowledge about what to expect.

Join a dementia awareness group, or contact your local Alzheimer's organisation.



The simple pleasure of baking a cake



The colourful 'wheelbarrow garden' outside Mahal



Enjoying a stroll in the garden together

Visit our website at [www.dementiacarenz.co.nz](http://www.dementiacarenz.co.nz) to link to our Facebook page.

'Like' us and receive regular updates on our activities, news and views and links of interest!

Archived copies of all newsletters are also available on our website under each facility name.

## “Magic moments”

*Below are some of the special moments staff from all our facilities have shared with us over the past few months.*

When I come to spend one on one time with a particular resident, he frequently greets me with a kiss and a smile says “I am pleased to see you”.

It is always a magic moment for me very time I take this resident shopping. It is always her most awaited time of the week and I cannot help but notice her happiness when we take her out in the car and to the shops. While in the car, we would talk about her house and people that reminds her on the places we passed by.

Just the mere fact that a resident remembers my name and calls me by that name makes me feel special (and this is when I forgot to wear my name badge!)

Seeing the smile and sense of achievement on a resident’s face when she was teaching me about gardening and plants when we were outside maintaining the vegetable garden

A magic moment seeing a resident join in with the ladies at the sewing table helping a new resident with the sorting of material and ribbons

## Summer’s on the menu!

With daylight saving comes summer and the re-introduction of our summer menu.

As well as taking the dietary requirements of our residents into account, the menu devised by our dietician changes with the seasons. The hearty soups, stews and hot puddings that provide warmth and comfort in winter give way to lighter, more summery seasonal fare featuring fish, pasta, chicken, cold meats and salads, sandwiches, savouries and quiches.



Residents loved watching Merlin and Mason, Sue’s grandson, play together

Seeing a resident pop out his wallet to shout us all a coffee when out on a van outing one day. He didn’t need to of course as we had already paid the waitress, but he is such a gentleman.

At our “Cuppa for a Cause” party it was so special to see all the residents and staff enjoying themselves. They danced and had a lovely time. It was especially moving to see one husband and wife dancing tenderly together.

Witnessing a resident looking into her husband’s eyes while listening to music with a portable DVD player and earphones on.

Sing-alongs with residents in the dementia home and having one of them play the piano. Seeing them smile and enjoy the engagement and sense of purpose in singing familiar songs together is truly wonderful.



Our lovely Memory Room is a refuge from a bygone age, full of treasures to explore

Desserts remain a highlight of every meal, with ice cream and fresh fruit salads, mousses, jelly whip and crumbles being among the favourites.

Fresh home baking is always on offer for morning and afternoon tea.

Please remember that there is an open invitation for you to join your loved one for a meal.



A special corner for our gentlemen in the Memory Room

## Sanctuary

It is my pleasure to share some thoughts with you. As always when I share my musings in this newsletter, today, I will write about something that is fresh to me because that is where my energy is. I write in humility as I am just learning. One thing I am learning, slowly, is that if I want to act wisely in the world, the first step is to quieten my mind. Believe me, I don't find this easy.

Recently I spent time with our team of clinical managers and spoke with them about the importance of sanctuary in our lives. As leaders, they take care of residents and their families, as well as the staff team, and do a myriad of other things besides. This is energy intensive work. It takes their mind, heart and soul. It both takes a toll and also gives enormous enrichment.

Being a family member of a very special person who is very unwell and/or has dementia can be exhausting and heartbreaking. Visiting is not easy. If your loved one has dementia then, often, much loss occurs before the final parting. Being a family member of loved ones in care has brought me anguish at times. The responsibility and care of my loved Aunty Eileen is particularly poignant perhaps because it is most recent and because she is the last of that generation to die in my family. I found visiting her difficult. She didn't talk, she didn't smile, she cried a lot, she just sat. Many times I got back to the car with tears in my eyes. In the end, we did find a way, with music. I would put her music tape of James Galway playing the flute on her very old tape player; we held hands and just sat together. It became a special time – it was a sanctuary for me ... and I think for her also. I miss those times we had together in her little room.

A sanctuary is where we can find space to reclaim our soul and get our bearings. It gives space where we can

## Alison Hume

take refuge and heal from our many painful encounters. A sanctuary can take the form of: being in the natural world, a special song or a poem, the company of a trusted friend, sitting in stillness and silence, being with a loved dog, sitting with the sun on your back, just breathing. This is where we protect and nurture what Thomas Merton calls the "root of inner wisdom."

I encourage you to recognise and acknowledge the feelings that can be aroused as your loved ones reach the last years, months and days of their lives. Allow the feelings. They are to be expected. Then find sanctuary so that you experience a resilient, still, peaceful part of you that brings much comfort. When our own hearts and minds are in peace, we hear the purest intentions of our hearts and peace shows through in what we do.

I send my love to you.

Alison



### Important safety notice

If deliveries to the facility are underway when you arrive for your visit, please remain in your vehicle in a safe location until the delivery has been completed and the truck has left.

### Naming clothes

Please remember that all new items need to be clearly marked with the owner's name before they arrive. This is especially important at Christmas time, when many lovingly chosen new items are given as gifts by family members. We discourage expensive woollen items, which are easily damaged in the wash. Please select easy care clothing wherever possible.

### Outing reminder

If you intend to take your loved one home for the day or afternoon over the Christmas period please discuss this with a Registered Nurse so that medication and comfort requirements can be arranged.

For safety reasons outings of this nature first need to be discussed and approved by the EPOA.