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EXCLUSIVE

West Leederville's Villa Pelletier aged care home first in WA to offer rooms to people over 65 and homeless

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Southern Cross Care's Villa Pelletier has set aside 12 of its 40 beds specifically for homeless people aged 65 and over with health needs. Credit: Justin Benson-Cooper



A West Leederville residential aged care centre is the first in the State to reserve rooms for homeless elderly people.

Southern Cross Care's Villa Pelletier has set aside 12 of its 40 beds specifically for homeless people aged 65 and over with health needs.

After opening the beds up last year, it took just two months to fill them.

The move has been life-changing for 73-year-old Donald Lukaras, who spent 10 months last year living on the streets of Armadale, before moving into the facility.

“If I didn’t come here, I don’t know where I could have been; could’ve been dead as far as I know,” he told PerthNow.

Villa Pelletier facility manager Sharon Hallam said the aged care home’s decision recognised that socially disadvantaged people aged over 65 had “nowhere to go”.

“We just thought let’s try and give these people somewhere to live,” Ms Hallam said. “We are only reaching out to homeless moving forward as beds become available in the home.”

Prospective residents who meet Aged Care Assessment Team criteria, have a mental health diagnosis and demonstrate insecure tenancy will be offered permanent residency in a private single room at Villa Pelletier.

Ms Hallam said most residents at the facility had no money other than their full pension.

Mr Lukaras arrived at Villa Pelletier on January 6 after visiting Royal Perth Hospital’s emergency department for health concerns, including swollen legs.





It was through the hospital's in-reach program Homeless Healthcare that Ms Hallam was contacted about whether the facility had a spare bed available.

Mr Lukaras became homeless after the Kalgoorlie residential complex he was living in was knocked down.

He moved to Perth where he lived in his old V8 car around Armadale until he was forced to sell it and purchase a mobility scooter.

“Sometimes I would go and stay in a hotel and then I would go back on the street again,” he said. “I’d get underneath where Westpac Armadale bank is and I would have shelter, or sometimes I’d go up to the Armadale museum (History House Museum).

“I had good places to get out of the rain and when it was hot I would go into shopping centres and get free air-conditioning but from day to day I was eating and showering alright.”





“I’ve got the right medications now, I feel a lot better,” he said.

“Sometimes I would forget my medication – I must be honest about that – but it’s all good here because I’m getting it done every day.”

It costs residents such as Mr Lukaras \$58.98 a day to live at the facility which provides 24/7 nursing care and lifestyle activities.

“That covers occupational therapy, the doctor, a warm bed, three meals, everything,” Ms Hallam said.





“I receive calls from transitional care, older adult mental health, charity organisations, public guardians, volunteer organisations and, at times, friends of the individual.”

A State Government spokesperson welcomed Southern Cross Care’s decision to open vacancies at Villa Pelletier to assist those with complex needs.

“It should be noted that funding for primary health care, including aged care, is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government, however at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic the State Government, through the Department of Health, provided additional funding to Homeless Healthcare to help protect our most vulnerable people,” the spokesperson said.

“In 2020 Homeless Healthcare received two grants in addition to their ongoing service agreement for drop-in clinics, which included a six-month grant of \$735,493 to increase Street Health service delivery, focused on rough sleepers, and \$317,984 for 12 months for a Transition Clinic.

“The State Government has also delivered on its election commitment to secure \$3.65 million in funding for Street Doctor Programs in Perth and Fremantle, to operate a free mobile medical service for people experiencing homelessness.”

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