



ST JOHN OF GOD

Accord

We're there for you

# iAccord



## Lisa Evans

CEO, SJG Accord



It is with great pleasure that we bring to you the spring edition of iAccord. I don't think there has ever been a year when the change of seasons has been so welcome than this year.

We continue to navigate the complexities of COVID-19 throughout all our services at SJG Accord. It has been an ever changing and challenging environment to work through but like everything, it does have its silver linings. This edition of iAccord is a wonderful show case of our stories that demonstrates triumph through the hardship that has been lockdown and stage 4 restrictions in Melbourne.

Our clients as always continue to demonstrate incredible resilience and maturity in navigating the space that they find themselves in. I am forever humbled by their capacity to adapt and to continue to always find the good in a day.

In this edition you will love reading about Matts 'echidnuts', the gardens at the Moroaki group home as just a couple of examples of our clients achievements across our service during COVID-19 restrictions. There are also stories of how all of this has had a profound impact on some of our caregivers, and in some instances bringing about complete career changes.

As you are aware, over the past weeks SJG Accord has been managing an outbreak of COVID-19 in our accommodation setting. It has been one of the most complex and challenging scenarios I have ever managed throughout my career. We have been highly commended by all the government agencies and authorities on our preparedness and response to the outbreak. I have been forever grateful to the resources and support of St John of God Health Care (SJGHC) our governing body who ensured our clinical governance was sound. We have had access to a group of highly specialised infection control nurses at SJGHC that assisted with our contact tracing and management of the outbreak. All of these things have greatly enabled us to contain the outbreak in timeframes

that simply would not have been achievable without this internal resourcing and expertise. Having access to a reliable and continued supply chain of PPE has definitely been an added bonus and benefit to belonging to a large healthcare organisation.

Home really is where the heart is, and while many of us including our clients have spent a significant amount of time at home this year, the clearing of our outbreak in three of our homes saw four clients return to their home, with the people they live with and the place where all their belongings are. The cover of this month's edition features Graeme and his chickens. Graeme was relocated to one of our COVID-19 isolation sites for almost a month. While he was still able to receive care from familiar staff during this time he did miss his housemates, his things, and especially his chickens. The night these clients returned home I was treated with photographs of them unpacking and giving the thumbs up to being back home.

I want to acknowledge the extraordinary work of the SJG Accord caregivers over the past few months. At all levels and all parts of our organisation our team has gone above and beyond to be there for you. The commitment to care, service and keeping our clients in their own homes, being cared for by those that know them best has been extraordinary and I am very proud to be leading SJG Accord at this time.

I hope you get as much enjoyment reading this editions stories as I did.

*Until next time take care of each other and stay safe.*

Lisa

# Where the heart is

Aisling McCabe – Marketing and Communication Coordinator



*Everyone home at last and Graham returning to his bike and beloved chickens.*

When COVID-19 came knocking on the door of Polaris Accommodation Group home, it upheaved the clients there, as they had to leave their home and go into quarantine.

It was evident from the outset that they were not just leaving an accommodation environment but in actual fact their home. For several years now friendships have formed, milestones have been achieved and an all-encompassing warmth greets you at their front door.

Leaving with just a suitcase and having to leave their belongings behind was difficult. “Despite having known caregivers supporting them in quarantine it was the familiarity of their home they deeply missed,” said Andrew Drysdale, Accommodation Manager.

Last year Graham Stirling informed us how he reach his goal in buying a new bike to go out riding. He said “his next goal was to get chickens and have a chicken pen.”

Well Graham did realise that goal and his chickens and chicken pen are his pride and joy.

He cares for his beloved chooks with tender care. Collecting eggs and having scrambled eggs for breakfast is a big part of his routine.

During his time away from them, he talked of nothing else. Once quarantine was over, and upon returning home, his first stop was of course the chook pen.

The excitement was palpable on the day they all returned home. The sound of whisking scrambled eggs was heard from the kitchen, the karaoke machine came out, and suitcases were pushed back deep in to the wardrobes.

*Familiarity was home.*

# A chance taken, now a heart taken

**Carole Beale** – Disability Support Worker

For 10 years I have worked as a Disability Support Worker (DSW) at Sydenham Community Campus (SCC). We were forced into lockdown and SCC was closed to keep our clients safe due to COVID-19. Subsequently we were all stood down. Now I'm often called Mrs Brown after the television show 'Mrs Brown's Boys'. I'm a bit of character!!

All caregivers who experienced being stood down where offered opportunities of work in other areas of St John of God Accord. I was very fortunate to get work at an accommodation group home called O'Keefe Street. This experience changed my life for the better.

O'Keefe Street group home is a good hour's drive from my home compared to a 20-minute drive to work at SCC. I of course got lost the first day. I was really nervous and had no idea what to expect after working in group programs for a very long time.

*Well when I got there I realised  
had nothing to be nervous about.*

The warmth of the five clients that live together, Brady, Kevin, John, Jozef and Daniel greeted me at the front door.

Helene Meese is the Team Leader at the house and given I'm known as Mrs Brown well I christened all the caregivers as I got to know them – Helene is now Mrs All-Rounder. She's a great leader and team worker and always busy, willing to help me and explain things.

Jacki Williams, well she's Mrs Fix-It, you name it she will fix it, a good team worker, and friendly, helpful Jackie put me through the test of time. She supported me to pass from L-plates to P-plates. What's that about I hear you ask? There is a hoist at the house to support Kevin, and Jacki trained me to use it and I was so happy to earn my P-plates!

J'Rhette Bishop is Mrs Master-Chef is an excellent cook, friendly, helpful, good team worker and master shopper for bargains.

Tince Mathew is Mr Happy and always has a great smile on his face, lights up the whole house, friendly, helpful, good team worker, great on computer, lucky me!

Sead Rahmanovic is Mr Gardener. He has set up a veggie patch for Daniel and put in plants to make the garden look nice. He is very supportive, friendly, and a good team worker.

All the caregivers give 150% to the clients and there is a lot of love and respect demonstrated in the home. Equally as humbling for me I was completely accepted by the clients into their home. When I arrive for a shift, Daniel and Brady will both come out to my car and help with items to bring into the home. We would be joking around and you could hear everyone laughing down the street.



Everything that happens in the clients lives is 100% decided by them. They have complete autonomy in everything that happens in their home.

Each week the clients gather at the dining table with cookbooks, picking out the meals for the following week. They are then supported to write the weeks shopping list.

The clients completely determine their own activities in and outside the home. It is all about choice. I have contributed to their support and it's very affirming for me to see each client have so much choice in their lives to reach their goals. It's great to be part of this team that is encouraging each individual to have a voice and enjoy life.

All clients are close and look out for each other, respect each other and all of us too. Always friendly and helpful. Just five men living together and having fun. This works because of the caregivers at this house. Nothing is too much trouble, even in lockdown all clients shop online. All the clients wear Ugg boots, their choice and yes now we all wear Ugg boots. Again, I witnessed choice as caregivers along with the clients brainstormed how best to purchase warm bedding; weighted blankets, warm clothing to promote better sleeping outcomes.

We're always thinking how and what can be done to enhance and enrich each person's life. Communication is very important and there is a great energy. We are constantly looking for opportunities to improve different situations like decision-making skills and confidence for the clients and that is why this house works as a great team.



*Carole earning her hoist licence!*

*I would like to thank, Steven Williams, Margaret Gibson and Silvana for allowing me to work with wonderful caregivers and clients.*



# Bringing art to life at Sydenham Community Campus

**Leigh Boles** – Community Support Worker

As a community support worker I'm fortunate in my role to be able to support our clients to reach their goals and have positive experiences in the community.

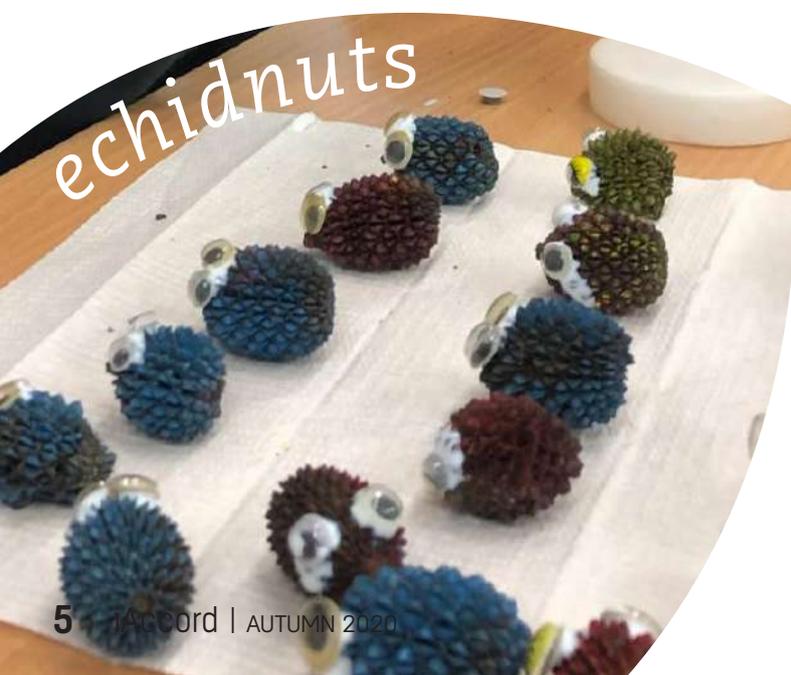
Matt loves being out in nature and we spend a lot time in parks. More than anything he loves experiencing nature evolve through the seasons.

Then one particular day, we went to the park. For Matt it turned out to more than just a walk in the park but an experience where the art form of 'echidnuts' was born and brought to life.

As Matt walked around park I said as a joke "those pine cones look like echidnas". Matt replied. "Hey Leigh, echidnas are an Australian animal, these are nuts not an animal, these are 'echidnuts', and that's how 'echidnuts' came about!

From that day on Matt has made it his mission to bring 'echidnuts' to life in collecting as many nuts as he could when out in the park. Once he got back to SCC he got into action and proceeded to paint and glue eyes to each single one of the nuts he collects.

*Matt now delights clients and caregivers at SCC and the rest of SJG Accord with his new art creations of 'echidnuts'.*



# Working toward positive outcomes

**Marrisa Parkinson** – Community Support Worker

Fiona is a vibrant social person who really enjoys the interaction with her friends and engaging in multiple activities. When group services closed at Greensborough Community Campus (GCC) due to COVID-19, I set about organising activities to support Fiona in an individualised capacity.

Being able to access 1:1 support meant Fiona is still able to come to GCC and keep up to date with her cooking. With spring in the air she has also continued to practice her gardening skills. We also developed a program to assist her with her overall fitness and well-being.

Part of that program is participating in a number of telehealth models available at SJG Accord. Fiona loves music and has been able to join the music therapy online each week where she catches up with her friends via the screen.

I have been able to support Fiona to visit the local horses occasionally, and she really enjoys this. The local horses also enjoy the apples Fiona brings for them very much! Its been very rewarding for me to support Fiona in these activities over COVID-19 and see how much she enjoyed keeping herself busy with these initiatives.



# Adapting Pastoral Services to support clients

**Tania Rose** – Pastoral Care Partitioner

The pastoral support offered to the people who access SJG Accord's services, and in particular those who live in its shared supported accommodation homes, has always been important. As a pastoral care partitioner I've been always on the move travelling to see our clients across all our supported accommodation homes.

When we realised that we had a pandemic on our hands, it became very clear that in order to keep our clients safe, I had to cease all visits to see clients in their homes.

The next step was to make contact with clients over the phone. While this proved successful, I was very aware that the spark of warmth and connectedness I experienced in engaging with the clients was now significantly lacking.

Calling all of our 32 shared accommodation homes became a daily ritual. I would call, and speak with the caregiver who managed the house and ask how they were travelling during this COVID-19 climate before speaking to those living in the house. Caregivers shared a great deal about their own home life, family and friends during this incredibly unusual time. Most felt safe and greatly appreciated the opportunity to share their own narrative of what was important to them.

It became apparent very early on that phone conversations were difficult for many of our clients within the houses, and so I decided to set up WhatsApp and then my conversations took off!

*People being able to see me when talking made all the difference and allowed each client to engage with me more openly.*

When John and I first started talking over the phone, he was dubious of who I actually was. John is a very visual person and needed to see me to completely understand and feel comfortable. He would ask questions about what I looked like and how he really could not be my friend or chat like friends because we had not met. In his mind I was a stranger because we had not had the opportunity to meet formally. I suggested to his support person that we connect through WhatsApp, and when we did John was very excited. He stated that he felt so much better that he could now see me. He said *"Oh Tania, this is much better, we have really met now, we can be friends. You are not a stranger anymore"*.

John now regularly contacts me via WhatsApp and has encouraged the other people he lives with to do the same!

Through these virtual encounters, I have also discovered that there are no inhibitions to sharing at that deep level. Andrew, for example, continues to open up and share about his loneliness and how he misses his family connections. We chat visually a few times a week and he has shared that he would like to have a cuppa with me very soon as I have helped him on the very long days.



These virtual connections do not exclude those who can only communicate non-verbally. Philip is a prime example of this. His understanding of my verbal language is very good and he will make noises in response to questions, however on one occasion he was in his element. I asked the questions and he was able to sign in simple Auslan sign language back to me. He was able to take me to his drum set and play a small piece as I asked what was keeping him really happy during the day. Being able to connect visually with Philip has given me a greater appreciation of the power of virtual connections. It's not just about connection to the outside world, it's also about maintaining the connection to our inner worlds, our daily journeying and the sense making of it.

Prior to COVID-19 I wouldn't have believed that I could have virtual engagement level with clients. What is important is that as an organisation we are very aware of importance of connection and been responsive quells the feelings of isolation. We are only a virtual conversation away.

*We are only a virtual conversation away.*

# Upbeat during COVID-19 at Rouke St Accommodation Group Home

Anita Fisher – Team Leader

## Lockdown:

Covid-19 lockdown at Rouke St certainly has presented it challenges and changed the lifestyles for everyone. However we have embarked on a journey of positive outcomes to overcome these challenges.

Initially we put our creative hats on and in conversation with the clients we came up with initiatives that would better support them. In the early stages of the lockdown each person did very well. Exercise was top priority and getting out for walks regardless of the elements was very much enjoyed by all.

Jerry and Joe continue to enjoy their time working on jigsaw puzzles, although we are running out of space to keep the finished one as no one wants to pull them apart!

## Birthday celebrations

We also celebrated four birthdays in lockdown with both Joe and Paul turning 60. Travis and Tony also had birthdays and three of the celebrations held here at Rouke St. We held balloon competitions, with who could blow the most balloons up, followed by balloon decorating and finishing with balloon ping-pong. There was lots of birthday cakes, singing and blowing out candles. Obviously due the lockdown no visitors were permitted to the houses to ensure the safety and well-being of our clients and caregivers, but we were able to Facetime with family.

## Gardening

The vegetable garden was resurrected at the end of last year. Then during the lockdown Paul tidied and replanted some winter vegetables. Paul is currently working on the garden along the front fence, which he has cleaned out and the next step will be to get some soil in and finally some new plants.

## In memory of past clients

Earlier this year two clients of Rouke St passed away. The clients decided that wanted to do something to remember their house mates. After a house discussion, it was decided to plant a rose bush in memory of Alan and Greg. A red rose for Alan and a white rose for Greg.

## Serenaded in the park

When we able to go the park we packed a picnic as the weather was on our side and Jerry serenaded us with tunes on his harmonica. It was enjoyed all around us.

*There is a lot of laughs and music at Rouke St, and everyone is contributing to remain upbeat.*



# Lockdown brings us together

**Anthony Sellar** – Team Leader

Lockdown has become a way of life at our Morokai accommodation group home and while these are difficult times the tenacity of our clients has shone through and inspired a list of projects to help everyone to remain busy.

When the initial lockdown was put in place in March, we recognised a number of initiatives around the house could be taken on. One such project was the reshaping of the Morokai garden. We had been talking about a garden make over for some time now and the timing seemed right.

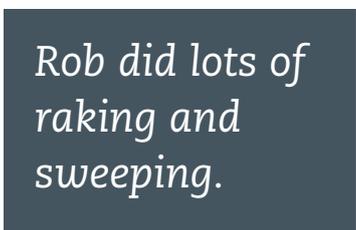
Our old garden had a large paved path with big rocks along the side that ran through to the middle of the garden. It became difficult to navigate certain parts of the garden and it could be challenging to access the vegetable garden.

So we put a plan in place and in consultation with the clients we had a truck load of soil delivered and set to work.

We decided that during the Easter break was the perfect time for a big push to get the garden finished. We utilised all the rocks and soil and planted new seeds and flower beds. All the time our neighbours would walk past with their dogs, or when strolling by and stop for a chat. Lots of neighbours provided great advice on what and where to plant certain seeds and shared in great gardening tips.

Then winter came along and the clients were really looking forward to seeing their great achievements. As the grass seeds began to sprout, there was excitement in the air to having a garden full of flowers in spring. The clients can now actually enjoy the fruits of their labour. It certainly was a lot of hard work but worth it.

Everyone played a significant part in successfully remodelling the garden and it gives each person great pleasure to see their garden begin to bloom.



# Accord's Online Music Therapy Groups

When COVID-19 restrictions first started and we had to stay at home, many of us were worried about how we would stay connected with our friends. Luckily, some of us have been able to stay connected by making music together online!

Each week, Accord's music therapist Zara Thompson facilitates two online music therapy groups that provide an opportunity for group members to connect with each other,

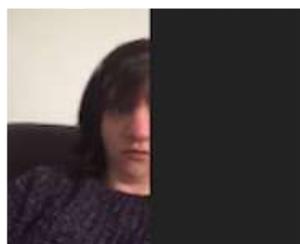
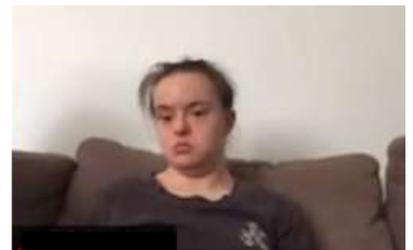
share music, do some dancing (great exercise!) and talk about our feelings through writing songs together. Zara says that at first, it was a bit tricky for us all to learn how to make music together online, but that we have been learning how to use the different technology and make it work best for us!

One group member, Aaron, says that having to stay home during COVID-19 has been good and bad – good because *'it's better*

*to be safe than sorry'* (than going out and getting sick), but bad because we can't *'go out and do random things'*. He says that the groups have been a chance to connect and *'good to collaborate with others'*.

Fiona says that she is enjoying the group as it gives her a chance to catch up with friends, and Lisa says that she enjoys the chance to play different instruments and sing different songs with everyone in the group.

If you would like to learn more about Accord's Online Music Therapy Groups, please contact Zara via [Zara.Thompson@sjog.org.au](mailto:Zara.Thompson@sjog.org.au)



# Successful employment for clients at St John of God Accord

**Courtney Hedges** – Transition Coordinator

The Employment Services team are congratulating clients Bianca, Kayla and Ashlinn on successfully obtaining employment at Benton Rise Farm and Nic at 7/11, with thanks to Business Engagement Coordinator Sophie for her hard work in brokering these positions.

Bianca and Kayla have been participating in the SLES Service since finishing school in 2018. Between them they have been involved in 10 different work experience placements and have shown dedication, enthusiasm and a never give up attitude.

Ashlinn was involved in the transition program at Marillac in 2018 and signed up to DES at St John of God Accord earlier this year. Ashlinn has shown herself to be hard worker with a great sense of humour – but still gets the job done.

This marks their first paid jobs and we couldn't be more proud.

## *Awesome work girls!*

*Below: Kayla, Bianca & Ashlinn working at Benton Rise farm, and above right, sorting vegetables.*



Nic Moore started as a SLES client before transitioning over to DES last year. Since then he has been working with Joseph who has done a fantastic job in keeping Nic motivated and helping him address his barriers. Nic is doing a wonderful job with his training and has recently been learning to serve customers. We are so happy for Nic and can recognise what a life changing moment this is for him.



## SLES Update

Despite the recent challenging times the SLES participants are still doing their best to stay engaged and work towards their goals.

The team has been providing one to one support, as well as running online group workshops such as 'Road to your Learners', 'Money Matters' and 'Organisational Skills'. They have also been undertaking a range of discovery activities with their key workers which is an integral part of the employment process. This ensures we will be ready to hit the ground running once the restrictions start to ease. The team are also helping everyone to keep their social connections with the power of social media and most recently have set up a penpal program.

The participants have done a stellar job in navigating the changes and this has been a true test of their ability to adapt and overcome.

We look forward to continuing to support them through to the other side of the pandemic, and onto their goals.

# Speech Pathology and Positive Behaviour Support services available

**Stephanie Broadway** – Allied Health Practitioner

As an Allied Health Practitioner working in disability, I'm passionate about working with participants to help them achieve their goals and improve their quality of life. SJG Accord has a strong focus on developing the skills of our participants in a supportive team culture.

I enjoy meeting a wide range of people and being able to support them from either a Speech Pathology or Positive Behaviour Support Practitioner role.

My role as a Speech Pathologist involves assessing a person's communication or swallowing to determine their current skills. From there, I'm able to make goals with the person and their support networks to work on improving skills. In therapy we may work on learning how to use alternative ways of communicating (through symbols, photos, key word sign and writing), improving their speech quality and on social or language skills. These are all important skills that help participants to build connections with others, participate in community activities and improve their self-confidence.

I've also been able to incorporate Positive Behaviour Support as a part of my role with various clients. Positive Behaviour Support focuses on understanding the behaviour of our participants and working with them to increase their positive behaviours. We do this through working with the participant's support team to make sure their living situation and daily activities

are meeting their needs. Ensuring that the people in their environment understand a participant's communication skills helps the participant to get their wants/needs met and feel a better social connection. A large part of my role is also to help participants understand the world around them by setting up visual schedules and choice boards.

We engage the participant themselves in skill development which may include emotional regulation tasks, social stories and improvement of their communication abilities. Participants we support often demonstrate behaviours to communicate with others, especially if they are having difficulty expressing themselves using words or symbols. I've been able to successfully use my skills in teaching communication to support clients to express their thoughts and feelings better, therefore improving their quality of life and interactions with those who support them.



For further information visit

**1300 002 226**

**[www.accorddisability.org.au](http://www.accorddisability.org.au)**

# 'We're there for you'

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