

It's Like Visiting A Dear Friend

In 1980 I found myself eligible to use the services of the Collingwood Community Health Centre (CCHC), and many memories have gathered over twenty-two years! To my surprise I found an informal but very professional service including doctors and staff. My involvement in the CCHC would become one of the most positive events of my life.

Then in 1993 the Kennett's government enforced amalgamation of Collingwood, Carlton and Fitzroy Community Health Centres, including 50% cutbacks to their combined budgets. We lost many staff, and some Board Members. Numerous services were slashed. I felt shocked, suffering a sense of alienation, grief and anger that Government could take away our ownership, desecrate the CCHC's democratic tradition held since 1869 of community health service.

Today, thanks to inspirational efforts of our Board Members, a Liaison Committee was created between the three Centres of North Yarra Community Health (NYCH). The attendance at the general quarterly meetings has grown, community involvement and morale is high, with participation from various groups, including multicultural communities with interpreters.

When coming into our Health Centre today, it is like visiting a dear friend. I feel privileged to belong.

Anne Bolton.



The Village Well

In the late 80s it was so good coming to the Centre as a sick mum accompanied by two, then three little kids. The kids played happily in the kids' play space and I could sit in a chair and let myself feel sick in peace.

Over the years we've been here for a myriad of reasons. The nurse reassured me that I could handle head lice. The podiatrist fitted two of my kids with orthotics and their basketball playing took off. The pharmacists ever patiently took me through the implications of medications.

I remember some wise advice from doctors on some tough occasions for our family, from the time when one of our kids had difficulties at kinder to the time when our friends' baby was murdered. What I remember from all those times was the respectful listening and the sense that the decision was in our hands.

I remember my eldest son doing a drama program with the community nurse, his teenage peers and a group of older Yarra-ites; two years later a 92-year-old participant still kisses him in public and calls him her sweetie.

Whenever I come up to the Centre I meet someone I know, whether it's a family, from school or basketball or someone from church. It feels like the village well.

When I saw this competition advertised I thought it was a great opportunity to acknowledge publicly my gratitude to the whole North Yarra staff, to the people whose roles I've mentioned and to the people behind the scenes who keep the place humming along.

Christine Carolan

A Life Line

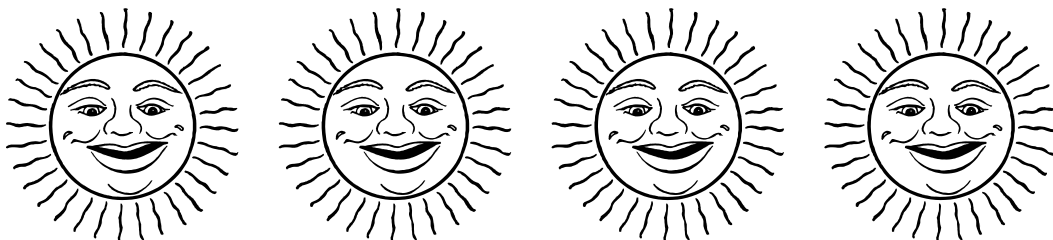
I can vaguely recall, I was only 5-6 years old when I had my first visit to Singleton's in Wellington Street. At this period of time, things were not so plentiful (depression) and my mother often said that Singleton's was a life line to us all by helping in times of need both physically and health wise and ensuing that we all had our needles for diphtheria and any or all diseases that were prevalent at that time.

Much of my childhood and youth together with my parents and brothers and sisters benefited greatly by this wonderful offer of care and attention to those people whom would not otherwise have been able to afford the services that were provided and freely given without prejudice to whole communities.

Then in 1977 the services were moved to Hoddle Street Collingwood and in more pleasant surroundings, the medical care continues as well as many more services such as podiatry, physiotherapy, dental and nursing.

I myself still use the services and care that emanate from NYCH and I am extremely grateful to all of the doctors and staff. I have made many friends through Singleton's and NYCH over 60 years of devotion to attention by all.

Harold Hamilton



A Finger in Many Pies

I came with my two sons to live in Collingwood in 1970. The youngest boy longed to ride and own a motorbike. He got a bike, but had many falls. Just in case he needed medical aid, a fellow enthusiast told him about the clinic in Hoddle Street. I went to have a look at it.

It is housed in a large modern building with doctors in attendance from early morning till late in the evening. It has its own pharmacy so prescriptions can be made on the spot.

Treatment is available for all bodily ills except for X-rays and Dentistry.

The clinic has its finger in many pies, and is a remarkable influence for good in the neighbourhood.

Bernice Morris



It's Just the Worry

My first experience with health care in Australia was at the Collingwood Centre, now known as North Yarra Health Centre. My baby daughter and I had come in on the suggestion of the local baby health nurse. She was 4 months old and I was a worried new mum. The receptionist was helpful and obliging, holding my daughter while I filled out forms.

The doctor was patient with us and I'm sure that I left feeling better. Sometimes it's just the worry about what you don't know that needs to be addressed. My daughter is now 18 and very healthy. Staff members always remark on their memories of her as a child as they don't see her that often, perhaps for an injection or an ingrown toenail.

The Centre was always a community gathering point, even when it had to move for renovations. The clientele came from all different ethnic, social and age groups and most usually interacted amiably. If there were a problem, somebody at reception or a passing doctor would usually resolve it with much aplomb. I was always impressed with their patience and empathy, especially under stress.

Linda O'Connor



I Remember

I remember Arzih's roses from her family's garden; Spiro's beaming greetings; Chris O'Neill's Hawaiian shirts and the swing of Jenny B-S's pony tail.

I remember Helen recognising my daughter's "chicken pops" as flea bites; my toddler screaming his lungs out whilst having a huge splinter removed, and at pharmacy, Katrina and Lee gently handing us medication for unglamorous occurrences of worms, head lice and tinea.

I remember seeing my husband's relief after Sharon made up his footplates. I remember the temporary premises, just down the road from our old house in Nicholson Street; wheeling the pram down there to have my baby's ears checked every other week until she finally got grommets. I remember upsizing to the new premises and downsizing again, but always with those big old portraits looking on.

And now, Fay and Sally-Ann on reception, knowing my kids since they were babies and asking after them; my kids nudging me and asking me about the brown paper bags at the front desk; meeting neighbours in the waiting room, saying "How are you?" and feeling silly saying "Well thanks" when we obviously weren't. I remember feeling better because people down there cared enough to ask.

Julie Perrin



Poverty Begets Ill Health

My son, now 24 and I moved into the area when he was just six month old. Through all the ups and downs life offers us all, this centre has been a cornerstone of what at times seemed like a very precarious existence.

This centre has given me the support I needed to raise two beautiful children, and penniless or not – no matter. It has been instrumental in helping me say goodbye to that lurking fiend known as the “cycle of poverty”.

Without Collingwood Community Health Centre I may have given up. Life was often too hard to negotiate. With great doctors, excellent medical attention, arm in arm with a fantastic support crew – especially the girls at reception – (the first faces you see – the first voices you hear), I was always treated with respect and courtesy.

I have seen a pot pourri of characters in the waiting room – and I am sure their stories would be ones of gratitude too.

Dr Singleton had a dream. Poverty begets ill health and ill health begets poverty. His compassion for the working class has continued on long after his demise. Thanks to Chris O'Neill and other like-minded staff, those who may be at their lowest ebb can find help.

Despite severe reforms and government cut backs, this centre has continued to operate, (overworked) seamlessly.

Name withheld

Have Your Head Washed Free of Charge

Travelling by train each day from Briar Hill Greensborough I worked at the Leggos Pickle Factory in Gipps Street Collingwood, then later in Foy and Gibson Weaving Mills in Oxford Street. Later, when married, I shifted to Campbell Street and have lived there ever since, for 51 and a half years.

Three minutes walk up the back lane of my house (called Little Smith Street – “renamed” two years ago to Singleton Street) I came across a beautiful building named after two lovely people called Mr & Mrs Singleton and Dr Bradbury. Dr Eileen Higgins worked there, and also a lovely nurse in her white starched cap and veil named Nurse Frances Fowler, and a dispensary nurse called Kath Mulqueen. I visited there often with my three children and if needed, myself. Their motto was helping the poor and they certainly did do that. In the backyard of that place was a tin shed where you could go and have a bath or have your head washed free of charge. There was a lady in charge of that.

Now we have moved to better facilities in Hoddle Street and great things have been achieved there in many ways – like more doctors, community nurses, male and female physiotherapists, podiatrists, clubs, social outings and events to attend. The centre is also in good vicinity for the public to get to. Please keep the good work going.

Phyllis Storey



Fond Memories

I have very fond memories of the North Yarra Community Health Centre, starting there when it was known as the Collingwood Community Health Centre, both as a client and as a Board Member. I represented the community as an elected person on the Board. Being on the Board, you help to make decisions that help the centre, for the clients, the staff and the community.

When it was known as the Collingwood Community Health Centre, the government decided to 'sack' Board Members across health centres. They then appointed interim Boards until such time as the centres ran to what they were, with less staff. While on the Board, I interviewed people for various positions – some of them are still there today.

After a period of time, the three centres, Carlton, Collingwood and Fitzroy became known as North Yarra Community Health. At these centres, the staff members include: Doctors, Physios, Pharmacy, Nurses, Dentists, Receptionists, Counsellors, Pathology, and Podiatry etc. Some of the staff speak another language besides English.

There are groups eg Over 60s, walking, ethnic groups, Community Liaison etc. MINE (needle exchange) is part of the centre, they are in Smith Street and they help people who are on or trying to get off drugs.

People are free to make any queries they would like to know.

Thank you very much for letting me tell this story.

Jeannette (Jean) Hales

When John Wasn't Well

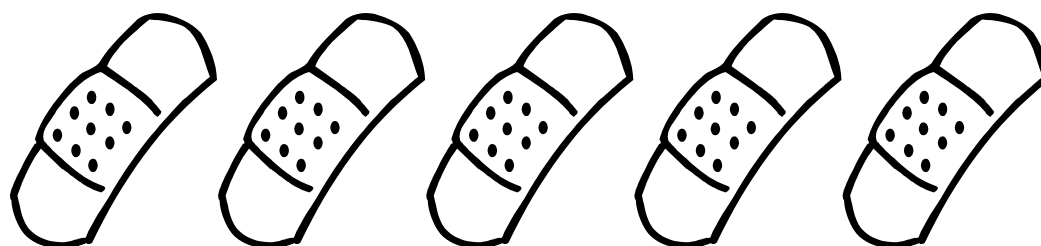
In 1958, that was 44 years ago, we moved to walk up flats in Collingwood from South Melbourne. I didn't know the area, someone told me about Singleton's free clinic, so when John wasn't well, I took him there.

They gave him some treatment and then referred him to the Children's Hospital - he had osteomyelitis of the hip, and was in hospital for three weeks.

Those days we had to pay to go to the Doctors and the Hospital, and I didn't have any money.

I was always thankful to know about Singleton's Clinic when it was in Wellington Street.

Mary Rogers



Less Housebound

My earliest memory of my contact with the Collingwood Community Health Centre is 1988. I was moved by the caring attention of the nursing staff, doctors and the reception staff.

My association has continued over the years and has gone into other exciting areas. Never in my life have I ever acted or performed before an audience and it was through my association with the centre that this opportunity arose.

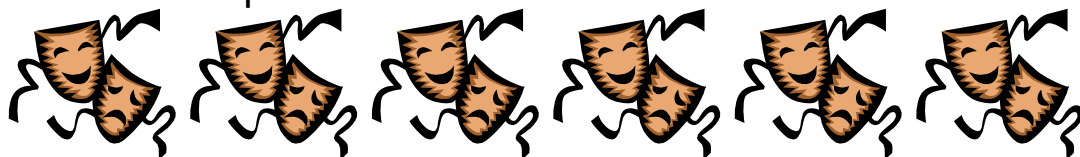
Ever since my husband passed away I had found it difficult to motivate myself to get out and about. Thanks to the walking, swimming exercise and Over 60s group, with the wonderful outings organised by the groups and the Centre, I have become less housebound.

I treat the Centre as my centre, my family and doctors, nurses and staff relate to me as a close friend. This friendship has allowed me to have staff home for lunch and dinner and I thank them for their humility and readiness to relate so closely to me.

Over the years I have seen many changes and lots of events. All have been great, especially the compilation of the book "Dancing In The Kitchen".

Thank you once again,
Your friend

Anna Bevilaqua



Shining Smiles

I would like to thank this community health centre for all the excellent service which they offer, with love, honesty and appreciation.

In particular reception, who welcome us with their shining smiles, and all the very efficient doctors who show great respect for their patients.

I also remember the pharmacists.

There is nowhere in Melbourne like this community health centre.

We are very happy and appreciate all these services.

I have been in this area since 1971 and am at the service always.

Monira Soliman

