

President's Address at Trilogy-K&DCCAI-Mable collaboration launch 5.5.22

Thank you, Lynda. May I just tell you all right now of the admiration & gratitude I feel towards **Lynda Sempf** – she & I were at school here in the 60s & 70s & she now stands with me every single day to keep this community care project happening & expanding – plus she's a terrific MC!

Hello everyone!! Thank you all for coming to this party.

I am so very pleased that we were able to have this launch function here at **Kilkivan Bowls Club** – a few years ago just after we'd kicked off our Kilkivan Community Care organization I was here one Friday evening watching several women flat out cooking up a storm in the kitchen – suddenly realized, because I'd known them since I was a child, that all except one of these toilers were over 80 yrs of age!! In fact, I knew for sure that 3 of them were 85 plus!! I was really struck that night by how darned productive and committed these community volunteers were!! They weren't passive or dependent or expecting someone younger to do the work that needed to be done!! These awesome role models had spent many decades volunteering, often in multiple organisations, to help build the community that Lynda & I returned to – and we are all the beneficiaries of their hard work over decades.

Now, like the next two speakers you'll hear from shortly, I got into this ageing-in-place stuff because of personal experience. Some of you know that I am a **carer for a Level 4 in-home care package holder** named Hayden – he has 4 chronic conditions; I also saw first-hand how distressing it is to be relocated from one's home of more than 55 years when my **mum**, suffering from Parkinson's Disease, had to move into an aged care facility in Gympie because there were **inadequate in-home care services** available to her on the family farm at Oakview. Kilkivan district seems to inhabit a **black spot** on the fringe of jurisdictional boundaries –so when anything goes wrong, such as a Covid crisis limiting worker availability, the **first locations to be abandoned** are those on the edge of the area.

So I think I became a bit fixated, maybe obsessive, about how damned unfair it is that good people, like my mum and the Bowls Club kitchen workers, **who have not just paid taxes & rates all their lives but have also perhaps volunteered to build their community over decades**, are expected to consent to being relocated to aged care homes when they are at their most vulnerable as adults and are compelled to either re-establish themselves socially or just wait for "the end". *Don't misunderstand me:* there are wonderful people in lovely aged-care homes everywhere who are content and who embrace this next stage of their lives. However, I know many, many people, **especially country people, really want to stay in their homes – or home area – for as long as possible....**and some of them are adamant that they are not going anywhere. So thankfully there were others who were willing to join with me to find a different option for our district!

I am now going to mention former locals – rest assured I have their permission or their family's permission to do so. I want to firstly pay tribute to **Lesley & Robert Thompson** who supported my approach and together we established Kilkivan & District Care Assn with support from several others in 2019.

Unfortunately, Lesley & Robert had to relocate to the Sunshine Coast in 2021 due to there not yet being adequate transport options especially when he had sight issues and relinquished his licence. Lesley & Robert, & others, had helped me to refine our concept which has **4 elements:** community transport – tick – that's the **KilkiVAN!**; **more efficient & appropriate in-home care** – what we are launching this evening; **affordable, accessible rental accommodation;** & a **community hub building**. We've achieved 2 of the 4 and we're aiming for 4/4!!!

There are many, many **joys** available when one is involved in a community project like ours – **one is those I get to volunteer with!** This community organization is blessed to have a handful of people who have really stepped up to help deliver what I refer to as our "**Rise & Shine**" project: you know **Lynda, our Treasurer;**

we also have **Sally our Secretary**, a vastly experienced nurse who has worked overseas & in Australia; our **Assistant Secretary is our local born & bred Heidi Dunham** who is our Facebook whiz, & moonlights as the local librarian; **Anneliese who formats the monthly newsletter Kilkivan Kickstart & keeps the website** up to date, & **Jan who hails from Goomeri**, is a tireless fundraiser and helps keep that locality up to speed on what we're doing. There are also several others who regularly chime in with a hand or great idea – like **Jan, Robyn, Jo & Kerrie who are responsible for the beautiful quilt** being raffled, or **Marg who caters** beautifully for our seniors' social hub gatherings each fortnight!!

We all **work very hard**. But what keeps us especially **motivated** to improve our local situation are the **stories of long-term senior** locals who had to leave (like my mum) *before* they wanted to, due to the lack of services & facilities in this area.

One of these was **Elizabeth Leyer** & I'm delighted that her **daughter Catherine & son-in-law Douglas** are here this evening. Elizabeth came with her husband Bevan, their 3 daughters Alison, Catherine & Meredith & her in-laws from New Guinea and bought a farm opposite my family's farm 10 kilometers from here in the mid-1960s. I grew up with her girls until we all moved to the big smoke to get jobs or study. Elizabeth forged a long-term career as the Kilkivan Librarian and was involved in several community groups. After Bevan passed away in 2006, she then lived alone on her same patch – was creative, engaged, often came on a Friday night here to the Bowls Club...until January 2021. When her daughters, all of whom lived a long way from Kilkivan, realized that their mum could no longer manage with just the weekly service of a traditional, well established aged care provider, they desperately tried to source additional care – but there was none available. Even her own regular provider could not deliver additional services to ensure she could remain at home. Her daughter Meredith said the following to me: **"As to the 'packages': I spoke with the service provider already servicing Mum (so she's in their system) but was advised that there were NO further services available for the next 12-18months. They were well and truly booked up."**

So, because something had to be put in place quickly, Elizabeth agreed to go to Brisbane to live in a facility where at least she could receive daily assistance with medication and meals. But she fretted for her home and friends, and passed away peacefully in her sleep on 19.6.2021 – less than 6 months after her move from her home territory.

Now, you may ask: why should someone living 10 kilometres from here, on a bitumen road, and who was still mentally competent and reasonably mobile, be unable to receive enough support to remain in her own home? It's not as if Kilkivan is west of Thargominda!! We are only 2.5hrs from Brisbane's CBD & 1.5 hrs from the Sunshine Coast!! We now know the reason. It's because the status quo for ageing people in rural & regional areas like ours has been totally inadequate. And despite a Royal Commission into the issues, it remains inadequate.

So this is why we are here this evening – to celebrate a new way of doing things in the ageing-in-place space!!

I am so, so grateful that fate panned out for me, and us. When our project featured on both Landline & House of Wellness tv shows in 2020, I was hammered by so many phonecalls & emails from what I generally thought of as business operators trying to cash in on both the block of land we hoped to use for our project & on the fact that here was an area with a higher-than-average aged cohort which really needed more services and they planned to make a motza somehow!! In amongst the bombardment I experienced that year were phonecalls & emails from a James Whitelaw of Trilogly Care & a Brad Grieve of Mable...whom, I confess, I lumped in with the others who I felt harassed by at the time – they were all hustlers in my mind and at that time I just wanted someone to offer some volunteer hours to help us deliver the newsletter or do something basic & practical. So I am fessing up right now to overlooking what

was a remarkable opportunity to address, early, the problems we'd identified with the in-home care system. I effectively told both James & Brad to go away please!!

Luckily, they are both generous, gracious people who gave me, and us, a second chance. That second chance came after the stars aligned and I was contacted by the newly appointed General Manager at Trilogy Care David Melloy – who is married to a daughter of long-term former locals Clarrie & Dorothy Millar - David knew the area and my family well! He activated the second chance – thank you, David!

So here we are on the cusp of an exciting, beneficial era as we implement a model pioneered by Lesley Bryce from Bell. Trilogy, founded by James Whitelaw, and Mable, founded by Peter Scutt, are partnering with rural & regional community groups to ensure that seniors on farms and in small towns across Australia need not necessarily dread their later years and the forced relocation that others before them have endured. Instead, we can anticipate remaining here, if we wish to, for much longer than was possible even 2 years ago. On top of that, this community-managed system of in-home care can provide local economic benefits to the communities in which it operates. I really believe it's a win-win-win opportunity for this area's seniors, for our community organization, and for the economic sustainability of our beautiful home territory.

Thank you for listening!

Rosie Fitzgerald

President, Kilkivan & District Community Care Assn Inc.