

Media Release

IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Empathy suits trial a success

ACH Group is on track to roll out its innovative 'empathy suit' training to approximately 800 support and care workers by the end of October.

Six months from the launch of the Australia-first program, the aged care provider has trained more 500 workers as part of their Dementia Learning and Development Competency Level Three training requirements.

Three Premature Ageing Unisex Leisure (PAUL) Suits were used for the initial trial in March 2019 which led to a decision to invest in having a further twelve suits purpose-made. The suits were developed by the University of Sydney's Department of Rural Health.

Workforce participants wear a suit to carry out daily activities that allow them to experience a range of conditions including vision impairment, hearing loss, a hunched posture, reduced tactile sense and shortened gait.

The program was listed as a finalist in the recent Aged & Community Services Australia (ACSA) State Innovation in Service or Design Award last month (July).

ACH Group Learning and Development Manager Rebecca Burns said the response from workers who had undertaken the training had been extremely positive.

"In personal reflections about the program, participants overwhelmingly rate the experience as 10 out of 10," she said. "Many have told us they found the experience eye-opening, even when they have worked in the industry for a long time. Our people have empathy - you have to have empathy in this industry - the suit experience provides a deeper insight into customer needs through simulating the lived experience of an older person. "

Researchers from Flinders University and the University of Sydney Broken Hill campus are undertaking research to study the effectiveness of the empathy training experience.

ACH Group General Manager, People, Culture, Business Quality Nichole Tierney said , the training will continue to be rolled out across ACH Group's 1700+ workforce as part of onboarding and induction training.

"An ageing population worldwide makes it increasingly important that people employed in the aged care industry understand issues that older people face," she said. " Developing the suits is in keeping with ACH Group's person-centred approach and extends its toolkit to help the workforce build empathy, challenge stereotypes, respect uniqueness and individual identity, raise awareness of potential limitations in the environment and communicate effectively with customers."

Support Worker Ashlee Wirth said she was surprised by how much she gained from the training. "It really opens your eyes, makes you reassess your understanding of our customers and how much they rely on support workers and staff, and how important it is to our customers to have their own

independence,” she said. “It gives you such a good understanding on the restrictions people face daily. I really enjoyed it and would recommend it to anyone in the industry.”

ACH Group will showcase its empathy suits as part of ZestFest this October. Details: Weds 2 October, 12.30pm, ARC Campbelltown. Other ZestFest events include Intergenerational Singing Workshops, a Brain Health seminar and a range of art classes, including Watercolour Painting, Still Life, Abstract Drawing and Painting, Seascape and Spring Painting. Find out more: ach.org.au/events.

Caption: Support Worker Ashlee Wirth, pictured with Workplace Trainers Julie Mettyear and Sue Smart, took part in empathy suit training at Perry Park, Port Noarlunga, this year.



End Media Release

About ACH Group

ACH Group is a not-for-profit aged care organisation that has been offering services to support good lives for older people in South Australia since 1952.

As well as accommodation options across Adelaide, the Fleurieu Peninsula and East Melbourne, the group offers a range of health, wellbeing, respite and support services, help at home and social activities.

Our 1700 specialist staff and hundreds of volunteers share the belief that older people should be valued and respected, connected to their communities and in control of their lives.

For further information or comment, please contact Anna Randell on 0400 580 924 or at arandell@ach.org.au