

CAREERS

Flexible learning and the joy of helping our seniors

Looking for a career change? A move into the aged care sector could provide a secure and deeply rewarding option, writes CHLOE METCALFE

While this year has proven devastating for job losses and redundancies, for the aged care sector it has been a year of growth.

Recent data from the Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment shows demand has been relatively strong through the pandemic, with vacancies for aged and disabled carers increasing by 16.7 per cent over the year to September 2020, while the number of nursing support and personal care workers has grown by 46.7 per cent.

So it's little wonder senior Australians who have been hit by job losses are looking at opportuni-

ties to retrain and enter a thriving sector.

For southern suburbs-based care worker Yvette Bartlett, the decision to change careers was a combination of the impact of COVID-19 on her job in real estate and the need to move into an industry that offered more employment security for the future.

"When COVID came along, my hours halved and they weren't able to continue with my wages," she says. "Luckily JobKeeper came in, otherwise I probably would've lost my job."

Having worked in real estate for 15 years in Australia, and about another six in the UK, Bartlett wanted a career that was not only secure but also rewarding.

"I'd always wanted to go into nursing when I was younger, but I met someone, had kids and life sort of took another direction," she says. "I took a long hard look and wanted to go into something that was going to get me out. I love meeting people and chatting to them."

The 54-year-old enrolled in a Certificate III in Individual Support four-month course with Open Colleges School of Health, which she was able to do two days a week.

"The course I did with them



linked placements with ACH Group, so a lot of them were down south," Bartlett says.

"I was very lucky to be offered a job with them after four weeks of placement in August."

Having worked in her new role since September, Bartlett says her age is definitely a factor in enabling her to connect with residents; along with her approachable manner.

"I'm quite happy to talk to anyone, which probably helps in this industry," she says.

"There are a lot of people in aged care who are from the UK, and we connect in that way."

"That isn't to say young people don't get along with residents just as well, but I do think (my age) helps a little."

While the aged care sector offers plenty of job opportunities, it also provides workers with the ability to continue their training and undertake additional courses to expand their qualifications.

"I've done other studies on de-

mentia, but ultimately I'd like to do my EN training," Bartlett says. "ACH Group does encourage you to do those things and helps you along the way - they're very supportive."

For those considering a career change, Bartlett highly recommended looking into aged care. "It is such a rewarding career. I wish I'd done it years ago but I'm here now and I'm thoroughly enjoying it," she says.

"There's a lot of courses to help and some companies offer assistance to get the training."

ACH Group chief executive officer Frank Weits says there are plenty of opportunities available to people looking to make a mid-career transition into the aged care sector.

"The aged care and disability sectors are providing exceptional opportunities for workers to build stable careers at a time when COVID-19 is disrupting economies across the world," he says. "For people with appropriate

skills and the right attitude, the sky is the limit in terms of career development within the aged care and disability sectors."

While seniors aren't the only

GET STARTED

Courses:
You will need a minimum Certificate III in Individual Support to work in aged care

Registered Training Organisations:
Open Colleges School of Health, the University of South Australia and TAFE SA are three organisations that offer courses in aged care.

What employers are looking for:
→ Excellent communication skills
→ Positive attitude
→ Strong interpersonal skills
→ High levels of empathy

I took a long hard look and wanted to go into something a lot more rewarding, something that was going to get me out; I love meeting people and chatting to them

workers attracted to this sector, the average age of ACH Group's 1800 employees falls into the 40 to 50-year bracket.

"The ideal candidate is someone who likes working with people and has high levels of empathy," Welts says. "Those who have backgrounds in hospitality or customer service often make the switch quite easily and can enjoy rapid progression across all levels of the sector."

In order to gain work in the field, a Certificate III in Individual Support or equivalent is a minimum requirement. However, there are plenty of course options for those considering the change of career.

"The course can be completed through multiple registered training organisations," he says. "We're pleased to work closely with tertiary and education providers to help create a rewarding career path for anyone with an interest in aged care and disability services."

"ACH Group is collaborating with the University of South

Australia and Open Colleges School of Health to support two new education programs to grow the professional and frontline workforce."

When it comes to aged care courses, the range of available options means you can choose one that best works with your lifestyle.

Another popular avenue is through TAFE SA, with its VET sector offering courses in a Certificate III in Individual Support for ageing, disability and home and community, and a Diploma of Nursing.

TAFE SA principal lecturer Sue Harkin says about half of the students in the Certificate III courses at TAFE SA are mature-aged and predominantly female. The availability and flexibility of work in the aged care sector definitely appeals to her more senior students.

"Mature-aged students have life experience and they bring a maturity to the role that enables a greater empathy with older people," she says.

Job security and variety are other factors. "There is demand for different services in both residential and home care," Harkin says. "More than 56 per cent of the current adult workforce will require services from these sectors in the next 10-plus years. Our numbers have remained stable across these qualifications, and we see a diverse mix of people looking to work in the aged care sector."

Completing a Certificate III in Individual Support at TAFE SA or equivalent education institutions will usually take the equivalent of six months study, while the Diploma of Nursing can take around 18 months to complete.

REWARDING

Yvette Bartlett with client Beppe Bergamin at his ACH Group's Colton Court residential unit. Yvette previously worked in real estate before retraining to become a care worker with ACH.



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