

Village Hub is changing the face of ageing, inspired by the US 'ageing in place' movement

By Emily Piesse

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PHOTO: Nordic pole-walking helps members of the Village Hub stay active and socially connected. (ABC News: Emily Piesse)

On the streets of Victoria Park, in Perth's south-east, a revolution is underway.

There are Nordic pole-walkers and gardeners, creative writers and chair yogis. One by one, they are challenging public perceptions of how older people should behave.

Each is a member of the Village Hub — a community club for people over 55, run by social housing provider Connect Victoria Park.

The Hub is the first organisation of its kind in Western Australia — and only the second in Australia — inspired by the "ageing in place" village movement, which began in the United States.

The goal is to engage and connect older people with one another, to help them live independently in their community for longer.



PHOTO: For an annual fee of \$40, Village Hub members can access a range of fitness classes. (ABC News: Emily Piesse)

Since the Hub opened its doors in January, it has signed up 185 members.

For an annual fee of \$40, members can access a range of activities including social cycling, a book club, coach tours, fitness classes and community lunches, along with a library and neighbour-to-neighbour volunteering program.

"Some of our activities are purely around socialising, some of it's about physical activity, some of it's about lifelong learning," says Connect Victoria Park chief executive Luke Garswood.

"Those three things ... about keeping mentally active and physically active and socially connected ... are really critical for healthy ageing."

Hub helps seniors cope with the digital age

The Hub, which employs seven staff, also provides a help centre to assist people with online tasks.

"It could be assistance to navigate the aged care system, it could be difficulties with MyGov," Mr Garswood says.

"That one-to-one help with somebody who is able to be tech-savvy, somebody who can bring their professional expertise to the table, helps.

"Isolation is a big problem."



PHOTO: Village Hub members can take part in creative writing classes, a book club and a civic discussion group. (ABC News: Emily Piesse)

Elizabeth Pappas runs "Chapters", a creative writing group at the Hub for about 10 writers.

"It's really quite intimate, and it gives everybody a chance to read and talk about what they're working on," she says.

"I think isolation is a big problem in our society and the Hub is trying to break that down.

"The Hub is about reaching out and connecting with people and making sure they don't feel lonely."



PHOTO: Village Hub member and Victoria Park resident Tricia Young says the club has allowed her to give back to her community. (ABC News: Emily Piesse)

Tricia Young has been a member of the Hub since March, dabbling in creative writing, Nordic pole-walking and a civic discussion group, which has been canvassing ways to tackle climate change at a local level.

"When you're getting older, you're starting to think about what's ahead for you and [it seems] as if everything's being taken out of your hands," she says.

"You just feel as if you're past your use-by date, but you [aren't]."

Ms Young grew up in East Victoria Park and has lived in the area for more than half her life.

She is passionate about the role the Hub plays in her community.

"It's amazing, you can give back and make it more a village-style, like when we were growing up," she says.

"You just didn't know old people's homes and things when I was a kid. Everyone had grandma living in a back room."

Baby boomers drive lifestyle, entertainment focus

As the baby boomers enter retirement, the Hub's Annette Hoskisson says aged care services will need to adapt to focus on "lifestyle and entertainment".

"We're really having to make sure that our program and what we offer is relevant to that group, as well as catering for our traditional members," Ms Hoskisson says.

"We see great opportunities with people, probably the Gen Xers who haven't yet retired.

"They're the people we want to connect with next as our volunteers."



PHOTO: The Village Hub offers activities designed to promote physical and mental activity, as well as social connection. (ABC News: Emily Piesse)

For management, the next step is to make the Village Hub as self-sustaining as possible.

Lotterywest and the Town of Victoria Park have provided seed funding for the Hub, while local businesses have provided sponsorship for some activities, including an all-ages community choir.

But Mr Garswood says boosting membership will be key to the centre's long-term viability.

"We're aiming for 10 per cent of the population of Vic Park who are over 55, which would be 700 members."

He says that is a realistic target, given the positive feedback and uptake in memberships to date.

"We're not interested in the old model of slowing down because you're old," he says.

"We think the more that you do to stay active, the healthier you'll stay and the better quality of life you'll have."