



THE HON JUSTINE ELLIOT MP

Minister for Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australian first to help older Australians stay connected with their loved ones

Minister for Ageing Mrs Justine Elliot today announced the launch of Virtual Visiting, an initiative linking older Australians living in rural aged care accommodation with their loved ones via video conferencing.

The Virtual Visiting allows aged care residents – especially those with hearing problems – to speak with their families and friends anywhere in the world through video conferencing technology and the internet.

Virtual visiting is being implemented by the Western District Health Service in Victoria. Over the next two years, the project would receive \$120,000 in Australian Government funding.

“With the use of a laptop, webcam and video conferencing technology, families can remain connected,” Mrs Elliot said.

“Older Australians faced with the challenges of vast physical distances between them and their loved ones will greatly benefit from the project.

“This is better than the traditional telephone call. It assists older people to stay connected with family and friends,” Mrs Elliot said.

As part of the funding, the Western District Health Service is developing a resource kit that will be distributed to other aged care facilities throughout Australia to help explain how to introduce this project.

The Western District Health Service provides 170 residential aged care beds catering to all care needs, and also provides 30 community care places and respite care services.

Australia’s Ambassador for Ageing, Ms Noeline Brown, today experienced first hand how this project is benefiting the lives of older people.

She visited *Kolor Lodge* in Peshurst in rural Victoria where she saw the interaction between 94-year-old resident Mrs Sylvia Simons and her grand daughter Kylie, who lives three hours drive away in Melbourne.

“This project uses technology to help older people in rural areas maintain social connections with the people they love,” Ms Brown said.

“Virtual Visiting is a wonderful initiative that helps families get together at important times in their lives.

“The ability to see a loved one's face, rather than just a voice over the phone is very special for people living in rural aged care accommodation, whose children may live miles away or in another country,” Ms Brown said.

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Note: See attached story of an older Australian who are benefited from the Virtual Visiting project.

The Virtual Visiting Program – making a difference

Kylie Jeffares Story

About 18 months ago, Kylie's mother died from brain cancer. This was a devastating loss for both her and her grandmother, Sylvia, who at aged 92 lost her only daughter.

Sylvia had been living independently at home in East Bentleigh with her daughter visiting a few times a week, helping with groceries and doctors' appointments. When Kylie's mother died Sylvia decided she needed to move into assisted living accommodation. She moved from Melbourne to Kolor Lodge in Penshurst to be closer to her son and his wife.

Before moving to Penshurst, Kylie tried to visit her grandmother each month but she has only been able to visit her once since she moved to Penshurst - making the six-hour round trip with three children under 5 years is not easy.

Kylie, who has a very close relationship with her grandmother, was thrilled to learn about the Virtual Visiting program. She believes her mother would want her to maintain contact with her grandmother, especially as Sylvia misses her daughter, granddaughter and great grandchildren very much.

Making sure her children know their great grandmother is very important to Kylie.

Kylie said while her Grandma turns 94 in December this year, she was frustrated by her loss of hearing, and talking over the phone is arduous so I was really pleased with the virtual visiting technology. “Grandma can see our faces and mouths which makes it easy for us to communicate,” Kylie said.

Because Kylie's girls are so young phone calls with their great grandmother are difficult but now they can interact in a meaningful way with their elderly relative, and she gets to see her great grandchildren in action, which brings her enormous joy.

The children show Sylvia things they have made, they dress up for her, sing her songs and they get a thrill seeing her reactions.

“I think they would find it hard to remember her if they weren't seeing her 'live' in the way Virtual Visiting allows them to. And I now feel less guilty about not making the trip to see her more often. What a wonderful initiative – it has brought us back together as a family,” Kylie said.