

Happiness in being useful

Gardening has made one resident happier, writes GEMMA NISBET

At an hour when most of us are still asleep, Ron Honey is ready to work in the garden.

The 78-year-old begins each day at 4am by cleaning the footpaths and watering the plants, moving on to pruning and looking after the budgerigars, with a break for breakfast in between.

The resident of SwanCare Waminda has found tackling some gardening duties at the aged care facility has provided a real boost to his sense of wellbeing.

"Before taking on the garden I really felt quite unattached, I just felt I wasn't being useful," Mr Honey says.

"Now that I have purpose and I'm busy, I feel a lot happier. I get a tremendous buzz from seeing other people enjoy the garden, too."

Having lived with mental health issues for many years,

Mr Honey had previously stayed away from group activities at SwanCare Waminda and had opted to eat meals in his room.

But, according to diversional therapist Annemarie Kluvers, he "jumped at the chance" to get involved in some gardening.

"I've seen a huge difference in Ron," she says. "Instead of spending his days in his room, he is out talking to people, laughing and smiling."

"It's beautiful to see."

Mr Honey's story illustrates how people can foster good mental health at any age, says University of WA adjunct professor and Act-Belong-Commit founder Rob Donovan.

"Keeping active, having social connections, doing something for the benefit of others and having a purpose in life are all good for our

mental health," he says. "Ron is also getting an extra boost through his contact with nature, which has direct mood-enhancing effects."

Ms Kluvers has seen several of Waminda's residents thrive after taking on tasks, ranging from light administration duties and washing dishes to setting up for events and working with children with disabilities.

"Just like anybody else, most people in aged care want to contribute, and there are so many ways that they are still indeed useful," she says. "We always encourage residents to look at what they can do, not what they can't do."



'Now that I have purpose and I am busy, I feel a lot happier.'

Ron Honey

Ron Honey starts work in the garden early. Picture: Iain Gillespie



*Valid if a new resident signs an offer by 30 June and settles by 30 September.

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