



Maranoa Club and its day centre program have been designed for clients with younger onset dementia

A day at the club

A purpose-designed setting and program is offering clients with younger onset dementia friendship, comradery, and a regular place to visit, writes SANDRA SHARP.

The Maranoa Club is in a renovated residential house in Canterbury in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. It has a large living and kitchen area with a view of the garden. There is a lounge room with a television, separate dining room, games room, quiet room and a good-sized backyard suitable for outdoor activities and meals.

The club and its day centre program have been designed for clients with younger onset dementia. The club has a homely, safe and calming atmosphere. We have maintained it to look like a house so there are no clinical aspects to the exterior or interior.

The day care program aims to enable clients with younger onset dementia to continue living productive, enjoyable lives in the community and provide respite and support for carers.

Our goal is to allow clients to flourish and go home feeling energised and good about themselves and with smiles on their faces. And they almost always do.

The Maranoa Club opened its doors in September 2020. But our story of providing dementia day care and respite goes back much further. It started two doors up at Maranoa House, which has been offering respite services to people living with dementia and their carers for 33 years.

Maranoa House is a homelike day care centre. All the services are operated by



Maranoa House has been offering respite services to people living with dementia and their carers for 33 years

“Clients feel like they have visited a friend and they often thank us for having them.”

Booroondara Aged Services Society (BASScare), an independent, not-for-profit organisation that also offers, meals on wheels, social community day programs, residential and home aged care services and affordable independent living units.

While Maranoa Club is specifically for our younger onset group, members of this group can attend Maranoa House for other programs too.

Our younger onset dementia program came about after a female client with a diagnosis of younger onset dementia joined the day care program at Maranoa House in 2013. Her husband was frustrated there were no programs to specifically cater for the needs of a person with younger onset dementia.

We established the program that same year and operated it from Maranoa House for six years. During this time, BASScare purchased the house two doors down for future planning. An indoor fire that caused internal damage only provided an opportunity to renovate the house and give it a new purpose.

The Maranoa Club setting and program were designed for and with the younger onset dementia group and in consultation with Dementia Australia and carers. Many carers are still in the workforce and requested longer hours to accommodate their jobs, which we offer.

Maranoa Club program

Maranoa Club operates on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays and we are aiming to expand to five days. The program runs between 9.30am and 3.30pm but we offer flexibility with times, such as 7am to 5pm on Mondays or as needed.

We accommodate carers when they have an appointment or are working late. Future plans also include using the space as a drop in centre for carers and clients, and opening it to families for private functions.

All groups are small and personalised. We source as much information as possible during assessments, including favourite cafes, music and films, along with getting to know them and their changing needs.

Monday's and Tuesday's program includes half a day at the house and a walk with morning tea or lunch. After our walk, clients are offered a choice of activities, such as puzzles, art and craft, gardening or a televised concert or other program.

We usually have music playing based on clients' choices. Some clients relax and listen to the music while others opt to sing or dance. It is a fun, relaxed atmosphere. We also conduct many activities outside, such as barbecuing or gardening, so clients can spend time in the fresh air, weather permitting.

Many clients enjoy doing jigsaw puzzles so that is often a group activity, and we usually have one or two on the go. One client likes to draw or watch his favourite show on YouTube and he likes his space. Another enjoys doing art and craft and listening to music.

Cooking lunch or morning tea also plays a big part and clients are welcome to assist. We often use vegetables from our garden, which the residents have planted. One of our clients loves to clean up and load the dishwasher.

On Thursdays we go on an all-day bus outing. We travel up to an hour visiting places such as King Lake, Mornington Peninsula and the Dandenong Ranges. We go for walks, morning tea and lunch.

Our clients often like to help set up the picnic or cook the BBQ. We source picnic areas with tables, shelter and bathroom facilities nearby so clients have the independence to go unassisted.

We go to different cafes or hotels each week and are constantly sourcing new places that have good food and a quiet area so everyone feels comfortable. It is a great day out for clients and staff members, which assists in retention.

Key outcomes of the Maranoa Club program include that clients:

- have a regular routine and look forward to attending Maranoa Club each week
- enjoy the social aspect while feeling supported
- are engaged in activities as opposed to being at home with a carer or family member
- often improve fitness levels due to regular walks.

Involving carers important

We consult and include clients and carers with program planning and make them aware of all activities a month in advance. Carers establish friendships with staff members and are supported. They are briefed on their loved one after each session.

The overall feedback we receive is positive and includes comments such as “my partner gets out of bed easier when I tell him he is attending Maranoa Club” and “they sleep well when they get home and often show an increase in overall happiness and participation”.

Clients often start with one day then slowly increase their days as they become settled and carers realise the mutual benefits of the program. Carers are also helpful in offering suggestions for our outings, such as a cafe, restaurant or park they have visited. They are an integral part of our program.

Consistency of staff, volunteers

We have three staff members or two staff members and a volunteer for up to nine clients. We have consistency of staff, which enables clients and care workers to develop relationships.

We are proud that most of our staff have been at Maranoa for between 10 and 20 years. Our job is to entertain and ensure each person is happy, safe and comfortable. Staff members are not task focused. All tasks are completed once clients have departed.

We also have several volunteers who have been with us for many years, as well as two who are relatively new. They are passionate and invaluable, assisting in the engagement of the clients in activities.

Program benefits

The key benefits of the program are comradery and friendship. Clients who connect and like to communicate with each other are usually seated together and we often see them chatting like old friends.

Other benefits include that all clients are a similar age resulting in them often having similar tastes in interests, music and television shows. The program is different each week, which keeps it interesting.

We usually get smiles on arrival and hugs on departure. Clients feel like they have visited a friend and they often thank us for having them.

For further information about Maranoa Club please email maranoa@basscare.org.au ■ **Sandra Sharp is the assistant manager of Maranoa House and Maranoa Club**