

# Aged care reimaged, how the town of Bell is revolutionising assisted living

by Clare Adcock

## Changing the Face of Aged Care

Aged care was a recurring issue at the WQAC assembly last week, but a group of guest speakers provided a new and refreshing outlook on a model that they call "community care management."

Lesley Bryce introduced her community based group, Bell Cares, which assists seniors in gaining homecare packages and employs locals to provide home support services.

Bell Cares is run through the online platform Mable, which helps elderly residents find a support worker who lives in their community and is able to offer services tailored to their needs.

The organisation operates in conjunction with Trilogy Care, which provides a compliance framework and organises the government funding that is distributed for home care packages.

Speaking to the crowd at the WQAC Assembly, Ms Bryce said that Bell Cares would not be able to operate successfully without their partnerships with Trilogy and Mable.

"Trilogy, Bell Cares and Mable, it's a fantastic fit," she said.

"Self-management of home care packages is not a well known or well understood thing, so the hardest part was trying to explain to locals what the hell it's all about."

"We're now using a new term and we're calling it community management, to cover what we think is an entirely new entity in fulfilling the governments state of desire to keep elderly Australians ageing safely and well in their own home, and in their own community.

"The absolute beauty of this project is that outside the first couple of years of where you're starting to reach a critical mass of packages, it's entirely funded by government subsidised home care packages.

"Grants are wonderful in the start up phase, as are donations and short term endowments, but the business model is very sound."



Brad Grieve, Mable Community Engagement Manager, Lesley Bryce, founder of Bell Cares, and James Whitelaw, Managing Director of Trilogy Care.

The unique aspect of Bell Cares, and the fact that was emphasised to council members, was that it not only provides a vital service to seniors, but also offers employment opportunities and keeps money within the local community.

"Community managed age care as we offer it in Bell, is a really viable and acceptable alternative and it's a great solution for our elders," Ms Bryce said.

"It keeps the money in our town, it keeps the elders incredibly happy, and it empowers country people anywhere, many of them farming families, that they can become essentially small business owners within their community, providing the services that we need in our small rural towns.

"It's not just Bell, you can do it anywhere, in any community.

"In Bell, it's been about two years and we now have 42 people in various stages of the project. We have 22 people with their home care packages assigned and receiving services."

Managing Director of Trilogy Care James Whitelaw told the crowd that home care services like Bell Cares ensures that elderly residents can remain in their own homes, but also that funds stay within their local communities.

"It brings great benefit to the people who are getting older in your community, but it does also benefit the community itself as an employer," Mr Whitelaw said.

"I'll give the example of Etheridge; if they need to leave Georgetown and go to Charters Towers or to Townsville, that money is going out of the community away from Etheridge and into those other regions.

"This way, they can stay within the Etheridge shire."

Mable Community Engagement Manager Brad Grieve agreed that the new model has financial benefits, but he also told assembly attendees how it can keep people living in rural areas by offering them well-paid employment.

"We support people to become small business owners, the entrepreneurs that we always say these small towns need," he said.

"When a job is well paid, that's when it becomes something that young people want to do, something they want to get involved in.

"We know that when a young person or a young family leaves a small town, it's a big deal, and it's hard to get them back. But if we can give them jobs that have purpose, are paid well and mean they can support their family, then they'll stay.

"They'll spend that money in town and create more jobs. So it's not just the 16 jobs that come directly from this, it's the other jobs that happen when the money gets reinvested into your community.

"It's changing the face of aged care, it's a revolution."