

When Someone's World Starts Getting Smaller

by Robyn Papworth from *Never too Old to Play*



Every Monday morning at 10am, I run a movement and play group for older adults in Chirnside Park, and for some of the people who come, that hour is one of the only times they leave home all week.

A few of them did not arrive because they were especially excited to try a new activity, and if I am being realistic, some of them probably came because a daughter had encouraged them, reminded them, suggested it again, and then gently nagged until eventually they walked through the door.

What keeps them coming back, though, is not the daughter.

It is the laughter, the familiar faces, the fact that someone notices when they are not there, the little conversations that happen before we even start, the silliness of kicking a beach ball around a circle, the feeling that Monday morning now has somewhere to go and someone expecting them.

Over time, something that began as “Mum, you should really try this” can become part of the rhythm of their week. And that is the part I keep thinking about, because it makes me wonder about the older adult who does not have that daughter.

What happens when their adult child is exhausted, working, raising children of their own, living interstate, or simply does not know what is available locally?



What happens when the older person does not know how to navigate aged care, does not know what community health services exist, does not use Facebook, is not searching community noticeboards, and would never think to type “movement group near me” into Google?

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Who Is Helping the Senior Who Has Stopped Going Out?

There can be wonderful programs happening only a few kilometres away from someone's home, but when their world has already become smaller, they may not know those programs exist, may not feel confident enough to walk into a new room, may not drive anymore, may not use Facebook or community websites, and may simply spend more and more of their week in front of the television, scrolling on a phone, or waiting for the next appointment.

We often say there are plenty of things available for seniors to do, whether that is lawn bowls, the RSL, walking groups, craft groups or local activities, but that only helps the person who already knows where to look, feels comfortable joining in, and sees themselves as someone who belongs there.

This is why councils, home care providers, community health organisations and aged care services can play such an important role. For many older adults, these organisations are already trusted, which means a care manager saying, "There is a local group I think you might enjoy," or a support worker personally handing over a flyer and encouraging them to try it, can be far more powerful than simply listing a program online and hoping they find it.



If smaller community programs are not being shared, if brochures do not reach the right people, or if everyone assumes someone else will make that connection, then the older adult who is already socially isolated is often the person least likely to discover what is available.

I would love us to think more carefully about how we reach those people before their world becomes even smaller, and how local organisations, community programs and families can work together so that social connection is not left to chance.

Because sometimes the hardest part is not creating another activity. It is helping someone believe there is still somewhere worth going.