

## Virtual Villages – The best of both worlds

The term “virtual village” may be new to you, but the concept has really started to gain good traction internationally. For those wanting to know more, Nigel Matthews gives an insight into how it all works.

For many New Zealanders the idea of what a retirement village offers sounds enticing, but the comfort, familiarity and security of remaining in your existing home can be hard to relinquish. Welcome to Virtual Villages – a concept that allows you to enjoy the services and care usually found within a retirement village while continuing to remain at home.

Although the first virtual village was founded in Boston nearly twenty years ago, it's taken ten years to reach Australasia and a further five years for a New Zealand not-for-profit organisation to trial it in Auckland (in 2018). However, one of the 'Big 6' village operators now plans to make it a reality across the country.



Arvida Good Friends is an initiative to keep older New Zealanders supported and connected, while living in their own home. By eliminating the need for people to move into a village, Arvida's intention is nurturing connections and independence for all their members. The system is Community Centres, private home help and rideshare transport. This allows members to have both independence and social connection. CEO, Bill MacDonald explains the concept as a solution for older people to live well wherever they are, especially the 80% of people over 65 who choose to stay in their homes. Although they already have 33 retirement communities across the country, McDonald believes Arvida Good Friends will fill a vital gap in the retirement sector.

“In ten years' time, I want the world to notice how well older New Zealanders live. And I hope it can be traced to Arvida's commitment to transforming the ageing experience through person-centred care – what we call the Attitude of Living Well.”

When summarising the key advantages, MacDonald claims the framework will provide state-of-the-art facilities for their clients, offer intelligent technology alongside human service and serve members with affordable transport solutions.

Based in Addington, the first Living Well Centre opened in April 2021. The facility brings together activities, classes, club meetings, a cafe, beauty salon, exercise centre, physiotherapy, allied health services and regular events. After the launch in Christchurch Arvida has plans to roll out centres across the country over the next five years.

During their market testing phase, Arvida quickly identified control, transparency, reliability and consistency as fundamental problems in existing home care services. Hence, as they start their service, they are focusing on three components to combat these current issues.

First, Arvida Good Friends is powered by Lookout technology. Australia has used this technology for the past few years in their Home Care Package, the National Disability Insurance Scheme and remote health monitoring by the government and private insurance companies. Seeing its success, Arvida has actively invested in the development of this app for New Zealand.



Secondly, their focus on people centred care has driven Arvida to offer a unique subscription based membership model. This gives members the opportunity to have full control over what services they choose and when. Bill McDonald explains the technology is an important part of this service, as it enables transparency around care and costs, including for family members. Furthermore, it matches helpers to members receiving care at home, based on their needs and their personality.

Finally, all staff will be inducted on the legal standards of home and community support care and taught Arvida's Attitude of Living Well philosophy. Through an online qualification system, supportive clinical oversight and Lookout, they will ensure Arvida Good Friends helpers will provide service of the highest standards.

Bill McDonald believes these practices will set Arvida Good Friends apart as a one-of-a-kind, positive and effective service for their members. He says, "Living Well is about having choices on how and where we live, being able to find the help we want when we need it and finding it easy to stay active and connected with friends, family and hobbies. Arvida is here to help older New Zealanders choose to live well, wherever they decide to live."

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