



# Methodist Homes

Providing affordable, secure and caring accommodation and services to the elderly

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## Press Release

### Methodist Homes for the Aged does its part in helping to prevent suicide amongst the elderly

Statistics show that there is a general increase in suicide rates amongst people over the age of 65. “The physical and mental wellbeing of all our elderly residents remain our top most priority and we take suicide amongst older persons very seriously,” says General Manager of Methodist Homes for the Aged (MHA), Lynda Erasmus. “With 10 September 2020 marking World Suicide Prevention Day, we want to draw attention to this very real issue amongst senior citizens.”

Having been established in 1970, MHA has 50 years of experience in providing professional care as well as secure, comfortable accommodation to close to 2000 elderly residing at its fifteen retirement villages in Gauteng (12) and the Northwest Province (3).

Suicide is a complex subject which is influenced by a number of physical and mental factors. One of the leading causes of suicide identified within higher age groups is loneliness which can be triggered by one or a combination of facets including mental disorders, physical illness and the loss of loved ones.

Recent studies have shown that no single factor places the elderly at greater suicide risk than mental illness, with between 76 and 91% of suicides amongst the elderly having had one or more diagnosable psychiatric disorders, the most common being depression, substance abuse and a combination of the two. Unfortunately it appears that older people seem to be less inclined to seek treatment which is thought to be linked to the historical stigma attached to being mentally ill.

Medical illnesses have also been shown to directly contribute to suicide in up to 70% of seniors over the age of 60. “Declining health or physical ailments can severely limit or end the ability to engage in routine activities that help maintain the elderly person’s independence such as bathing, cooking, walking, driving, reading, engaging in conversation or any other daily tasks,” explains Lynda. Bereavement due to the loss of a life partner, other close family members or friends can result in the collapse of social support leaving the older person living in isolation. All of the above can lead to depression and suicidal thoughts.

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In line with the principles of the Eden Alternative, adopted by all fifteen MHA's retirement villages, professional, dedicated and passionate care givers develop close relationships with the elderly residents and get to know their individual personalities, their likes and their dislikes. If any changes in behaviour such as withdrawal from activities or conversations are observed, it is immediately reported to senior staff so that the necessary swift action can be taken.

The Eden Alternative perfectly aligns with the organisation's philosophy that old age homes and care centres should not be sterile medical institutions but instead caring environments where residents want to live and where carers enjoy working. "We maintain the attitude that residents do not live in our workplace, we work in their homes," says Lynda.

"On-going Eden Alternative training is essential in keeping all our care staff up to date in dealing with the COVID-19 lockdown struggles," notes Lynda. "The care givers are very conscious of the effects that lockdown is having on our residents and their families, especially during levels five and four when no visitations or interaction was permitted. While helping to keep our residents and staff safe and healthy, this situation could result in feelings of isolation and depression and we maintained even higher vigilance of any behavioural changes or emotional states. During this time our staff ensured that residents were kept busy with lots of activities and they also pampered the elderly by washing their hair and giving manicures and hand massages."

"We completely understand how crucial interaction with loved ones is for all concerned so we encourage online or telephonic interaction with loved ones throughout the different lockdown levels. Our residents are amongst the most vulnerable when it comes to COVID-19 and therefore our care centres remain, to a large extent, in lockdown. We do however allow through the window family visitations under strict COVID-19 protocols. While the wearing of face masks and social distancing still prevent physical interaction and those all-important tight hugs, at least our residents are now able to engage face-to-face with their loved ones," concludes Lynda.

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