

Rehabilitation, Ageing and Independent Living (RAIL) Research Centre

Friends of RAIL eBulletin #6 – July 2024

Friends of RAIL are people in our community who may contribute to – or use – any of RAIL's research outputs across the areas of rehabilitation, ageing and/or independent living. Friends include consumer and community members, such as people with their own lived experience across the areas of rehabilitation, ageing and/or independent living, and their families and friends. To become a Friend of RAIL, email spahc.rail@monash.edu.

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A message from Aislinn
(RAIL Consumer and Community Engagement Lead)



Dr Aislinn Lalor

Welcome to another jam-packed eBulletin for our Friends of RAIL and we do hope that particularly with the colder weather, you might find a cosy spot to stay warm while having a good read of all that is included! There are some great tips throughout, including those from Grainne, and our usual Friend Spotlight, as well as some interesting

insights to the current programs and work being undertaken!

Remember, if you'd like to provide a Spotlight on yourself, or provide any feedback, we'd always love to hear it!

Stay warm and happy reading!

A message from Grainne
(Friends of RAIL Consumer and Community Representative)

Grainne Cruickshank

Welcome everyone to our 6th eBulletin! To our new members, my name is Grainne Cruickshank (pronounced Gron-ya) and I am the Friends of RAIL Consumer and Community Representative (or "Head Friend" as the RAIL staff refer to me!).

I received an email recently and was happily reminded of one of the last holidays I had with my husband Peter. The email was from [Coastcare Medical Equipment Hire and Sales](#); we used their branch in Mornington. Our holiday was to an accessible property in Blairgowrie, we were fortunate to have twelve days there in March, a beautiful month on the Mornington Peninsula. We were funded to have carers with us and luckily for most of our holidays, we were joined by family and friends who were also helping; the more the merrier was our motto!



We hired an electric bed with cot sides and a self-help pole for that holiday (over the years we had gathered most equipment). Three of us took a pressure mattress, shower commode, manual chair, and mobile hoist down with us the day before and set up the house. Travelling with someone with a severe disability involves some organisation and planning.

We had the most amazing holiday from eating at beautiful restaurants, cocktails on the beach, wine tasting at some of the great wineries, to shopping up a storm in the Main Street of Sorrento, and having feasts at home with visitors. Mornington Peninsula has a website where you can plan or make your own itinerary based on your interests.

We weren't to know that it would be Peter's last holiday but he had an absolutely amazing holiday and I have many wonderful memories to look back on.



Telling others about becoming a Friend of RAIL



Do you know someone who may like to become a 'Friend of RAIL'?

If so, please either:

- share [this link](#) with them to complete the registration survey

Or they can:

- email spahc.rail@monash.edu or,
- call 03 9904 4557 to speak to Karine about registering.

In addition to this Friends of RAIL eBulletin (distributed four times per year), RAIL also runs free networking events for our Friends and invites Friends to contribute to and/or collaborate on education and research activities.

RAIL Team member introduction



Hi everyone,

You may have noticed that RAIL is fortunate enough to have 2 Natasha's on staff! I'm Tash Layton, occupational therapist, not to be confused with our RAIL Director Tarsh Brusco, physiotherapist!

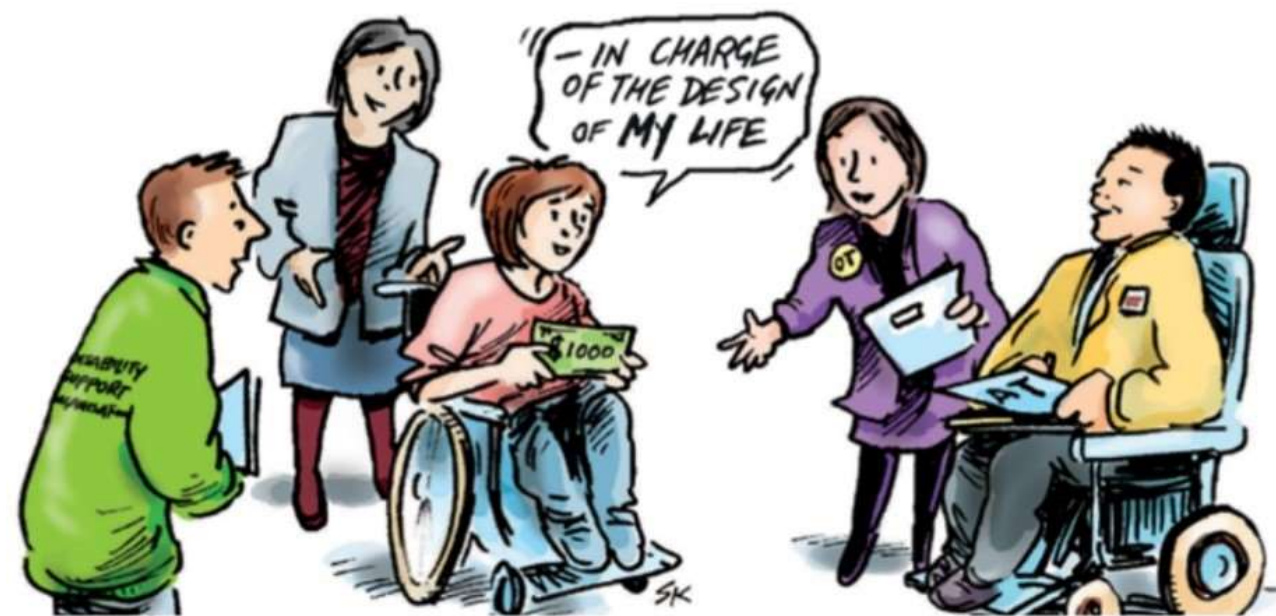
The picture here is of me in the Rift Valley in Kenya, learning about assistive products from the experts who use them.

Assistive technology (aids and equipment) is my favourite subject. I spent many years providing assistive technology to people as a practicing therapist, then providing information about assistive technology by working on an early version of the National Equipment Database (<https://askned.com.au/>).

I began to think more deeply about assistive technology and related supports, and about outcomes, through my Masters and PhD studies. Then I was fortunate enough to work in policy and advocacy for organisations like the Summer Foundation, COTA (Council on the Ageing), the Occupational Therapy Association, and the World Health Organisation.

These experiences taught me lots of different skills, and three important lessons, Firstly, to work 'with' and not 'on' people, for example through co-design and co-authorship. Secondly, to answer questions that matter to service users. Thirdly, to aim for research that has practical impacts.

I have found my research 'home' at RAIL Research Centre, Monash University, and I enjoy working on projects that explore 'what good looks like' from the perspective of people who use supports like assistive technology, and that help to build the evidence base to support better policy.



Spotlight on a Friend of RAIL

Stephen Peterson

After a career in the law and corporate public relations, plus nine years living in Japan, I stopped working in early 2014 and set about creating a new life for myself. Little did I then know what lay ahead, but fortunately, both by chance and proactive looking, a new life began taking shape, which I much enjoy.



A life now comprising two streams: my role as a volunteer, and as a consumer representative. In the former, I'm an Independent Prison Visitor with Corrections Victoria, a Community Visitor with the Office of Public Advocate, a visitor to aged care and Cabrini Hospital, a reader on Vision Australia's Radio 3RPH, and a tutor at U3A. I also occasionally undertake public speaking about Japan.

My 'career' as a consumer commenced initially at Safer Care Victoria (SCV), on committees considering issues related to older adults. I am still involved with SCV, but am a consumer with numerous other organisations, mostly also having a focus on older adults, but others too, including the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust.

As well during this period, and continuing, I have been privileged to be a Consumer Investigator on a number of projects through the Medical Research Future Fund, all of which relate to older adults, particularly falls. Among these activities, I am very pleased to be included as a Friend of RAIL.

The primary focus of my activities is social justice for people in a disadvantaged living environment, and improving the lives of older adults. But plenty of time also for morning coffees and lunches with friends.

If you would be happy to provide a Spotlight of yourself to be featured in upcoming Friends of RAIL ebulletins, please contact Karine via emailing spahc.rail@monash.edu or calling (03) 9904 4557.

Friends of RAIL 2024 online event – 1st July

On Monday 1st July, Friends of RAIL attended an online event with RAIL staff and Head Friend, Grainne. Led by Aislinn, Friends engaged in some brief live surveys regarding the initial themes (see image below) developed from the White Paper in-person Friends event in November 2023. Feedback regarding several themes was invaluable (alternate wording to aid understanding and clarification of terms used) and will be integrated to revise the present display of the themes across the RAIL streams of Ageing, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation. Over the next few weeks the RAIL team will meet to use feedback gathered from the session and finalise the White Paper that will be shared with Friends of RAIL. We thank participants who provided additional feedback regarding timing and what they would like from the next Friends event. Additional feedback from the online event will also guide the end of year Friends of RAIL in-person event at Peninsula campus (details to be advised).



Pet and People pilot program - to support healthy ageing

***If you would like to access an easy read version of this article, please contact us at spahc.rail@monash.edu ***

Monash University researcher, Dr Em Bould and their team are exploring the potential of using human-animal bonds in aged care to facilitate social connections between intergenerational and intercultural groups at risk of loneliness and social isolation.

The pilot of the Pets and People program has been funded through the Community Health and Hospitals Program Grant, via the [National Centre for Healthy Ageing](#) (NCHA). Two

aged care facilities in Melbourne are hosting a Pets and People group, and between 8 to 15 volunteers from two target groups (older Australians and international university students) are meeting for 1 hour each week. Pets and animals including a robotic [dog](#) and [cat](#) have formed a key focus, but there have been a range of other animal-assisted activities, including arts and crafts, jigsaws, animal bingo, and singing.



We look forward to seeing the final results of this important research and hope to offer the program to other aged care facilities and community services.

Top Tip from the RAIL team

Top Tips



Do you know about Carers Australia and state/territory specific Carers organisations?

[Carers Australia](#) is the national peak body representing Australia's unpaid carers, advocating on their behalf to influence policies and services at a national level.

States and Territories also have their Carers organisations which advocate for carers and provide a range of information and support. For most of these organisations including Carers Australia, you can register for free to receive their newsletters which contain helpful information for Carers and details of upcoming events. For more information on the Carers Organisations in a specific state/territory, please visit the following websites:

- Victoria: <https://www.carersvictoria.org.au/>
- Tasmania: <https://carerstas.org/>
- Western Australia: <https://www.carerswa.asn.au/>
- Queensland: <https://carersqld.com.au/>
- New South Wales: <https://www.carersnsw.org.au/>

- Northern Territory <https://www.carersnt.asn.au/>
- Australian Capital Territory: <https://www.carersact.org.au/>
- South Australia: <https://www.carerssa.com.au/>

If you have a top tip that would like to share with others, please feel free to contact us at spahc.rail@monash.edu.

Virtual Reality in Aged Care – a toolkit and creative

A team of researchers from Queensland and Victoria, led by Queensland University of Technology's Professor Evonne Miller, have explored the potential of VR – virtual reality – in aged care. Technology-based leisure activities, specifically immersive VR experiences, are one way to help make daily life in residential aged care more interesting. Through wearing special head-mounted displays, VR can enable participants to visit different countries and places (e.g., The Louvre or Eiffel Tower in Paris), surround themselves with animals or nature, go on adventures (hot air ballooning, bungee jumping), and engage in interactive games and favourite hobbies (table tennis, golf, bowling) and even virtually visit childhood homes and other significant locations. For residents, who may have significant mobility challenges and rarely leave their aged care residence, virtual experiences - especially during Covid-19 - have the potential to improve quality of life significantly.

To date, VR is not routinely offered in aged care – potentially because many aged care staff are not familiar with or comfortable using VR technologies. This study - funded by a philanthropic research grant from Facebook - addressed this knowledge gap, using creative methods (illustrations, digital stories, plays and photographs) to demystify the experience of using and deploying VR in aged care, and co-creating a VR implementation toolkit, which is freely available online:

<https://research.qut.edu.au/designlab/projects/transforming-aged-care-with-virtual-reality-vr/>



Figure: Example illustrations communicating best practices VR in aged care guidelines

As well as the free online resources, two academic publications outline the challenges of introducing VR into aged care as well as the process of creating a play on this experience:

- Miller, E., Wilding, R., Caldwell, G., Baker, S., Neve, B., & Waycott, J. (2023) Transforming aged care with virtual reality: How organisational culture impacts technology adoption and sustained uptake. *Australasian Journal on Ageing*.
- Lewis, C., Miller, E. & Pike, S. (2023). Writing research-based theatre on aged care: the ethnodrama, *After Aleppo*. *Culture and Organization*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2023.2216829>.

ABC article: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-03-15/immersive-reality-helps-aged-care-living-with-disability-travel/103585628>

ATscale thematic briefs on why assistive technology matters



Together, transforming lives through Assistive Technology



[ATscale, the Global Partnership for Assistive Technology is a 'cross-sector global partnership with a mission to transform people's lives through assistive technology.'](#)

[ATscale](#) has established a new series of briefs explaining why assistive technology matters for various sectors including healthy ageing and climate action.

To access their briefs, please visit: <https://atscalepartnership.org/why-assistive-technology-matters>

People with disability in Australia



The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has recently released a report titled *People with disability in Australia* bringing together information from a range of national data sources to contribute to a greater understanding of disability in Australia. To know more about it or download the report, please

visit: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/about>

Friend Contribution and Feedback

At RAIL, we are committed to conducting research that occurs with the community and would love to hear from you. If you would like to share a story related to your experience of rehabilitation, ageing, and independent living, be involved with RAIL research, share a top tip with Friends of RAIL, or provide any feedback that you may have on the format/content of the Friends eBulletin, please contact us at spahc.rail@monash.edu or call 03 9904 4557.

RAIL aims to provide an accessible ebulletin for all. Image descriptions are available for images appearing in the ebulletin, with the use of a screen reader. If you have any issues with accessing any part of the ebulletin, please let us know at spahc.rail@monash.edu.

We acknowledge and pay respects to the Elders and Traditional Owners of the land on which our four Australian campuses stand. Information for [Indigenous Australians](#)

We're committed to [diversity and inclusion](#)

<https://www.monash.edu/medicine/spahc/rail/>

Our mailing address is:

spahc.rail@monash.edu

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