

## **‘The Letterbox Project’ brings connection to older Australians still in isolation during COVID-19**

A new letter writing initiative is poised to bring meaningful connection to thousands of older Australians who are feeling lonely or isolated during COVID-19, connecting them with a network of over 3,000 letter writers, including families and school groups, wishing to send a little joy to older Australians through these tough times.

Connected AU’s Letterbox Project seeks to engage with older Australians who have been excluded from their usual social networks during COVID-19. Connected AU and Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia are calling on members of the community to register older family members, friends or neighbours who would like to receive a small gesture of kindness in the form of a letter.

COTA Chief Executive, Ian Yates, said the Letterbox Project is an important initiative at a time when the rest of the nation is beginning to open up, but restrictions will remain on visits in aged care homes for some time, and advice to older Australians is to be cautious and largely remain at home.

“Meaningful social connection is central to everyone’s health and wellbeing, including older Australians,” said Mr Yates. “But older Australians living alone and those in aged care homes can often feel isolated at the best of times, let alone in the midst of a pandemic where they are encouraged to avoid company for their own safety.

“Council on the Ageing Australia is proud to support this grassroots initiative that helps build a connections in the community. We encourage everyone who knows an older person who may be feeling isolated, like those living alone or in aged care, to nominate them to receive a letter by visiting Connected AU’s website. For those who are not digitally connected they can contact COTA on **1300 COTA AU (1300 26 82 28)** and we’ll help them register.”

Mea Campbell, founder of Connected AU, said public support for the Letterbox Project has been overwhelming so far.

“In times like this, receiving a letter from someone you’ve never met who is thinking of you and wishes to bring you joy is a wonderful feeling for anyone,” said Ms Campbell. “It’s a sense of connection that is unique to letter writing, and it gives visibility and value to the recipient.”

“I created this project in memory of my late grandfather. My thoughts during the initial stages of Covid-19 were of him, and of how distressing he would have found this experience; 95 years of age, living alone, no capacity to engage with technology. I realised there are so many other people in that experience and it led me to create The Letterbox Project, and then Connected AU.”

“The project resonates with so many people and organisations, the idea that those of us who are lucky to be healthy, and surrounded, can gift our time to someone whose experience might be more challenging”

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To register someone to receive a Letter from the Letterbox Project – go to <https://www.connectedau.com.au/the-letterbox>

For assistance in registering, contact COTA Australia on 1300 COTA AU (1300 26 82 28).