

18 May 2021

INCREDIBLE NEWCASTLE CANCER SURVIVOR & CHARITY WORKER ACKNOWLEDGED FOR COMMITMENT TO OTHERS THIS VOLUNTEER WEEK

Three time cancer survivor, Sue Clark-Pitrolo, has been recognised this Volunteer Week for her outstanding commitment to helping rewrite the future of people in the Hunter, awarded the prestigious annual Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation Chairman's Medal.

"I am delighted to bestow the Charitable Foundation's Chairman's Medal on Sue Clark-Pitrolo for her work to create the Kaden Centre in the Hunter. Thanks to her vision and determination, her purpose-built exercise oncology centre has so far helped over 800 cancer patients throughout their treatment journey," said Jennifer Leslie, Chair of Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation.

Established by the Charitable Foundation in 2017 to honour the late Michael Slater, who was both Chairman of Newcastle Permanent Building Society and Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation for almost 10 years as well as a prolific volunteer for more than 50 years, the prestigious Medal acknowledges the contribution of an outstanding individual volunteer to their organisation's work.

"It is such a huge honour to receive this medal. When I was told I started to cry," Sue shared on receiving the news she was awarded the accolade for the creation of the Kaden Centre.

An environmental scientist, Sue was inspired to start the unique facility in Newcastle in 2018 after realising how important exercise and movement was to her own cancer treatment recovery.

"Whether you're in cancer treatment or in survivorship, going from being active to not at all can lead to massive muscle atrophy. For me, it got to the point where I couldn't stand up from a chair," Sue recalls.

"The saying 'if you don't use it you'll lose it' is really true when it comes to cancer. But with exercise oncology like that which we provide at the Kaden Centre, allied health professionals design individualised exercise sessions around your cancer, to help you stay in the best physical condition you can, rather than you going down into the depths of disability."

When established, the Kaden Centre was seeing 30 oncology patients a week. Now that figure is around 370 a week, with the Centre having helped keep over 800 clients undergoing cancer treatment active at its Warrabrook centre and through COVID, via home-based programs.

"We now have over 50 specialists referring here – oncologists, surgeons, anaesthetists. We also have over 300 GPs referring to us. This is going from exercise oncology being a complete unknown in 2017, to the Kaden Centre being an integral part of cancer care in Newcastle and the Hunter in 2021. So I'm pretty proud of that," Sue said.

Sue says key to the Kaden Centre's growth has been the generous support from the community, including that of the Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation which has given more than \$111,000 to the charity to fund at home programs, a studio area, additional exercise equipment and a new kitchen for clients to use.

Sue says the Kaden Centre has evolved to be its own community of sorts, supporting clients generate not just physical strength but emotional strength too.

"You can literally walk in the door and take your wig off – many do!" she laughs. "It's a safe, happy space. It's not a hospital. We don't call you a 'patient'. And talking to other people with cancer means you don't have to protect anyone, like you might with family. I had a lady the other day who's been through cancer twice and she said the difference this time is she has the Kaden Centre. 'Last time I had cancer I was planning my funeral,' she said to me, 'and this time I'm living'," Sue shared.

With the Kaden Centre now firmly established in the Newcastle region, the Charitable Foundation Chairman's Medal recipient has no plans on stepping back her volunteer work yet.

"My vision is that every person diagnosed with cancer in Australia, or who has a chronic condition, has access to a Kaden Centre exercise programme. Whether that is via a shopfront or accessing the remote program elsewhere in Australia, everyone who is diagnosed with cancer deserves to be offered exercise oncology," Sue said.

"Your mental health improves instantly. It's one of the first things we see. I also know that exercise oncology empowers people in their own wellness journey, it gives you something to do. And it really can make a difference."

Sue will be presented the Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation Chairman's Medal by Chair, Jennifer Leslie, at next week's Grant Ceremony.

"The Charitable Foundation sees daily through its work that the region is blessed with some amazing volunteers and charities and Sue Clark-Pitrolo is certainly at the top of this list. Sue is an amazing testament to the care and support volunteers offer local communities and is a truly fitting recipient of the Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation's Chairman's Medal this National Volunteer Week," Jennifer added.

Media Interviews

Please contact Kristie Carter, 0409 654 107 or kristie.carter@newcastlepermanent.com.au, for additional interviews or radio grabs with the Kaden Centre's Sue Clark-Pitrolo or Charitable Foundation Chair, Jennifer Leslie.