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MEDIA RELEASE

Benetas brings a family back together

The idea of being separated from family and loved ones for years, let alone decades, is unimaginable to most people. But for 74-year-old local Werribee resident Margaret King it was reality until a recent family reunion.

“I hadn’t seen my brothers and sisters for over 40 years,” Margaret says.

Margaret and nine of her ten siblings were born with Fragile X Syndrome, an inherited condition. The syndrome ranges from learning disabilities to more severe cognitive or intellectual disabilities.

When their mother passed away in the early 1940’s and their father was unable to care for them on his own, the ten siblings were separated. The six boys went to live in orphanages and Margaret and her sisters were sent to convents.

Six decades have now passed. As well as living with Fragile X Syndrome, Margaret has had several strokes over the years. She lives in Werribee, receiving support from not-for-profit aged care provider Benetas through a community care package to live at home. Her daughter, Kathy, also provides support to her mother so she can live independently.

After so many years apart from her family, Margaret was understandably thrilled when her nephew called in February and said he was organising a family reunion in New South Wales for the six siblings who are still alive.

Kathy, Margaret’s daughter, said at the time she thought there was no way they could organise it or make it interstate for the reunion.

“I looked at the price of airfares to Newcastle and I couldn’t afford it... Mum couldn’t afford it,” Kathy says. “We really thought there was no way we could get there.”

Then Rachel, Margaret’s care manager at Benetas, called Kathy and told them about the Benetas Quality of Life Fund. This special fund provides a one-off gift to Benetas clients, allowing them to achieve something special in their life that they would otherwise not be able to afford to do. Rachel encouraged Kathy to apply for a grant so Margaret could travel to Newcastle for the family reunion.

“I told Mum about the Quality of Life Fund and she sat there stunned,” Kathy explains. “We got straight on the phone and made an application for support to make the trip to Newcastle – we were thrilled when we found out we were successful!”

With the support of Benetas, Kathy and Margaret organised the trip and were able to travel from Margaret’s home in Werribee to Newcastle for three days for the family reunion.

“Mum couldn’t fly because of her heart so I organise the trip by train – it was a 12 hour journey all up. We stayed in a cabin, close to her nephew’s house, and spent a couple of days with the whole family.” Kathy says.

Margaret says being reunited with her family after so many decades apart was just beautiful. "There were lots of tears," she says.

"It was like a dream," Margaret recalls. "I kept thinking I'd wake up and it wasn't really happening, But in reality it was true. The more I think about it, the more grateful I am. If we hadn't had the help from Benetas we wouldn't have been able to do it."

The Benetas Quality of Life Fund is only possible with the ongoing support and generosity of donors. Margaret's story is the focus of Benetas' state-wide Winter 2010 Appeal.

To make a donation visit www.benetas.com.au or contact 03 8823 7958.

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Benetas is a not-for-profit organisation, founded by the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne in 1948. Benetas provides quality aged care services for more than 2,000 older Victorians within its 12 residential care facilities and through its extensive community care programs that enable older people to stay at home with support. Benetas is also one of the leading providers of dedicated day and overnight respite services in Victoria.