

# Healing powers of laughter

ABOUT 2 YEARS AGO

Aged care residents across Melbourne are reaping the health benefits of Laughter Yoga trials being run by La Trobe University academics Dr Julie Ellis and Ros Ben-Moshe.



**PHOTO:** Melbourne aged care residents, Phyllis, left, and Rose, have a giggle as part of the trials. (Source: La Trobe University)

Participants are guided through simulated laughter exercises, all of which naturally prompt laughing, such as the ‘greeting laugh’ where people shake hands whilst laughing, or the ‘tapping the body awake’ laugh, where participants gently tap their arms and legs whilst simultaneously laughing.

Senior lecturer in aged care nursing at La Trobe, Dr Julie Ellis, says: “These simple things often set off a chain of hilarity which is hugely cathartic for a

group. We know laughter has health benefits like reducing stress and boosting immunity. We wanted to see how a community of older aged care residents would respond.”

After several months of laughter yoga sessions, data has been collected and the results have been overwhelmingly positive – with improved mood and happiness scores noted post class and slight drops in blood pressure.

Laughter therapist, Ros Ben-Moshe, who also teaches in the Department of Community Health, says meeting as a group also increases residents’ sense of community and can foster friendships and social engagement.

About 90 lifestyle staff responsible for extra-curricular activities at Aged Care Services Australia Group (ACSAG) aged care facilities have also been trained to run the workshops.

The trial sessions ran for half an hour with groups of about 12 people once a week for six weeks.

Working with ACSAG, Dr Ellis and her team are hoping to get funding to continue and expand their Laughter Yoga program in residential aged care homes across Victoria and the wider community

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