

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

HANSARD

Tuesday 4 November 2025

The President, **Mr Farrell**, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

[excerpt...]

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS

[11.25 a.m.]

Mr PRESIDENT - Before I call on Special Interest Matters, I welcome the second group from Sacred Heart College who are joining us in the Chamber today. We're currently going through our formal business before we go into Special Interest Matters and then we will go on with some other business. It's been a little while since we've been in here, so we've got a lot of things to catch up on. I know that all members will join me in welcoming you to the parliament and thanking you for taking great interest in the democratic processes of this state.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr PRESIDENT - Special Interest time: our first member to contribute will be the honourable member for Nelson, who has some guests that I'd also like to welcome to the Chamber today that have been sitting very patiently as we went through all the bits and pieces. I'd like to welcome Brigid Wilkinson, CEO of Council on the Ageing Tasmania (COTA), who is probably well known to us all.

Rosary Gardens residents: Ann and Frank; Liz McDermott, a teacher; students: Vladimir Kelly, Harvey Pyefinch, Liam Haynes, Daisy Barnes, Sophie Skeggs and Jasmine Williams. To tell us why they're here, the honourable member for Nelson.

SPECIAL INTEREST MATTERS

Generations Connect: Tech Together Program

[11.26 a.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, it is such a pleasure to rise today to speak about a program in our community that is utterly delightful and genuinely life-changing: COTA's Generations Connect: Tech Together Program.

Most of us here will be familiar with the challenges we face when seeking to foster social cohesion, respect, and inclusion in our community. For some, the key challenge is ensuring they don't fade into invisibility, or not be left behind, disconnected and alienated from participating in the community.

We know technology and technological advances can be a double-edged sword in this way. It can foster immediate and greater connection for some, while entrenching a sense of isolation and disconnect for others. The digital divide is of particular concern for many older Tasmanians, and that is where we see the brilliance of this groundbreaking, intergenerational digital inclusion initiative called Generations to Connect: Tech Together.

This inspirational program is led by Council on the Ageing, known to many as COTA, and that brings together young people and older Tasmanians in a unique, intergenerational learning environment. During the annual Seniors Week last month, I had the pleasure of attending the launch of a locally-made film showcasing the life-changing impact of this inspirational and innovative program. I attended along with COTA Tasmania patron, Governor, Her Excellency the Honourable Barbara Baker AC; the State Minister for Ageing, the Honourable Bridget Archer MP; as well as an audience of young people, older Tasmanians, family, friends, and community members.

There was so much affection and humour in the room. I know we were all extremely impressed by the genuine engagement, interest, warmth, and caring demonstrated by all participants, young and not so young. In an increasingly digital world, access to technology is essential for staying connected, informed and independent. This innovative program seeks to address the digital divide while simultaneously tackling social isolation, ensuring that both younger and older generations feel valued, capable, and connected.

It does this in structured weekly sessions over an eight-to-ten-week period in residential aged care homes or community venues where students, who take on the role of digital mentors, meet one to one with older adults to explore digital devices, apps, and online tools in a supportive, patient and social setting. These young digital mentors include those from secondary school, college, university and home school students.

Together they meet weekly with older Tasmanians living in residential aged care homes to learn, laugh, and share skills that improve digital confidence, well-being, and intergenerational understanding. They also do a range of other enjoyable activities together to build understanding and relationships among the group. Certainly, in the film, the enjoyment factor that was there in these interactions shone through. In term 3 this year alone, 120-plus young digital mentors trained in the south of the state, with programs running in multiple residential aged care homes. The impact of those three months is already having a positive ripple effect. Residents experienced increased confidence and independence with technology and a sense of achievement in learning new skills.

Crucially, the program reduces isolation through digital communication with friends and family, while also providing invaluable enjoyment and stimulation from the intergenerational connection. The young digital mentors learn practical teaching, volunteering and mentoring experience while growing in empathy, patience, leadership and communication skills. In fact, the program can even open up career paths for the young people involved, with at least one participant recently taking up, I believe, a traineeship at one of the residential facilities, an option that she perhaps had not previously considered prior to participating in the program.

The broader community also benefits from this shared understanding of ageing, resilience and community, particularly in the forging of stronger intergenerational bonds which help break down stereotypes about age, whichever end of Father Time's calendar you currently sit on. I recommend honourable members check out the film about this program if they haven't already, available on COTA's YouTube platform, and explore the program which may benefit many in our respective communities.

The heartwarming film demonstrates that learning is cross-generational. Students assisted in very practical ways to reconnect residents with loved ones via text, video calls or emails. In turn, students gained adoptive grandparents, if you will, who shared wisdom, stories and encouragement. I hope that this transformative program continues to grow as COTA rolls

out further programs over the next 12 months. I particularly hope to see the initial two-year funding of the program continued and expanded. It's clearly demonstrating vast benefits.

To close, I wish to congratulate COTA and all involved in delivering such a life-changing program as generations connect tech together. I specifically wish to congratulate COTA CEO, Brigid Wilkinson, who's in the Chamber today, along with Rosary Gardens residents: Frank - I believe Ann was to be here, but perhaps she's not available today after all. We send our wishes to Ann as well. Also, Liz McDermott, a key inspirational teacher supporting the program, and participating young digital mentors who are here with us today, including Vladimir Kelly, Harvey Pyefinch, Liam Haynes, Daisy Barnes, Sophie Skeggs, and Jasmine Williams.

A big shout-out, as well, to the program coordinator, Mel Knuckey, who unfortunately could not be here today, because she's out busy on location delivering the program.

Generations Connect: Tech Together is more than just a digital literacy program; it's a movement that builds bridges across generations. It reminds us that when young and old come together, everyone learns, everyone grows, lifelong friendships form and our communities become stronger, resilient and more compassionate. I know everyone here will join me in congratulating all those who brought this beautiful program to life in our community.

[end of excerpt]