

Introduction

Australia's population is rapidly aging. Over the next four decades, the number of people aged over 85 will quadruple to around 1.6 million (Australian Government Productivity Commission). As a consequence, the challenge of meeting the needs of this growing number of elderly people must become one of the nation's greatest priorities (Grant Thornton Aged Care Survey, 2008). Whilst many Australians prefer to remain in their own homes as long as possible, supported by community care programs, there are others who are seeking alternative accommodation outside of this. Elderly people when considering alternative accommodation to their own homes, look for a place where they can have privacy, maintain their dignity and receive comprehensive care. This is one of the major influences driving the delivery of aged care accommodation being provided in the industry today (Grant Thornton Aged Care Survey, 2008).

This paper will discuss the challenges of being a Facilities Manager in the Aged Care sector. Its content is drawn from my experience as the Property Manager at the Royal Freemasons Homes of Victoria (RFHV), current research and writing in the area, discussions with colleagues from other similar organizations, discussions with colleagues at the RFHV as well as discussions with some of our residents. It is a subjective view to a large extent, with the prime purpose of the paper being to profile a Facilities Manager practicing in the Aged Care environment. Whilst many of the tasks and experiences are similar to other facilities management environments there are some elements that make this industry unique, specifically our clients are elderly, many stay with us for a considerable amount of time and they call our properties home.

The Challenges

To create a scene that is reflective of managing facilities in aged care it is probably useful to profile, my organization, the RFHV. The organization was founded in 1867 on a crown grant of land (now 45 Moubay Street, Melbourne) to Trustees, the RFHV was one of Victoria's first deliverers of aged Care and today provides accommodation for over 900 residents and clients daily. This number is spread through both community programs and a residential network of quality independent units, hostels and nursing homes (www.freemasons.net.au). This profile of services can be found in other similar organizations particularly those in the not for profit sector of Aged Care.

When conferring with my peers i.e. other Facilities Managers, mostly from the not-for profit sector in Aged Care, the major challenges that we agreed we all had to deal with in some way are:

- The emergence of the Property Branch
- The managing of a diverse range of properties,
- The regulatory compliance in residential care, and
- New accommodation trends

The Property Branch

It is interesting to note that in our Aged Care organizations, I and most of my peers have position titles with the word Property rather than Facilities as the descriptor. This is because in our industry the position title Facilities Manager is often interchanged with the title Director of Nursing. It is not unusual for example to see a position advertised as Facilities Manager to find that in fact the position is calling for a Division 1 Nurse to manage a residential nursing home. Many agreed that it is only relatively recently that the Property Branch has emerged and found strength as a business unit in its own right within their organisations. Prior to this, the responsibility for the facilities management requirements, including those related to essential services, was often that of the Director of Nursing. This resulted in staff who were trained to be responsible for care services being also responsible for building and maintenance issues. These people had little or no facilities management experience and relied heavily on contractors and suppliers for advice. Occasionally there would be a maintenance person who would often with the support of volunteers and 'handymen' perform daily maintenance tasks. These people still exist in some of our organisations, but the supervision of these maintenance people has usually passed to the facilities management experts, much to the relief of the Directors of Nursing who can then concentrate on providing care to the residents.

However whilst this move to established Property Branches is seen as a positive move for all it has had its challenges. Caring for our residents would have been the priority of the Nursing Managers, this is what we would expect, but without wanting to sound too critical, this meant that the property issues often became the poor relation. There has had to be a significant turnaround in the way we do things, much of this driven by the increasing regulatory requirements imposed by the Department of Health and Aging as well as those associated with the Building Code and Occupational Health and Safety requirements.

In my own workplace shifting functions away from volunteers and handymen and giving them to suitably qualified contractors was a tussle. Many of the people involved had been working in our facilities for long lengths of time, were dedicated, loyal and committed and suddenly they felt as if they were no longer valued. Many of them were themselves quite elderly. My discussing OH&S requirements particularly those pertaining to working at heights and hot work and the need to have, by law, qualified electricians and plumbers and other service providers working in our facilities caused considerable angst for quite a few. This included the care staff who were loyal to these people they had been so dependent on. Whilst I needed to recognize the contribution these people had been making they could not continue to do what they had been doing in the past. In the end by limiting the people that our volunteers and handymen take instructions from to one or two key managers and ensuring that the tasks they undertake are low risk e.g. hanging pictures, changing a light globe, we have managed to retain these people in the organization and they do continue to make a valuable contribution. In the not for profit sector where there are Church groups involved or in the RFHV many of the volunteers come from within those fraternities and as such are a very important part

of the culture of our organizations. We must acknowledge this history but manage it so that everyone who resides works in or visits our sites are safe at all times.

Similarly there were issues with how external contractors and providers were engaged. Many of these types of arrangements were based on good will and actually worked very well but this in itself became the problem. In the process of making these arrangements more rigorous including introducing formal service level agreements, we were met with some resistance. Some of these contractors and providers felt that they had given good service for a number of years and did not see why they had to enter into a formal agreement. These contractors no longer work for us. We insist on seeing the company's documented OH&S policy and procedures; one of my contractors did not have this in place but was actually grateful that this forced him to do something that he should arranged long ago. We retained him. Performance of contractors is now monitored and annual performance meetings are held with all. The issue we had was not so much about the work not being done, after all in my organization we were accredited and the sites were functioning quite well but we needed to be in a position where we were absolutely certain that all the maintenance and preventative maintenance was being done and we had to be in a position to prove it. In my organization we have an electronic system that emails our contractors when work is due, they then email back a report that says the work is done. The system produces reports that show what is outstanding and this gives an opportunity to send an immediate reminder to contractors. Essential Services folders are updated manually at every site as well. This has taken some of our contractors a bit of getting used to but after running this for 12 months we are now producing reports showing no outstanding tasks. This of course will not be new to many of you but feedback would suggest that in the Aged Care industry this is a new concept. During a recent accreditation process, assessors made the comment that this sort of formal process is the exception rather than the rule in the industry.

In spite of the recent emergence of the Property/Facilities Division it is pleasing to observe that amongst the members of the Property Managers Forum run by Aged and Community Care Victoria (ACCV) there are a number of people who are members of the Executive team in their organizations. In my organization I am part of the senior management team and am responsible not only for the management of the operational facilities tasks associated with the running of our business but I am also very much a part of the project team having input into the design and construction of our new buildings.

Diverse Properties

Independent Living Units

Independent Living Units (ILU) provide retired people with comfortable, low maintenance accommodation which is adapted to the requirements of the elderly. Residents are secure, can live independently, can choose a very private lifestyle or enjoy the benefits of the friendship and support that the community offers (www.freemasons.net.au). At the RFHV we provide an in-house 24/7 maintenance service and manage all preventative maintenance. We also make capital improvements were necessary and in the last few years have extensively renovated kitchens and

bathrooms making them much more compatible with the needs of our elderly clients. The majority of the residents who choose our accommodation do so in the main because it is in close proximity to where they were currently living and/or close to family and friends. Most of our Independent residents also have the assurance that when they need extra care in their homes or need to move to residential care this transition will be managed for them.

Our Independent Living Units are made up of one and two bedroom free standing villa units mostly built in the 1980s and one bedroom flats in blocks of eight (four upstairs and four downstairs). There are five sites in inner Melbourne and five regional sites. They are very traditional sites in that they reflect the older model of a retirement village; a number of units, with car parking, often an individual garden plot, some outside storage and in some cases a central Community Centre which provides a place for residents to meet and interact. Some sites have a Residents Committee and these can be very active, arranging everything from afternoon teas to trips away and always a Christmas Party! Whilst our the Independent Living Units are not always reflective of the current trend for retiree apartment living they are still proving attractive especially as our city sites are located in inner city areas, close to amenities and public transport whilst our country sites are in the larger regional centres, again close to shops and public transport.

Many organizations with aging ILU stock are now making long-term decisions about the viability of their properties. Older buildings as we know need more maintenance and as their age increases so does the funding needed to maintain them. Some properties, such as those with internal staircases to the second floor and no option for the installation of lifts, or ones with shared laundry facilities are becoming less attractive to the market. The Property Manager is tasked with maintaining these units at a level which current residents are used to whilst decisions about their future of the property are made. Whilst we may not plan for any significant refurbishment of the less viable sites we ensure that the elements involved in the external presentation of our properties, including the garden, are well maintained. Inside we make sure that all furniture and fittings are in good working order and these are replaced as required. We would also modify the units as much as possible to meet the changing needs of our clients as they age. The conflict and the challenge for the Property Manager is to deliver a property that the resident continues to be proud to call home being mindful that the possibility of undertaking any significant work, which would enhance the unit's presentation even more, is not possible. I should note here that if a decision is made to sell a site or refurbish significantly then the existing residents are always relocated.

Residential Care

As stated in the introduction people moving into residential, or nursing home care, have as their key criteria a high level of care, a single bedroom and extensive services and amenities (Kane & Kane). AT RFHV we are in the fortunate position that all of our Nursing Homes have been built or extensively refurbished in the last decade or so and we have very few rooms where residents, and only ever two, have to share amenities.

Within our residential care facilities at the very least we have resident rooms with separate bathrooms, staff amenities, a commercial kitchen, a commercial laundry, lounge rooms, dining rooms, meeting rooms a reception area and general office space. Many of these areas have a number of uses so the dining room, lounges and meeting rooms in particular have to be as flexible as possible. These facilities are a hive of action with all sorts of lifestyle, allied health and other such activities taking place. Our kitchens prepare all meals on site and our laundries provide a full service to our residents. It is tantamount to a number of small businesses running simultaneously under the one roof.

The external surroundings of our residential facilities have substantial garden areas; we pride ourselves on creating an ambient environment for our residents, car-parking and the usual spaces associated with plant rooms and industrial waste bins.

Residential facilities that cater for dementia specific residents have the added requirement of being secured at all times. It is important that this is as unobtrusive as possible keeping regard for the dignity of these residents.

Community Care Centres/Offices

Many of our clients are cared for in their own homes. Staff travel from a central site to residences within their area providing a number of support services. Whilst the Property Branch can be called on from time to time to provide advice about modifications to a client's residence it is the spaces that we provide for staff that can prove more problematic. When I set out to find new leased accommodation in the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne for one of these centres, I had to find a landlord that was affable about allowing us set up a fully equipped, albeit domestic, laundry in the office space as this is a service we often need to provide for our clients. Our clients also access services within our offices. They come for social gatherings such as art classes or just to meet with their care managers. Many of the office spaces did not allow access for elderly residents with walking aids or mobile scooters or parking for the latter, nor were there many with suitable access to toilets for people with mobility challenges. We also need large storage areas for cleaning equipment and consumables. This includes an area for the chemicals used in our work. Car-parking as our staff drive to see their clients. The brief is substantial. Whilst we found a suitable site and a landlord that agreed to our needs we had to make substantial modifications to the space and will have to make more to make-good when we vacate.

Regulatory Compliance in Residential Aged Care

To receive government funding residential aged care homes must be accredited. Accreditation is the arrangement established by the Australian government to verify that a residential care home provides quality care and services for residents. The body appointed by the government to ensure this happens is the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Industry. Accreditation is granted for a period of three years. Towards the end of each three year period the care facility must apply to renew its accreditation. There are four standards, and under these four standards 44 outcomes.

Under each of these outcomes we must provide evidence of compliance. The four standards are,

1. Management Systems, staffing and organizational development
2. Health and personal care
3. Resident Lifestyle
4. Physical environment and safe systems

It is within the fourth standard that most of the responsibilities of the Property Manager lie. Assessors are particularly vigilant about and seek evidence that all the preventative maintenance works associated with essential service measures and our building certification are undertaken when they should be and that all are up to date. They are particularly concerned about our compliance with fire and emergency procedures. Evidence of security measures is also high on the agenda and we have to demonstrate how we maintain our systems to ensure that our residents are not compromised in this regard. As well as the physical infrastructure it is mandatory for all contractors to have current police checks and at the RFHV all our contractors are signed to formal agreements. These agreements include a Code of Conduct for external providers and we monitor compliance against this. Before commencement of work contractors must present evidence of insurance cover, company registration and a comprehensive OH&S policy.

Added to this is what the Agency describes as Support Visits. These take place at least once a year, over the life of the Accreditation period. These visits can be announced, in that we are notified of the visit, or they can be unannounced where Agency assessor comes to site without notice. During these visits, Assessors can ask for evidence of compliance against any of the outcomes under the four standards. This creates the need for the Property Manager to be vigilant about the maintenance of essential services reports and to be constantly monitoring workflow to make sure that all tasks associated with achieving compliance are being undertaken when they should be. Sometimes the visits are the result of a question from or complaint made to the Agency by a resident's family. One recently involved the temperature of the water in the shower. I had to go to great lengths to prove that the contractor maintaining the temperature via thermostatic mixing valve knew what temperature the water had to be. It ended up with the Agency recommending that a copy of the relevant Australian Standard become a part of the contract documentation given to and signed by the contractor involved. Incidentally the water in question was the right temperature (43°C, the standard being between 41°C and 45°C).

At the RFHV we are very proud to say that we have recently had three of our residential sites go through the process of re-accreditation and we met compliance in all 44 outcomes associated with the 4 standards. The process however is one of the most

intense types of audit that I have ever been involved in and the visits from the Agency always cause a minor ripple through the sites when they occur!

Refurbishment and Redevelopment of Existing Properties

Routine maintenance tasks, either in our Independent Units or in our Residential Care facilities are not difficult to manage but complex maintenance or major refurbishment where the residents' daily routine is disturbed requires careful planning. Whilst we need to maintain the value of our assets, we also need to manage very carefully the disruption to our residents' lives whilst we do this. The most important thing, as it is in all facilities management environments, is communication with all those involved.

Take for example a current project involving the renovation of 24 bathrooms at an Independent Living Unit site. For the residents this work is very intrusive. Strangers coming into their homes uninvited, their bathrooms being inaccessible for a lengthy time, the worry about whether they will have a toilet available during the work, whether the work will be done when they are home or when they are not at home; all sorts of things become issues of great concern for them. Some do not want to be disturbed at all, are happy with what they have and are adamant that the change is unwarranted. It is just as important to take all these concerns on board and give them as much attention, possibly more, as we give to managing the actual work taking place. This takes time but in the long run it is time well spent. Many resident meetings were held to explain what we wanted to do, how we were going to do it and what the impact would be on them. We needed to give the residents an opportunity to discuss the process with us, time to get used to the idea and make arrangements to cope with this disturbance to their lives. Whilst you may be thinking that the simple solution would be for them to leave their unit for the day or so while the work is being done, often the residents do not have a source of alternative accommodation available to them. Some will use the amenities of another resident on site but again some of our residents value their privacy enough not to be comfortable with this option.

Then there is the management of the contractor. The scheduling of the work is heavily influenced by the needs of the residents. The brief in this project was that the work required was carried out to two bathrooms at a time. This work being completed before two more commenced. This remained the program until all works were complete. The contractor had to commit to coming to site and staying until work was complete. This decreases the time that each resident is inconvenienced especially as only two residents are disturbed at any one time. Deviation to the plan especially at short notice would have caused distress to our residents so we work to avoid any changes to set plans as much as possible.

New Accommodation

New Independent Living

Last year the RFHV commenced the redevelopment of what was known as Princes Hill Village. The building renamed Redmond Park is due for completion later this year. This iconic building, a significant example of Functionalist architecture, is located on the fringe of the Melbourne CBD, in Carlton North. The redevelopment entails moving from

cramped bed-sit and one bedroom flats into new premium apartment style retirement accommodation. As well as having 18 one bedroom units, 33 two bedroom units and 14 three bedroom units, the development will also result in the addition of two new floors for penthouse living. Although the units are restricted to retired or semi-retired people over 55, most of those moving into this building are at least 20-30 years older. We found again that security and safety are foremost in the mind of our clients and have allowed for round the clock staffing to be available. We are also committed to catering for those residents in need of support services as they grow older. Whilst the apartments are very self-contained and residents can live quite independently of each other if they wish the development will also have a restaurant, a gymnasium, a private dining area for entertaining, lounges, shops including a hairdresser, rooms for health visitors and even a workshop for those residents still with a notion for a bit of DIY! (www.redmondpark.com.au). This elegant and stylish development is a first for my organization, as is the sales program attached to it, so as this building undergoes enormous change to meet market need so too does the organization. Mike Bosel, Group Operations Manager for FKP Property Group's retirement division summed up the current market succinctly and explains why organizations in this sector are moving towards this class of accommodation,

“We are aging as a population, we're living longer, and we're more active and health conscious. What is important now is a provision of a lifestyle. We can build and operate the (retirement) villages but we have to provide a way of life” (FMA Online Issue 12, 2007).

During the design phase and now during the construction phase of this building I have been actively involved in meetings and discussions regarding this project. It is pleasing not only to have this level of recognition for my position but to be able to have input and provide feedback about decisions and how they may impact on the future maintenance of the building.

New Residential Living

The RFHV is also about to transform its site at Moubay Street in Melbourne. A new aged care facility is to be built to replace the current hostel. The new building will provide us with a 138 bed comprising of low care, high care, transition care, dementia and respite care places. This 4 storey building will also accommodate our corporate offices and a day therapy centre on the top level. Again in response to the growing demands of the market we are creating a, that turns its back on the institutional-style nursing homes of the past. This building will have shops, cafes, a hairdresser, professional suites and many other features that will well cater for the needs of our residents. Again having involvement in this project from the initial stages has afforded me the opportunity to not only have some influence in the design phase but also to understand more fully the rationale behind the design, not only from the perspective of our residents but also those who will be working within it.

Writing this paper has afforded me the opportunity to journey through what has been for me a very new and quite different experience. Having spent the last 10 years or so working predominately in the management of facilities functions associated with Corporate Office space I found myself at the bottom of what is still a large well of learning. Aged Care is about caring and it is this predominant force that drives all we do. At the same time however we have to conform to some of the most stringent regulatory compliance that I have ever had to work with. The theme that continually comes to the fore for me, when reflecting back on the content of the paper, is the need to grow and continue to provide the services required to maintain properties that are attractive, safe, and secure and ones that our residents are proud to call home but at the same time balancing this with business planning and as already stated the formal compliance. It is a unique experience being part of a business that impacts so much on the personal lives of others, others who are elderly, relying on you and trusting you when you impose into their homes and their lives.

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