

Sign up for care army

JESSICA MARSZALEK

AN army of volunteers and professionals will be deployed to protect the state's senior citizens from the coronavirus pandemic, with new recruits urged to join up now.

Dubbed the 'Care Army', Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk will launch the major community endeavour today to guard the health of one million seniors who have been asked to stay home to stay safe.

"Queensland's community spirit always shines through in times of crisis, as it did when the Mud Army went into action after the 2011 floods," Ms

Palaszczuk said.

"The Care Army may operate differently because of health and safety restrictions, but the spirit and effect remain the same.

"Many seniors will of course be supported by family, but others will need volunteers and community service organisations to help them stay home and stay safe and with things such as food or medicine drops.

"Even something as simple as a daily telephone call can make a huge difference."

Those willing to pitch in have been asked to register by calling the government's Com-

munity Recovery Hotline – on 1800 173 349 – which links seniors and other vulnerable people to essential services and support.

Older people, particularly those with a pre-existing medical condition like asthma, diabetes, heart disease or weakened immunity, are most at risk of serious infection and have been asked to stay at home by authorities to limit their exposure.

Senior Palaszczuk Government Minister Kate Jones will lead the new COVID-19 Seniors Panel that will co-ordinate the Care Army and manage a community awareness cam-

paign. "When the Premier asked me to do this job I jumped at the chance because it's so critical," Ms Jones said.

She said support would be given to Queenslanders over 65 with underlying health issues, all Queenslanders aged over 70, and indigenous Queenslanders aged over 50 with chronic disease.

"The best place for seniors to be right now is in their own home," Ms Jones said.

"Seniors should not be out and about doing errands that someone else can do for them.

"It is now up to every single Queensland to show we care. "Whether it's your mother,

your grandfather, your next-door neighbour or a friend – we all know a senior in our community who will need us so they can stay safe from infection."

She said officials would give clear advice to people about how they could safely support older family and friends while still limiting the older person's exposure to them through the program.

"We are urging Queenslanders to immediately work out a plan with their families and loved ones to ensure seniors have access to essentials without leaving their homes," she said.

Shebah grows Bundy services

THE coronavirus pandemic has caused many businesses to change how they operate and Shebah is no different, now offering to deliver supplies to Bundaberg homes.

People can pay for items such as medication, food and other essentials and request through the app that a Shebah driver collects the items and brings them to you for a flat fee of \$11.66.

Bundaberg Shebah driver Kelli Thurston said she loved how the company was expanding its service due to the current climate.

Shebah Drop is available on the regular Shebah app. If you do not have access to the app call Kelli on 0418 451 966.

Childcare centres urge govt to waive gap fees

THE Australian Childcare Alliance is urging the Federal Government to waive gap fees to help keep centres open in the face of a dramatic withdrawal of children because of COVID-19.

Alliance board member Doug Burns said while the government's proposed job-seeker subsidy will help providers to retain educators, it may not keep the doors of many childcare centres open.

"Centres throughout Bundaberg such as Acorn Childcare Centre are working hard to do everything in our power to stay open to ensure that we provide a valuable service for parents employed in essential job sectors such as healthcare and emergency services," Mr Burns said.

"But ultimately as our occupancies drop, many



FINE LINE: Staff at child care centres such as Acorn Child Care Centre (pictured) are working hard to provide a valuable service for parents.

Picture: Contributed

centres do not have the revenue to remain open because it must be remembered we still have costs to cover such as rent, rates and electricity without factoring in any others.

"This urgent step means the Federal Government must allow providers to waive the gap that parents must pay and continue to

fund their places with the Child Care Subsidy meaning services will be able to recover from this economic crisis and the children can return."

Mr Burns said this solution would impose no further cost to taxpayers and would serve as an immediate lifeline for families, educators and providers to be sure Aus-

tralian can maintain a high-quality early learning sector.

"We don't want healthcare and emergency workers forced out of the frontline so this simple, first-step lifeline is needed now," he said.

Attendance has fallen by as much as 60 per cent at some childcare centres.

Family business calls for a fair go in chaos

A BUNDABERG small business is calling for a fair go after an online furore over the price of celery.

April and Fady El-Azzi run Start Fresh Fruit Market, a wholesale grocer, on Maryborough St.

But recently a Facebook post slammed the couple's business for selling bunches of celery for \$15.

Mrs El-Azzi explained the price of the celery was due to soaring prices from markets, along with some price increases from farmers who had been hit by fires, compounded by the massive demand caused by panic buying.

Mrs El-Azzi said her family business was paying \$11.80 for a bunch of celery and had to add some form of mark-up.

"We're copping a lot of abuse," she said, adding that even the couple's 13-year-old daughter had been the target of anger in their store.

"We're trying to support local and Aussie farmers."

Mrs El-Azzi said they had even sourced local lettuces so they could provide them at a



FRESH PRODUCE: April and Fady El-Azzi. Picture: Contributed

reasonable price.

"There were some really nasty comments," Mrs El-Azzi said of the Facebook posts.

"One guy was accusing us of price gouging.

"One guy did back us up and said Coles and Woolworths can do \$5.90 because they buy tonnes of it."

Mrs El-Azzi said many products in their shop were at a reasonable price and that fruits had not been as affected by vegetables in the current situation.

The couple is also looking to start a home delivery service in case they can no longer run a shopfront because of Covid-19.

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Backpackers won't be packed

A POPULAR North Burnett backpacker hostel has closed its doors to new arrivals in order to protect guests.

Picky Packers Hostel in Mundubbera has stopped accepting backpackers due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Since opening in 2017, it is usually packed to the rafters every season, accommodating up to 70 people.

The growing concern about the virus, however, has forced owner Mark Postle to reduce occupancy to 40 residents.

Mr Postle said he believed it was the only way to protect the community and the residents at the hostel.

"We're trying not to completely isolate them, but they're not allowed to have any friends here at the moment," Mr Postle said.

"We're trying to make life better for the kids in there."

The current guests in the hostel have been in the country for quite some time, and Mr Postle said their safety, and that of the broader community was his highest priority.

"We've got in excess of 100 people wanting to come, and we're doing ourselves out of a lot of money here, running at just over half the capacity," he said.

- Sam Turner

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