

# impossible

NEWS | AUTUMN 2022

## NEWS

### **Andrew making his mark**

Push for myeloma research

## FEATURE

### **Remembering Lex**

ICU care stands out for Mrockis

## FEATURE

### **A lifelong association**

The Alfred's always there for Andrea



theAlfred

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A celebration of the human spirit

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

As we move forward in 2022, I am continuously reminded of how fortunate we are to have such committed supporters.

Testing the waters of post-lockdown life, we are facing ongoing and varied challenges, but our staff remain committed to providing the best possible care and service regardless of the circumstances.

While we celebrated the hospital's 150th year of service last year, the invaluable contributions of our community have been integral to our achievements. The Alfred has a long and proud history of philanthropic support. In a time when the community has needed us more than ever, you helped strengthen our response while our frontline staff cared for a huge number of critically ill patients.

Thank you so much for your ongoing generosity and I look forward to continuing this special partnership throughout the year ahead.

Stay safe and well,



**Patrick Baker**

DIRECTOR - THE ALFRED FOUNDATION



## COVER IMAGE

Lex Mrocki was a passionate photographer whose love of all things photography shone throughout his life, as shown in this self-portrait.

## NEWS

# First of its kind women's mental health service announced

**Alfred Health is set to play a lead role in overhauling how women access inpatient mental health care with the delivery of a specialised 30-bed service.**

Development of the new service is driven by recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, which heard that a range of gender-based safety issues significantly impacted women's experiences of in-patient mental health care.

In a first of its kind 'public in private' partnership, Alfred Health will deliver the psychiatric expertise to the Specialist Women's Mental Health Centre, based at Ramsay Health's Albert Road Clinic.

Mental and Addiction Health Director of Operations at The Alfred, Associate Professor Sandra Keppich-Arnold, whose team was responsible for developing the initiative, said the service would give women the best opportunity for recovery.

**"Women deserve to feel safe, particularly when they are at their most vulnerable," she said.**

"We are completely re-imagining how women receive inpatient mental health care services here, in a way that is welcoming and safe, and where the most expert care is available to them at a time they most need it."

The service will be co-designed with people with lived experience. As part of the service model, five extra beds will be delivered by Goulburn Valley Health at a regional site in Shepparton.

An evaluation of this 'hub and spoke' model will inform potential future sites across other regional locations.

The statewide service, which will support about 750 women over the age of 18 with a range of complex mental health conditions a year, including presentation during the perinatal period and eating disorders, was announced by The Honourable James Merlino, the Deputy Premier of Victoria and Minister for Mental Health.

NEWS

## Myeloma research a 'game changer'

**Andrew Marks considers himself lucky. A high-risk myeloma patient – a disease considered fatal – he was diagnosed early enough to take action. He was fortunate to access a new experimental drug from Belgium, however the treatment came with a huge \$350,000 price tag.**

Recognising how lucky he is to afford this treatment, Mr Marks is now determined to help raise money towards an Australian solution – one that is being developed at The Alfred through Head of Myeloma Research, Professor Andrew Spencer.

Myeloma is a type of blood cancer that develops from plasma cells in the bone marrow. Part of the immune system, these cancerous blood cells spread throughout the bone marrow so that normal blood cells do not have enough space. About 2400 Australians are diagnosed with it every year, and it is more common in men and people over 60.

Most people aren't diagnosed with myeloma until it's in its advanced stages and they have a multitude of problems, such as kidney failure or bone fractures. Mr Marks was made aware of his propensity to get myeloma about 10 years before his diagnosis, so he was closely monitored and the disease was consequently picked up at an earlier stage.

Diagnosed in September 2015, Mr Marks relapsed during his induction therapy and, while a patient's position is marginally improved by a stem cell transplant, they "are basically unsalvageable".

"Their life expectancy is an average of 16.9 months," Mr Marks said. "I had the stem cell transplant at The Alfred in May 2016, and I relapsed in February 2017. Fortuitously a new drug became available, called daratumumab. I was one of the first patients in Australia to access it."

Requiring specialist Therapeutic Goods Administration approval to import the drug, developed by Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Mr Marks had his first treatment

via IV infusion in May 2017. By October 2019 (and combined with some additional medications prescribed by Prof. Spencer), he had no active myeloma and has remained that way ever since.

Mr Marks, a former lawyer, has made a significant donation (\$50,000) to kickstart the research campaign, which needs about \$1 million, and is hoping his story can encourage others to make these advanced methodologies and techniques more accessible.

"My donation to The Alfred Foundation is designed to assist in the funding of the liquid biopsy project whereby a blood specimen is taken with a view to ascertain the presence of myeloma in the body," he said.

While the traditional test for the disease is through a bone marrow biopsy, Prof. Spencer said their research during the past eight years has devised ways to more accurately measure myeloma in the body.

At its essence, he said the research was vital in understanding why benign symptoms could transform into myeloma.

"It would be an absolute game changer," he said. "That's what this project is all about, employing all these methodologies and techniques that we've been the leaders globally in developing.

"It is a fairly new technology, but a very powerful way of monitoring the disease, and it's just through a blood test. There's no need to stick a needle through the pelvic bone, it's way less invasive, has fewer complications and is a better way of monitoring and characterising the disease."

The research is being led by Dr Sridurga Mithraprabhu.

**ABOVE**

Professor Andrew Spencer is the Head of Myeloma Research at The Alfred.



FEATURE

## The memory of Lex to live on

**The Intensive Care Unit (ICU) waiting room at The Alfred is a place that will live long in the memory of the Mrocki family. After witnessing first-hand the exceptional care that beloved son and brother Alexander, or 'Lex', received, the family decided to make a donation to the hospital in recognition of the care, patience and understanding shown by staff and to commemorate him.**

"Lex wasn't an easy patient - he didn't follow instructions well, but everyone was so patient with him," Lex's sister Freydi said. "The care he received at The Alfred was inspiring. The ICU nurses were unbelievable, and so patient. They were incredible."

Always inquisitive and enjoying challenges, Lex forged a strong relationship with tactile things early in life. Once he had mastered the Rubik's Cube for the first time, he adapted his own version that could be deciphered via touch, so that he could solve it under a blanket.

When photography entered his life in his late teens, Lex took to it like a duck to water. After a first experience with a youth photography group, Lex became entranced with the taking and developing of photos. He then progressed from working in a camera shop, where he was valued for his ability to guide people in how to use their cameras, to become the first staff photographer at the *Australian Jewish News* and, in so doing, becoming a regular, well-known face in the community.

Behind the lens at the newspaper for 10 years, he could be expected at any event, decked out with all sorts of gadgets to help him get the perfect shot.

"He was just a gorgeous person," Freydi said. "He was very gentle but had a strong sense of justice. He was softly spoken, warm, patient and charming. People would often speak about what a lovely human he was. He didn't lead a remarkable life, but he was a remarkable person."

After leaving the newspaper and freelancing for a time, Lex became unwell. Constantly tired, pale and having terrible back pain, he was unable to find relief. It was not until his mother Chana noticed spots on his legs and discovered blood in his urine that the GP was called, who urged that Lex be taken to Alfred Emergency, where he was admitted for kidney failure.

"They eventually worked out that he had a bacterial infection on two heart valves that presented to Lex as back and joint pain," Freydi said. "He needed dialysis and they also had to get the infection under control before surgery. Given a choice of valves, Lex opted for the mechanical one."

It was the time just before his operation that draws the most fondness towards The Alfred for Freydi.

"What was amazing for me was when we decided we would come home from our holiday," she said. "I was at Los Angeles airport and rang him from the airport. I will never forget that the nurses put me through as Lex was being wheeled in to have the operation. I thought that was incredible."





Postoperatively, Lex still had fluid in his legs and required frequent dialysis. Due to be discharged, he collapsed in the middle of the night after complaining of a headache, the result of a brain haemorrhage. He never regained consciousness and was placed on life support. The family was placed in a terrible dilemma of what to do.

"Ultimately, it was decided. We had discussed this issue since we were children, as our parents had often spoken with us about voluntary euthanasia and a person's right to die with dignity," Lionel, Lex's older brother, said.

"We knew Lex felt the same way. So, after various brain scans and consultations with specialists, we decided to take Lex off life support."

**"We basically lived in the ICU those last couple of weeks. The ICU nurses were again so respectful of Lex as a human, cleaning him, shaving him, preserving his dignity. We were allowed to be there with him," Freydi said.**

"Spending so much time in the waiting area of the ICU ... we saw the photos on the wall taken by previous patients, as well as plaques of people and families who'd made donations. Grateful people who wanted to give thanks to The Alfred for the amazing work and care. Experiencing it ourselves really led our parents, Chana and Morris, to make the decision to honour Lex's memory, by also making a donation."

#### LEFT TO RIGHT

Lex Mrocki was a constant presence at community events, taking tens of thousands of photos. These are a selection of some of his photographs.

Freydi was especially moved by the dignity with which Lex was treated and the way staff gave them privacy and support to create a tranquil space to say goodbye.

"Mostly people live and it's great and positive, but then there are the tragic situations," she said. "One of the hardest things was being called in to the family room where the specialists reported to us about Lex's final condition and prognosis, and where we made our painful decision. The support from the doctors, the ward and ICU nurses, the other families in the waiting room and, in particular, Marcel the ICU receptionist, was remarkable. Our family will always be grateful to The Alfred."

If you're in The Alfred during the next few months, look out for Lex's story on our new 'story wall' in the main corridor.



PROFILE

## 'The Alfred's always been there'

**The Alfred has always prided itself upon its connection and bond to the community. This connection has been forged through its long history of caring for Victorians and from the trust this has instilled in people. There is a sense from the community that The Alfred is always there and can be relied upon to produce the best possible service and care to all and sundry.**

Andrea Cooper feels this deep connection and trust, having lived a life around which many significant events have involved The Alfred.

"It's always been part of my life. The Alfred's always been there," she said.

Andrea was born at Margaret Coles House at The Alfred in 1956. However, it was not long before her family returned to the hospital. In late 1960, after a blood donation, her father Jack was referred to the haematology unit because something was mysteriously wrong with his blood.

He was told he had less than six months to live. Thankfully, through receiving regular blood transfusions, Jack survived.

"Some of my earliest memories are dad going to hospital to get more blood," Andrea said. "Once he was even asked to speak to medical students about his condition."

Still a patient in 1966, he was put on the new wonder drug - cortisone - and the regular transfusions were no longer necessary. In the 1970s, Jack's blood condition was finally solved; diagnosed with hairy cell leukaemia - a cancer which causes the bone marrow to make too many lymphocytes. With the aid of cortisone, Jack was in remission.

Returning to The Alfred in the 1990s due to skin tears, a problem triggered by a side effect to cortisone, he was told that he was one of the longest surviving hairy cell leukaemia patients in Australia. Meanwhile, Andrea's mother Bell was diagnosed with lung cancer and had surgery.



While Bell was recovering in hospital, she experienced something that would go on to inspire her and Jack - a visit from a Jewish volunteer as part of a lay care program.

"My parents then decided to volunteer at The Alfred and also became Jewish lay visitors. That was something they really enjoyed doing," Andrea said.

In mid-2001, Jack's leukaemia became active again and Bell's lung cancer returned. "I recall saying, 'we're in for a shaky ride,'" Andrea said. "Dad was in and out of The Alfred for short periods. He was still there the day in September when mum had the rest of her cancerous lung removed. My sister and I found time to smile, fantasising mum and dad sharing a room and holding hands between their beds."

No sooner had Bell recovered, than Jack worsened. Receiving chemotherapy again in December, he developed pneumonia and died in a fourth-floor ward on 18 January, 2002. Then within months, Bell's cancer had returned so she started attending The Alfred's William Buckland Centre for chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

In late 2003, Bell was told that she was terminal and was referred to The Alfred's palliative care program. The following February, while in hospital, she was visited by a Jewish lady doing the same visiting Bell and Jack used to do.

"Mum realised that she had actually visited this lady when she had been in hospital!" Andrea said. "I promised myself that one day I would do something based on that incredible interaction. Someone my mum had visited and inspired had ended up visiting mum! You give of yourself, not expecting to be given back. But you get it back."

ABOVE

Pictured in November 1992 for Jack Cooper's 70th birthday, with his daughter Abigail, wife Bell and daughter Andrea.

Bell passed away on 16 April, 2004.

In early 2016, Andrea decided it was finally her time to volunteer. Programs had changed and she was asked to join The Alfred Consumer Panel. Drawing on her life experiences, she has since represented the viewpoint of patients, carers and families on some of The Alfred's committees and working groups.

**"It was full circle in a number of ways. I felt like I belonged, it felt like the right place for me to be," Andrea said.**

Then, in March 2020, Andrea was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"I'm very lucky that it was found early. During the first COVID-19 lockdown I had surgery, followed by radiation treatment. The Alfred care has been amazing," she said.

"However it hit me when I had my radiation treatment. I went into the basement of the William Buckland Centre for my first appointment and I just burst into tears. It seemed exactly as I remember it - sitting in the same waiting area that I'd been with mum in 17 years earlier. That emotion ... still hits me."

It is now two years and Andrea remains cancer-free under The Alfred's care. She continues to be proud of her connection with The Alfred.

"It's always been reliable. I'm so thankful for the public health system," she said. "It has never been a sad connection for me, I see it in a positive light and as I've become more involved, it's even more positive because I know how hard people work there. It is a genuine place."

## RIGHT

Frank Roberts (right) with Neurosurgery Nurse Unit Manager Noel Sceriha.

## COMMUNITY

### Neurosurgery group offers frank support

**Frank Roberts had just retired from a lifetime career in the automotive industry in 1991 when he suffered from a ruptured cerebral aneurysm while out on his boat in Port Phillip Bay.**

"I knew something was radically wrong because immediately I was violently ill and vomiting," he said. "They got the boat in, and I was at The Alfred within 45 minutes, which had a huge amount to do with my recovery. I was stabilised that night and operated on the following day."

During a follow-up appointment with then Chief Neurosurgeon Kevin Siu, Frank asked what he could do to help. Following a discussion with the then nurse manager, the Neurosurgery Support Group was established in 1993, which Frank led for many years. Frank found it rewarding to talk with patients about their experience.

In 2013, Frank received a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for his services to community health, particularly through patient support services. He is also an ardent supporter of The Alfred and has committed to remembering the hospital in his Will.

Neurosurgery Nurse Unit Manager Noel Sceriha said there was "nothing better" for a patient to see and hear the story of a volunteer who had been through a similar experience.

"It gives them some hope," he said. "I can stand there as a professional and say 'you'll be fine, you'll be okay', but when they see someone that's been through the experience, it makes such a difference to their stay."

The group is looking forward to resuming services when safe to do so.

For information about leaving a gift in your Will to The Alfred, or about accessing or volunteering for the group, please phone Feygl or Sue on 9076 3222.



## Yes, I would like to donate to The Alfred

\$35  \$60  \$100  \$250  \$1,000

Other \$

**OR**

I want to give a regular monthly gift of \$  to The Alfred to be deducted from my credit card on the 30th of each month. (I can cancel at any time by giving 14 days notice)

Please find enclosed my:

Cheque  Money order (payable to The Alfred Foundation)

OR, please debit my:

Visa  MasterCard  Amex

Name on card:

Card number:

Expiry date:  /

Signature:

**From:**

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

I am considering including a gift to The Alfred in my Will

I have already included The Alfred in my Will

**To make your gift, complete and return this coupon in the enclosed reply paid envelope, or send to:**

**The Alfred Foundation**

PO Box 2021

Prahran VIC 3181

T: 1800 888 878

[alwaysalfred.org.au](http://alwaysalfred.org.au)

Donations of \$2 and over are tax deductible

ABN 27 318 956 319



**theAlfred**  
FOUNDATION

# Make the Impossible Possible

Donate to The Alfred today



## COMMUNITY

# Our community making the impossible possible



## Jacob Oates - Run Melbourne

Working at The Alfred, Jacob sees firsthand the difference that community donations can make. This is his second Run Melbourne for The Alfred Team.

"It's a privilege to work at The Alfred. For all the opportunities I've been given, I'm motivated to give back where I can. That's why I've chosen to participate in this year's Run Melbourne," Jacob said.

"I'm passionate about representing The Alfred and raising funds so we can continue to provide the best specialist care in the state."

**Sign up to join Jacob and Team Alfred Run Melbourne at: <https://runmelbourne22.grassrootz.com/the-alfred-foundation>**

## Peter Mansell - Birdman Rally

Sadly, Peter and Julie's daughter Morgan Mansell passed away in 2018 at just 25 years of age after a short battle with melanoma.

Morgan had always been passionate about helping others, so Peter and Julie have since been continuing her work to raise awareness of melanoma and funds to help find a cure. In the latest fundraiser, Peter attempted to fly across the Yarra River in his homemade flying machine at the Moomba Birdman Rally last month, raising more than \$6700.

**To learn more about Peter's effort, please head to: <https://birdmanrally2022.gofundraise.com.au/page/Peter-94914669>**

## ABOVE

Jacob Oates is back again to raise money for The Alfred.

## Stephen - Stromlo Running Festival

Towards the end of 2021, Stephen's brother, Bryan, underwent a brain MRI - the results of which left their family lost for words. It showed a large intracranial tumour, occupying three cortexes within the dominant side of his brain.

But the family had experienced such feelings and emotions before - it was the second time that a sibling of Stephen's had been diagnosed with a brain tumour.

Inspired to raise funds for the neuroscience department at The Alfred, he and his friend Brenton took part in the Stromlo Running Festival 50km ultramarathon in March. Aiming for \$5000, Stephen was blown away by the support he received from friends, family, colleagues and strangers. Their target was met in just four days - and went on to tally an incredible \$10,100. "To reach \$10,000 has blown our minds and we are super happy with the results," Stephen said.

## Are you interested in creating your own fundraiser?

Organising your own fundraiser is a great way to take action and support The Alfred. You could take on your own unique physical challenge or ask your friends and family to give to The Alfred in lieu of gifts. You could also create a tribute page to celebrate the life of a loved one.

**Head to [fundraising.alfredfoundation.org.au](https://fundraising.alfredfoundation.org.au) and create your own page today.**

## The Alfred Foundation

PO Box 2021, Prahran VIC 3181  
T: 1800 888 878  
[alwaysalfred.org.au](https://alwaysalfred.org.au)