

hen Vicki Fowler feels like a chat or a walk, she knows there is always a friendly neighbour nearby for a catch-up. The resident of Blue Care's Cartyle Gardens Townsville moved to the retirement village last October and has never looked

"It's amazing that any time of the day, I can pick up the phone and just walk around to somebody, or they can come to me, and we can have a chat or a cup of tea," she

The 71-year-old part-time disability support worker said living in a retirement village meant being surrounded by people who were at the same age and stage of life - and

"We're just all at the same level at the same time," Ms.

"Here you can see each other as much as you like, or as fittle. There is always someone around. I can't tell you how happy I am here. I'm bursting at the seams."

Ms Fowler is among almost 200,000 Australians who live in a retirement village, a place deliberately designed to support a key pillar of health social engagement.

Her village, Carlyle Gardens Townsville, is almost a suburb, with about 460 secure and safe homes spread across a landscaped and lush garden setting.

But for Ms Fowler, it is the friends and neighbours she has made that have boosted her life satisfaction.

"Most of us are retired and there are so many social

"You can either live a quiet life on your own or you could socialise every day if you wanted to. Every day there's something on, from playing cards to exercise, to a gardening club where you can do some gardening and



compared it to her previous years living solo. Until late loved, on Townsville's The Strand.

But when she needed some extra medical support, Ms Fowler became concerned about being isolated and alone in the apartment. There were people around saying hello at the lifts and

so on but there was little in the way of engagement. On the day she moved into the village, Ms Fowler was introduced to her neighbours and that was that. She had lots of events to attend and activities to enjoy, as well as

time to herself. "I'm so glad I made the move," she said. "I've just had so much love and friendship and support." There is growing awareness of the importance of strong neighbours can make a huge difference to your overall happiness and wellbeing, inset helow: Vicki Fowler

THE GOOD LIFE: Having great

social relationships at key transition points in the lifespan. for example in early parenthood, the loss of a spouse or retirement. It is now understood loneliness especially at these key times is a major health issue. People who enjoy close relationships with their mmediate neighbours often find

a higher level of overall life satisfaction and happiness, and lower levels of loneliness.

A recent report commissioned by Relationships Australia found people who developed strong connections with their neighbours were significantly less lonely, even throughout lockdown.

Relationships Australia chief executive Nick Tebbey said it was critical to nurture these social relationships, especially at times in our lives that we could be susceptible to loneliness.

"We know that social support and connection is a really important part of being human," he said.

"As we age and go through different life stages, there are some significant changes. If we have strong social connections during those periods of change in our lives, we're better supported and better resourced to be more resilient in the challenges we face.

"That has a significant impact on better mental wellbeing and physical health."

He said neighbours and a sense of community could be a strong antidote to loneliness, which is known to have poor health impacts.

"The people who identify with their local community and feel like they've got that support network around them are actually experiencing greater identity and support. That has direct impacts on their health and

He explained this is because close friends can encourage people's own sense of self-worth.

"Those who do make that effort to connect and put. effort into their social connections, they're the ones who have that stronger sense of identity and ultimately, the support factors around their sense of health and wellbeing," he said.

Ms Fowler said her friendships, both her old friends and her new neighbours, had sustained her amid some ongoing health challenges. She catches up with people at water aerobics and yoga, as well as lunches, dinners at the Carlyle Restaurant & Bar, and the garden club.

"I am probably lucky I am a social person," she said. "I made the change and it was beautiful. It's the best move Tve ever made.

Carlyle Gardens Townsville offers independent over-60s premium resort-style living. Find out more at the website. Tel: 4432 9222

carlylegardens.com.au/townsville



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\*Price correct at 15/10/2021















