



**MAGGIE BEER
FOUNDATION**
CREATING AN APPETITE FOR LIFE

MEDIA RELEASE

September 2025

Thanks to Gwen!

The Maggie Beer Foundation was honoured and proud to work with the son and daughter-in-law of Gwen Edwards to bring our training program to Warrigal Aged Care in 2023 and 2024.

Garry's mother, Gwen Edwards, lived at Warrigal Mt Terry in Albion Park until she passed away in September 2021. According to Anne and Garry, she was very well taken care of by Warrigal, and they felt happy she was safe, healthy and in good hands.

However, Gwen did comment on the food. Being forthright, she had had conversations with the chef about the meals. It wasn't bad, but it just wasn't what she would usually have, at the time she would usually have it and with the people she would prefer to be with.

Garry and Anne thought these were normal expectations. They knew that it was challenging to delight a bunch of people with different preferences and experiences each and every day. However, they also wondered what they could do to make things better for Gwen, and so, during a Warrigal 'families meeting', they talked with others and learned that their feedback was similar. They also learnt that the 2010 Australian of the Year, Maggie Beer AO, in the years following her award, had started the Maggie Beer Foundation (MBF) to focus on improving food in aged care facilities.

This planted a seed for Garry and Anne, and they set about bringing Warrigal and MBF together. Unfortunately, Gwen passed away before they could get the program going. Garry and Anne discussed what they could do with some of the money Gwen left them. In June 2023, the first of the MBF trainer mentor sessions was held at Shell Cove. Warrigal cooks, chefs, managers, and care staff worked alongside Maggie Beer and MBF team members to undertake training. The training included a MasterChef-inspired group cooking session along with mentoring sessions between October 2023 and May 2024. Sessions were held at Warrigal, Mt Terry and Illawarra ITEC and involved a total of 15 cooks and chefs from Albion Park Rail (APR), Mt Terry, Mt Warrigal and Shell Cove. Topics included the dining environment, texture-modified food, the ageing palate, pumping up nutrition and the importance of recorded recipes. The presence of a dietitian at every session was invaluable.

The sessions became known as **Thanks to Gwen**.

At every meeting, the level of engagement and participation was high – and it was fun!

According to Garry and Anne, Warrigal managers commented about a lift of interest and enthusiasm among the kitchen teams. They also noticed changes like -



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- The inclusion of a drinks' menu
- A review and rearrangement of the dining area
- Changes in snack station inclusions
- The third party catering company established a WhatsApp group across their company
- A Secrets of the Kitchen activity using a Masterclass-style live chef-led demonstration with tasting available for residents and family members
- The purchase of new equipment, including a Vegepod, a movable, raised garden bed to grow fresh herbs and vegetables, small ceramic ramekins to reduce single-use items and keep food warm, and a Pellet system with heatable 'plates' and covers to keep food served on trolleys warm.
- New access to computers in the kitchens as well as attending to internet connectivity.
- The kitchen and care staff working together more closely.
- Skim milk powder being included in many recipes to boost protein content which was both cost-effective and able to be incorporated easily.

Garry and Anne have since supported MBF's efforts to achieve an accreditation for aged care cooks and chefs. This certification will set an industry standard that will help to attract and retain qualified staff.

Garry and Anne also learned lots in the process including that -

- The training elevated levels of staff care, interest, experience and skill.
- Providing nutritious, appetising meals with a diverse set of dietary needs and wants is complex.
- That meal arrangements are often complicated involving in-house employees, more than one catering company and a range of food suppliers, each with a separate contract.
- Every facility has different cooking and dining arrangements.
- Although there are menus and menu plans, for the most part, very few written recipes were used.

We thank Warrigal Aged Care for welcoming this program. We thank Gwen for her lasting legacy. And we especially thank Garry and Anne Edwards for the generous donation that made this work with Warrigal possible. We thank them too for writing a report which we have abridged here. Their work beside us became the basis for our continuing and game-changing Trainer Mentor Program.

