

Amid allegations of staff shortages, Lyndoch's off and racing



Lyndoch Living CEO Doreen Power cheering on from the stands during the 2019 May Racing Carnival. Image: Lyndoch Living/ Racing Victoria.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

With aged care under the pump, it's hard to believe Lyndoch Living spends tens of thousands of dollars sponsoring the Grand Annual Steeplechase and hiring a marquee at the Warrnambool May Races.

Details of the deal are not public, but it means potentially around \$160,000 – if not more – will have been spent on supporting gambling via race sponsorship and corporate hospitality for selected Lyndoch staff, guests and residents.

When did supporting gambling become a core value of Lyndoch aged care, which is a registered charity and a public benevolent institution?

Just as with Lyndoch's plan to build a multi-million-dollar medical centre, the [appropriateness of this deal is also the subject of complaints](#) to the Australian Charities and Investment Commission, which will make an assessment.

The close ties between Lyndoch and the Warrnambool Racing Club also raise potential conflicts of interest, which I will get to in a moment.



Lyndoch chair Kerry Nelson and CEO Doreen Power, right, with the sash for the 2019 Grand Annual Steeplechase sponsored by Lyndoch. Image: Lyndoch Living.

First, however, it has emerged that while members of Lyndoch's

hierarchy were enjoying the May Races this year, life was less glamorous back at Lyndoch itself.

The daughter of one resident was, at that time, spending each day in Lyndoch to watch her Mum because she had taken to falls and there was not, allegedly, enough staff to keep an eye on her.

To protect the privacy of the resident, I am not revealing this woman's identity, but I have spoken with her several times and she is a highly credible source.

The woman in question took a week off work to spend seven days straight, from 7am in the morning until 10pm at night, in her mother's room at Lyndoch because, she told me, she could see the staff were "literally running" to keep up.

Many staff, she says, were not able to take their breaks.

The situation was compounded by the wing being in lockdown due to an outbreak of influenza, which meant an additional burden on staff, such as feeding all residents in their rooms.

While the woman could see the staff were "doing their best", it was clear that if she wanted a close eye kept on her Mum while the doctors sorted out her medications, it would be better to watch her herself.



Lyndoch board member Cr Sue Cassidy and CEO Doreen Power in the Lyndoch corporate tent during the 2019 May Racing Carnival. Image: Lyndoch Living

Spending hours each day with her Mum was a commitment she was prepared to make, but then she scrolled through Facebook and saw Lyndoch posts of CEO Doreen Power and chair Kerry Nelson at the May Races.

Judging by the Facebook posts, some Lyndoch executives including Ms Power didn't attend just one day of the carnival, but at least two.

The woman, to put it plainly, was absolutely furious.

She arranged to meet directly with Ms Power to express her concerns around Lyndoch's handling of the lockdown, the alleged staff shortages and the impact on her mother's care, but, she says, left that meeting far from satisfied with the

CEO's alleged reactions and responses.

The woman then contacted the chair, Ms Nelson, who she described as sympathetic, as was the Director of Nursing Julie Baillie, but she ultimately came away feeling "very concerned" by the overall response of Lyndoch to her complaints around duty of care.

I asked both Ms Power and Ms Nelson to comment on this woman's story. Neither responded.



Lyndoch board member Peter Downs, former CEO of the Warrnambool Racing Club, (far left) and Lyndoch CEO Doreen Power (third left), who are part of a syndicate behind Strategic Force. Image: Racing.com

This snapshot of life inside Lyndoch during the 2019 May Race Week brings me back to the question of what is Lyndoch Living doing at the races in the first place?

Were staff on paid time or personal leave? Perhaps this is another example of Lyndoch's new "core business" in action.

I do know that the relationship between the Warrnambool Racing Club and Lyndoch has become much closer since former club CEO Peter Downs joined the Lyndoch board in September 2016.

It was just four months' after Mr Downs joined the board that Lyndoch announced its first, three-year sponsorship deal of

the Grand Annual Steeplechase.

At the time, the board was at pains to point out that Mr Downs – who had a very clear conflict of interest – excused himself from anything to do with that decision.

This must mean the Lyndoch Living board came up with the whole idea itself.

Lyndoch has since re-signed its sponsorship deal for 2020 and Mr Downs, who now lives in Melbourne and works for Moonee Valley, remains on the Lyndoch board.

The links, however, don't stop there.

As I wrote in April, [Mr Downs and Ms Power also have shares in at least one racehorse](#), Strategic Force.

Any potential, perceived or actual conflicts of interest there?

Apparently not.

It is these tangled webs and inexplicable decisions that have so many of us outside of Lyndoch worrying about its direction and priorities.

And it is why we will keep asking questions of those in charge, no matter what hurdles are thrown in our way.

The final instalment – before I pick up the thread after Christmas – is coming soon.

In the meantime, I am starting a Foxy Fighting Fund. If you would like to make a small contribution, you can do so below.

[The Foxy Fighting Fund](#)