

Staff morale slipping to rock bottom at Lyndoch Living



Carol Altmann – The Terrier

Hear that? Alarm bells are ringing and they are coming from inside Lyndoch Living.

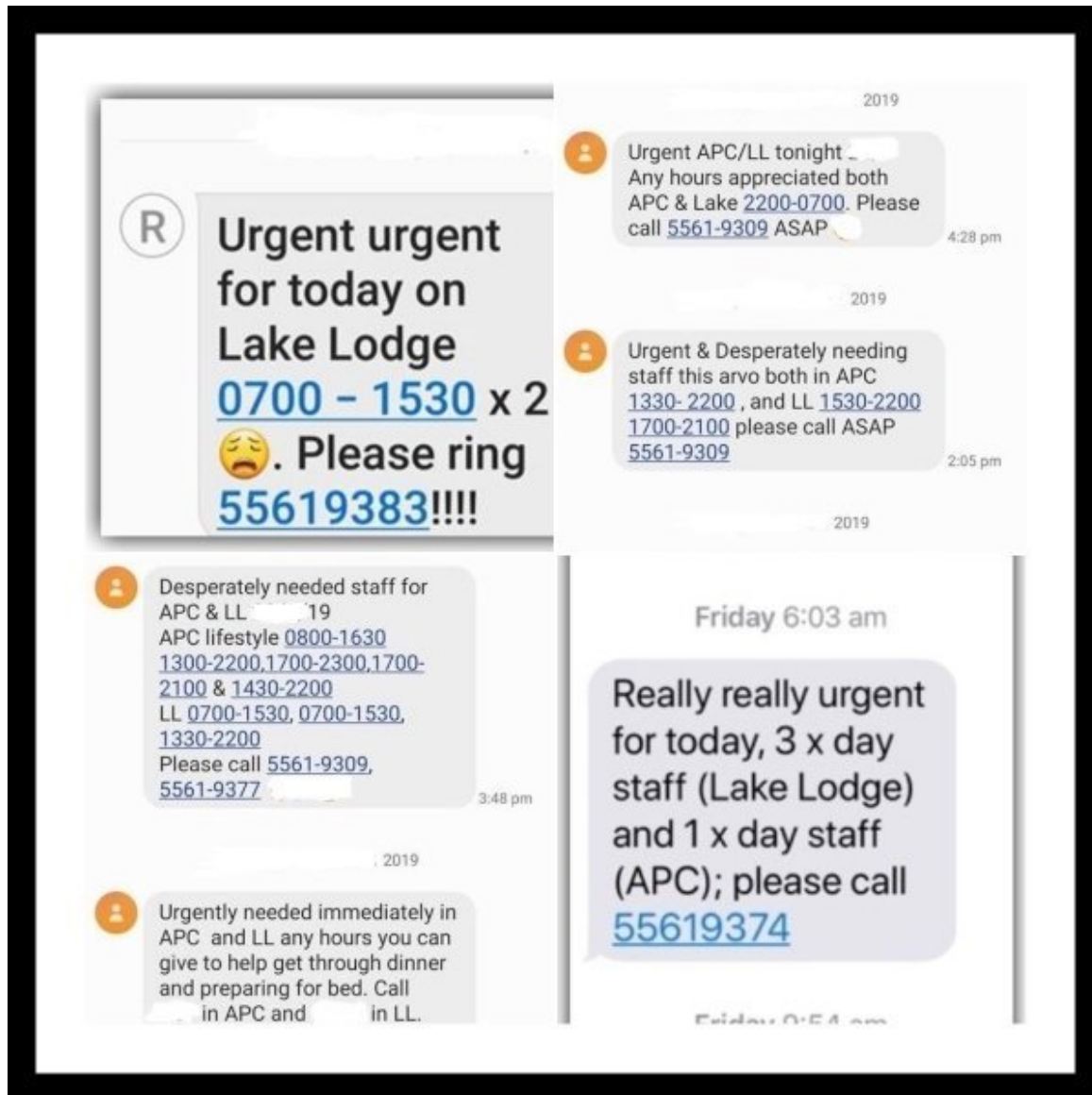
What follows comes from talking to dozens of people who have all expressed the same fear: the Lyndoch culture is turning toxic.

Many of the staff at Lyndoch are under so much pressure from staff shortages or low morale that they are starting to crack under the strain, or have already left. Others have been allegedly pushed out.

The images posted here are just a slice of the 'please help' messages of the past nine months, desperately asking for

nursing staff to fill roster gaps.

Note that these gaps include during the week of the May Racing Carnival, where Lyndoch had a corporate tent and [sponsored the Grand Annual Steeplechase](#) (and has signed on again for 2020).



I have to tread very carefully here, because I know each word will be read forensically, but I believe this issue goes far deeper than the staff shortages suffered by many aged care homes across Australia.

What I am hearing is that since CEO Doreen Power took over in 2015, there has been a complete change in workplace culture that has brought an upheaval way beyond what you expect with a new chief.

This upheaval also goes further than nursing staff and into areas like catering, kitchen, supplies, maintenance, finance and administration. I am told that, as a result, up to 80 people have left Lyndoch in the past two years – an extraordinary number by any measure.

For many people, Lyndoch is no longer a very happy place, despite the “good news stories”, #hashtag slogans and [Facebook snaps](#) that would have you think otherwise.

The brave people who talked to me took an enormous risk because of fears of reprisals, but they have done so because they care deeply about the residents and for each other.

Tonight I am giving them a voice, because it seems nobody within the Lyndoch executive or on the Lyndoch board is listening.

This is what we need to hear:

So many long-serving Lyndoch staff are no longer there, with some devoting 15, 20, 30 years of their lives to Lyndoch, only to find that they were no longer wanted.

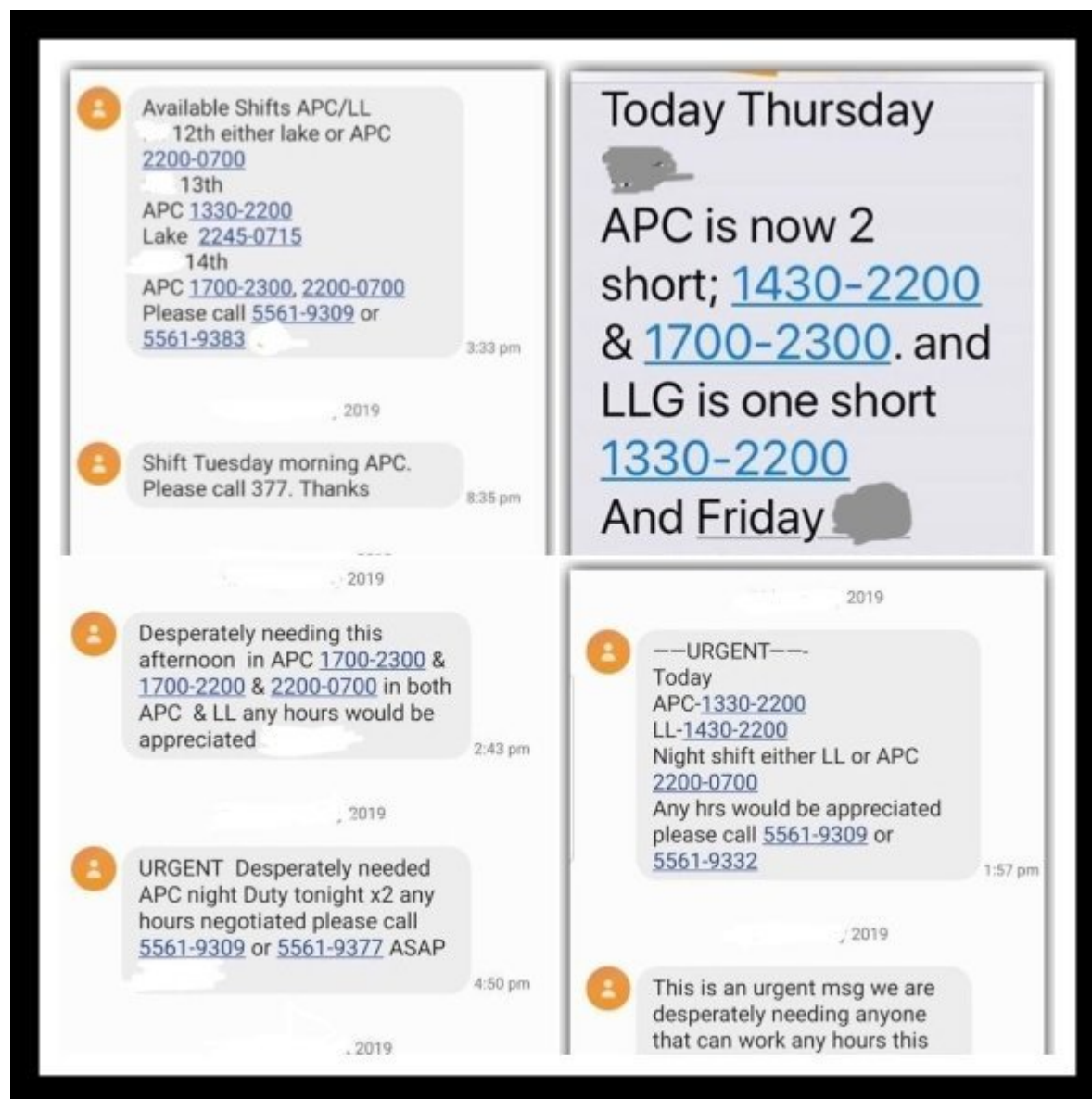
This was not how they imagined Lyndoch would treat them after such service, but their careers ended in ways that left them feeling either disillusioned or, in some cases, devastated.

Many other staff, including experienced nursing staff, have left because they could no longer tolerate the stress and how it was starting to affect their personal lives.

I know the methods that can be used: the unreasonable workload, the nit-picking, the micro-managing, the criticism, the sudden outsourcing of your job, the constant fear of dismissal, the slow wearing down of confidence.

In that environment, people choose to leave, rather than tolerate one more day.

This is allegedly what happened to many long-serving staff at Lyndoch, and to others who thought they had a career path ahead of them, only to have it suddenly fall away.



The stories I have been listening to revealed the same management pattern over and over again and I believe them.

People talked of certain staff allegedly having “targets on their backs” and the fear of who would be next, which is exactly the sort of terror that is designed to keep people silenced.

Others told of distressed staff crying in the carpark as they left work, or as they prepared to enter it.

The old Lyndoch culture, with more warmth, empathy and understanding, appears to have become collateral damage toward a big corporate, pumped-up dream that someone decided was where Lyndoch needed to go.

From the hours of interviews I have now done, I can say the new Lyndoch culture appears to be one infused with bullying, intimidation, gaslighting and a poisonous game of divide-and-rule where some people are looked after at the expense of others.

In this world, not all staff suffer, only some: there are the insiders and the outsiders.

This is how a toxic culture works and it crushes people.

Worse, it can all filter down to the most vulnerable in this story: the residents.



Staff shortages following
the days of the 2019 May
Racing Carnival, where

Lyndoch had a corporate tent and sponsored the steeplechase.

So many people I talked to were wracked with a sense of guilt and “feeling that I let the residents down”, because even if they worked themselves to the point of exhaustion, they felt it was not enough.

It was always the residents they worried about most.

It was not that they wanted more pay, or that they wanted less hours: they just desperately wanted more help.

I have been told there is often just one Registered Nurse on night duty for the entire Lyndoch building – around 200 residents. This nurse is also phoned by staff at the Lyndoch May Noonan Hostel in Terang, when there is often no RN on night duty at all.

I understand that there are only two unit managers for all of Lyndoch: there used to be four.

This means each unit manager is overseeing the care of 100-120 residents – including those with high needs such as dementia, psychosis and schizophrenia – plus overseeing all of the nursing staff.

It's an impossible task.

Things can get missed, or not followed up, and the leadership that used to be there to support the nurses and care workers – to allow proper shift handovers, guidance and so on – falls away.

To try and cover the gaps, some senior nursing staff in the past 12 months have worked shifts for no pay.

One senior Registered Nurse, who worked part-time, worked for free on weekends at least three times during her contract,

because there was nobody else available and it became her problem to fix.



Thursday, 7th May 2020

Day 3 features the \$350,000 Waterfront by Lyndoch
Living Grand Annual Steeplechase (5500m) and
\$250,000 Sungold Milk Warrnambool Cup (2350m).

Lyndoch has again signed on as sponsor of the Grand Annual Steeplechase at the May Races. Former W'bool Racing Club CEO Peter Downs, who has relocated to Melbourne, remains on the Lyndoch board. Image: WRC.

Lyndoch says it is trying to hire more RNs and [it is advertising a range of jobs](#), but word is now spreading that Lyndoch is not the place it used to be.

Highly qualified or experienced aged care staff can choose where they want to work, such is the demand for their skills, and many are not choosing Lyndoch.

They are, instead, choosing Moyne Health, or Mercy, or

Southwest Healthcare.

I understand that four RNs hired by Lyndoch over the past 12 months each lasted barely more than a week before before moving on.

All of the above I have put to Ms Power, who, despite winning an award for aged care CEO of the year, refuses to talk to me about what is allegedly happening in the aged care facility she runs.

I have also asked questions of the board chair, Kerry Nelson, which have been similarly ignored.

This on [top of its increasing secrecy](#) makes me think that Ms Power and [the nine-member board](#) have forgotten that Lyndoch is a public institution, not a private company – at least not yet.

What is unfolding at Lyndoch is unfolding on our watch and we, as a community, need to be asking questions and demanding answers from Ms Power and the board.

To look away and just leave Lyndoch to it is not an option, so I am ringing the bell loudly and I am going to keep ringing it.

More soon.

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