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Care workers' \$35k land discount leg-up

Geelong Advertiser, Geelong

'It made all the difference': developer slashes cost of a block

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**Nicole Mayne
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Geelong essential workers are being offered a \$35,000 discount on land to build their dream home.

Developer Villawood Properties is slashing the cost of a block at its Armstrong and Coridale estates for nurses, teachers, emergency services personal and other care workers. The scheme is aimed at helping them connect them with housing in areas where their services are needed, but where they struggle to afford a home.

Executive director Rory Costelloe said the \$35,000 was a \$15,000 extension to an existing grant his company had offered to care workers over across the past six years, and a nod to its 35th year in business.

So far it has handed out \$4.6m to 300 care workers around the state, with applicants means-tested and required to live within about 11km of where they work.

In launching the expanded funds, Villawood noted Australia Bureau of Statistics data shows care workers are paid as much as \$21,000 less than the average yearly wage.

Geelong occupational therapist Beth Crosby is among those who have already been given a leg-up by the care worker support program.

She moved into her new home in Mount Duneed after

buying the discounted land the week before Covid hit.

"It made all the difference to me," Ms Crosby said.

"I was a new graduate, fresh out of uni, and I was eyeing off Villawood and Mount Duneed and it did not look feasible for me.

"I worked five casual jobs in uni and the bank didn't really see that as mortgage-worthy.

"It is a bit more of a prime area in Mount Duneed and my price range was probably further out, and then I saw this carers' grant and it made it so accessible to me."

Means-testing previously capped applicants' salaries at \$85,000 for singles or \$135,000 for couples, but that has now been increased to \$125,000 a person and \$195,000 a household.

The grants are capped at 25 lots at Armstrong and Coridale in Lara.

Villawood chief executive Alan Miller said that research showed many care workers struggled to own their own home. "This program is aimed squarely at helping achieve that," Mr Miller said.

"It's provided a mechanism to ensure they can live close to work and in a thriving, positive community."



The district park at Armstrong in Mount Duneed.



Villawood's Armstrong estate in Mount Duneed.



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Beth Crosby and pet dog Nova at her home Mount Duneed.