metlifecare

PART 2:

Make up the *research*

FED ERA TION

METLIFECARE - BRAND AND CATEGORY RESEARCH

What the *research* told us

Six weeks across four Auckland catchments, weighted deliberately to qualitative work, and commissioned against one question – how do we break the category conventions?

34 HOUSEHOLD CONVERSATIONS, PROSPECT AND ADULT CHILD TOGETHER WHERE ALLOWED

12 IN-HOME ETHNOGRAPHIES ACROSS THE FOUR CATCHMENTS

23 WHO TOURED A VILLAGE AND DID NOT PROCEED

22 METLIFECARE VILLAGE MANAGERS, SALES AND CARE STAFF

400 QUANTITATIVE: 250 PROSPECTS 65+, 150 ADULT CHILDREN 45 TO 65

Fictional study, created for this exercise.

WE WENT LOOKING FOR HONESTY ABOUT AGING

What we *found* was narrower than that, and more useful.

Nobody is deciding where to move to. They are deciding when to stop pretending nothing will change.

THE BARRIER IS NOT THE VILLAGE

Of the 23 people who toured and walked away, 19 said they would happily live there. **They weren't rejecting the place.**

THE BARRIER IS KNOWING 'WHEN'

71% say **"I will know when I am ready."** Among those who settled, 82% say they weren't ready and moved anyway.

AND TIMING IS ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE

24 of 34 prospects used the phrase **"not being a burden"** without being asked a single question about family.

Why the category *converged?*

Vitality isn't a strategy anyone chose. It's what five operators arrived at separately over seven years, and then kept reinforcing for each other. That happened for an uncomfortable reason rather than a failure of imagination.

WHAT SOCIETY REINFORCES

Age means decline. Capability, mobility all reducing. With no respected way to be old and diminished.

WHAT PEOPLE ACTUALLY DO

Act defensively. They perform capability. They raise their volunteering, their driving and their fitness unprompted. They shield the truth.

WHAT THE CATEGORY HEARD

Research asked what people wanted and they heard 'an active life'. **They missed 'a plan for aging.'**

WHAT THE CATEGORY SOLD

Vitality. The audience's coping mechanism for aging has been sold back to them as a product benefit.

So marketing converged on sameness. 'Vitality' achieves little.
An ad that mirrors someone's defence back at them, changes nothing.
Nobody acts on a message they're using to avoid a decision.

Outside of the category, universities are already solving the problem

University brands sell your future self - the progress you'll make in life from having a plan. Aged living sells vitality and independence in the now, staying silent on what comes next, compounding indecision in prospects.

HOW THE UNIVERSITY CATEGORY WORKS

1 - EMOTIONAL

The promise of an enriched future life

The long term future they can picture themselves living. Personal, aspirational, and what drives consideration.

2 - BRAND

Your world opens up

New people, new challenge, new possibility. The transition is framed as expansion.

3 - FUNCTIONAL

Care and support

Reassuring, and necessary once you are there. Never the reason anyone goes there.

HOW THE AGED LIVING CATEGORY WORKS

1 - EMOTIONAL

Vitality

Living in today, a permanent state of wellness. Not a plan for the future, it is a defence against what might happen.

2 - BRAND

Life inside the gate

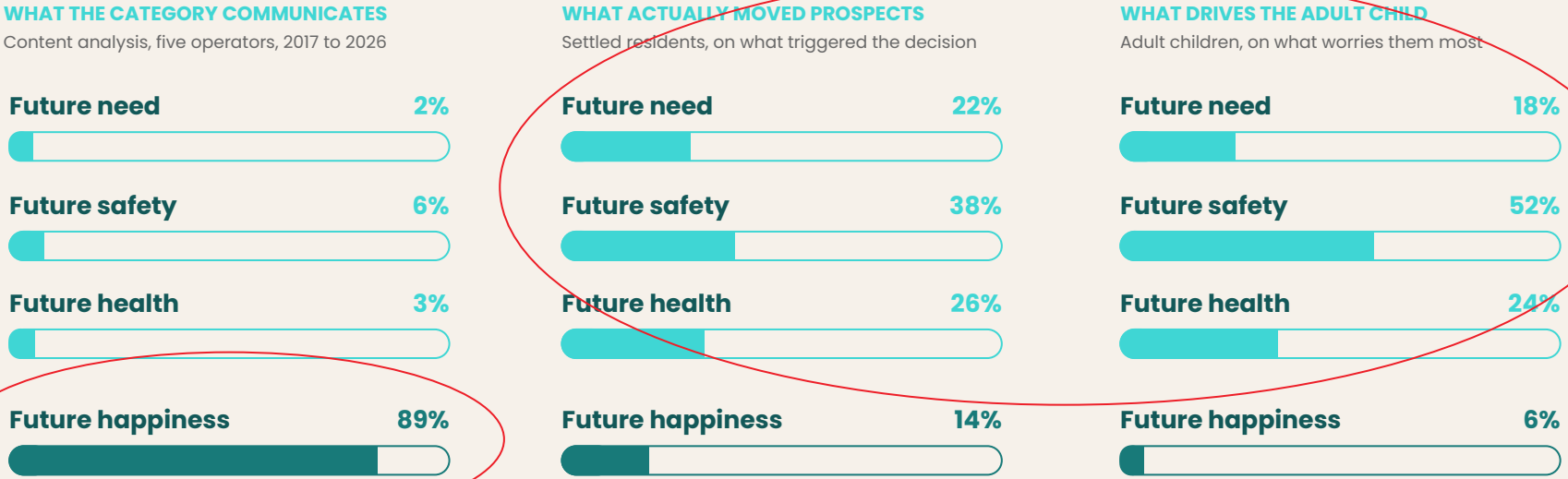
Everything shown happens inside the village. The transition to aged living is framed as a life that has contracted already.

3 - FUNCTIONAL

Care and support

The category fears it as a proposition, much more than the resident does.

The category is selling the one state *nobody* actually makes their decision on:



Eighty-nine per cent of the category's message is aimed at fourteen percent of the reason people move. And at six percent of what the family is worried about.

Six *uncomfortable* findings

The daughter who helps can delay the move	Households where an adult child raised the move before any trigger took a median 3.8 years to settle. Where it was never raised, 2.1 years. Early advocacy is heard as a verdict on capability.
Everyone regrets waiting and nobody says so	68% of recent residents wish they had moved earlier. 4% wish they had waited. No operator in this category says “do not wait.”
The decision trigger is smaller than anyone expects	We looked for falls and diagnoses. We found a steep path, a bath, a ladder nobody should be on. 6 of 14 settled residents named a piece of the house, not a health event.
Nobody says the word, and everyone is planning for it	Three of 34 households said “death” out loud. Twenty-nine described arrangements that only make sense if you are planning for one.
Inheritance preservation isn’t the barrier they assume	Adult children raised money unprompted in 19 of 34 conversations, always to say it did not matter. Parents raised it in 26 of 34, always to say it did.
It takes about a year to belong.	Residents describe a year to settle and longer to be known. The category sells instant arrival and is silent on the part that is actually hard.

Three audience groups. The *same* fears in all of them.

The reactive mover

Moving because something happened. A fall, a diagnosis, a partner gone, or a task in the house that stopped being possible.

"I need more support. I do not want to stop being myself."

41% of settlements

The proactive planner

Thinking ahead, in no hurry, and close to the only person the category talks to.

"I want to get ahead of it. I am not ready to give anything up."

23% of settlements

The adult child

Usually a daughter, 45 to 60. Researching quietly, often long before she says anything out loud.

"I want her safe. I do not want to take anything from her."

Present in **78%** of settlements

Their reasons are different. Their fears are identical:
Moving means being less of a burden to the people they love.
Everything they built gets left at the gate.

The *convention* inventory

KEEP

These codes earn the right to be considered. Breaking them costs fluency, buys nothing.

- Use real residents. Stock imagery = not real life.
- The physical place, shown properly. Vagueness = evasive.
- Continuum of care, stated plainly = risk-reduction.
- Village-level specificity. The decision is geographic first.
- Warmth and smiles. No black humour.

BREAK

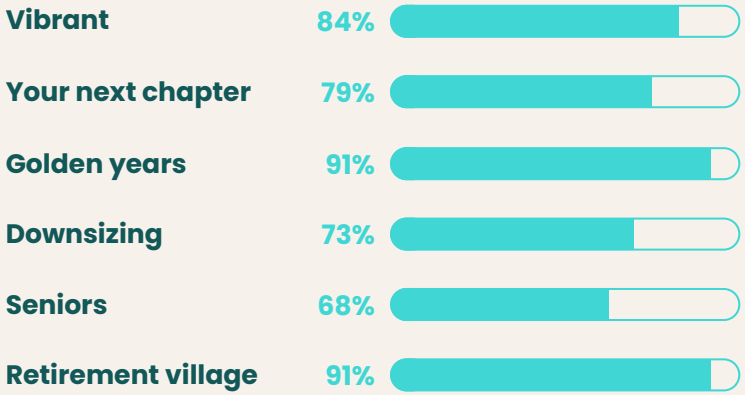
Avoidance behaviours. These exist because the category is uncomfortable, not because they work.

- Vitality as proof of worth. It asks people to try to fit in.
- The proactive planner as the only protagonist. 77% of settlements are somebody else.
- Skipping the transition. Currently the story starts after the hard part is over. That's not the human truth.
- The village gate as the start. Everything shown in advertising happens inside the village.
- Silence about what comes next. It's why they are making their decision anyway.

The words they use, and the words they *refuse.*

REJECTED

Shown real category advertising copy, this is the percentage who said it wasn't written for someone like them.



Nearly half reject the category's own name. Visitors arrive expecting a rest home and residents spend the first ten minutes correcting them.

THEIR WORDS

Unprompted, across 34 household conversations.

"Not being a burden"
24 of 34 prospects

"The house", never "home"
31 of 34, when discussing leaving

"When things change"
The euphemism everyone reached for

"Getting ahead of it"
Used only by people who had already moved

"Sorting it out"
What families call the decision

Three things *we* had wrong

THE ADULT CHILD IS THE ROUTE IN

She is, eventually. Raised too early she is the barrier. The task is not equipping her. It is giving the parent a way to raise it first.

DEFERRAL IS FEAR OF THE VILLAGE

It is fear of being a burden. People do not move when they accept the village. They move when they accept they might become one.

THE WHITE SPACE IS HONESTY ABOUT DECLINE

Too broad, and it frightens people. The space is honesty about timing, which is the same truth people can act on.

WHAT WE STILL DO NOT KNOW

- Whether the West and North Shore gap is proposition or sales execution. We could not separate them and will not guess.
- Whether the failure sits at application to settlement. If it is the house sale, it is barely a creative problem.
- How much of what residents told us is post-purchase justification. People defend the choice they made.
- Whether single prospects differ from partnered ones. The base was too small to say.
- Māori and Pacific households were under-recruited. We will not generalise from what we have.

THE HUMAN TRUTH

Moving is the last act of *truly* looking after yourself... (and your family)

The category has spent seven years arguing that later life is not an ending. That argument is won, and it was never the one that mattered.

What nobody has said is the thing every person in this study was circling. The fear is not the village and it is not decline. It is becoming a weight on the people you love. Which means the move is not a surrender. Done in time, it is the most generous thing you can do for them.

WHAT IT GIVES THE BRAND

The forward vision the category has never had. Not your world opening up, but your family's. Need, safety and health become acts of love rather than admissions of decline.

WHAT IT GIVES THE SIX MONTHS

The 23 who toured and walked did not reject the village. They decided they were not a burden yet. That is a timing argument, and timing is winnable inside six months.