



May 2025

Uniting Heritage

For past residents, people affected
by adoption, and their families.



Uniting is the community services organisation
of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.

Uniting

Founding agencies

The founding agencies of Uniting Vic.Tas provided out-of-home care in Victoria. Under each agency listed below are the names of orphanages, children's homes, family group homes, foster care and adoption providers that were run by the former denominations of the Uniting Church – Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational. Uniting Vic.Tas continues to provide some of these services today.

Connections: Methodist Babies' Home (1929-1974), Presbyterian Babies' Home (1928-1977), Copelen Street Family Centre (1974-1991), Canterbury Family Centre (1977-2000), Copelen Child and Family Services (1991-1998).

UnitingCare Gippsland: Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys, Sale (1923-1978), Kilmany Family Care (family group homes), East Gippsland (1978-2002), Kilmany UnitingCare (2001-2010).

UnitingCare Harrison: Arthur Harrison Boys' Home, Hawthorn (1960-1977), Harrison House Youth Services (also known as Harrison Youth Hostel), Melbourne eastern suburbs (1982-1994).

UnitingCare Kildonan: Kildonan, North Melbourne (1890-1937), Presbyterian Sisterhood (1901-1978) Kildonan, Elgar Road, Burwood (1937-1961), Kildonan Homes for Children, Melbourne's eastern and inner suburbs (1961-1993), Kildonan Child and Family Services, office in Whittlesea/Epping (1993-2007).

UnitingCare Lentara: Methodist Homes for Children, Cheltenham (1891-1953), Orana, the Peace Memorial Homes for Children, Burwood (1953-1988).

Wesley Mission Victoria: South Yarra Home (1900-1936), Tally Ho Boys' Training Farm, Burwood (1903-1986), Tally Ho Youth Services, Melbourne eastern suburbs (1986-1990s), Memorial Girls' Home, Fairfield (1922-1984), Moreland Hall, Brunswick (1936-1969), Lincoln House, Central Mission Hostel for Boys, King Street, Melbourne (c1939-1950), Wesley Youth Services, Melbourne eastern suburbs (1986-2017).

UnitingCare Wimmera: Wimmera Family Homes/ Wimmera Community Care, Horsham/ Stawell (1979-2000), UnitingCare Wimmera (2000-2017).

UnitingCare Wyndham: Werribee Support and Housing (also known as Bridges Foster Care Inner West), Werribee and Melbourne (1982-2017).

UnitingCare Victoria and Tasmania: Dhurringile Rural Training Farm, Tatura (1951-1964), Regent House Hostel for Girls, Elsternwick (1966-1977).



Bronwyn's message

Welcome to the first issue of Uniting Heritage for 2025

It seems fitting that I write this in Autumn, the season known for ushering in change. As many of you know, in January, we farewelled Catriona Milne as she retired from her position as manager of the Heritage Service.

Catriona had such an incredible impact on many people as she supported them to uncover their past. We wish her the very best in her retirement.

And a warm welcome to Chris Wade, who I know is keen to continue the Heritage Service's important work in the years ahead. Many of you may already know Chris, while others will have the opportunity to meet him soon.

As an experienced counsellor and records manager, I know the Service is in good, gentle hands. I also welcome our new Social Worker Beth Exiner.

In more news of change, I must let you know that I too am leaving Uniting at the end of June. It has been a great honour and privilege to work at Uniting – first as Board Chair and then as CEO for nearly 6 years.

From both a personal and professional perspective, I feel the timing is right to step down from the role. I will forever treasure the opportunity it has given me to meet with some of you to say sorry for harms caused by Uniting's predecessor agencies. These are moments I shall never forget.

I am proud that Uniting is now planning to say sorry to people affected by forced adoptions. Please see page 4 for more information about this, and how you can get involved.



Bronwyn Pike
Chief Executive Officer

Tributes

Since the last newsletter we have learned of the death of the person named below. Our thoughts go out to his family and friends.

† Cliff Burns

If you would like to let us know about anyone who has died, please contact Chris Wade on 0402 969 621.



Updates from the Heritage Service

Uniting says sorry to Forgotten Australians

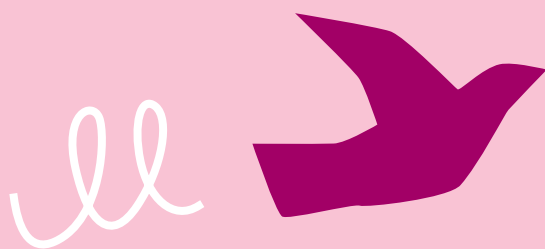
On 26 November 2024, Uniting said sorry to the Forgotten Australians who suffered from our past actions and practices.

Forgotten Australians, also known as care leavers, include people who spent time in out-of-home care in Australia before 1990. As shared in our previous newsletters, the Heritage Service wrote to care leavers who had contacted us since 2016 to invite them to help us.

Some former residents shared their views on what an apology might look like, some people welcomed this opportunity, while others told us they would not find an apology helpful.

We are grateful to those Forgotten Australians who helped develop the apology with input from the Heritage Service team, Director of Mission Jess Hateley-Browne, and members of a specially formed task group.

This is the first time Uniting as an organisation has made a collective apology for its failure to protect and care for children, including on behalf of its predecessor agencies from the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches.



What Forgotten Australians told us matters when Uniting says sorry

Whoever is delivering this message to Forgotten Australians, it needs to be sincere, heartfelt, honest and transparent.

For so many years it has come from the mouths of government people and organisations who haven't asked us what happened, and what we want. We don't want organisational language – keep the words simple.

We want you to try to reach the hurt child that is within us all. Forgotten Australians need to be on the platform alongside Uniting Vic.Tas. We also understand that for a lot of people this public day is too hard to go to. And very overwhelming.

We were all beautiful children, often powerless and with no voice. Many of us were not seen, and silenced. The strong preyed on the weak. Those in power dished out punishments while we curled up and cried.

We need to honour those who have died and to those who are still grieving the loss of family. We need to hear that it did happen, and that it was wrong. Some things should be mentioned, but in a way that does not cause more trauma.

An apology can't fix the problem, because it did happen, but an acknowledgement goes a long way to help some people more forward. It needs to be said that this was not our fault. Now, together, let our voices be heard. We were just kids, and we were innocent.

Never again.

Go to the **Uniting Vic.Tas website** to read more and watch the recording of Uniting's apology.

Uniting to say sorry to people affected by forced adoptions

Uniting plans to say sorry to people affected by forced adoptions arranged by the agencies of the former Methodist, Presbyterian churches and the Uniting Church.

In 2012 the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania made an apology regarding forced adoptions. But, this was before Uniting was established, bringing together all the homes that previously ran the churches' out of home care and adoption services. This means we can offer an apology on behalf of the former agencies.

For some of you, an apology may be meaningless, and some of you may not be happy to hear about this. We will acknowledge and value each of your responses to this planned apology. If you have been affected by forced adoption, we want to hear your thoughts about how our apology can be meaningful. We want to learn from you about what would be important for you to hear, and what an apology event may look like when the apology is made.

If you would like to help us say sorry, please contact Chris Wade. If you have already told us you are interested, we will be in touch with you soon.

Kilmany Park Correction

Statement about Kilmany Park in the October 2024 Uniting Heritage newsletter.

Two past residents of Kilmany Park contacted us querying the following statement:

'In 1923 the Presbyterian church purchased the homestead and its surrounding 81 hectares ...'

We were incorrect. In fact, some of the land was donated by the McClelland family in memory of



New Victorian redress scheme for care leavers

In December 2024, the Victorian Government introduced a redress scheme for care leavers who experienced physical, emotional or psychological abuse and neglect as children in institutional settings in Victoria before 1990.

Eligible care leavers could get a payment of up to \$20,000, a personal acknowledgement or an apology, and counselling. The scheme is managed by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and is expected to run for 18 months to June 2026.

Agencies that can help you apply for redress include: Open Place, the Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN), Drummond Street Services and the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency.

More information is available on the **DFFH website**.

their son, Thomas. It's believed Thomas was a Kilmany Park committee member, while his wife Elizabeth was a member of the Melbourne Ladies Auxiliary for Kilmany Park.

In that same year, the Presbyterian Church purchased a further 200 acres.

Our thanks to Chris Ward who provided information which helped us clarify this detail. And thank you to the past residents who alerted us to this error.

200 acres was purchased from the Closer Settlement Board by Rev. Donald Alan CAMERON (1862-1940) on behalf of the Presbyterian Church. Cameron was the Director of Home Missions and Conventor of Social Services for the Church. The cost was £9,500 but repairs and alterations are expected to bring this amount up to £11,000.

An article in The Argus about the Presbyterian Church's purchase of 200 acres of Kilmany Park.

Tours of Melbourne's children's homes

In January the Heritage team took a group of staff from Uniting on a tour of the children's homes; Kildonan in North Melbourne and Burwood, the Methodist Babies' Home, Presbyterian Babies' Home, Presbyterian Sisterhood, Orana and Tally Ho.

It was moving for them to see these places where children and mothers lived over the decades as they learned about the Homes, the lives of those who lived there, and how the Heritage Service supports them.

The Heritage Service will host another tour later in the year – everyone is welcome. Please contact Chris Wade if you are interested, and we will keep you posted.



The group at the former Presbyterian Babies' Home in Canterbury Road, Camberwell (1928-1977).

Changes in the Heritage Service team

In January, we said goodbye to Catriona Milne as she retired from her position as manager of the Heritage Service and welcomed new Manager Chris Wade.

In August 2016 Catriona commenced as the Heritage Service's first staff member. Since then, she helped more than 2,400 people who lived in homes as children, or were affected by adoption, receive their records and valuable support.

Catriona has had a profound impact on many people. As we farewelled her, we acknowledged her dedication to honouring each person's lived experience, and her determination to centre the Service's work around people, rather than expecting them to jump through hoops.

We are grateful for Catriona's willingness to listen and learn from the people she worked with, and for acting boldly to lead the Heritage Service to becoming the unique and highly regarded service it is today.



Chris Wade has stepped in as the new Manager of the Heritage Service. Some of you may already know Chris, who's been part of the Heritage Service team since April 2021. He's an experienced counsellor who has recently provided therapeutic support to unpaid carers. Chris also has deep knowledge of records management from his many years working at the Victorian State Library.

Chris is excited to lead the Heritage Service and continue the excellent work in the years ahead.

In March we welcomed Case Worker Beth Exiner to the team. Beth will work directly with people seeking their records and support relating to their adoption or time living in out-of-home care.

Beth is a social worker who has worked with victims and witnesses of crime, as well as people affected by family violence. Beth has a background in cultural heritage and is passionate about helping people understand their past.



A significant gift inspired by connection

Fire & Clay is a Uniting social enterprise which employs people living with disability to make pottery for the home and garden. Recently they gave the Heritage Service a thoughtful and significant gift.

A year in the works, the folks at Fire & Clay handcrafted six beautiful plaques, representing historical homes Dhurringile, Kildonan, Kilmany Park, Methodist Babies' Home, Presbyterian Babies' Home, Orana and Tally Ho.

The idea was inspired by a Fire & Clay staff member when they met the Heritage Service team and found a deep appreciation for their work. Supported employees lent their creative talents to the project, enhancing each plaque with vibrant colours and intricate details.

The Heritage Service team is deeply touched by this gesture. We will showcase the plaques at 130 Lonsdale Street soon.

**Fire
& Clay**
Handcrafted with love.



Reconnection after almost 6 decades

In 2024 in a park in Warrnambool in Victoria, Helen met Anne and Gwen, two women who had cared for her and her twin brother at the Methodist Babies Home almost 60 years ago. The women remembered Helen clearly and shared photos of her and their memories. Here, Helen and Anne share their story.

I kept a pair of Helen's shoes for years

By Anne

During my time as a trainee Mothercraft Nurse at the Methodist Babies' Home in 1967, I bonded with a toddler, Helen, who was a twin.

I returned to the Home after days off to find Helen was gone. I was happy she had been adopted, devastated I hadn't had the chance to say goodbye, and concerned that the twins had been split.

My mum said I kept a pair of Helen's shoes for years, and I also had treasured photos.

Over the years, whenever my group of former trainee nurses met, we wondered what happened to certain children. My wish was to know if the twins found each other.

As the organiser of Home's former trainee nurse reunions since 2014, I became involved

in the Uniting Heritage Service project, which gathered information from former trainee nurses about the children we cared for, and in some instances linked them.

I had never imagined being one of those links until I received an amazing phone call from Uniting, "Guess who I have just spoken to?"! There were many tears that day as I shared the news.

Eventually a meeting was arranged by Uniting with Helen, myself and Gwen, who also loved Helen. I recognised Helen by her deep blue eyes, so familiar, but in an adult person. A very emotional moment to deliver a hug 57 years on.

And yes, the twins had found each other.

A poem about reconnecting with Anne and Gwen

By Helen

57 years and with it a surprise
A call about some mothercraft nurses
Had brought tears
Tears now down my eyes.

A special arranged reunion
Two angel caring nurses
A lifetime of not knowing
Of these sweet ladies' lives.

Having love for all the children
And the challenges they faced
They worked with great diligence
Their work was fast paced.

They knew the time would come
for those they cared for
That they would say goodbye
These children had no idea
It would make the trainees cry.

The nurses continued to remember
The children that were in their care
The work these ladies had been put in
It was indeed rewarding
All was right and fair.

For Gwen and Anne
They have brought purpose
Encouragement and strength
They have helped bring clarity to my past
They've gone the extra length.

My dream to meet these ladies
57 years have passed
I am relieved and satisfied
I know my past at last.

For those children
Now grown up
And the questions that remain
There is help and guidance
To know from whence you came.

Help to gain some answers
As to why you were in a home
I came to learn and understand
I wasn't on my own.

These trainees loved all the children,
and they could clearly see
That my life had been happy
I was happy as could be.

My thanks goes to Catriona
And the plans she put in place
For I am now in a happy place
With a smile now on my face.

To Anne and Gwen I love you both
My now forever friends
You both are now my family
That bond it never ends.

Tom's story

Tom* first made contact with Open Place, Victoria's service provider to Forgotten Australians. When they contacted us, we offered to contact Tom as we had significant records for him. Amongst the information we gave Tom were the details of a social worker who had been involved with him and his family. This is what he wrote after he met with her.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Catriona at Uniting for being so instrumental in helping me by gathering information about my past. Uniting has greatly assisted me by sourcing and providing me with records that I would have otherwise have not been able to access.

Given the sensitivity of the records, Uniting also took the time to personally deliver and summarise the information contained in those records. This was extremely appreciated given the details surrounding the reasons I was placed in care as a child.

As a 66-year-old, I have wanted to understand my time in care for a very long time. Uniting assisted me by putting together many missing pieces in my life and allowing me to understand why I spent such a significant amount of time in a children's home, along with details of my time there.

In addition, Uniting went the extra mile in actually connecting me with people who cared for me and arranged an opportunity for me to meet with one of my social workers when I was in care. Although this reunion was an emotional one, it provided me the opportunity to ask questions and connect with someone that cared for me.

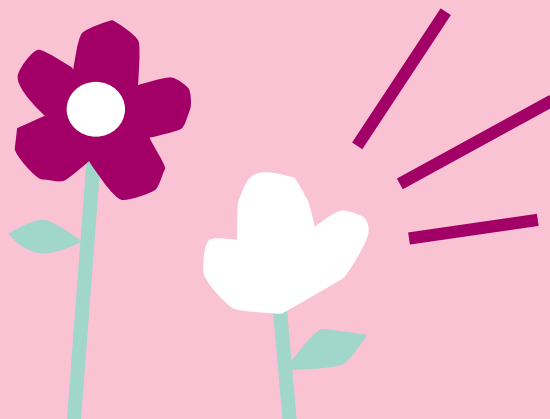
I sincerely thank Uniting for doing this and the social worker for volunteering her valuable time. It was comforting to meet someone who showed much compassion to me as a child.

Without the caring help of Uniting, my past would have still been a mystery that would have continued to trouble me. Although the pain of being in care will always be a concern for me, Uniting has played a significant part helping to repair some of the pain I was feeling from not understanding my childhood years.

With great thanks,

Tom

*Not his real name.



Collections spotlight

By Olivia Hărșan, Archives and Records Coordinator

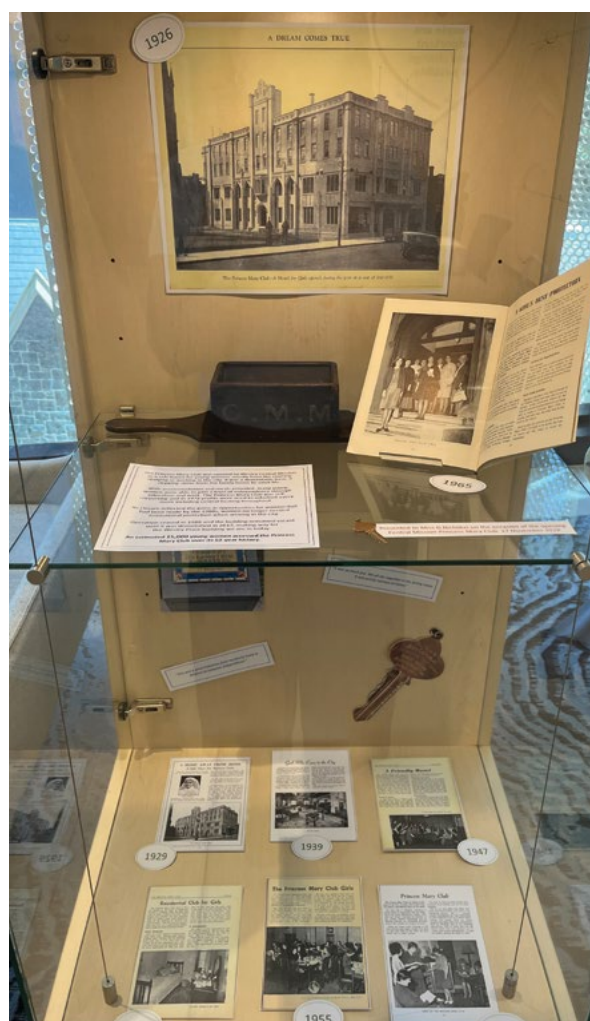
We're constantly thinking up themes for collection displays, and last December it seemed only fitting that we put together our first Christmas display! It featured photos, newspaper clippings and a 1929 Kildonan Christmas Appeal.

While preparing for the Tally Ho reunion last March, we found a series of black and white photos from a Christmas Pageant at the Wesley Church on Lonsdale Street in 1949. It shows children dressed as nativity characters, camels, a herd of sheep, and a plastic doll to play baby Jesus.

As we began to assemble the display, I recalled seeing Christmas related content in a Regent House scrapbook of newspaper clippings from the 1930s. There were sisters dressed as Father Christmas, or rather 'Mother Christmas' as the article title published in *The Age* proudly declares. No shortage of feminist movements in those days!

Speaking of staff dressed as Santa, we have a photo of someone arriving by way of helicopter (almost a sleigh!) at Tally Ho in the 1970s. We also found some Christmassy portraits of Mothercraft Nurses from the Methodist and Presbyterian Babies' Homes, including one of a nurse at a Christmas Party in 1965 wearing a cap typical of the era.

In January we made a new display devoted to the Wesley Central Mission's Princess Mary Club. This was a hostel for young women, mostly from the country, who were studying or working in the city. Operation ceased in 1988, and the building remained vacant until it was demolished in 2017, making way for the Wesley Place building the Uniting Heritage Service is based out of today. The most precious artefact we have in this collection is a bronze key which was presented when the club opened on 17 November 1928.



A cabinet of Christmas curiosities

Other services outside of Uniting



The Care Leavers Australasia Network

The Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) is a support and advocacy group for people brought up in care away from their family as state wards or children raised in children's homes, orphanages, other institutions, or in foster care. CLAN also assists family members of people who were placed in care. The founding members of CLAN are both care leavers who have been involved in awareness-raising and advocacy about the issues facing people who experienced out-of-home care as children.

T 1800 008 774
E support@clan.org.au



Open Place

Open Place is a support and advocacy service that provides direct assistance for people who grew up in Victorian orphanages and homes. This service helps people who identify as Forgotten Australians to deal with the legacy of their childhood experiences and provides support to improve their health and well-being.

T 1800 779 379
E info@openplace.org.au



VANISH

VANISH provides search and support services to adults affected by adoption including natural mothers and fathers, adopted persons and their family members.

T 1300 826 474
E info@vanish.org.au

Support our work

The Heritage Service mostly relies on non-government funding. We greatly appreciate any donations that help further our work and secure this service into the future.

You can donate online and specify that your donation goes to the Heritage Services by visiting unitingvictas.org.au/donate

Get in touch

Chris Wade
T 0402 969 621
E christopher.wade@unitingvictas.org.au
unitingvictas.org.au

About Uniting

Uniting Vic.Tas is a not-for-profit organisation working alongside local communities delivering a range of services for over 100 years.

The Heritage Service has been established for past residents and their families who were affected by adoption or who received out-of-home care provided by, Methodist and Uniting Churches. We help people access information about themselves or their family member's time in care and support them in their journey to better understand their past.

We work in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First Peoples and as the traditional owners and custodians of this land.

We celebrate diversity and value the lived experience of people of every ethnicity, faith, age, disability, culture, language, gender identity and sexual orientation. We welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender diverse and non-binary, intersex and queer (LGBTIQA+) people at our services. We pledge to provide inclusive and non-discriminatory services.

Learn more
unitingvictas.org.au

