



The Dhurringile Rural Training Farm in Tatura.

November 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).



Carol's message

Welcome to the final issue of Uniting Heritage for 2025

It's a great privilege to join Uniting and begin this new chapter. As Bronwyn Pike stepped away in June, I started as CEO in July 2025. In the short amount of time I've been here, I have been deeply impressed by the passion and purpose that shines through every part of the organisation.

I'm so heartened by the Heritage Service team's work to support people to reconnect with their past, and find family members who were lost, either through out of home care or adoption.

This issue shares some of your very moving stories of restoring relationships and reconnecting with your past. The reunion for past residents of Orana – the last to be held at Rentoul Hall (page 5). Hugh and Helene's stories of how they met in 1955 when Helene nursed Hugh back to health over 11 months, through to their reunion an incredible 70 years later (page 6). And Kerrie's emotional and cathartic account of how she uncovered her family's extraordinary history (page 8).

There is also important information about the Victorian Government's redress scheme. I encourage you to contact the agencies listed to find out if you should apply before applications close on 30 June 2026.

And a special thank you for John Lott, a talented artist and former resident of Tally Ho Boys' Training Farm in Melbourne, who has donated some photographs from Tally Ho, as well as a beautiful painting (page 11). If you happen to visit the Heritage Team at 130 Lonsdale Street in Melbourne, be sure to ask to see it!.



Carol Jeffs
Chief Executive Officer

Tributes

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

† Adrian Morrissey (dec. 6 July 2025)

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

Redress scheme updates

In more recent years, the Victorian Government introduced redress schemes for people who were abused when living in institutional care as well as people who experienced forced adoption. These schemes offer successful applicants a range of supports including a financial payment, counselling and a personal acknowledgement.

While applications regarding Historical Forced Adoption are still ongoing, applications for the Out of Home Care Redress Scheme close on 30 June 2026.

A range of supports and resources are available for those who are interested in learning more about the schemes. They can also help understand the eligibility criteria and work out whether to make an application:

- Out of Home Care Redress Scheme: services.dffh.vic.gov.au/redress
- Open Place: openplace.org.au
- Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN): clan.org.au
- Historical Forced Adoption Redress Scheme: www.vic.gov.au/redress-forced-adoptions
- VANISH: vanish.org.au
- Relationships Australia Victoria: relationshipsvictoria.org.au

Stolen generation reparations packages

Since 2022 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have been able to apply to the Victorian Government for reparations packages to address the trauma and suffering caused by the forced removal from their families, culture and country.

The packages offer a range of supports including a lump sum payment, counselling, a personal apology, support to reconnect with family and country, as well as opportunities to share your story and access records about your removal.

First Nations people who were forcibly separated from their family can apply for a package until 31 March 2027. Support to do this is available from the following agencies:

- Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency: vacca.org
- Link Up: linkupvictoria.org.au

More information is available on the Stolen Generations Reparations Package website: www.vic.gov.au/stolen-generations-reparations-package.

Saying sorry to those affected by forced adoption

As mentioned in our last newsletter, Uniting is committed to saying sorry to people affected by forced adoptions arranged by the agencies of the former Methodist, Presbyterian churches and the Uniting Church.

Uniting is the successor of these agencies and acknowledges its responsibility for these past practices and the harm caused to all involved, particularly the mothers.

Anyone who wants to help us develop this apology is welcome. If you have been affected by forced adoption, we invite you to share your thoughts about how our apology can be authentic and meaningful.

If you'd like to be involved, please contact Chris Wade. If you have already told us you are interested, we will be in touch with you shortly.

Heritage Service tour of children's and babies' homes

Seeing the places where children and mothers lived, and learning about their lives, can be a moving experience.

The tour will visit the sites of many former homes around Melbourne including Kildonan, Methodist Babies' Home, Presbyterian Babies' Home, Presbyterian Sisterhood, Orana and Tally Ho.

Across the day you can also learn about how the Heritage Service supports care leavers, people affected by adoption and their families.

The Heritage Service tour of children's and babies' homes is now held annually and is open to anyone who is interested to learn more about the homes and lives of people who spent time at them.



The next tour will take place on Wednesday 14 January 2026. Everyone is welcome to come along. Please contact Chris Wade if you are interested to secure your place.

The last Orana reunion at Rentoul Hall

By Lisa D'Acri

On 26 March we held a reunion for past residents of Orana. Nearly 30 people attended, including family members of past residents. The reunion focussed on saying goodbye to Rentoul Hall and the Orana grounds as the City of Whitehorse has told us the site would not be available for reunions after April 2025.

Many former residents shared poignant memories of their time at Orana. They also shared thoughts about where they would like the reunion to be held in the future. We also celebrated the 90th birthday of a past resident as it was important for her to celebrate the significant event with her Orana family.

We were fortunate to visit the chapel at the Orana site. Lively discussions were held about where everyone used to sit and the songs they sang during the Sunday services. We enjoyed an



Former residents of Orana at Rentoul Hall.

impromptu performance of one of the hymns by two of the past residents. We are grateful to Colin from the Christian Alliance Church of Victoria for opening the chapel for us.

As we make plans for the 2026 Orana reunion, we encourage you to share your thoughts about its new venue. Past residents who would like their birthday, or other significant life events, to be acknowledged at a reunion are welcome to contact the Heritage Service.

Reconnected after 70 years

By Hugh Barclay and Helene Sutherland



This year, the Heritage Service assisted Helene to reconnect with Hugh, a former resident of Dhurringile Rural Training Farm, whom she cared for as a trainee nurse in the 1950s.

Hugh's story

I was born in Scotland in 1941. We lived in Govan, Glasgow, very close to the river Clyde and at the time they had the biggest ship building yards in the world.

During the war, there was a lot of bombing and the whole area was severely damaged. Our home was in the old tenement buildings, and our house was one room for our family of 5. Mum and Dad and three boys. There was no bathroom, and the toilet was outside on a landing shared by 2 other families.

Things were difficult and we had no money, and we lived on coupons for food and other basic items, however we still got on with life as best we could.

My mum was quite unwell and died in 1949 aged 32. My Dad was devastated and unable to look after us three boys, so we went to live with our aunties who took one of each.

In October 1950 our Dad decided to send us to Australia. I don't want to go into details as to why this happened – it was not easy for our Dad. We travelled to Australia on the MV Cheshire with 30 other children from the UK. It took 6 weeks and 2 days and we arrived on the 13th of December.

We were taken to the Dhurringile Boys Home near Tatura. We were the first group to settle in the home. I was there for 8 years. It was a totally different lifestyle for us: it was run by the Presbyterian Church, and we had work rosters before school.

It was very difficult to settle. For me, it was a very emotional experience. Good things happened at

the home, but unfortunately there was sexual and physical abuse, as well as emotional.

I was on holidays at Christmas time with the Russell family. They had a dairy farm and I had been going there since 1952. In January 1955 I had a bad fall from a horse and suffered a serious injury to my spine. I was taken by ambulance from the farm to the Maroona Base Hospital and stayed there for 11 months.

I was, as many of the nurses said, part of the furniture there. I was very well cared for and the nursing staff became like family. In June I had my 15th birthday – I had almost 8 months in bed, 3 months rehabilitation and I was fitted with a brace before I left hospital. I recovered very well, and after 2 years, I was playing football again.

I had many jobs when I left school, working as an apprentice electrician, then on a dairy farm at Edi Upper, near Wangaratta in 1961. I went to Queensland to cut sugar cane at Babinda for 3 seasons, and did fruit picking around Shepparton and Tatura. I became a locomotive driver hauling cane.

I married Elaine in 1966. We have 2 daughters and 5 grandchildren.

In 1967 I became an ambulance officer at Babinda, and after serving 35 years at stations around Queensland I retired as regional superintendent of South East Region. I am 84, and have been retired for 24 years.

It has just been amazing to be in contact with Helene and Alison. They nursed me 70 years ago, and because of the wonderful work they did – it left a lasting impression on my life and played a big part



Left: Hugh with wife Elaine.

Above: Helene and Alison, former trainee nurses at Mooroopna Base Hospital.

Opposite page: Hugh and Helene, 1955.

of me choosing a career in the ambulance service – I am totally overwhelmed that they were able to make contact with me.

I am forever grateful for their support and friendship while I was in hospital.

Helene's story

In 1955 I was an 18-year-old trainee nurse at the Mooroopna Base Hospital, and that's where I met Hugh, a 14-year-old Scottish lad from the Dhurringile Boys Home who had fractured his lumbar spine and was hospitalised for about 11 months.

Hugh was a really nice-looking young lad with a gentle nature, a lovely smile and a beautiful soft Scottish accent. We, the nurses, all loved him. He never complained and was so easy to care for.

Earlier this year, whilst lunching with my nursing friend of 70 years, a Dhurringile Boys reunion just happened to be taking place in the same restaurant. We both immediately thought of Hugh, as my friend Alison had also nursed him, so we enquired as to whether he happened to be amongst the group.

Turned out it was a younger group who had arrived in the 60's, but it was that chance incident that prompted me to try and find Hugh. And it is through Beth at Uniting Heritage that we were able to reconnect after 70 years!

It was rather a surreal and slightly emotional moment when I first spoke with Hugh, and to my amazement, he remembered me as well as Alison and some of the other nurses. Unfortunately, I have been unable to contact any other nurses for Hugh.

Naturally I was eager to learn of Hugh's life and have spoken with him and his wife Elaine several times, as well as exchanging photos old and new. Alison and I have also watched a wonderful video-documentary of Hugh's life, and Alison has chatted with Hugh as well, all of this with very mixed emotions as the story of Hugh's life and his family's life unfolds.

Hugh should be very proud of his achievements. I am ever so grateful to Beth at Uniting Heritage for reuniting us after 70 long years!

Thank you.



Kerrie's mother Janet.

The rich tapestry of my life

By Kerrie Russ

My long-held interest in documenting my ancestry began, in part, with the death of my mother from bowel cancer in 1989, aged 58. Her sister subsequently died of secondary bowel cancer aged 59. Then, in my early 50s, I too developed a bowel condition.

With limited knowledge of my parent's past medical history, I was further motivated to research their story for the benefit of my own children's health.

From an early age, my mother had always made me aware that she had spent most of her childhood living at the Methodist Children's Home in Cheltenham.

My mother was aware her father had placed her there as a young child after her parents separated and he never came back for her. With this knowledge in my mind, I thoroughly researched online and then contacted the Uniting Church in Victoria in 2019.

The lovely Victoria Lavery (Heritage Coordinator) was assigned to my case. With just my mother's name and her father's name, Victoria did an amazing job of gathering more information than I could ever have hoped for. A lot of credit must go to the amazing record keeping by the Methodist Home and the Uniting Church.

When I received my mother's files in a day-long meeting and discussion with Victoria, it was both incredibly emotional and cathartic, providing me with greater insight into the events and influences which shaped my mother's life.

The records revealed my mother was placed in the Methodist Home by her father on 22 February 1936, when she was nearly 5 years old. He incorrectly stated her birth date as 5 May 1932. She was later found to be a year older and born on 4 May 1931.

According to official documents, he claimed her birth mother had been unsatisfactory for 3 years, and absent from home at times for months, and finally disappeared with their younger daughter aged 3 years. In his words, "He thought the mother to be not quite right mentally."

On 29 September 1936, my mother was transferred to legal guardianship of the Methodist Children's Home. It is quite telling that my Mum's mother never came looking for her. She is not documented in any of the historic files at the Methodist Home.

From the period February 1937 to March 1946, there were numerous expressions of interest to adopt my mother whereby families were interviewed, and she was placed in homes for a trial. Unfortunately, she was returned on all occasions to Methodist Home and cited as being unsuitable, unmanageable, or difficult temper and not fitting in.

On her final trial in February 1940 in New South Wales, when she was 9 years old, the prospective parents felt she remembered some of her past

and would not acknowledge them as her parents. It was this family that discovered my mother was one year older than her father had cited. Also noting she had poor eyesight and needed glasses. Yet again she was returned.

My mother, in her many conversations with me, had no timeline or conscious recollection of these actual events. This is corroborated by the detailed minutes in the records of the Methodist Church Home.

"I am very grateful for this information as it has explained a great deal about my mother, her anxieties, depression and temper."

- Kerrie

Possibly she blocked these memories and preferred not to consciously remember these trial adoptions.

I am also very grateful that the Methodist Church had checks in place to enable my mother to return to the home rather than leave her in a situation where she and the family were unhappy.

When relatives (our Aunty Ruby and Uncle Sid) became aware she was in the home they expressed an interest to adopt her. She was allowed to spend Christmas 1940 with them where she was reunited with her younger sister Rhonda who had been left in 1936 by her mother, Melba, with the relatives to be raised and educated.

By this stage her mother had given birth to another daughter, Margaret, in 1940 who was a half-sister to my mother. Aunty Ruby and Uncle Sid later also educated this sister. I am unaware of the reasoning at the time why my mother was returned to the Methodist home after Christmas, where she remained for another six years.

I am very grateful my mother Janet remained in the Methodist Children's Home for all these years. As a result, she was later discharged into the care of her aunty and uncle on 5 May 1946, at 15 years of age.

My mother never expressed bad memories or treatment at the home, although she retained a lifelong dislike of tripe or white stew as she called it. She did mention the nasturtium flowers from

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Janet at the Methodist Homes for Children.

the garden that she enjoyed eating with bread, as a treat. Learning to sew whilst in the home was also a blessing, providing her with an enduring form of income, particularly after she was widowed at 34 years of age with 3 young children.

Unsurprisingly, she never developed what I would call a close loving relationship with her birth mother, Melba Conyers. My mother was, however, able to build relationships with her sisters and a half-brother that her mother had in 1950. It has provided me with an extended family of relatives growing up.

Mum never met her birth father Keith, or the 4 children he had with his second wife. However, in my commitment to continuing my ancestry search, when my mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 1987, I took the opportunity to contact her father and inform him of my mother's terminal illness.

I explained who I was but made no reference or judgement of the past. He just nonchalantly stated, "A lot of water under the bridge since then". I was able to firmly shut the door on that part of my mother's paternal history after she passed away.

In searching through boxes of old photos after my mother's death, I discovered a photo of 7 young girls and a mature woman sitting on a bench knitting. I recognised my mother with her red hair and glasses, sitting 2 seats to the left of the matron.

As a long shot I took it with me to my meeting with Victoria. She immediately recognised the woman as a matron at the Methodist Children's Home, in the 1930s. She also was able to provide me with other archival photos of my mother at the home in 1945. These remain the only photos of my mother as a child which I greatly appreciate.

Ironically, my father Ronald Plumley also spent some of his teen years in the Augustinian Orphanage in Geelong. Again, Victoria went above and beyond connecting me with Mackillop Family Services. I was able to retrieve his records, albeit lacking the detail of my mother's files. But that's a whole other story in the rich tapestry of my life.



Collections spotlight

By Olivia Hărşan, Archives and Records Coordinator

A unique painting hangs proudly in the Heritage Room at 130 Lonsdale Street in Melbourne.

John Lott, a former resident of Tally Ho Boys' Training Farm, a Methodist children's home in Melbourne, recently contacted Uniting Heritage Service. John lived at Tally Ho in the early 1960s with his brother Tom.

John holds an interest in preserving the past, which led to a long and meaningful career spanning work across the State Library of Victoria, various local libraries, and the University of Melbourne.

Last year he decided to generously donate several items from his personal archives to the Uniting Heritage Service. These include a selection of photographs from his time at Tally Ho, as well as a significant artwork that reflects both personal and cultural history, adding a rich dimension to our collection.

The painting, 'Red Gum, Wilcannia NSW' (undated, c. 1970s), is a temperate oil on canvas piece by Ronald Elliot Bull (1942-1979), a First Nations artist and former Tally Ho resident. John acquired the

painting around 15 years ago, motivated by his interest in Bull's life and legacy.

Born at Lake Tyers Mission Station on Gunaikurnai land in Victoria, Ronald's parents Alfred and Agnes were from the Ngarrindjeri and Wemba Wemba peoples, having moved from Cumeroogunga Aboriginal Station in New South Wales.

Ronald's early life was marked by forced removal from his family – first as an infant, then as a child sent to Tally Ho, and later spending his teenage years in foster care.

Despite this series of unjust impacts on his life, Ronald emerged as a prolific and talented painter, creating around 2,000 works. Influenced by both English and Australian landscape traditions, he is now recognised as an important figure in the history of Aboriginal Australian art, and a forerunner of Melbourne's Koori art movement.

This invaluable addition to our collection not only preserves important personal and artistic histories, but also strengthens the collective memory of the Tally Ho community for future generations.

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 care leavers 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 providing direct assistance for people who grew up in Victorian orphanages and homes. Open Place 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

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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 the Presbyterian, 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

