



November 2022

# 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 and foster care 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), 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 second edition of Uniting Heritage for 2022.

**The Heritage Service started prior to the formation of Uniting in 2017. One of the organisation's first acts was to commit to the continuation of this service and provide additional resources.**

We understand that significant pain, grief and trauma occurred within out-of-home care and adoption services set up by the Presbyterian, Methodist and Uniting Churches, which were directly or historically linked to the founding agencies of Uniting. We continue to provide some out-of-home care services today.

I have been a member of the Uniting Church most of my life. Now, as CEO of Uniting Vic.Tas, it is a strong personal belief of mine that we take accountability for the distress and pain caused to individuals and families.

An option that some people take up is to request and receive an apology, either in person or by letter.

Accepting responsibility for what happened is an important part of any personal response requested. To date, I, alongside the Moderator of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, have sent written apologies to seven people and met two people in person.

It is deeply devastating and emotional to learn about those who have been harmed by our past actions. However, people who do choose to connect with us sometimes find sharing what

happened to them and hearing a formal apology assists them. This is one of the many reasons it is important for us to offer this option.

Addressing and taking accountability for the actions of the past is meaningless if we don't work to stop abuse from happening again. At Uniting we are committed to ensuring all children involved in any Uniting activity, service, event or program have the right to feel and be safe.

If anyone is interested in receiving a personal or written apology please contact:

**Catriona Milne**

**T** 0402 969 621

**E** [catriona.milne@vt.uniting.org](mailto:catriona.milne@vt.uniting.org)

As you will read in this newsletter, the Heritage Service offers many ways for individuals and family members to understand their past. I'd like to thank our dedicated team, and all the past residents and staff members who contribute.

Bronwyn Pike

**Chief Executive Officer**

## Tributes

**Since the last newsletter we have learned of the deaths of the people named below. Our thoughts go out to their families and friends.**

- † Jessie Lumley (formerly Lorraine Hager)
- † Jeff Sharp † Patrick Thomas
- † Avis Graham (formerly Addinsall)

**If you would like to let us know about anyone who has died, please contact Catriona Milne.**



# Updates from the Heritage Service

It has been a busy six months for the Heritage Service team. Here are some of the developments since our last newsletter.

## Gatherings for people from the Methodist and Presbyterian Babies' Homes

In August, we held two gatherings for people who had lived as children in the Methodist and Presbyterian Babies' Homes. They met former Mothercraft Nurses who had lived and worked there. We sat in a large circle and people shared stories, including the nurses who spoke of their memories and their work in the home caring for babies and infants.

During lunch people learnt more about where they spent the very first days, weeks, months or years of their lives. A slideshow of photos donated by the nurses, most likely on box Brownie cameras, showed more of the daily life.

The following words were shared by participants when reflecting on their feelings and experiences:

"I am aware that I have always had some sense of abandonment, and now it's gone."

"I feel like I've had a huge hug."

Following the gatherings these words were sent to us from participants:

"I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed today. All my tears were happy tears. I realise now I was always in very good hands when I had no control over what was happening in my life. Thank you and your team for your efforts. It's a day I will always remember."



"I wanted to thank you for organising the get together on Saturday. I had no idea what to expect and I really enjoyed the day. It was lovely to hear what everyone had to say and to feel trusted with their stories. Thanks so much for including me."

Natasha who was a resident at the Methodist Babies' Home in 1971 enjoyed meeting the Mothercraft Nurses who trained and worked at the Babies' Home during the time of her stay. She was relieved and delighted to learn from the Mothercraft Nurses that the babies and young children in care were looked after with such love, care and enthusiasm. Natasha also enjoyed the opportunity to talk informally with the nurses and other former residents over lunch and was grateful to be provided with the opportunity to participate in such a unique event.

In the next newsletter we will share photographs and a story from the 1970's gathering.

## Adoption Information Service

We learnt recently that the Department of Justice and Community Safety has reduced the funding to our adoption work.

This means a reduction in staff time of roughly two and a half days. We are working to manage this and aim to keep the quality of the service at its current level. We have terrific volunteers taking on some of the family searching and work scanning and indexing records. We hope to recruit some more soon.

The greatest impact will be that the length of time to prepare records may go from five weeks to 8-12 weeks. We are sorry for this longer wait period.

We have sought a meeting with the Department to look at options and are also seeking funding from other sources to compensate. We are very fortunate that Uniting funds most of the work of the Heritage Service from donations.

## Kilmany Park plaque

The commemorative plaque to remember those who lived at Kilmany Park is progressing.

We are talking with the current owner of the land outside the gate where the preferred site lies.

## Staff

Victoria Lavery returned after parental leave in April and has now sadly decided to finish her time with us. We will miss her very much. Many of you have experienced her care and warmth. She has written something herself to say goodbye.

Olivia Harsan has joined us as the new archivist and is doing a wonderful job making sense of our complex and diverse collection of records.

## Catriona's trip to Scotland

Some of you will know that I spent most of June in Scotland. While I was there I visited the site of the Quarriers, a home outside Glasgow where several of the men from Dhurringile lived before coming to Australia.

I also visited Kildonan, on the Isle of Mull, and thought of those of you who lived at the home with this name. The word Kildonan comes from Cell of Donan, or Saint Donan. I have shared a collage of photos from both the Quarriers and Kildonan.

As I travelled through Scotland those of you with a Scottish heritage were in my thoughts, and I said a quiet hello with you all in mind.

And in Scotland, they even know how to spell my name!



# Mothercraft memories

By Denise Hartnett, former trainee Mothercraft Nurse.



## My Mothercraft nursing training at the Methodist Babies' Home - 1963/64.

On March 5th 1963, as a 17 year old, I left my family in Seymour, and began my Mothercraft nursing training at the Methodist Babies' Home, in Copelen St, South Yarra.

I chose this Babies' Home because I came from a Methodist family, and our lives revolved around the church. I was very homesick at the beginning but my fellow nurses, children and babies, soon filled that void.

Our training was over 15 months. For the first six months we were paid 25 shillings and 30 shillings for the latter nine months. During our training we spent time in each of the four wards. Ward 1, upstairs, was for the newborns and Ward 2 was for the older babies. Once they became toddlers they went downstairs and joined other toddlers, in Ward 3, some of whom were living with disabilities. The fourth ward was for older children who were approximately three to five years old.

During our training we spent a month in the maternity section of Epworth Hospital in Richmond. We attended lectures during the 15 months, and at the end of our training we had written as well as oral examinations, and we received a certificate, which enabled us to become a State Registered Mothercraft Nurse.

As junior nurses we worked split shifts which required us to arise at 5:30am The newborns were fed and had their nappy changed at 6am, 10am, 2pm, 6pm and 10pm.

All children were bathed daily and given fresh clothes. There were no fancy Avent or Tommie Tippee bottles but 13-ounce glass bottles that once contained tomato sauce. There was an array of teats that pulled on over the bottle top. Babies also had vitamin C each day and the older children had Pentavite drops.

The children wore clothing that was lovingly sewn or knitted by Church Guilds, ladies' groups or the many people who supported the Babies' Home. On the first Sunday of each month the Babies' Home had 'open day' where friends, families and interested people could visit the home and observe the children. On those days the children were dressed in their Sunday best and looked beautiful. It was always a special time for all of us, and we looked forward to the occasions.

On arrival each child or baby was designated to a specific nurse and was known as that person's 'nursechild', and that nurse was able to spend extra time with the baby or child when she was off duty. This was a very important time for both nurse and baby – I loved this time and so did the babies. Some of the nurses made special clothes for their nursechild. We grew to love them so much. It was bittersweet when the child was adopted or when we finished our training.

There was very little crying as the children had plenty of friends and nurses with them. If a child cried they were quickly soothed.

Never, during my time at the Babies' Home, did I ever hear of or see any mistreatment of any of the babies or children.

The older children played outside when the weather permitted. There was a sandpit, ride-on and pull-a-long toys and plenty of nurses or other children to play with. We also took the children to the local parks e.g. Como and Tivoli Road. Older children walked and younger ones were taken in a pram.

I have nothing but very happy memories of my time at the Methodist Babies' Home and I hope I have given you some insight to training of a Mothercraft Nurse some 60 years ago.

*\*Pictured above: Denise Hartnett, second left, with other former Mothercraft nurses at the August reunion.*



# Collections Corner

By Olivia Harsan, Records and Administration Support.

**My name is Olivia, and I am the new Records and Admin person in the Heritage Service team following Ann McCarthy's departure earlier this year. Ann was meticulous with her record keeping practices and I am grateful for the attention to detail and care with which she treated every item in our archive.**

I have a background in audio-visual archiving, having studied, trained, and worked in the Netherlands. I am very pleased to bring my preservation and digitisation knowledge and skills to Uniting Vic.Tas. It is great to manage such a unique collection of paper files, photographs, film, ephemera, and objects that form an integral part of Australia's social history.

Since starting this role in May, I have been researching the sub-collections represented by each home or institution and coming to understand the intricate way in which they are connected. This knowledge is the foundation of what I aim to achieve in my role and with the support of others in the team. I look forward to portraying a clear story and timeline of the historical institutions, providing more immediate access to requestors, and safe-keeping client records and related objects in the long-term.

Recently, the Presbyterian Church Archives donated a significant collection of records originating from former homes such as Regent House, Presbyterian Sisterhood, and Kilmany Park. The upcoming tasks with these records are to

assess and sort records, ensuring that information is easy to find, extract and deliver to consumers. We are grateful to Michael Smith from the archives and the Presbyterian Church for giving Uniting these records.

Uniting's Heritage Collection continues to grow with items being regularly shared with us. Many are loaned or donated by former home residents and staff via gatherings or word-of-mouth. In recent years, the Mothercraft Nurse Project has been a focus within the Heritage Team. We are now moving from digitising, describing, and storing photos from the Methodist Babies' Home to the photos from the Presbyterian Babies' Home. A key part of this project is receiving objects related to, and formerly used in the homes, including Mothercraft journals and pamphlets, badges, bowls, a spoon, and a bright yellow cot!

Excitingly, our office in the 130 Lonsdale Street building is located next to the Bennetts Lane archaeological dig. Artefacts are constantly being discovered and exhibited in the foyer of our building. The remnants of porcelain, glass bottles and utensils act as reminders that the past informs the present, and for this reason should be within reach, accessible and treated without intervention where possible. This authenticity, even if it is in pieces, ensures that the truth will prevail into the future.



# Lisa's story

By Lisa, a past resident at Kildonan.

**Having children of my own prompted me to try to find records of my time in care at Kildonan.**

As a young child, I lived with my sister at one of Kildonan's cottage homes at 15 Wattle Valley Road Canterbury. We lived under the care of Aunty Marg and Uncle John. We spent many holidays down at Torquay with Aunty Marg and Uncle John and other children from Kildonan.

After a little research I was told to contact Uniting Heritage Service, which is a free service. When I contacted them Chris Wade was appointed my case manager. Over the course of a few months Chris was in constant contact with me with updates about records that had been located on my time in care at Kildonan.

My records were put together in chronological order and included different files about my family, a school report and a personal file which related totally to me. The records held over 200 pages including letters, school reports and observations by welfare officers.

While sharing this information with me Chris was very supportive, understanding the sensitivity of the records at hand. He was able to do the same for my sister.

With my written permission, Chris was able to access my records from the State Welfare Department, as I was made a Ward of the State as a young child.

I am looking forward to more dealings with Chris and the Uniting Heritage Service regarding my mother's records who had unfortunately passed away.

I am so grateful to both Chris and the team at Uniting Heritage Service. It has been a pleasant experience in accessing my records and has certainly filled some missing gaps and given me understanding of my young life.

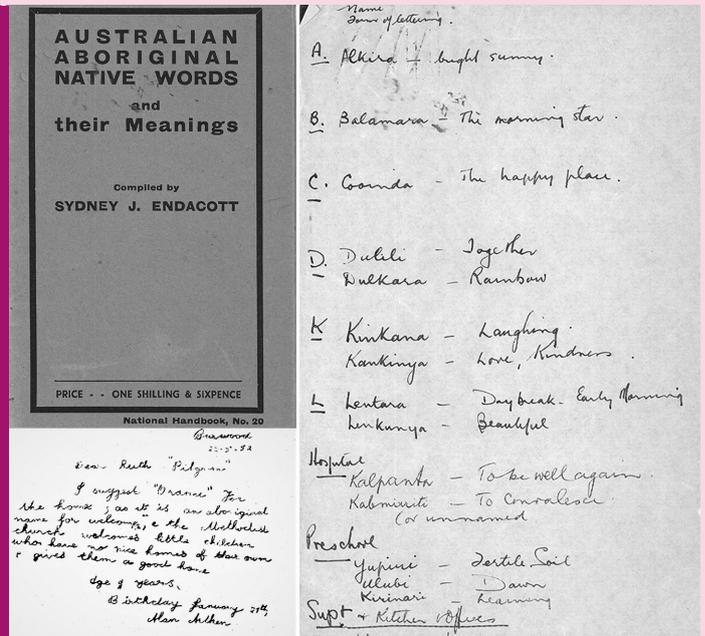


## Orana reunion

We were glad to be able to meet again at Rentoul Hall, on the former Orana site, for the Orana reunion on Monday, 25 April.

# Orana names

By Rebecca Liston, Admin Support, and supported by Lisa D'Acri, Case Worker.



Attending the yearly Orana reunion is a highlight of our working year. During this year's event we were asked about the meanings behind the Orana Cottage names.

We knew that most cottages were renamed in the early 1950's using First Nations' words, such as Cooinda Cottage and Lentara Cottage. However, we were not sure why they were changed or the meaning behind these words. I was anticipating the search for the meanings to take quite a bit of work but it was important to fill in this missing information.

A few months later, I was at one of our record storage units searching for some unrelated records when I found 10 boxes simply called, 'Orana General Correspondence'. I opened the first box on the shelf out of curiosity and there was a folder called 'Meaning of Orana and Cottages 1952'. It contained correspondence detailing the plan for the name changes, handwritten notes deciding which names to choose and their meanings, as well as a dictionary handbook first published in 1924 on First Nations' words.

The documents even detail how the name 'Orana' came to be chosen. In 1952 the committee held a competition to choose an 'every day' name for the new cottages at Burwood as The Methodist Peace Memorial Home for Children was too long. Prize money of £1.1.0d was to be given to the winner – equivalent to \$40.95 today. The competition was placed in the Methodist newsletter called The Spectator by Mrs. W.J. Hunkin pseudonym 'Ruth Pilgrim'. More than 60 suggestions were received. The name 'Orana' was submitted by nine-year-old Alan Aitken. It was chosen as it was "distinctly Australian, short, soft-sounding and had a suitable meaning of 'Welcome'."

We are excited that we can share these meanings with past Orana residents and plan to do more research into which First Nations' language the words have come from. Unfortunately, neither the handbook nor the notes specified this information. We feel it is an important detail to include once we know.

Transcription from above scan;

Cottages:

- A. Alkira – Bright, sunny
- B. Balamara – The morning star
- C. Cooinda – The happy place
- D. Dulili – Together  
Dulkara – Rainbow
- K. Kinkana – Laughing  
Kankinya – Love, kindness
- L. Lentara – Daybreak, early morning  
Lenkunya – Beautiful

Hospital: Kalpanta – To be well again,  
Kabminiti – To convalesce.

Pre School: Yupini – Fertile soil, Ulubi – Dawn,  
Kirinari – Learning.

Transcript of letter from Alan;

Burwood 22.05.52

Dear Ruth 'Pilgrim'

I suggest "Orana" for the homes as it is an Aboriginal name for welcome and the Methodist Church welcomes little children who have no nice homes of their own and gives them a good home.

Age nine years.

Birthday January 27th,

Alan Aitken

# Jack and Joan's story

By Lauren Utzinger,  
granddaughter of  
John Richard Westley.



*The only photograph of Jack and Joan together.*

**For my whole life I have known that my grandfather, who went by Jack, was an orphan.**

Ironically, his mother had been killed by a motor vehicle as she collected for a boys' home and her death had left behind Jack, three years old, and his sister Joan, five years old. Their father considered himself incapable of caring for the two children alone and as a result they were sent to live with their maternal grandmother. Sadly, she died of cancer just one year later and at four and six years old, Jack and Joan entered Kildonan in North Melbourne in 1932. Jack and Joan were separated upon arrival and not long after entering the home, Joan was adopted. Later, Jack was moved to the Kilmany Park Boys' Home.

At the age of 17, Jack left the home to look for any living relatives, including his sister who he had always thought about and wondered where she was. We have correspondence between Jack and the home over multiple years, where he asks for any information regarding the whereabouts of his family. Not much news comes through to him and the letters are heartbreaking to read. A few years later there was a breakthrough and he headed to the small country town of Euroa where he had heard a cousin, from his mother's side, was living. He found his cousin and he also found the woman he would marry, my grandmother. So, some happy news for him at last. However, there was always a sadness that existed, particularly for the loss of his sister. He continued his search for Joan, but never got anywhere. At the time he was looking, adoption records were still sealed and no information was ever given to him.

Up until his death in 1994, the not knowing was something that we spoke about as a family but didn't dare look into as we knew that hope of

finding his sister was pretty much a lost cause. A few times my mum and I had tried to do research into his family history but we never got very far, and certainly never anywhere with Joan. And then in 2021 it came to us to try and directly contact the home that Jack had lived between the age of four and 17.

Contact proved to be something we could never have expected. The dedicated Uniting Heritage Service were able to find reference of Jack in the very first phone call and after an identification, we were able to receive a treasure trove of information relating to my grandfather's time at the home. We asked about Joan of course, and much to our surprise, we could find out a few things about her too, like her birth date which we had not known before.

And the surprises kept coming for us and were beyond our wildest dreams. The wonderful team at the Heritage Service had information on Joan. They had taken the steps to track down her family and had found that she had two daughters. My mother's cousins. One of these cousins was contacted by the Heritage Service and the next thing we knew, we had a full release of the information for Joan.

My mother and her cousin spoke at length about Joan's life, where she went, what she did and how she lived a life full of love. Something that has stayed with me is that Joan's daughter was shocked to find out that her mother was adopted. She believed that if her mum had known, she would have told her. This brought great comfort to my family as there had always been a sadness in thinking that maybe Jack's sister had not wanted to know him. That she had not actively looked for her brother. And yet it seems this was

not the case. If only I could have a cup of tea with my grandfather and tell him this story, what we have found out about someone he had loved and tried so hard to find.

Whilst he wasn't able to find her, I'd like to think that we can say we helped him. Even though he wasn't here to see it, his spirit and the love we have for him has helped to find his sister and reunited their children to share stories from two very different lives but who began a life together, with a loving mother and father. The likeness of the two is undeniable and we shall ever be grateful for knowing both Jack and Joan's fate.



## Farewell from Victoria

**I wanted to thank you all for your support and understanding as I returned to work part-time after my parental leave.**

Balancing work with motherhood has certainly been challenging and I have made the difficult decision to focus on family and say goodbye to my role with the Heritage Service. I will miss the privileged role I have shared in supporting you with adoption and out-of-home care records. This has given me much fulfillment in seeing the benefit from the service that I could provide. Many of you continue to inspire me with your resilience, courage and hope in the face of adversity. This is no easy feat and is something to be acknowledged and shared.

Wishing you all the best for the future and goodbye, from Victoria Lavery.

## 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:info@vanish.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 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 (LGBTIQ+) people at our services. We pledge to provide inclusive and non-discriminatory services.

## Ways to 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 Service  
**[unitingvictas.org.au/donate](https://unitingvictas.org.au/donate)**

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