



December 2020

# 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 and adoption services in Victoria. Below under each agency 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), Canterbury Family Centre (1977-2000).

**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), Wimmera UnitingCare (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

It has been a challenging year for all of us due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Like many of our programs and services across Victoria and Tasmania, the Heritage Service team had to quickly adapt and find new ways to support people, while under COVID-19 restrictions.

**I'd like to thank Catriona and the team for their hard work and innovative thinking to make sure people were still able to access their records during this time.**

Despite the challenges, our Heritage Service has celebrated some big wins this year.

The Adoption and Information Service previously run by the Uniting Adoption and Permanent Care team in Dandenong has now come into the Heritage Service. This allows our Heritage Service team to provide records, information and support to people affected by adoption as well as past residents and their families.

It enables those who seek adoption records to be given information about the Homes where they spent the first weeks of their life, stories from the mothercraft nurses who worked there and ongoing support.

The team continue to gather photographs taken at the Presbyterian Babies' Home or Methodist Babies' Home through the Mothercraft Nurse Photographs Project.

Over 3000 photos have now been digitised and added to this collection, with more to come.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition. I wish you a safe and peaceful Christmas and a happy new year for 2021.

Bronwyn Pike  
**Chief Executive Officer**

## Gathering updates

**The Heritage Service team has been working with a past resident of Dhurringile to organise a gathering for men who lived there and their families.**

Dhurringile was a home near Shepparton and was featured in our last newsletter. We will be contacting people directly about this gathering and ideas are welcome.

Due to COVID-19 the 2020 Orana Reunion had to be cancelled. Plans are proceeding for a reunion next year and we hope to see many of you there on April 25. Invitations will go out closer to the date.

## Tributes

**We've been asked to share the names of people who have died. Our thoughts go out to their family and friends.**

† Ron Martin      † Val Johnson



# Working during a pandemic

By Heritage Service  
Coordinator, Victoria Lavery



**The COVID-19 pandemic has placed many challenges on the Heritage Service, and like so many other workplaces, we have entered uncharted water.**

On Friday 20 March we trialed working from home for one day. Since then we have only been back in the office for a handful of days.

There have been positives and negatives with the new working-from-home arrangements. There is the flexibility that working from home brings. But it's the people, banter and team collaboration that can be difficult to replicate.

Using technology like Microsoft Teams for meetings has gone some way to fill this void by providing face-to-face interaction.

One of the challenging aspects for our team to navigate is putting together records. They are taking longer to compile due to the restrictions. Gathering and preparing the documents is more complicated and time consuming.

Before COVID-19, we had a general time frame of 3 to 4 weeks of preparation time to get someone's records together. This can take up to 6 weeks if we are waiting on a ward file from the Department of Health and Human Services.

Since March, the challenge of not having an office and access to colour printing has seen the 3 to 4 weeks become a 6 to 8 week wait time.

Record releases have been done over the phone with numbered pages on both copies to ensure both parties have an index point.

I even managed to visit Sale for a records release during Stage 3 restrictions, while wearing a mask and socially distancing.

People have been so patient throughout this year, with many saying things like "what's another couple of weeks" and "everyone is trying their best, I don't mind waiting."

Some people have requested to have their records on a USB stick rather than a paper file.

I have recently provided a past resident's daughter with a copy of an oral history that her deceased father took part in back in November 1991. The recording was about her father's time at Tally Ho. She was delighted to hear her father's voice after so many years.

I feel we have been able to adapt and confront the challenges COVID-19 has presented, and it may have even made Uniting nimbler, and given us the ability to work in ways we didn't know were possible.

Thank you for your patience and understanding during this time.





# Mothercraft Nurse Photograph Project

By Records and Administration Support, Ann McCarthy

**We have now gathered a large collection of photographs taken at the Presbyterian Babies' Home (PBH) or Methodist Babies' Home (MBH) through our Mothercraft Nurse Photographs project.**

The collection includes many photos of the babies and children who lived at these homes, as well as the staff, buildings and grounds.

Many of the photos date from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. There are smaller numbers of earlier records, back to the 1930s.

The project isn't finished yet and we're hoping to see the collection grow, in particular the PBH photos. Many former nurses have shared their photos with us as part of this project.

The photos are currently being scanned by a professional scanning company. This allows us to pass on high quality images to care leavers and their families and it also helps us preserve the records for the long-term.

Photographs have a special significance as personal records of childhood. We began this project with the aim of having a photo collection to draw on in response to enquiries from those who lived in the homes and from their families.

We're pleased to have been able to pass on photos to numerous people already.

We're interested to hear from any past residents and family members who would like to know more about our Mothercraft nurse photos or would like a search carried out of the collection.

## Presbyterian Babies' Home gatherings

**We were able to hold 2 gatherings for former nurses from the Presbyterian Babies' Home since the last newsletter.**

It was wonderful to meet them and be able to add their photos and stories to our collection. It was special that a person who had been adopted from the home was able to attend and volunteer.

Many people who contact the Heritage Service for their adoption information will have lived at either the Methodist or Presbyterian Babies' Homes.

*Uniting Heritage Service staff and volunteers with former mothercraft nurses from the Presbyterian Babies' Home.*

# Updates from the Heritage Service

It has been a busy 6 months for the Heritage Service team. Here are some of the developments since our last newsletter.

## Adoption Information Service

**In big news, the Adoption and Information Service that was previously run from the Uniting Adoption and Permanent Care Team in Dandenong has now come into the Heritage Service. This is an exciting step.**

The Heritage Service can now give records, information and support to people affected by adoption as well as past residents and their families.

We can now release information directly to people that we could not before.

The team members who give people adoption records underwent training (remotely!) to be properly informed.

There are many connections between people who were adopted and people who lived in foster care and homes.

Often some children in a family may have gone into a home, and others been adopted. Also, some people were adopted and then came to live in a home or foster care.

This means people from former Methodist, Presbyterian and Uniting homes and services only need to come to 1 service for their information.

The adoption work is funded by the Department of Justice and Community Safety, so we have 2 new positions in the team.

The other part of our work with past residents and their families continues to be funded by Uniting.

## Consumer consultants and Kilmany Park memorial

**Consumers of the Heritage Service have continued to work with us to improve and support the work we do.**

Stephen has written an article for this newsletter and his story also feature in the Uniting Vic.Tas Annual Report.

Another past resident helped us interview new staff, while other consumers have provided feedback on documents and policies.

Thank you to those of you who supported our work this year.

Some past residents of Kilmany Park are keen to be involved in planning the memorial, and once we can meet in person this will get started.

If anyone else who lived at Kilmany Park would like to be involved, please contact Catriona using the contact details provided on the back of this newsletter.







# Since our last newsletter

## Staff changes

By Administration Support,  
Ramona Audrey

**Ramona Audrey has joined the team in the full-time role of administration support.**

“I started administration support and record searching with the Uniting Heritage Service at the beginning of August and am thrilled to be a part of this terrific team. There is much to learn, but I’m trying not to get overwhelmed! Remote learning certainly has its challenges, but everyone has been supportive. I’m excited to be able to assist the Heritage team in the wonderful work they do.”

Rebecca Liston has increased her hours from 1 day per week to 3 days.

Blanche De Guzman has left Uniting.

## New Building

**Our old office at 505 Little Collins Street has now closed.**

Once COVID-19 restrictions ease, we will move into our new building at 130 Lonsdale Street, next to the Wesley Church.

It will be lovely to see some of you there.

## Volunteer

**We have a new volunteer waiting to start 1 day a week in our team.**

She is a retired archivist and will do some work entering names from records into indexes and scanning, so that eventually the searches for records will be quicker.





# Stephen explores his past

Stephen contacted us in 2019 to access his records. Here, he shares his story.

**For many people, the experience of being in out-of-home care as a child or young person can have a lasting impact on their lives.**

My life story is one of going from rags to riches to the rocks. My childhood was one of foster homes, Babies' homes and stepfamilies.

Later in life I managed to settle down, marry, have kids and launch a successful corporate career. But one day my life fell apart, I lost my job, I lost the family home, my wife left with the children.

I hit rock bottom, which at my age over 50, left me in shock. Where did it all go wrong?

I could only put it down to my childhood. A part of history I had managed to bury for many years.

My corporate life taught me that nobody is interested in your past, only what your value is today, what you can offer and what you can do.

So, I was able to get away with living life by continually looking forward as people always told me not to look back.

Burying my memories also meant burying my emotions, tightening the lid to ensure there was no escape.

One day I did a google search on a children's home that I remembered and accidentally came

across while walking down Victoria Road in Hawthorn East. It was the Kildonan Admission Centre, under the Presbyterian Babies' Home.

That led me to contact Uniting in May 2019, and so began the journey of reconnecting with my secret past. Catriona Milne was delightfully helpful.

She agreed to search the foster side of the equation and put me in touch with Karen Mirfin to explore the adoptive side.

After completing many consent forms I finally received a call from Catriona, saying she had located some records and could we catch up.

With mixed emotions I meet with Catriona in November 2019 supported by a close friend, Margaret.

Catriona was warm and friendly, with a teapot and cups to greet us on the table, making the room feel safe and homely.

We waded through the documents and for the next 3 hours the emotional roller coaster ride ensued.

Anger, pain, anger, pain, hurt, helplessness, hurt, hopelessness.

A number of times I had to leave the room, once in rage and wanting to slam my fist down hard on the table. *(Continued over page)*



Other times in an overwhelmed, emotional state that only endless tears could relieve whilst I hid in the toilet cubicle.

Although the records that day only covered 2 years of my childhood from the age of 4 to 6 years old, it was a start.

Although it wasn't a lot, I began to see why I was the way I was.

The children's home supervisor reports revealed that I was starved of love, which made me needy, grabbing any attention I could find to fill the void of insecurity.

I was finally beginning to understand myself.

When I finally left the children's home a second time, after a failed adoption, I was placed with a loving foster family. This was the 13th move and I was only 6 years old.

I felt there were still more records to uncover, so I asked Catriona to keep searching and a few months later she hit gold.

She found the rest of my records with OzChild, as I was with FosterCare Westernport for many years.

Because of COVID-19 we couldn't meet, so I requested the records be posted so I could gradually digest their contents.

More history, more stories, more upsets and more dramas.

What surprised me throughout was that I was one of the lucky kids in the process.

I could see that the social workers involved actually cared, the department actually did try to do the right thing to make the best choices for me in between the custody battles of my biological parents.

Wading through my past records hasn't been easy, but I finally feel like I do exist now.

There are records, evidence that my memories aren't imaginative but that it did happen.

Records that validate my history, but importantly validate my feelings.

With these records I feel like I can come home to rest.

I don't have to bury the past anymore, rather I can build on it.

Instead of being awkward and backward, I can now look forward confidently because I know I was there in the past.

Before I was guessing, but now I know.

Now you know. Now I want everyone to know and I'm not afraid.

Thank you to Uniting for supporting me on this journey of discovery and healing.

## Sharing your Story

By Catriona Milne

**We asked Stephen to write for the Uniting Vic.Tas Annual Report.**

We hope that the people who read this story now and into the future will get a glimpse of the impact of the past and how we support people in the present.

Stephen speaks openly and eloquently about his experience. Stephen speaks of having to fill out lots of forms when requesting records.

It can be off-putting and time consuming.

This is why the Heritage Service does not have application forms and the Adoption Information Service will no longer have application forms.

Stephen mentions the search for his foster care records. This is an example of how difficult it can be finding information.

I was frustrated that these could not be located in our record collection.

Fortunately, Stephen remembered the name of a foster care social worker, I managed to locate her through the electoral roll.

She told me that the foster care program had been taken over by another agency and we eventually found 300 pages about Stephen at OzChild.

So much of the work of the Heritage Service is trying to locate information, not just through our records, but through other methods to help people learn more of their story.



# Lorraine's family history

Since 2018, Lorraine has been researching her family's history with the support of the Uniting Heritage Service.

**One of the roles of the Heritage Service is helping people piece together their whole story, not just the part Uniting has records for.**

As Lorraine has learnt about different family members and asked for more information, we have been able to locate a number of death and marriage certificates through the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

A birth and marriage certificate was obtained from the UK, and newspaper articles were located from TROVE at the National Library.

Psychiatric and ward records were requested and received from the Department of Health and Human Services. Records were also found at the Royal Children's Hospital.

We spoke to Lorraine about her research and here is what she told us.

My journey started when I approached Open Place for files for my dad and myself, because we were Forgotten Australians who grew up in institutions.

I found a newspaper article my father had placed in 1984, when we were very small, trying to find us.

When I was 14 I found dad, but I never knew about this article he had placed in the paper and it made me want to find the rest of my family's history.

Open Place passed me on to Catriona, because Uniting had some of my records and could help me with my search.

Catriona helped me request a lot of death and marriage certificates. I learnt my family suffered a lot of trauma.

On both sides of the family they died early.

For example, on my mum's side, my great uncle Jack was only 20 when he went to war and died, jumping off the boat because he was so scared to go to war.

My mum's little sister Leanne died falling down the stairs.

My mum's mother died unexpectedly in a mental institution.

I found my other great nan and pop on mum's side too.

I haven't been able to look so much at dad's side as most of them are in the UK and it costs more to get certificates.

The main things I knew before that came from my uncle's book, where he mentions that dad's great, great, great, grandfather was a hangman.

I think I've inherited power, courage, strength and bravery from my family and especially my dad's side. That's helping me to tell my family's story now. *(Continued over page)*



What I've learnt is that I've got family. They sound like they were very loving people and I wish I had a chance to meet them.

Finding out about them makes me feel like I actually belong to someone.

Putting my history back together has been like putting a puzzle together that's been broken for so long.

I've also learnt about the trauma my family has experienced through government decisions.

My dad had been left to fend for himself in Australia at the age of 14, with his 2 older brothers, when his parents returned to the UK with two younger siblings.

He became a ward of the state.

My poor mother suffered terrible trauma at an orphanage.

Learning about my history gives me a voice to speak about the past and these traumas. It also gives my family a voice to speak back to me.

Most of my family died without gravestones.

Part of me thinks the government should be held responsible for laying people to rest without a family headstone.

My partner and I had to find the graves.

Sometimes I felt like giving up, but I didn't.

The numbers for their graves were often covered over with grass.

We've gone to Bunnings and bought fences to mark out the graves.

We've decorated the fences with fake flowers, angels, crystals, steel butterflies and solar lights.

It gives me peace of mind that I can help them rest now, even though their lives were hard.

I want to make them feel they can rest. They are someone. They have never been forgotten. I want to have my voice and to give my family their voices.

My partner and I are going to keep searching.



## Support 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 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 supports adults who have been separated from their family of origin including people affected by adoption and donor conception.

**T** 1300 826474

**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.

### Learn more

[unitingvictas.org.au](http://unitingvictas.org.au)

### Get in touch

Catriona Milne

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If you would like to receive event updates and future editions of Uniting Heritage, please contact Catriona Milne.

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