

May 2024

## **Uniting Heritage**

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





## 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), 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 edition of Uniting Heritage for 2024.

On 8 February the Hon. Jacinta Allan, Premier of Victoria, made a formal apology to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care.

From 1881 Uniting's founding agencies were some of the largest providers of out-of-home care, making this a part of our story.

Many people across Uniting gathered to listen to this apology, to honour and celebrate the resilience and courage of the people who were in out-of-home care and adoption services in Victoria. And by listening and learning we hope to better support and understand individuals and families who experienced care systems.

It's a strong personal belief of mine that we take accountability for the distress and pain caused to individuals and families. Some people request an apology, either in-person or by letter. This can be important for those who connect with us, as they find sharing what happened to them – and hearing a formal apology – can assist them.

We are here to listen so please contact Catriona if you want an in-person or written apology, on **0402 969 621** or via **catriona.milne@vt.uniting.org**.

There are many reasons people make contact, and thank you to those of you who have waited patiently for responses. The Heritage Service team has been very busy with requests nearly doubling at the end of last year, and they continue to be higher than usual.

This may be in part because of publicity our Heritage Service received over December/ January when The Age, ABC Radio Melbourne, and Channel 9 News shared the story of our discovery of 4,000 photos of the babies from the Camberwell Methodist Babies Home. These pictures, taken against the rules by mothercraft nurses, are now finding their way into grateful hands, with dozens of adopted people now having received their precious baby photos. You can read more about our Mothercraft Nurse Photos Project in this newsletter.

Lastly, it is timely to announce that Catriona Milne is retiring at the end of this year. We will hold a farewell event to which everyone and their families will be invited to attend. And we will feature an article in our next newsletter to honour Catriona's contribution to our Heritage Service. I have great comfort in knowing Catriona will leave us all in very good hands, as she passes the reins to the rest of the team.



## Updates from the Heritage Service

It's been a very busy few months since the last newsletter. Requests almost doubled in October and November 2023 and continue to be higher than usual for the first few months of the year. We greatly appreciate your patience when our responses have been slower than we would like.

## Kilmany Park commemorative plaque

Several years ago a request from some past residents of Kilmany Park led to the idea of a commemorative plaque to remember all the young people who lived there over the time of its operation. Kilmany Park was situated outside Sale and a group of past residents has been working with the Heritage Service on this idea. Several possible sites have been suggested and explored.

In February this year Gippsland's Wellington Shire offered a site at Counhihan Road Reserve in Wurruk, just out of Sale. Because the Reserve is not an established park, landscaping, seating and ongoing maintenance would be needed.

Another option is to site the simple stone with a plaque on Uniting Church land. So far this is the group's preference so it's the option we're now exploring. The Uniting Church in Sale is welcoming of this idea, and at the time of writing, it's envisaged that members of the group will visit the church in April to discuss the siting of the plaque. If all goes according to plan the plaque will be unveiled in September.

We'll send individual invitations to the unveiling to everyone on our list who was connected to Kilmany Park.

### The Orana Rose project

We've spoken with the Victorian Rose Growers' Society who asked a volunteer to look at the Orana Rose. They then spoke with the current owner of the rose who has very generously offered to propagate the rose for us.

New Orana Rose plants will be available to people who wish to own one in about two years time, once the cuttings have had a chance to grow – we'll let you know when they're ready. The new roses will also be brought to reunions to give to those who would like one.

#### **Tributes**

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

- † Lynette Dean (formerly Harrison)
- † Dorothy Stielo

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

## Family searching workshop

We often receive requests from people searching for family who weren't in our past homes or services. So, our volunteer Alan, who is a very skilled researcher along with members of the Heritage team, will host a workshop to share some of the basics of family searching and ways to locate people and develop family trees.

The workshop will be held at 130 Lonsdale Street in Melbourne in the coming months. If you're interested, or think someone you know may be interested in attending, please reach out to Catriona.

Because much of the work of the Heritage Service relies on donations, a fee will be charged to participate in this workshop. For some of you it may be too expensive, so please remember that if you (or your family members) were in out-of-care, or adopted through any of our past services, a family searching service is available to you free of charge.

### Seeking Consumers Partners

Uniting is committed to involving past and present consumers, participants, or care receivers in all aspects of our work.

We use the word consumers as a way of highlighting people's central place and a degree of autonomy in our service delivery. We reimburse people who share their expertise and lived experience with us to improve what we do and to hold us accountable. You could partner with us as a member of interview panels for selecting new staff members and on advisory groups across a range of topics.

Further information is available at www. unitingvictas.org.au/consumer-partnerships. If this appeals to you, please contact Catriona.





## The Tally Ho reunion

On Saturday 16 March about 15 past residents of Tally Ho, along with their family and friends, gathered at Uniting's office in Lonsdale Street, Melbourne to share memories of their time at Tally Ho from the late 1940s to the mid-1980s.

A couple of former staff members also attended the gathering who were able to make connections between and across generations. It was lovely that two people reconnected with staff who remembered them. In the morning, past residents looked through photo albums of Tally Ho from across the decades. Then video footage of Tally Ho from the early 1970s was played before the group shared lunch together.

Everyone was then invited to share a personal memory of Tally Ho which prompted some interesting and sometimes humorous discussions.

One past resident said they enjoyed learning how Tally Ho has changed over the years and how interesting it was to learn a bit more of the history of the place.

If you're a past resident who's interested in future gatherings, or would like to talk about your experience at Tally Ho, please contact

**Chris Wade:** 0481 469 899 **Catriona Milne:** 0402 969 621

Another past resident said they wished they could have met up with people who had lived at Tally Ho while they were there so they could talk about old times together. And another past resident made friends with someone who was at Tally Ho at a similar time to them, which was a pleasant surprise.

Another person said that while they didn't have the same memories as others, it was helpful for them to hear what other past residents' experiences at Tally Ho were like.



# Mothercraft nurses' social history enriched by Sally's dedication

By Olivia Harsan, Archives and Records Coordinator.

Sally is a volunteer with Uniting's Heritage Service who has been assisting us with our Mothercraft Nurse Photos Project. Since February 2022, Sally's indexed thousands of photos of babies who were in the Methodist or Presbyterian Babies' Homes during 1930-1970.

Sally has become an expert at recognising the babies, infants, and young children featured in these photos. She examines them closely, capturing their clues and written descriptions, and technical qualities which help us to meaningfully preserve, and make available, this precious collection.

The Presbyterian Babies' Home (1928-1977) and Methodist Babies' Home (1929-1974) housed babies, toddlers, and Mothercraft trainee nurses. For many nurses, some as young as 17, this was their first time living out of their family homes, with many having moved to Melbourne from regional Victoria for nursing training.

These were formative years for these young women and the bonds they developed with the nurses with whom they shared care of the children

sometimes extended to lifelong friendships.

People who were in early care, whether it be for weeks or years, often have no memory of that time in their life. Viewing photos such as the ones in this collection can often be the first time they've seem themselves at that young age, which can be incredibly meaningful.

And that's why we're so grateful to volunteers like Sally. Sally is meticulous, passionate, and dedicated to her work. Her attention to detail, interest and fascination of the archiving processes has proven her to be an integral part of our team.

This project has, and continues to be, an ambitious collaborative effort between Heritage Service staff and volunteers like Sally. With 4,000+ baby photos digitised, indexed, preserved, and accessioned to date, this incredibly valuable source of social history will provide past residents with meaningful images and stories of their early years.





## How Robyn found her sister, and how together they explored their story

By Robyn with the assistance of Catriona Milne.

My adoptive parents took me to live with them when I was three and a half months old. I had been placed in the Methodist Babies Home in South Yarra shortly after my birth in the Royal Women's Hospital. My birth mother had spent the last few months of her pregnancy in a home for unmarried mothers in Fairfield. Having had her baby and having made the decision that adoption was her only option, she returned to the small country town where she lived for the rest of her life.

This special day was also my adoptive father's 40th birthday! Their names had been on the waiting list for some time. They had been married for quite some time but had been unable to conceive a child. They enjoyed looking after their nephew and niece and longed for a child of their own. This day was always referred to as my anniversary, and for many years I received a gift on this day as well as one on my birthday. I think and I understand why this date was so important to them.

When I was six years old my parents told me I was adopted. I remember going to school the next day, I couldn't wait to tell my friends, I felt so special!

I thought about being adopted from time to time during my childhood and teenage years, but it didn't concern me. However, when the law changed, I decided that I would like to know something about my birth mother.

I contacted the Methodist Babies Home. I was sent a copy of my original birth certificate and hospital records, which included birth time, weight, length etc.

My birth mother was told that I would like to meet her, and after some reluctance she agreed. I had written to her, enclosing some photos of me at different ages and my sons.

A social worker drove me and my husband to my birth mother's home town. As we got closer I had butterflies in my stomach as I wondered what the outcome of our reunion would be.

She seemed pleased to meet me and held my hand as we sat side by side on the couch. There were tears in her eyes. She told me that she never married and didn't have any other children. Years later I found out that only part of this was true! I visited once more without the social worker and we had phone conversations from time to time.

A few months before my 50th birthday a social worker from the town where my mother still lived rang me. He told me that someone else could be looking for my birth mother as he had found records of a baby being born to her amongst records at the local hospital.

I rang Copelen Street to ask if a baby had been placed there who could be my sibling. The answer was no. I was told that they would make enquiries, and sometime later it was confirmed that I had a sister, three years younger than me!

I was asked to write a letter to her saying that I would like to meet her. When they gave it to her she did not hesitate to agree to meet me. She, like me, had grown up as an only child and often wished that she had a brother or a sister!



For several years Robyn's sister had tried to locate records from the small hospital in regional Victoria where she had been born. She remembered someone had told her about some old records many years earlier.

The Heritage Service located this person, Bill, on the electoral roll. Bill explained that he'd been looking through five large old hospital registers with single line entries of births kept in an alcove of the old hospital. He'd hoped they had been retained due to their curiosity value as the old hospital had burnt down.

We then put in a Freedom of Information request on Robyn's sister's behalf, and in July 2020 a record was received.
Although the record was brief, the impact of it was significant as it meant Robyn's sister could finally confirm her exact place and date of birth.

I was contacted and told the good news and asked if I could meet her at Southbank in Melbourne. I asked that as I worked every afternoon at Waverley Gardens Shopping Centre in Mulgrave, would it be possible for her to meet me there? Her reply was that she lived a short drive from there and that it was her local shopping centre!

So it was there in the food court that we met. We ate lunch together, showed photos of ourselves and talked about our children. A bond formed between us from that very first meeting. We are very good friends and although technically we are half-sisters (same mother, different father), as far as we are concerned we are sisters! We always give each other 'sister' birthday cards. We are alike in many ways, some ways noticed more by others.

We both appreciate what our adoptive parents provided for us, and the love and security they gave us.

My sister's adoptive parents had been thinking about adopting a baby for some time. They had their names down in a few places.

During a visit to her grandmother's home in a large regional town they heard about a baby girl being in a hospital in a nearby town who was going to be placed for adoption. Her neighbour's son was the local doctor and he had told his mother about the baby he had delivered unexpectantly in his surgery. When my sister's parents heard that they drove straight to the hospital and said "we have come for our baby".

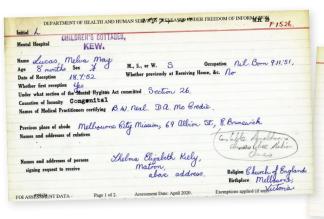
Unfortunately it wasn't quite that simple and because she had been born prematurely they had to wait patiently for a number of weeks until she gained weight. That happy day arrived and they were able to take their daughter home.

A few years ago I discovered that our birth mother had another baby girl called Melva 14 months after giving birth to my sister. Sadly she was profoundly disabled and passed away in Kew Cottages when she was 15 months old.

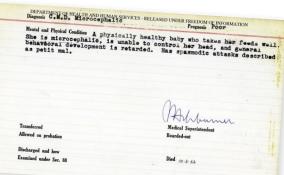
My sister and I visited her bare, unmarked grave at the Preston cemetery. We brought a bunch of flowers and placed them there. I found myself shedding tears as it is so sad! We're hoping to place a plaque there in the near future.

We are grateful to Uniting for the assistance they have given us over many years of searching.

At the request of Robyn and her sister, the Heritage Service was able to locate records for this sister at the then Department of Health and Human Services, the Royal Children's Hospital and the Royal Women's Hospital. COVID-19 delays meant this took more than a year, with the last record provided to Robyn and her sister in December 2021. (see images)



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### A note from the Heritage Service team

Robyn and her sister faced several blocks to their request to place a plaque on their sister's grave so they sought the Heritage Service team's help. First we followed up with Cemeteries and Crematoria unit at the Department of Health who referred us to the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust. There were several stages to go through such as making enquiries through the newspaper to locate the owner of the grave. In August 2023 Robyn and her sister were finally given permission to place a plaque on their sister's grave.

They also wished to learn more about the cause of their mother's death. We made a request to the Department of Justice and Community Safety and this information was given to them in September 2023.

## Our photographs

#### By Rebecca Liston, Records and Administration Officer.

In our last newsletter I shared my experience working with our Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys' photo collection; organising it and gaining a better understanding of the photographs. I wrote about when a past resident of Kilmany told one of our case workers a specific memory of a photo being taken of him building a boat in the wood working shed and how I knew I'd seen this photo in a larger newspaper clipping that I had explored very recently.

Well, the discoveries didn't stop there. After we shared this story and the picture of the newspaper article, Fred, another past resident told us that he'd got quite the surprise turning the page and seeing himself in the photos in that article! In fact, he remembered the names of all the boys and staff in the photos, information we didn't have on hand.

I called Fred to chat more about his memories, and the conversation became an hour of memory sharing. I transcribed our conversation which can now be used as contextual information for future requests regarding Kilmany Park.

Fred was in several of the photos in the original newspaper clippings. One showed him loading

hay onto the truck, a job delegated mostly to the weekends during hay season, as well as tending to the garden patches. The garden plots were set up for the boys to tend to themselves but after the initial excitement wore off, only Fred and a couple of other boys continued the garden, selling the produce back to the kitchen to earn pocket money. Another memory Fred shared was of a teacher named Mrs Hurst, who would visit the farm every Wednesday night to help the boys with their homework. Fred remembered how committed she was, coming every week for the several years he was at Kilmany.

Connecting names and memories with the photographs we hold is an ongoing commitment the Heritage Service team holds for all our photographic collections. Notably, attendees at the Orana and Methodist Home for Children reunions gave us more names, as have past Mothercraft Nurse trainees from at the Methodist and Presbyterian Babies' Homes who also gave us more photos.

Thank you, Fred for generously sharing your memories and helping us continue to grow our understanding of Kilmany Park.



## 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 nongovernment 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

T 0402 969 621 E catriona.milne@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





