



April 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 first edition of Uniting Heritage for 2022.

Two years on from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and it looks like we've finally found a way to live a 'COVID normal' life.

As we adapt to new ways of working with eased restrictions, I want to personally thank you for being so understanding and patient as we navigated our way through the challenges COVID presented and continues to present.

This service is a vital part of our organisation.

We are committed to providing access to records and information about you or your family member's adoption or time in care and offer support through this often difficult and emotional process.

As a lifelong member of the Uniting Church and many years of working in the community services sector – this work is close to my heart.

Everyone has the right to understand their past. It can help people understand where they belong in the present and shape the future.

Our Heritage Service team play a vital role in not only helping people to access records and information, but to listen, hear and acknowledge their experiences.

The Heritage Service is here to help people now and into the future, and we have also listed other support agencies on page 11 of this newsletter.

I have also seen how valuable reunions can be for people.

It's powerful when people can come together and talk about their shared experiences.

We can never take back the significant pain, grief and trauma caused to many people over many years.

I just hope this service can provide some answers and solace to people and their families who have endured so much.

I hope to meet with more of you at the upcoming reunions.

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.

† Bill Waller	† George Lakeman
† Rosalie Black	† Adriano Falcao
† James Devine	

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 6 months for the Heritage Service team. Here are some of the developments since our last newsletter.



Dealing with COVID-19

We're glad we have been able to start meeting in-person to give people their records and have done our best to keep everyone safe.

Where possible we have met outdoors - in parks - or helped people access our building without encountering too many people.

Because COVID-19 has prevented us going into the office as much as we would like, it has been taking longer to get records printed, ready and sorted.

We are very grateful for your understanding and patience.

From left to right, Rebecca Liston, Lisa D'Acri, Catriona Milne, Chris Wade and Ramona Audrey.

Staff departure

Since our last newsletter, Ann McCarthy has left the Heritage Service. We were sad to see her go. Ann helped further our understanding of our complex collection of records. We hope to have someone fill the vacancy soon.

Orana reunion

We are currently planning another Orana reunion, which we hope will be held again on 25 April 2022.

All going to plan, we will include a photograph of the reunion in the next newsletter.

Adoption Information Service

We are continuing to work through some of the changes that came into effect on 1 October last year.

We are now described as an agent for people wishing to receive their adoption records and for the first time, are required to use application forms. There have been delays due to the extra stages now needed and we are working with the Department of Justice and Community Safety to manage this as well as possible.

Employee Award

Late last year, Ramona Audrey from the Heritage Service team received a Uniting Award in the category of Living Our Values.

Uniting has over 3,000 employees, so this is a significant recognition of Ramona's work. This was awarded at the Annual Public Meeting in November. The following is part of Ramona's thank you speech, where she referred to the work she did for the Dhurringile gathering in April 2021:

"The event that I was involved in, with Uniting's Heritage Service, was a gathering for past residents of a Boys Home which was open in the 1950s and 1960s. When people come to us at the Heritage Service, we are often looking at momentous and sometimes traumatic times in their lives. The men who attended this gathering are now mostly in their 70s and our aim was to find meaningful records for them individually and as a group with a shared experience. Like so many teams around Uniting, the Heritage Service provides safe and supportive spaces for people to connect, and reconnect, and this was a special event to be a part of."

Kilmany Park

Establishing a memorial and gathering for men who lived at Kilmany Park.

By Catriona Milne



On 21 January, Gaye from Uniting in Gippsland and I met with a group of men who were interested in establishing a memorial and gathering for men who lived at Kilmany Park.

We met at the Criterion Hotel and shared lunch with the men and their family members.

A decision was made on the wording of the plaque and where to place it.

The gathering to unveil the plaque and who should be invited was also discussed.

Several other people have expressed interest in being involved but were unable to join us on the day.

We plan to meet again later in the year, with the hope that the plaque will be ready around October or November.

The next steps involve consulting with local government and investigating how we can publicise the event.

These are comments from 3 of the men who were at the meeting.

“The meeting of former Kilmany Park Home residents discussed the wording to be placed on a plaque to commemorate the 1000 plus boys who attended the home during its operating years. The discussion was powerful as we heard different experiences we had as boys in residence at the home and how that experience had impacted our lives for the good or bad. From my point of view, I found that many life lessons you experience in adulthood helped me deal with my attendance at Kilmany Park Boys Home.”

“The Kilmany Park Memorial is coming along nicely. We will be there before we know it. There was very good input from former residents. It was very constructive”.

“The only thought I have on the placement of this plaque is maybe outside the entrance on Settlement Road, as it will be under the trees and will not be overgrown by grass and other plants.”

A donation has already been made to this project and any more would be gratefully received.



Digitisation

We recently had a significant set of records from Kildonan and Dhurringile digitised and these have largely been finished.

Edith* from Blackburn North's story

My sister had been in touch with Catriona at the Uniting Heritage Service in search of our father, who we thought had been adopted.



After her correspondence with Catriona, my sister suggested it was time for me to search for my birth parents.

I didn't know I was adopted until I received an anonymous call at my place of employment, one week before I was to be married.

I thought the person was talking about my father, only to be told "no you are adopted."

This took me by surprise.

My father picked me up from the train station, which was unusual because my fiancé normally picked me up.

After telling my parents about the phone call, I was told I was adopted but they wouldn't talk to me any further about it.

I thought they must have a good reason for not telling me.

I had a very good upbringing with my brother and sister.

I didn't want to find out any information and upset my parents while they were alive.

As I am now in my 70s, my sister kept pushing me to start my journey with Chris from the Heritage Service.

I was not sure where this journey would take me but what Chris has found out about my adoption is very pleasing.

It was a "wow" moment when I received my adoption papers.

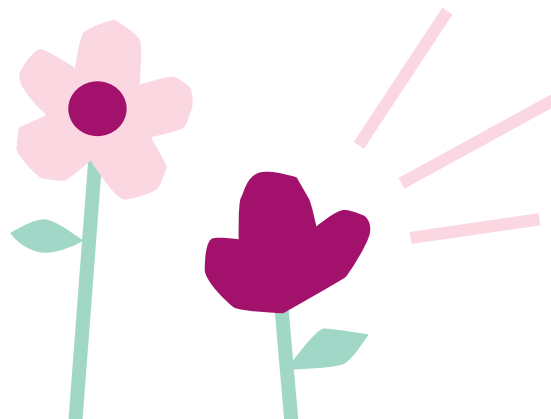
I now know my birth mother's name.

I am grateful and indebted to Chris for all his help.

Chris is still trying to find out more information about my birth mother.

I am looking forward to any further information he might find.

**This is a true story about a real person. Some details such as names have been changed to respect the wishes of the person featured.*





Mothercraft nurses gathering

The final gathering for former trainee mothercraft nurses from the Methodist Babies Home was held on the 8 February 2022. The aim was to add more photos to the Methodist Babies Home collection.

We are very grateful to these women, some of whom travelled from as far away as Traralgon and Bendigo to bring their photos and share their memories.

Hazel's story

By Hazel's
granddaughter, Lisa.



My Nanna, Hazel, would tell the story of being left at a children's home by her mother when she was a young girl.

She remembered watching with her 3 younger siblings as their mother walked away.

They never saw her again.

My Nanna didn't speak much about her experiences of being in a home beyond that and I could not understand how a mother could leave her children and never come back.

My Nanna passed away at the age of 81 without ever really knowing why.

During lockdown last year, I decided it was finally the right time to try to find out more about the story.

After a little research, I discovered records might be available from the Uniting Heritage Service.

I contacted Catriona and she appointed Chris as my case manager.

When Chris confirmed that my Nanna had indeed been at the Methodist Home for Children in Cheltenham, I was very hopeful.

I expected to find out some dates of her stay there and, if I was lucky, maybe a recorded reason.

What I got was so much more.

Over the course of 6 months, Chris and the team were able to find a pile of records from 1920, when Nanna first entered the home, to 1932 when she finally left the system.

When my brother and I met with Chris in December, we were able to form a detailed picture of our Nanna's time in care.

Nanna and her siblings were left at the Methodist Home for Children in 1920 by their mother.

It seems that she may have found herself alone and unable to support and care for them.

The information suggests that she did not intend to give her children up permanently and did try to visit them, however she eventually disappeared, and they were committed to the permanent care of the home.

The records paint a picture of a very unstable time for Nanna growing up in care.


She was sent on various domestic servant placements, but none of them lasted very long.

We will never know all that happened at these places, but I get the feeling that Nanna was headstrong and perhaps not suited to be a servant.

She also spent time at the South Yarra Home for Women and Girls and eventually the YWCA Hostel in St Kilda.

Nanna experienced some really difficult times, however as she grew older, she also stood up for herself and acted to try to change her situation.

Three years after she left the system, the records suggest that her mother contacted the Methodist Home for Children asking for contact details for her daughters.



The records state “no addresses given.”

I find this the saddest part of the whole story.

Nanna was never to know that her mother had not in fact left them and never come back.

I wish we had been able to tell her that.

When I told my dad that all this information was available, he was very emotional.

He felt he did want to know the story but was fearful about what we would find out about her experiences.

When I was finally able to share the story with him, he was surprised at how liberated he felt.

It helped explain some of his own childhood experiences and how his mother’s childhood trauma affected not just her, but the rest of the family.

One positive outcome was the picture it gave us of Nanna’s mother.

We were able to form a much more empathetic view of her and an appreciation of why she may have done what she did and the emotional toll that must have taken on her.

Finding out so much about my Nanna’s story has given me a much greater understanding of the person she was and the way she related to others.

She had many struggles, but I admire her strength and resilience and I am proud of her determination to stand up for herself.

Her childhood was full of rejection, insecurity and trauma.

This experience has shown me how knowing a story can make such a big difference to a family.

I am so grateful to Chris and the team for all the hard work they put in to researching the records so thoroughly and providing that story for us.

Chris was so supportive and patient along the way and shared the information with us in such a sensitive and caring manner.

He was aware of just what an emotional effect this might have on us and ensured we were well prepared to hear the story.

Nanna said that all she ever wanted was to have a family of her own.

It is a comfort to know that after her time in care she did marry and have children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren - a family who were there for her for the rest of her life.

Our valuable volunteers

We rely heavily on the support of volunteers to progress our work with records. Sally and Judy donate many hours of their time each week and are valued members of the Heritage Service team.



Here, Sally and Judy have written some of their reflections.

“We have been friends for over 10 years.

We both love history and met while working and volunteering in the archives of one of Melbourne’s oldest schools.

A chance conversation with a member of the Uniting Heritage Service team made us aware of Uniting’s large, important collection of records, dating back to the 1890s.

We indicated our interest in becoming volunteers and started in early 2021.

We work with records from the children’s and babies’ homes established by the Methodist and Presbyterian churches in Victoria.

It is widely known that across Australia, historical records from such institutions are often incomplete or missing altogether.

This makes it critical to ensure that surviving records are carefully preserved and then indexed, so the information they contain can be easily accessed by case workers, former residents and/ or their families.

We are focusing on this indexing.

Judy works with minute books created by the volunteer committees that oversaw the day-to-day operations of the children’s homes, dating from the 1890s to the 1980s.

She reads through the minutes and records every child’s name in a separate index.

The hand-written books, each approximately 200 pages, document the lives of the residents, mostly through brief notes that record the reasons for and dates of admission and departure, where the child was at all times (in the Home, foster care, in service or transferred to another facility).

Sometimes the notes mention health issues, education and communication with families.

More broadly, the minutes are a window into the social history of their time.

They show how society and the law viewed and regulated children and families during these periods and how the Homes responded to economic depressions, wartime conditions and epidemics.

Sally's focus is on photographs from the babies' homes.

Specifically, she works with images taken by Mothercraft nurses who worked in the institutions from the 1930s to the 1970s and kept personal albums of their times there.

These albums have been generously donated or loaned to the Heritage Service by the nurses.

The captions they wrote often include the first names of the children, which Sally carefully adds to a spreadsheet.

This can be a complex process as the children's real names were often not used and not every photo was captioned.

All images have been digitised, but Sally works with both the digitised and original photographs as this makes it easier to decipher captions, labels and to identify faces.

As in the case with the Homes' minutes, indexing facilitates access to these records — precious images of the early years of the young residents, are sometimes the only photos from this early stage of their lives.

We feel privileged to be working with such personal records, and greatly respect the privacy and experiences of the children and families whose names and photographs we encounter.

We enjoy volunteering with the Uniting Heritage Service team and hope that our contributions will help in the process of piecing together the stories of the children who spent time in these Homes."

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Catriona.

T 0402 969 621

E catriona.milne@unitingvictas.org.au



Heritage Service room

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 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

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. If you would like to help please contact Catriona Milne.

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