

November 2021

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 2021.

In June I wrote about Uniting's submission to and attendance at the Victorian Government Inquiry into Forced Adoptions in February this year.

The report from this inquiry was released in early September.

The report recommends that Uniting, along with 3 other non-government service providers, no longer be approved adoption information agencies.

Under the recommendations, the Department of Justice and Community Safety would be the only approved entity able to release adoption information.

There are many reasons for this, including the need for consistency and accountability, which we understand.

There is a perception that past providers of adoption services should be removed from the picture.

What we hear from those who connect with us is more complex than this.

If people have the choice to connect with us, they sometimes find that past trauma and pain reduces.

They can share what happened to them, and this time the response is driven by compassion, respect and accountability, not judgement and cruelty.

This is one of the reasons we want to continue to offer this service.

We owe this to those who have been deeply harmed by our past actions.

We are glad that the Department of Justice and Community Safety recognises the value of the Heritage Service.

They are working with us to enable people to continue to access adoption records through us.

Our hope is that we can act as their agent.

This means that we can still connect with people to offer an ongoing service.

We want to be able to locate records from Uniting and other sources, offer context and story to the

records, search for family on request and support ongoing contact with family as we have been doing.

The practical aspects of this will be resolved as time goes on.

On another note, I was pleased to attend the Orana reunion in April. I enjoyed meeting many of you at the former site of Orana. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did.

Bronwyn Pike
Chief Executive Officer



Tributes

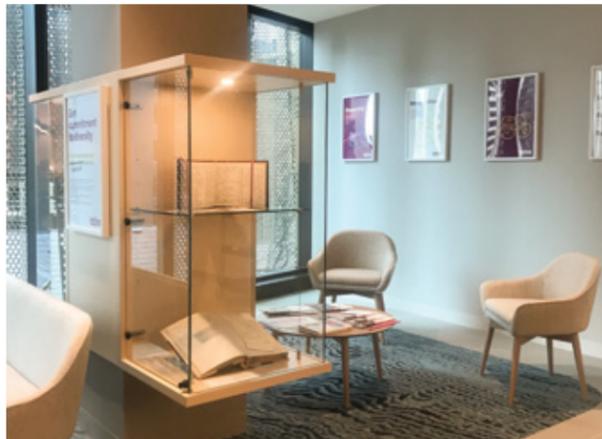
Since the last newsletter we have learned of the deaths of the people named below. Our thoughts go out to their families and friends.

† George Willis † Keith Houston † William (Wally) Sinclair † Greg Ellis † Yvonne Burley (nee Dunn).

If you would like to record a tribute, please let Catriona Milne know.

Updates from the Heritage Service

Despite the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, it has been a busy, few months for the Heritage Service team. Here are some of the developments since our last newsletter.



Our new office

Uniting has moved to a brand-new building at 130 Lonsdale Street on the former site of the Princess Mary Club, created to help country women move to the city to work.

We are on the 4th floor with views over the ancient olive tree and the Wesley Church.

We know from speaking to men from Tally Ho, this place holds many memories and reminders.

This is where many boys were picked up and driven out to Tally Ho in Burwood.

New volunteer

A new volunteer, Sally, has joined us once a week to create indexes for the 4000 photographs received from trainee Mothercraft Nurses. Welcome, Sally.

The Orana Rose Project

A past resident of Orana was given a rose from the Orana garden when the site closed in the late 1980s.

We are grateful to them for keeping this rose alive and for being part of the Orana Rose Project.

The rose has lived at their home in a pot and has been an important connection to Orana.

We wanted to make sure that this last rose is preserved and plants from this rose made available to people who lived at Orana.

We also thought it could be a good fundraiser for the Heritage Service.

Swinburne University has offered to help with this project and Stewart from the horticulture department will work on this with us.

Once COVID-19 restrictions allow, he will take cuttings.

We hope that many healthy and beautiful plants will bloom from this single rose that has survived for so long.

We will share updates and photographs of the roses as they start to increase in number and grow to mature plants.



Ways to help our work

Since the last newsletter, we have heard from someone wanting to donate to the Kilmany Park memorial.

It has reminded us to let you know that others can also donate to this project.

You can also support the general work of the Heritage Service.

Donations are always helpful as most of the work receives no government funding.

There are also opportunities for people to help with the mailout for the newsletter and with organising reunions.

If you would like to support us, please contact Catriona Milne.

T 0402 969 621

E catriona.milne@unitingvictas.org.au

History of Dhurringile

Following our recent gathering for past residents of Dhurringile, we were contacted by the Murchison Historical Society who asked that we advertise their exhibition about Dhurringile.

The email reads: We currently have a display in place called Four Lives of Dhurringile Estate and of course this features the time when it was the Rural Training Farm - see our March entry at: murchisonhistoricalsociety.wordpress.com

Anyone connected to the Rural Training Farm would find our display of great interest I'm sure. It is quite extraordinary, and must be unique for Victoria, that an outstanding mansion on the Victorian Heritage Register has had such contrasting uses over its lifetime of 140 plus years.

Could you make mention of our display in the next edition and invite visitors? Best way to make contact is by this email address: murchison-historical-society@hotmail.com

Kay Ball, President.

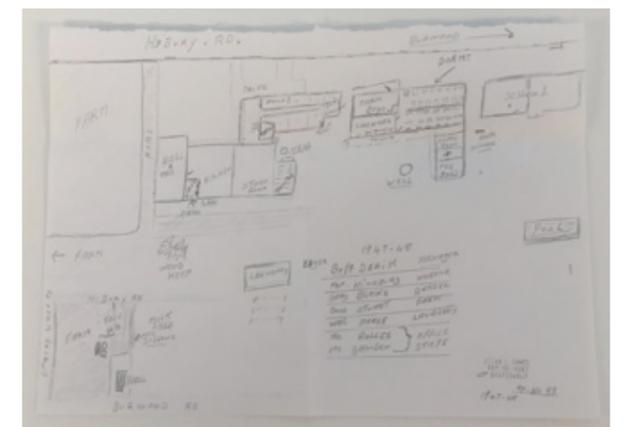
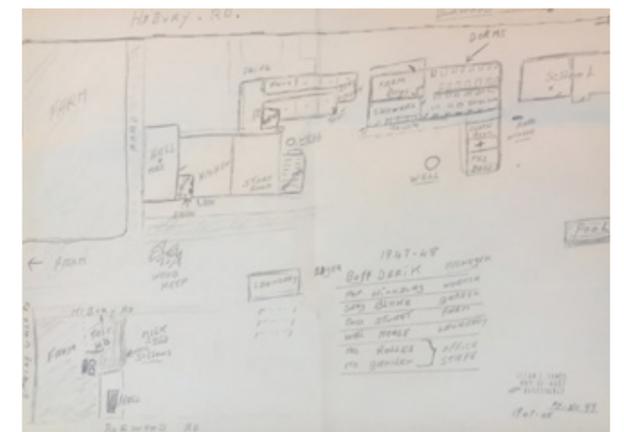
Map of Tally Ho

A past resident of Tally Ho is seeking information about the school that was based there.

To learn more, a notice was placed in the Desperately Seeking section of the Herald Sun requesting that people contact us if they have any information.

Several past residents of Tally Ho made contact. One person who called was Glenn.

Glenn lived at Tally Ho in the 1940s and has a vivid memory of this time. He sent us a map of the land and buildings that he drew from memory. We have included it here and are grateful to Glenn for sending this to us.



Reunions at the Heritage Service

By Lisa D'Acri



My name is Lisa D'Acri and I'm one of the newer Heritage Service team members.

I've been in my role of Case Worker for 9 months.

During my time, I've had the privilege of attending both the Dhurringile and Orana Reunions.

This article is about my thoughts and feelings about attending reunions.

It might sound strange but before each reunion, I felt a bit anxious and uncertain what my role would be, particularly because I didn't have the shared history with those attending.

Despite my initial nervousness, I found I went from feeling like a 'fly on the wall' to an active participant as many of you were happy to share your stories with me.

What struck me the most about the reunions were the connections between the attendees and how

quickly most of you connected to each other even after spending, in some cases, years apart.

Your vivid recollections brought the homes to life and gave me a real, honest and sometimes sad glimpse of what your childhoods were like in the different homes.

Visiting the chapel at the Orana reunion is an experience that will always stay with me.

I was moved by the deep connections some people had with it, by the beauty of the building and people's memories associated with it.

Coming away from both reunions I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude for being a part of both gatherings and I want to thank those of you I met for sharing your stories with me.

It helped me learn that for many people, these were places where families and strong connections were created and lifelong bonds forged.

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

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

T 1300 826 474
E info@vanish.org.au



Orana Reunion

We were fortunate to be able to hold the annual Orana reunion in 2021.

We had been unable to meet in 2020 due to COVID 19 restrictions.

The reunion is pictured here, and some comments from an attendee are featured below.

"Thanks for another very successful reunion at Orana.

Thank you for continuing the tradition that Yvonne Dunn instigated more than 3 decades ago.

It made it extremely special being able to visit inside the chapel.

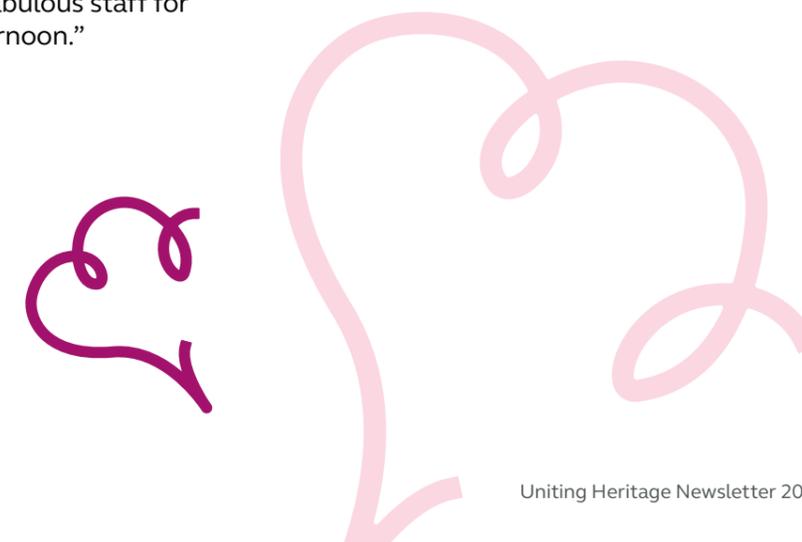
The Minister seemed genuinely interested in listening to the visitors.

It was also great listening to the different stories and memories.

Thanks once again to the fabulous staff for a wonderful lunch and afternoon."



Sharing lunch together.



Records Preservation Project

By Ann McCarthy



This has been a good year for an archival project we have underway in our regional offices in Gippsland.

The records covered by the project date back to the establishment of Kilmany Family Care during the late 1970s.

Kilmany Family Care was the successor to Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys.

An important focus of this project is records of out-of-home care services provided to children and families in the Gippsland region.

To help progress this project, I made 2 week-long visits to our Sale office earlier this year.

I worked with local staff to sort, list and document records.

We made substantial progress in archiving 252 cartons of out-of-home care records.

The biggest category of records we archived are from the home-based care (sometimes called foster care) program in Gippsland.

There are many case files, including client files and carer files, for Sale and Bairnsdale.

Further records come from the 4 family group homes operated by Kilmany Family Care.

These records consist of day books, client files, care-giver files, general files and minutes.

In addition, we archived a variety of materials documenting the history of the Gippsland agencies and the different programs they have run.

As part of the current project, a purpose-built archive room has recently been completed in Sale.

The room has 64 bays of shelving, which can be adjusted to allow for records of various sizes.

We can control the temperature and humidity levels in the room, creating conditions ideal for preserving paper records.

Documentation of the archived records is well underway.

The process of transferring records into an archive, which is called accessioning, involves checking and labelling the boxes and doing a broad survey of what is known about the records.

We allocated each set of records its own number.

We also gathered information about when and where the records were created, the dates they cover, and any records that were damaged or in poor condition that need attention.

Doing this work makes it much easier to locate records and means anyone who works on the records in future will have all the information at hand.

This includes any future digitisation of the records.

It also includes the task of expanding the existing inventory lists, which helps us to extract the names of the children, families and carers who the records relate to.

The commitment by local staff in preserving these records has been key to this archival project, which includes records from multiple programs.

The project is a continuing one, but the work done so far has already gone a long way towards archiving Gippsland's out-of-home care records and making them accessible to care leavers and their families.

Andrew's leap of faith

By Chris Wade

After a health scare 10 years ago, Andrew decided he finally wanted to learn more about his birth family.

Andrew knew he was adopted but didn't want to open a can of worms for everyone, particularly his birth mother.

While his adoptive parents had raised him, he had always wondered about his birth family.

He was ready to take a leap of faith.

He was curious about any health conditions he may have inherited.

Fortunately, his adoptive mother remembered his birth name and "the big home in Camberwell," where the adoption was arranged by the Presbyterian Babies Home staff.

With encouragement from his sister, Andrew contacted the Uniting Heritage Service and talked to case manager, Victoria Lavery.

Andrew had requested his records many years ago, but had not been ready to receive them.

He accepted Victoria's offer to search for his birth family and in the following weeks, she was successful in locating Andrew's records.

In December 2020, Victoria gave Andrew his adoption records and facilitated contact with his birth family.

Andrew learnt that after he was born, his birth mother had married and moved interstate.

Sadly, she had died of bowel cancer earlier that year.

Talking to her partner, Andrew learnt that they got married and had 2 children.

Their oldest son also died of bowel cancer in early 2021.

The family urged Andrew to get a bowel cancer screening.

Andrew's result was clear, but the doctor was concerned about Andrew's constant headaches.

Further testing showed a series of brain abnormalities, which Andrew has since had removed but could have been fatal without treatment in the short term.

Andrew has experienced tough times recently and is now getting back on track.

Today, Andrew is back at work and looking forward to driving again now that he is over his health scare.

Getting in touch with his birth family and learning their medical history may have saved his life.



Where are you, dad?

In December 2016, Elaine contacted the Heritage Service and received her father's records.



Richard Walton at Dhurringile.

Since that time, we have been on a journey together to learn more about Elaine's father Richard, who had lived at Dhurringile as a young man.

The search has involved trying to locate information from many sources.

We tried finding personnel records from the place where he may have worked and contacting the Magistrates Court for Child Maintenance records.

We tried shipping lists and the State Trustees.

When planning the recent Dhurringile reunion, we were contacted by several past residents who remembered Richard and one who had some photographs of him.

A Shepparton resident then made contact asking about Richard.

He remembered Richard visiting his family home and was willing to speak to Elaine about her father.

Elaine describes more of this story below.

My name is Elaine Walton, I am writing this on Father's Day 2021 from Darwin.

I started to look for my biological father, Richard Walton, in 1982 when I was 16-years-old.

My mother had suggested I ring Births, Deaths and Marriages in Melbourne as she thought he still lived there. I was hoping to find dad had married, and if so, I may have a lead in finding him.

I rang Births, Deaths and Marriages asking for information relating to Richard Walton and as I knew his date of birth and that he was Irish, I was able to supply that information when they requested details.

They told me that they had no records of a Richard Walton with his date of birth. So, I figured he had not married or died in Victoria.

Over the years I rang Births, Deaths and Marriages 3 more times. Each time I was told there was no record of dad.

In 1985 I contacted Births, Deaths and Marriages in each state and territory, only to receive letters stating they did not have records relating to 'your' Richard Walton.

In 1988 I contacted the newly formed Child Migrant Trust, as dad was an 8-year-old Irish orphan, child migrant, brought over from Belfast in Northern Ireland to Dhurringile Training Farm in country Victoria in 1950.

At the time I contacted the Child Migrant Trust, they were still compiling lists for the number and whereabouts of all the child migrants.

Dhurringile had not come up yet, though they did thank me as they had not heard of Dhurringile.

Over the next few years, I would have bursts of energy regarding the search for dad.

I have been to the electoral office and written letters to many registered voters named Richard Walton, asking if they were the Richard Walton I am looking for.

For the most part I never received replies to the dozens of letters written. Though, I did receive a reply from one of the Richard Waltons I contacted.

The day the letter arrived from Richard Walton was a special day. For a fleeting moment I hoped the letter was from my dad.

The anticipation, daring to breath and read the letter. It was not my dad. A very nice gentleman let me down nicely and wished me well in my search.

In 1997 I contacted the Australian Government Department of Immigration to see if dad had left Australia, maybe even returned to Ireland. Immigration had no record of him leaving the country.

In the early 2000s, Centrelink had a program where you could send a letter to anyone in Australia and if they were registered with Centrelink, they would pass the letter on.

Unless the person contacted you, you would not find out any other information. I sent off a letter to dad and waited. Of course, I never heard from him.

This service was cancelled around the same time as 2 convicted sex offenders contacted each other through the system and it caused an up-roar in the community.

By 2008 I had contacted the Salvation Army's Missing Persons Unit, I duly applied and again they could find no records relating to dad. Yet another dead end!

I started searching again in 2016, this time with the assistance of Catriona Milne, Manager of the Uniting Heritage Service in Victoria.

Catriona has been instrumental in assisting me and other clients that had also hit a brick wall with finding information.

Through Catriona's patience, professionalism and advocacy, she was able to get records for dad from Births, Deaths and Marriages - something I had not been able to do despite repeated attempts over 35 years.

Yes, I am angry. They could have solved the mystery in 1982. Dad died in 1976.

It turns out they had a death certificate for dad all along, and it even had the correct date of birth on the certificate, though his nationality was incorrectly listed as Scottish.

I have since applied and am waiting on the amended death certificate to show his true nationality, Irish.

In April 2017, Catriona delivered the news that she had received dad's death certificate. She did so with such kindness and sensitivity.

I found and lost my dad in the same moment. I had been searching for my dad for over 35 years and he had been dead for more than 40.

As soon as I could, 5 months later, I went to the cemetery to find out where dad was buried.

I have attempted many times to find out more information about where dad is interred at Springvale Botanical Cemetery. All to no avail.

The cemetery kept telling me that dad was buried in one of 3 public sections, all unmarked graves.

I still couldn't find my dad.

The documents that Catriona received showed he was interred in a coded way. The code was D 8 49. I went on to find this meant Compartment D, Section 8 and grave 49.

I wrote another email to Springvale Cemetery as a previous email was not responded to.

This time they did respond and gave me the same documents that Catriona had already shared with me. I responded to ask for the chart or map that had the code.

After hearing nothing for 2 weeks, I was getting impatient.

I made a complaint to Health Victoria, the government agency that deals with cemeteries and unbelievably, the very next day, I received the map of where dad is buried from Springvale Cemetery with an apology for the long delays in getting the information.

The following is part of that email: Please find attached an SBC Public areas map. At the map coordinates H-6, you will see the yellow highlighted area named "Tranquillity Public." This is the public area where your father, Richard Walton is interred. The second document is a chart showing the general arrangement of rows within area D. Richard Walton is interred in row 8 number 49 toward the bottom of the page.

The only common reference on both documents is the proximity of Mountford Drive so, while we have no scale maps or drawings of these areas, my estimation is the D-8-49 would be somewhere around where the word "Public," in "Tranquillity Public," is written on the SBC Public Areas map.

While I truly appreciate the efforts of staff at the cemetery, I now know dad is not in one of 3 public sections as I had been repeatedly told. However, saying that dad's grave is 'somewhere around' just doesn't cut it.

I have contacted 17 different land surveyors and only 1 has said they can help. I'm waiting on a quote from him.

I have also requested permission from Springvale Cemetery to allow the surveyor to pinpoint where dad is and to put a cemetery approved plaque on the area he is buried.

Maybe next Father's Day, I will be able to find dad.

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.

Please contact Catriona Milne if you would like to receive event updates, subscribe to Uniting Heritage, volunteer with us or support our growth.

Call us

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unitingvictas.org.au

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