

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 37 | MARCH 2021

OPEN PLACE

Support Service for Forgotten Australians

Relationships Australia
VICTORIA

A message from Michelle McDonald, Senior Manager Open Place

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2021...let's hope this year is not impacted by COVID-19 to the same extent that it was in 2020.

The Open Place staff group continued to work from home in 2020, with a skeleton staff in the office some days as per COVID-19 restrictions. It was a very different year for all of us, especially as we began transitioning from management under Berry Street to Relationships Australia Victoria during lockdown.

2021 has begun with renewed hope that we will soon be able to return to all our face-to-face activities in a COVID safe way. We are not quite there yet but working towards it. All other parts of our service are continuing to operate-, including records searches, health brokerage, co-ordinated support, counselling and redress support.

Our 14 Social Support Groups were all able to meet prior to Christmas and I was privileged to be able to attend each group. It was lovely to see groups reconnecting after months of pausing and also to hear that many group members had continued to meet throughout COVID-19. It was also helpful to meet so many of you and to hear some of your feedback and thoughts about groups in the future.

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We're going green

As you know, this newsletter is sent by snail mail to reach all our valued service users, stakeholders, funding bodies and members of the public. We're continuing to print and send the newsletter by post, but we'd like to send it by email to anyone who is happy to receive it.

If you'd like to help the environment and get the newsletter as quickly as possible by email, just let us know.

1800 779 379 | info@openplace.org.au | openplace.org.au

We began 2021 with our Social Support Groups resuming, though unfortunately we needed to pause again when we were placed under a 5-day state-wide lockdown. We have since resumed groups again, however, many of our regular meeting venues are still not open for food sharing events as they had been. As a result, some of the planning that is normally undertaken at the start of the year has been impacted. We are currently focusing on connecting groups each month and hope to be able to make longer term plans for groups over the coming months.

We have also resumed group activities and hope to have the Drop In centre re-opened in coming weeks. When we re-open, there will need to be some changes and greater planning to comply with providing a COVID safe environment for all. This may include a limit on numbers in the centre at any point in time and RSVP'ing for cook-ups and other activities. We will put these details up on the website once confirmed.

Take care and stay COVID-safe.
Michelle



A message from Relationships Australia Victoria's CEO, Dr Andrew Bickerdike

Welcome to the first edition of the Open Place newsletter for 2021. I'm pleased to say that at the time of writing, things are looking up. Case numbers are low, the vaccine rollout is in full swing and I am penning this from my desk at Relationships Australia Victoria Central Office in Camberwell – not my study at home.

I believe the measure of an organisation is its resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. 2020 bought many challenges for all of us, and I am happy to say we have all risen to these challenges and found new ways of delivering our services through the integration of different technologies.

On a personal note, I acknowledge it has been a challenge taking on this new service during a pandemic, without being able to meet people. However, in this COVID-normal way of working, I hope I will be able to meet more people this year. I am really looking forward to that.

Another impact from COVID-19 was the underspend of the funding Open Place received for Social Support Group activities. These funds are still available to us and we plan on using these important funds throughout 2021.

After a short pause for our Social Support Groups, it is extremely pleasing to have them up and running again for the 2021 calendar year and I look forward to an uninterrupted (hopefully) run into 2021 and beyond.

During the year we will be holding some client consultations for Forgotten Australians / Pre-1990 Care Leavers, asking what they would like to see from the Open Place service. Keep a look out for more information regarding these.

I look forward to a new year working with you and supporting you and actually meeting you.

Dr Andrew Bickerdike

Join Our Ladies' Art Group

If you are looking for a safe space to be creative, then our art group is perfect for you. From painting to sculpture work, collages and bead work, let your imagination run wild.

Not an artistic bone in your body? Don't worry, our Art Therapist, Susan, will guide you along the way, however, you will still have plenty of freedom to express yourself and create something unique and personal to you.

WHEN: Third Thursday of the month in 2021

TIME: 1-4pm

WHERE: Open Place Drop-In Centre,
Suite 1 / 8 Bromham Place, Richmond

For more information or to let us know that you would like to attend, please call Open Place on 1800 779 379 and speak with Emma.



Were You At ...?

St Vincent de Paul's Boys' Home 1968-1969

Malcolm (#31) would love to contact anyone from St Vincent's, especially from 1968 to 1969. Please contact Diane at Open Place on 1800 779 379 who will pass on your details to Malcolm.



Sutton Grange, Tanti Avenue, Mornington approx 1969-1971

Kim would like to get in touch with other people who were at Sutton Grange from approximately 1969 to 1971. Please contact Diane at Open Place on 1800 779 379 if you're interested in reconnecting with Kim.

St Joseph's section Abbotsford Convent 1943-1946

Jeannine is interested in speaking with anyone who was at St Joseph's section Abbotsford Convent during 1943 to 1946. Please contact Siobhan at Open Place on 1800 779 379 to connect with Jeannine.



Salvation Army Box Hill Boys' Reunion

WHERE: Wattle Park, Surrey Hills
WHEN: Saturday 13 March 2021
TIME: 11am onwards
RSVP: Ray Turner, 0427 332 584

BBQ lunch provided.

OPEN PLACE HEALTH BROKERAGE FUNDING GUIDELINES

OPEN PLACE
Support Services for Forgotten Australians

This document outlines guidelines in relation to the brokerage funding you may choose to access during the first quarter of the 2020-21 financial year (1 July 2020 – 30 October 2020).

Please note, the funding provided by the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to support the needs of Forgotten Australians is limited. Open Place currently has over 4,000 registered Forgotten Australians who are able to access its suite of services, including brokerage. If the demand for brokerage exceeds the funding provided by DHHS, Open Place may be required to revise these guidelines and/or prioritise funding according to need.

Each financial year, you may access up to:

- \$1,000 for Health
- \$250 for Medical Transport and Accommodation (regional and rural service users only).

If required, you may also access an additional \$1,000 (lifetime limit) for dental treatments (eligibility criteria applies – please refer to the section on Additional Dental below).

Funding Type	Health
Who may access	Forgotten Australians
Limit each financial year	\$1,000
Eligible expenses	<p>Medicare out-of-pocket expenses for GP visits and tests not covered by Medicare (for example, an MRI scan), as well as other areas that require Medicare gap assistance (for example, out-of-pocket expenses for medical specialist consultations).</p> <p>Private health gap expenses not covered by private health insurance (excluding the first \$250/\$500 of excess or annual excess fee).</p> <p>Optical expenses. Prescription glasses only \$400 limit. Sunglasses are not covered.</p> <p>Hearing aids, mobility aids and equipment expenses. Open Place will continue to seek out other available subsidies and assistance, e.g. SWEF or the Victorian Hearing Aid Bank.</p> <p>Allied health expenses may be provided following a letter of support from your GP.</p> <p>Efforts will be made to ensure that a primary health care plan is initiated by a GP, which provides five free sessions per year. Treatment may include: dietitian, podiatry, physiotherapy, osteopathy, myotherapy and chiropractic treatment.</p> <p>Pharmaceutical expenses for prescription medication that is provided via a prescription from a GP. Assistance is only available by prior arrangement with pharmacist who can accept payment by credit card or via direct deposit.</p> <p>Please note: Reimbursements will not be provided for pharmaceutical expenses.</p> <p>Dental. Expenses from a private dental clinic. As treatments can involve multiple visits, a treatment plan will need to be approved by Open Place after the initial consultation and prior to the first appointment. Alternatively, Open Place will make every effort to link Forgotten Australians to local public or community dental services and arrange for them to be placed on a priority list.</p>
Conditions	Health funding can go towards any number of the eligible expenses listed above. Reimbursements will only be made for amounts over \$30. You may submit multiple receipts that add up to \$30, except for pharmaceutical expenses.

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Health Brokerage Guidelines Update

The 2020/21 health brokerage guidelines date has been amended from 01/07/20 - 31/10/20 to 01/07/20 to **30/06/21**.

All conditions of the guidelines remain unchanged.

To view the guidelines, please visit www.openplace.org.au



Older Persons Advocacy Network Webinars

The Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) has been running a series of webinars in relation to ageing, aged care and COVID-19 vaccinations. You can find some of these on their website and register for future sessions that may be of interest to you, at <https://opan.com.au/>

To contact the aged care advocacy organisation in your state or territory, call 1800 700 600 (6am-10pm, 7 days a week).

Detached, by Debbie Valleri

Detached is a true and very personal story about Debbie's life growing up in the system during the 60s and 70s.

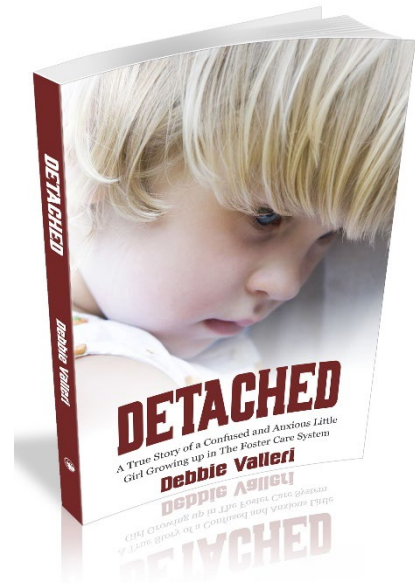
As explained by Debbie, "I am writing it because I want to share my journey and all the struggles and challenges, I went through growing up as a foster child and beyond. I hope that my story may help bring comfort and hope to others who have grown up in the system."

Debbie's book shows in detail, determination, strength and courage and it is written with the utmost respect and a dedication to her wonderful family and to foster carers and foster children.

A signed copy of *Detached* is available to purchase at the special pre-release price of \$19.95, plus \$5 postage (Australia-wide). **This offer is only available until April 2021.** After this date, it will sell for \$29.95 plus postage.

If you're interested in ordering a copy of the book online, visit <https://tinyurl.com/detached-book1>

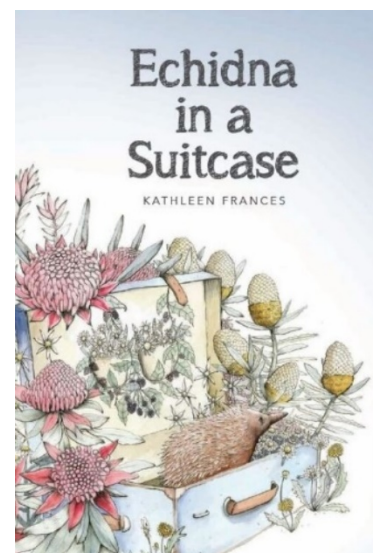
The book will also be for sale on Amazon and in as many book shops as Debbie is able to get it in, as of April 2021.



Echidna in a Suitcase, by Kathleen Frances

Echidna in a Suitcase is a memoir of a woman's journey of initial hardships and her rugged road to resurrection after being placed into Catholic institutional life as an infant. Through it all, she continued to look up through moth eaten blankets to see the stars.....

If you are interested in purchasing this book it is \$25 and can be purchased online at www.kathleenfrances.com.au



National Redress Scheme Update

If you are considering applying to the National Redress Scheme and would like support or information, please give us a call at Open Place on 1800 779 379.

At the time of this newsletter being printed the National Redress Scheme has:

- received 9232 applications
- made 5487 decisions
- issued 4971 outcomes.

\$250 Victorian Government Cash Back on Energy Bills

Victoria's state government is offering hundreds of dollars in cash back on power bills - and many households might not even know about it.

"This **one-off** payment will provide immediate financial relief for those struggling to pay their power bills," Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosio said in a statement.

"It's part of the ongoing support we're providing to Victorian households as we rebuild from the pandemic – as well as helping more families put solar on their homes to reduce their power bills and save money."

Who is eligible for the payment?

- The bonus is available to any households who hold a **pensioner concession card** or receive **JobSeeker**.
- The payment will be available for 12 months, but there is a limit of **one per household**.
- You must be a Victorian residential energy consumer (i.e. have a residential electricity account).

How do I apply for the payment?

The cash-back offer is available through the Victorian Energy Compare website <https://compare.energy.vic.gov.au> or alternatively by calling 1800 000 832.

A form can be completed there and a household electricity bill from a retailer must also be submitted.

Before you start

To submit an application, you will need to have the following documents ready:

- An original PDF or hard-copy version of your household electricity bill from your current electricity provider.
- Your Centrelink Customer Reference Number (CRN). You can find this on your concession card or in your MyGov account.

Social Support Groups (SSGs)

Shepparton SSG

The Shepparton SSG had two memorable outings early in 2020, with a tour and lunch at the breathtaking Noorilim Estate Manor in February, and a relaxing, sunny cruise on the Nagambie Lake in March.

As with all the other groups, unfortunately the Shepparton group couldn't come together again for most of 2020 due to COVID-19, however we were delighted to be able to have a long-overdue catch up in December. The Shepparton Council completed the construction of a picnic setting and shelter at the Victoria Park Lake, in honour of group member Peter Ditton who passed away in 2017 and generously left a bequest to the group. A small plaque will be placed there to remember Peter.

This will be a place that our Shepparton group members, families and members of the public can visit to sit and enjoy a picnic together or have some time alone to sit and enjoy the views over the lake on one side and the river on the other.

The group met at the picnic setting for our end-of-year in December where we sat back to relax and chat over pizzas and then cooled down with an ice cream from Mr. Sheppy's ice cream van!

We were also fortunate to catch up with everyone in February 2021 at the Community Hub and enjoy some subway sandwiches. We had a lovely turnout, with lots of laughs and smiling faces, sharing stories of what we had been doing since we last saw each other in December. The group discussed and decided where Peter Ditton's plaque will be placed at the remembrance picnic setting, and we hope to have a small launch to celebrate the occasion.



Gippsland SSG

Gippsland SSG managed to meet on two occasions last year in February and March before COVID-19. We had a great catch up and BBQ at the Sale Botanic Gardens on a perfect day in March and didn't meet again until December where we had lunch at a restaurant in Sale. It was so lovely to see everyone again and also welcome a new group member and also a new Open Place facilitator, Erika.



Bacchus Marsh SSG

The 15+ people who attended the group on 1st December were delighted to catch up having not seen each other for so long. There were lots of smiles and laughter and many stories of what everyone had been doing through the months. It was lovely for the Bacchus Marsh group to chat with Michelle McDonald who also attended.



Richmond SSG

Over 20 people attended and enjoyed a lovely lunch and get together at the Royal Oak Hotel on 15th December in Richmond. It was a wonderful afternoon with everyone happy to see each other after so many months apart. Good company and many laughs shared.



Dandenong SSG

What a year 2020 turned out to be!

We started the 2020 year in good faith, not knowing how the year would unfold, with a get-together at the Paddy O'Donoghue Centre. Then in February we had our trip to Phillip Island with a stop off to see the pelicans being fed at San Remo. It poured with rain and even the pelicans looked chilled. However, the sun came out when we got to Cowes and we enjoyed our fish 'n' chips with a bit of sun.

After our SSG ground to a halt at the beginning of March, recommencing meet-ups started to be discussed at the end of October and the beginning of November. However, with COVID-19 restrictions changing on an almost daily basis (or so it felt), venues were still unclear about their capacity limitations or otherwise unable to accommodate groups of people, so it was tricky to get a booking. We were able to change our allocated day by one week, but unfortunately negotiations were not able to be confirmed until the 'death knock'.

With no time to get flyers out, we tried to contact as many people as we could by phone/text, and we apologise to those who might have missed out this time. Lunch was held at the Sandown Greyhound Bistro in November for those who were able to come, and we really enjoyed getting back together again, see each other and have a 'change of scenery'.

Fortunately, we were able to have the Beer Garden to ourselves and Michelle McDonald, our Senior Manager, was able to attend. We were able to distribute hand wipes and sanitiser to everyone before lunch – the two Di's were set up in the car park (and heat) for the distribution of hand-outs and eggs like a car boot sale!

Paddy O'Donoghue Centre still has restrictions under their COVID safe plan, and this means we might have some trouble securing a suitable space there for the time being, however we are confident this will change soon.



Frankston SSG

Frankston group met at 'The Groove Train' in December and shared a great lunch together. We were all happy and excited to see each other again and we enjoyed welcoming two new members to the group. Many members who have been attending the group since it was first formed enjoyed a surprise visit from Open Place staff member David and it was lovely to be joined by Michelle McDonald as well. This was our first group since the passing of our dear Valda and she was greatly missed.



Ballarat SSG

Ballarat SSG meet on the second Tuesday of the month, and in November 2020, we met at the Ballarat Golf club for a Christmas-themed lunch.



Geelong SSG

It was a wild and windy day when the Geelong group came together to celebrate Christmas. We braved the inclement weather and climbed aboard the Geelong Boathouse to enjoy fish and chips (and burgers) for lunch and a much-needed outing and catch up.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, Malcolm (the skipper/boat builder) along with his wife, Shaz, were very accommodating by allowing only our group in the restaurant on the day. A fun time was had by all.



South West SSG

Group members came from near and far to congregate at the very stylish Warrnambool Hotel to celebrate Christmas. We dined in style in the hotel's Beer Garden on a beautiful Spring day! We enjoyed good company and a few laughs were shared.



Bendigo SSG

The Bendigo group celebrated Christmas at the historic Rifle Brigade Hotel where, for some of our members, it brought back memories of many a fun time back in the days of when bands played live at the pub.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions and the layout of the hotel, we had to divide the group and sit in three separate rooms. This was a challenge for all of us, but we had a good day, a good catch up, some good fun and a good feed.



Preston SSG

The Preston group met in December to have lunch at Groove Train Northlands. Everyone was very excited to see each other and share a meal together, including myself (Sue), and Lydia.

We had a variety of things to eat and it seems that it tasted good as there were no complaints. Open Place had organised a goody bag for each person with sanitiser, wipes, and a magazine. Not very exciting for the month of December but I think appreciated by everyone.

It was truly a very pleasant experience at the lunch.



Donald and District SSG

Donald and District SSG meet on the fourth Thursday of each month. At the November 2020 meeting, we met at the Halls Gap Hotel and enjoyed a lovely lunch. The venue overlooks lovely parkland with kangaroos and emus wandering around in the adjacent paddocks. Very special, particularly after a trying 2020.

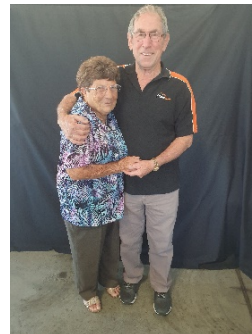


Horsham SSG

The Horsham group were joined by Caroline Carroll, Michelle McDonald and Fiona White (Senior Manager at RAV) for an end of year lunch at the Victoria Hotel. The afternoon was filled with lively discussion and lovely food enjoyed by all.



Wodonga/Wangaratta SSG



The Wodonga SSG met at the Goods Shed in Wodonga in December. It was a great venue and the event was much enjoyed by all who attended. Munni had been very busy preparing for the group ensuring some Christmas spirit was shared.

Announcements

Munni has injured her hand and will be unavailable for some time. If you have been trying to contact her please email info@openplace.org.au or call 0427 190 232.

CONTACT US

For information about your current services, to find out how Open Place can support you, or to subscribe to receive this newsletter by email, please contact us.

Free call 1800 779 379

Visit openplace.org.au

Email info@openplace.org.au



We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

Open Place is committed to inclusivity and providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia. We support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.