

# NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 46 | March 2025

OPEN PLACE

Support Service for Forgotten Australians

Relationships Australia  
VICTORIA

75  
- YEARS -

## Looking back on the last 6 months

**Michelle McDonald, Senior Manager Open Place**

In the blink of an eye, summer has left us, autumn has arrived, and the footy season is almost here – go Pies!

The end of 2024 seems a long time ago now.

Last year ended with a number of significant events, the first being the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Apology to Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants which we marked with a commemorative march. Read more on page 4.

The Alliance for Forgotten Australians (AFA) held its Annual General Meeting and forum in Melbourne, and during this time Board members, affiliates and Find and Connect managers (pictured below) joined Open Place staff and Forgotten Australians for lunch.



The Victorian Redress Scheme was launched at the end of 2024 and you can read more about this on page 3.

Open Place is available to support you with applications so please don't hesitate to contact us if you want to know more about the Scheme or want to apply. We do have a waiting list at the time of writing this newsletter, but we will respond to you with a timeframe for support when you contact us.

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## We're going green

Want to get this newsletter as soon as possible *and* help the environment? We can email you future editions instead of sending them via snail mail. Contact us to opt in to email newsletters:

**1800 779 379 | [info@openplace.org.au](mailto:info@openplace.org.au) | [openplace.org.au](https://openplace.org.au)**

The Open Place suite of services is funded by the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services and the Australian Government Department of Social Services.



Finally, the annual Open Place Christmas party at the Malvern Town Hall was well attended and enjoyed by so many as you will see by the photos on pages 12-19. It was a very special event for the Chalker brothers (pictured on the right) who reunited after much time apart.

Not long into 2025 summer and Victoria again experienced bushfires. Our thoughts go out to all those in fire-affected areas, especially with the loss of the Little Desert Nature Lodge which is well known to some of you.



Phillip, Robert, William and Andrew

We started 2025 with almost a full team of staff but sadly are about to say goodbye to our Assistant Manager, Fiona Paraman, who is moving to a Centre Managers role at another Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) centre. Fiona, who has been with Open Place for 2 years and 2 months, and I am sure is known to many of you, will be missed.

While we recruit for the Assistant Manager's role, Cameron Boyd will be acting Assistant Manager.

That's all from me this month, as there is a lot to read and view in this newsletter. This is one of our largest newsletters yet, and we are looking at how we can reduce the size going forward, given the significantly increased costs of printing and postage.

We appreciate that not everyone uses the internet for information and communication. If you do, however, and haven't already opted to receive this newsletter via email, we encourage you to contact us. All newsletters are also available on our website: [www.openplace.org.au/news](http://www.openplace.org.au/news)

We welcome your thoughts on what you would like to see in the newsletter going forward. Please let us know at the Drop-In Centre, social support groups, via email to [info@openplace.org.au](mailto:info@openplace.org.au) or by calling us on 1800 779 379.

Best wishes,

Michelle

## Welcome to Open Place

### Anthony Gartner, Coordinator of Historical Records

Hi, my name is Anthony, and I've recently joined Open Place as the Coordinator of Historical Records, after 25 years as a social worker in the community and education fields.

In a previous life I worked in the jewellery and antiques field, but I much prefer people to wood and rocks! Born in Papua New Guinea and raised in Melbourne, I spent a couple of years living in London once.

My favourite thing to do is walk. In 2019 I walked the Camino del Norte in Spain, taking 1,150,685 steps over 6 weeks and 800 kilometres on the North coast of Spain. My legs were tired, but I loved every step!

I'm looking forward to being of service at Open Place.





## Renee Wilkinson, Coordinated Support Worker

Hi all, my name is Renee, and I started in my role as a Coordinated Support Worker in December 2024. It's been lovely so far slowly getting to meet all of you in person and over the phone and I will be meeting a lot more of you as we go full steam ahead supporting Forgotten Australians with their Victorian Redress Scheme applications.

My work background is quite varied in the community services sector, including casework and community development in disaster recovery, mental health, refugee settlement and in Melbourne's women's prison as a multicultural liaison officer. I am very passionate about advocacy and supporting people to utilise their strengths to increase their sense of wellbeing in all aspects of their life.



While I've been based in Melbourne for many years, I'm originally from regional Victoria near Echuca and I think I'll always be a country girl at heart. I love to travel, get out in nature, keep fit, read books, watch interesting docos, spend quality time with my loved ones and enjoy lots of cuddles with my pug, Lucy.

## Victorian Redress Scheme

**Redress for Historical Institutional Abuse** is for people who experienced physical, emotional or psychological abuse and neglect as children in institutional settings in Victoria before 1990. Applications opened on 10 December 2024 and are expected to be open for 18 months. Victorian Redress will be managed by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

If you apply and are found eligible, you will be offered:

- a payment of up to \$20,000
- a personal acknowledgement or apology
- counselling.

You can choose any or all these options.

To be eligible, you need to meet the following criteria.

- Lived as a child in a Victorian institution for at least 6 months before 1 January 1990.
- Experienced physical, psychological, or emotional abuse or neglect in the Victorian institution.

When you apply, you will need to:

- tell us what you know about the institution including the names and dates (approximate) you lived there
- provide a brief description and examples of the abuse and/or neglect you experienced (approximately 300 words).

Please note:

- Family members cannot apply on behalf of a person who has died.
- Not all institutional settings are covered in Victorian Redress. If you aren't sure about your eligibility or institution, you can contact the Victorian Redress Support team on 1800 716 870 Monday to Friday between 9 am and 5 pm or email [victorianredress@dffh.vic.gov.au](mailto:victorianredress@dffh.vic.gov.au).
- You may not be able to apply for Victorian Redress, if you were placed in a justice facility as a child because you were found guilty of an offence, and you were not a state ward or under any other protective order. If unsure, contact the Victorian Redress support team.





## What types of abuse and neglect are covered?

- Physical abuse
- Psychological or emotional abuse
- Neglect

The Victorian Redress Scheme **does not cover sexual abuse**. For more information on the National Redress Scheme, you can contact Open Place on 1800 779 379 or the National Redress Scheme on 1800 737 377.

## What is included in Victorian Redress?

### Payment

Victorian Redress payments are to acknowledge harm and to support healing.

If you have received a prior payment from other Redress schemes or institutions, the payment will be deducted from the \$20,000.

### Personal acknowledgement or apology

You can receive a personal acknowledgement or apology from the institution/s responsible for the abuse and neglect you experienced as a child.

### Counselling

You can access a counselling service, which will include 20 sessions delivered by qualified professionals. If you already receive counselling from a practitioner, you can continue with them.

**Please contact our Coordinated Support Team on 1800 779 379 for more information or help to apply for Victorian Redress. The team has welcomed back Rose Pearce and new employee Renee Wilkinson to assist the team with Victorian Redress applications.**

## 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commemorative march



Our march in November 2024 to commemorate the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Apology to Forgotten Australians achieved what it set out to achieve: To respectfully mark the date of the apology – 16 November – and provide an opportunity for Forgotten Australians to feel heard, and to have their past acknowledged.



Between 150 and 200 Forgotten Australians, as well as Open Place staff and other services, gathered and marched behind a banner stretched across the width of the road.

The words, 'Support Forgotten Australians - Over 500,000 children - Remember us,' were emblazoned along the front. We marched along Bromham Place, left onto Highett Street, and over Church Street to Citizens Park with a police escort in the front, and 5 police officers marching behind. It was quite a sight to see.

The memorial event took place out the front of the Jack Dyer Pavilion, where the 2009 National Apology to Forgotten Australians was read out in full by our Senior Manager, Michelle McDonald. Forgotten Australian Alan Bowles performed his moving song, 'Forgotten (no more)'; Forgotten Australian Geraldine Goldthorpe recited her stirring poem, 'The Mornings'; Dr David McDonald from the University of Melbourne delivered an encouragement speech; Open Place Assistant Manager, Fiona Paraman, sang 'I am Australian' (which most attendees joined in); and Marie Holt from the Alliance for Forgotten Australians provided a passionate speech about the apology, and what has, and has not, been achieved for Forgotten Australians. There were tears, anger, and a mix of many emotions throughout.



This event took many months for us to pull together, and we truly believe it was worth the effort. The feedback we received from most Forgotten Australians (FAs) who attended was that it was a worthwhile event in which they felt 'heard' (we also received constructive feedback about how we could do it better next time, and will take this on board). As for us at Open Place, it was great to hear the (mostly) positive feedback, and to know we made an impact.

A huge thanks to all our partners who contributed to our event: Yarra City Council; Bunnings; Victoria Police; the Alliance for Forgotten Australians; Red Medical; Forgotten Australian Mark Opitz, Alan Bowles and Geraldine Goldthorpe; Dr David McDonald (University of Melbourne); Snap Abbotsford Print Solutions; Ternary Tuckshop; Ice Cream Delights Pty Ltd.; NTZ Group Pty Ltd.; Party Hire Group; Fisher Lane Mobility; Rehab Hire and Sales and many more. To all the Open Place and RAV staff who worked so hard – thank you!

To all the Forgotten Australians, and family and friends, who attended, you're amazing! If we've missed anyone, we sincerely apologise and thank you for your support.



## National Redress Scheme communication alert

### Please be aware: Suspicious activity on Facebook and Facebook Messenger

#### Quick facts

- The National Redress Scheme has been made aware of misleading and unauthorised information being sent through Facebook and Facebook Messenger.
- The messages are falsely offering redress outcomes to people within 24 hours of receiving personal details.
- Information about the Scheme should only be obtained from trusted sources.

#### What you need to do

- Warn people you know to be aware of any suspicious social media activity and to be cautious if asked to share bank details and personal information.
- Report any the incidents to ScamWatch: [www.scamwatch.gov.au/report-a-scam](http://www.scamwatch.gov.au/report-a-scam)
- Send any additional information you receive about the scam to [NationalRedressScheme@dss.gov.au](mailto:NationalRedressScheme@dss.gov.au)

#### What you need to know

The Department of Social Services has been made aware of unauthorised messages being sent to potential redress applicants through Facebook and Facebook Messenger. The messages are offering fast redress outcomes and requesting personal information including bank details.

The most recent and correct information about the Scheme can be found on the Scheme website: <https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/>

The Scheme does not contact redress applicants about their application through social media.

On average it can take 12-18 months to receive a redress outcome but may take longer.

#### More information

Please contact [NationalRedressScheme@dss.gov.au](mailto:NationalRedressScheme@dss.gov.au) if you have any information about the scam, or if you need more information.

## Community education

### An update from Richard Dove, Community Education Coordinator

Dear Forgotten Australians, I got out to all Social Support Groups (SSGs) around Victoria in the second half of last year and wrote down all your thoughts about Community Education, and what you'd like the world to know about Forgotten Australians. Just to remind you, it is my job at Open Place to educate Victorians, and Victorian services and organisations, about Forgotten Australians.

Through going to these Social Support Groups, I learnt many things. But most of all, I learnt that Forgotten Australians are a connected community of people who understand each other and provide support when a brother, sister, mother, or other, is in need. It is a brilliant thing to see.





I really loved meeting you all and it will certainly not be the last time you'll see or hear from me.

During the consultations, many Forgotten Australians asked me, "What are you going to do with this information?"

And I responded, "Well, I'm going to write it down, work out what things you want changed in the world, and then act upon those things you've said you want changed." Well, I said something like that.

I've now put all the things you've said into a report – your words! – and at some stage this report is going to be launched and then I/we will start going out in the world make a change through education. You'll get a chance to read the report for yourself. It'll be on our website after the launch.

But before the report is launched, I plan to go back around Victoria and provide some very basic training to Forgotten Australians about how to go into a service and say, "I'm a Forgotten Australian" and have them listen to you – properly. I'm also developing a flyer you can take into the service when you do that, so you don't have to explain over and over who is a Forgotten Australian. The flyer will encourage services and organisations to reach out to Open Place to receive education on Forgotten Australians – so they'll know who Forgotten Australians/Care Leavers are without need to ask.

This very basic training I'm going to provide to Forgotten Australians will mostly be about giving everyone a chance to put in your 'two bobs worth' about what will work and not work. I'll send out an email to let you know more.

Anyway, I can't do this by myself! I can only do it with your support, and only if you want it. It is what you asked for – to be able to go into a service and be treated with respect and dignity, and that the person behind the counter will know what it means to be a Forgotten Australian without you needing to explain. You asked for the Forgotten Australian 'tick-box.' I believe this will start to make it happen.

PS. You don't have to be going to a Social Support Group to take part in this. Any Open Place Registered Forgotten Australian can take part. You need to be registered because 'time in care' must be confirmed, otherwise any person could go out there and call themselves a Forgotten Australian.

PPS. I know this will create a lot of discussion so if there are any rumours, please call me and I'll confirm, deny, or give an explanation for whatever is being said. There's nothing to hide.

PPPS. I'm going to send out an email with more information.

## Helpful information

### Emergency relief services in Victoria

#### Uniting Vic/Tas: (03) 9192 8100

In many locations across Victoria and Tasmania, our emergency relief services offer practical resources and a listening ear from someone who cares.

You can receive:

- food
- personal care items



- material aid
- financial support
- links to other services.
- bills and expense assistance
- emergency food vouchers and material relief
- community meals

**CatholicCare: 1800 123 228**

Emergency Relief can be accessed by anyone who:

- lives in one of the following places in Victoria: Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Latrobe / Gippsland, Melbourne Inner, Melbourne Inner East, Melbourne North West, Melbourne West, Warrnambool and South West Victoria.
- is experiencing a financial crisis, which has left them unable to pay for necessities such as food.

**Anglicare: 1800 809 722**

Emergency Relief centres provide an array of immediate assistance including groceries, clothing, medication, financial assistance and counselling, and access to support services. Contact your local Emergency Relief centre to find out how we can help you.

**The Salvation Army (Salvos): (03) 8873 5288**

If you find yourself in a sudden crisis, call Salvos Phone Assistance Line who will listen to the issues you're facing and provide you with support options. For example:

- Financial counselling
- No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS)

**Tenants Victoria: [financialcounselling@tenantsvic.org.au](mailto:financialcounselling@tenantsvic.org.au)**

Provides a free, confidential financial counselling service to support renters in Victoria.

This service includes assistance with any matter in relation to debt such as:

- rent arrears (overdue or outstanding rent) – current or previous properties
- utility debt in current or previous properties – electricity, gas, phone, water
- credit – such as loans, credit cards and consumer leases
- fines – at any stage
- complaints about your utility or credit provider
- assessing your current financial situation
- budgeting
- managing your debt
- advice and information on credit and bankruptcy
- referring you to other services that may be able to help you.

Tenants Victoria is not funded to pay for rent arrears or other financial assistance.





## Thread Together

Thread Together collects unsold, brand-new clothing from fashion retailers around the country. With the support of volunteers, the clothes are sorted in readiness to be distributed to people in need through their national network of charities and social service agencies.

We are partnered with the Thread Together service and all clothing is given at no cost to people. Each person has access to the service once every 3 months.

**The service runs via appointments only, and all appointments are 45 minutes long. Referrals and bookings are to be made through Open Place.**



You can attend the clothing hub alone or with support from a worker, friend, or family member.

Please see the Thread Together website for more information: [threadtogether.org](https://threadtogether.org)

### Locations:

- Victoria: Richmond, Ballarat, and Wangaratta
- Interstate: Brisbane (Qld) and Maylands (WA)

If you are interested in attending a Thread Together appointment in Victoria, or have questions about the service, please call Open Place 1800 779 379.

## Were you at...?

Were you at Pleasant Creek between 1971 and 1975?

Michael Waters would like to reconnect with people who were at Pleasant Creek with him, between 1971 and 1975.

Please call Open Place if you remember Michael and would like to say hello.

## ‘Healing Together’ group update

Open Place’s first ‘Healing Together’ therapeutic group for women ran from July to September last year. Here is what some women from our pilot group had to say at the end of the 8-week therapeutic group:

- ‘Really enjoyed the experience.’
- ‘Exhilarating, and informative and welcoming.’
- ‘Facilitated with awesomeness and kindness.’



Artwork created by the Healing Together 2024 Group

Please see the information below if you are interested in enquiring about participating in our 2025 group.



## Therapeutic women's group

### A 4-week program for Forgotten Australian women who are survivors of abuse

This group uses the Shark Cage® framework, which was developed by Psychologist and Clinical Supervisor Ursula Benstead.



**If you're a Forgotten Australian survivor of any type of abuse, and are registered with Open Place, we welcome you to join our supportive group program.**

#### About the program

The group aims to help you:

- learn about healthy and unhealthy relationships
- feel confident communicating in an assertive way and setting boundaries
- reduce any feelings of self-blame that you may have.

#### When

4 x weekly, half-day workshops in August and September 2025.

#### Where

In person in Sunshine, Richmond, Cranbourne or in the North Metropolitan area, depending on demand.

#### Cost

Free of charge.

#### Express interest

Please call 1800 779 379 or email [openplacecounselling@openplace.org.au](mailto:openplacecounselling@openplace.org.au) by Friday 11 July 2025.

We plan to offer more therapeutic groups later in 2025 and in the years following, including for male survivors of sexual abuse and people of all genders. Please feel free to contact us to register your interest in future therapeutic groups. We have included a separate survey for you to fill out to help us understand what you would like to focus on in these groups.



## Would you like to hear from another Forgotten Australian when you are unwell?

Forgotten Australian Maree Holt is looking to trial a wellbeing contact service for Forgotten Australians who are unwell and who would like to receive some contact from a fellow Forgotten Australian during this time.

Contact could be via a card, a phone call, a visit or a mix of all 3 options, depending on where you are located.

### How to access support

Please contact Open Place and ask to be put onto the 'Requesting contact' list. You will also need to give us permission to share your contact details with Maree and other Forgotten Australians who are providing support, so that they can contact you.



Maree Holt

### How to join Maree in giving support

Please contact Open Place and provide your contact number for Maree to contact you.

This is a Forgotten Australian-driven initiative.

## Pausing to remember

In the course of our work at Open Place, sadly, from time to time, we hear of the passing of Forgotten Australians.

We thought some of you might like to know that Open Place staff take some time out of their schedule each month to acknowledge those Forgotten Australians who have passed away, share memories and stories, and to reflect on what a privilege it is to work with Forgotten Australians.

We are aware that sometimes people may pass away, and Open Place doesn't learn of this until sometime later. We invite anyone connected to the Open Place community to let us know of the passing of any Forgotten Australians, so that the staff can include them in our thoughts.

If you would like to let us know of someone's passing, you can do this via email to [info@openplace.org.au](mailto:info@openplace.org.au) or, if you would prefer to call, please phone Open Place on 1800 779 379 and ask for Cameron.







## Open Place 2024 Christmas party photos



































## Team updates

### Historical Records Team

The Open Place Historical Records Team recently visited the Public Records Office of Victoria, where we enjoyed a tour of the facility. The Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) is the archive of state and local governments in Victoria, located in North Melbourne. They hold over 100km of digital and physical records from 1836 to the present day.

Many records are accessible to the public either online or for viewing in their reading rooms. The PROV also sets mandatory recordkeeping standards for state and local government agencies and provides advice on recordkeeping to government. It's this warehouse that holds all the Care Leaver Records held by government. We couldn't look at any of the records, but just seeing books, boxes and folders was interesting. When digitised, it is these records that our team often works with and sends to Open Place service users.

The warehouse is cold, so we all wore our denim jackets as we followed our tour guide around. Here is a photo we took on the day, from left to right: Siobhan, Anthony, Sharon and Lydia. Emma couldn't make it on the day, but we've popped her into the photo, wearing her jacket too.

The Historical Records Team is receiving lots and lots of enquiries about records due to the Victorian Redress Scheme, and we have a 10-week waiting list at the moment. Please rest assured that we will get to you as soon as we can if you have put in a request for records.



### Health Team

The Open Place Health Team has settled in and is now in full swing.

We have significantly reduced the waiting time for anyone needing health advice or support. Health invoices are being paid and processed within 7 days. It is the Health Team's ongoing commitment to ensure service users receive the quality support they need in as quick a timeframe as possible.

### Dental

We recognise that dental treatment can cost a great deal of money and is a priority for a lot of our service users. The Health Team has concentrated on building strong working relationships with community centres, both within Melbourne, and regionally. If you have a health care card or pensioner card and need dental treatment, please feel free to reach out to a member of the Health Team and we can discuss advocating for priority access to public dental services. The public dental services that Open Place have been working with have proven to be professional with excellent treatment results. Please feel free to contact a member of the Health Team to discuss dental.





## Hearing

Another area of health that can be costly is hearing aids. It is worth shopping around amongst different providers as the prices can vary greatly. We have been working with Soundfair, who are based in Mount Waverly and Camberwell. If you have a health care card or are eligible for a health care card, they can offer significantly discounted hearing aids. Please feel free to contact a member of the Health Team to discuss hearing.

## Pharmacy

Consider asking your pharmacy to track your scripted medication spending to ensure that if you reach the PBS threshold, they take this into account. This will reduce the cost of your scripted medication.

A friendly reminder that we do not fund over-the-counter items, unless scripted by a doctor.

## 2024/25 Health Funding

Our funding is a contribution to your health costs, up to a cap of \$1250. We have over 5,000 registered service users and our funding is limited. Our Health Funding Guidelines ensure support of the maximum number of people.

The Health Team currently consists of:

- Kristine (Coordinator)
- Marissa (Administration Officer Health Brokerage)
- Tracey (Coordinated Support Health Worker). While Tracey now sits within the Coordinated Support Team, she continues to have a health focussed role.



You can view the 2024-25 Health Guidelines on our website at [www.openplace.org.au/health-support](http://www.openplace.org.au/health-support) or ask for a copy at Open Place.

If you have any questions regarding health needs and/or health funding, please contact the Health Team and we will get back to you as fast as we can.

## Communicating with health services

We are aware that whilst many Forgotten Australians are happy to be known as Forgotten Australians, some of you may prefer not to have this known.

When communicating with health service providers, it is often necessary for us to advise them of the name of our service, Open Place/RAV, especially if negotiating reduced fees to stretch funding, seeking priority access or when we are setting up accounts for payment.

We practise professional discretion and recognise that this is sensitive information.

Should you have any concerns about our name appearing on correspondence or in negotiations, please let Open Place know. This would mean we could only offer reimbursements (for **previously approved treatments or medical purchases**) to you.



## Counselling Team

The Counselling Team at Open Place provides and funds counselling support for Forgotten Australians and family members.

Counselling can be accessed:

- in your local area
- at our Richmond offices
- over the phone via telehealth
- online via video services such as Zoom.

### Referral process

A member of the Counselling Team can give you a call to discuss your needs so that we can find the right counsellor for you.

Open Place can fund a range of suitably qualified external providers (counsellors who do not work for us directly but agree to charge Open Place for your sessions).

This includes practitioners such as:

- counsellors
- psychologists
- equine therapists
- social workers (including mental health social workers)
- art therapists.

We also have a small team of Open Place counsellors based in our offices at Richmond that may be able to support you. There can be a waiting period to see an Open Place counsellor and sometimes we recommend an external counsellor if they will be able to better assist you.

### How to access counselling at Open Place

For more information, including accessing this service, get in touch by calling 1800 779 379 and ask to speak with a member of the Counselling Team. We will usually get back to you within 1-2 working days.

### Additional counselling support – Counselling and Psychological Care Scheme

If you have accepted an offer from the National Redress Scheme or the newly begun Victorian Redress Scheme, you and your family members\* can access funding for counselling through the Counselling and Psychological Care Scheme (CPC). For more information you can speak to a member of the Open Place counselling team or call the CPC Scheme directly on 1800 716 869.

\* At this time, family members of National Redress Scheme recipients can access the CPC counselling program. We are waiting for confirmation of whether this will also apply to the Victorian Redress Scheme. We will provide an update as soon as we know.

### Therapeutic group work

Last year the Open Place Counselling Team ran an 8-week therapeutic support group for women (see details of our 2025 group on page 10). We are planning to run additional groups and workshops on various topics this year. This may include offering shorter programs in regional areas across Victoria. More information will be available in the coming months.



If you are interest in attending a group, have some suggestions or would like further information get in touch by calling reception on 1800 770 379 and ask to speak with a member of the Counselling Team, or email us at [openplacecounselling@openplace.org.au](mailto:openplacecounselling@openplace.org.au)

## External Counselling Forums

In 2024, the Counselling Team also began running quarterly forums with the external counsellors that Open Place works with across the country. These forums have been a great space for counsellors to collaborate on how best to support Forgotten Australians and their family members. Any private practitioner working with Forgotten Australians with an Open Place counselling agreement can attend. Please contact [openplacecounselling@openplace.org.au](mailto:openplacecounselling@openplace.org.au)

## Mental health crisis support

Open Place is not a crisis service, and we are unable to provide immediate crisis response.

24/7 mental health support is available through Lifeline 13 11 14, and Beyond Blue 1300 224 636. If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 000.

Additional services that offer immediate support can be found at:

[www.rav.org.au/resources/mental-health-services](http://www.rav.org.au/resources/mental-health-services)

## Redress Support Team

Our Redress Support Team assists Forgotten Australians to apply for the National Redress Scheme (NRS), for people who experienced childhood sexual abuse in institutional 'care'.

Any Forgotten Australian considering making an application to the National Redress Scheme is strongly encouraged to get support, to ensure you get the best outcome. Redress Support Workers can visit regional areas in Victoria to meet people who would like in-person support with their Redress application.

Our team is highly skilled at supporting people with their applications and we are aware that it can be a difficult and challenging process, as it involves sharing details about childhood sexual abuse.

We work with people at their own pace with a 'safety first' approach that puts your wellbeing first. This means that once you are linked with a Redress Support Worker and the application process is started, the time it takes to complete an application can vary from person to person. Our team will work with you at the pace that best suits you and your circumstances.

Outcomes from the NRS can include a financial payment, access to counselling, and a Direct Personal Response (an apology) from a representative of the responsible institutions.

### **The NRS will accept applications up until June 2027.**

If you would like to discuss the National Redress Scheme, who is eligible to apply and what support we can offer, please get in touch with Open Place.

You can also visit the Scheme's own website for information: <https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/>



## Changes to the NRS Framework:

To keep up to date with changes to the NRS Framework, the *Redress Act*, and news on the Scheme, see the NRS newsletter: <https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/news>

Some of the recent changes include:

### Amendments to the *Redress Act*:

- Remove the restriction on people applying from jail
- Refine the special assessment process for people with serious criminal convictions
- Allow applicants to provide additional information with a request for review of their Redress offer.

## National Redress Scheme Survivors' Roundtable

Open Place staff attended the survivors' roundtable in Adelaide in August. The NRS Survivor Roundtable (the Roundtable) provides survivors of institutional child sexual abuse, supported by their advocates, an opportunity to advise on performance and operational issues affecting the survivor's journey with the NRS.

Six survivor-focused roundtables have been convened since the NRS began. The August roundtable gave attendees an opportunity to share ideas about how the NRS can be made more accessible and how awareness can be raised among those survivors yet to apply for redress.

The roundtable sought to hear survivors' perspectives on their engagement with other agencies and departments, including since the completion of their redress journey for those who had finalised their dealings with the NRS. It also gave survivors an opportunity to talk about their experience and ideas on how survivors can be better supported after their redress journey ends.

The report linked below provides an overview of outcomes from the latest roundtable in Perth in March 2025: <https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/about/about-scheme/reports-and-statistics/survivor-roundtable>

## Community workshops in Victoria

Free community workshops about the NRS are being held around Victoria by a working group facilitated by In Good Faith Foundation. Open Place Redress staff are part of the working group.

These workshops are led by Redress Support Service providers and are open to community organisations to provide information on how to support people they engage with in their organisation who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse. The sessions include information about the purpose and function of the NRS, ways to engage with the NRS, and how to access further support.

Representatives from the NRS attend and participate in a question and answer session with attendees. There are also presentations from various Redress Support Services and from Knowmore Legal Service. The next scheduled session is in Albury on Thursday 27 March. Interested workers and organisations can register through <https://humanitix.com/au/search> using the search term 'Redress Scheme Options'.

**Please note: These sessions are intended for workers supporting people in the community. They are not designed for individuals applying to the NRS. Support for individuals is always available through Redress Support Services like Open Place.**





## Drop-In Centre

### Free activities

- **Art Group:** Join us every third Thursday of the month from 1pm to 4pm.
- **Haircuts:** Available every 6 weeks on a Tuesday between 11am and 1pm. Our new hairdresser/barber with 25 years of experience caters to all hair types.
- **Podiatry (Foot Care):** Offered every third Wednesday of the month from 1pm to 3pm.

### New activities

#### Tuesday Fun Walk

Every Tuesday at 1pm.

Join us for a fun and friendly walk around the block! We'll stop by The Learning Bank on Victoria St to pick up Food Relief bags and enjoy some refreshments.

Don't forget your hats, coats, umbrellas and sunscreen. Come prepared for whatever the weather brings!



For activity updates in between newsletters, visit <https://www.openplace.org.au/events/>

### Friday cook-up

Every Friday, the chefs of Open Place cook a delicious hearty meal with dessert, for anyone who is a registered service user to enjoy. It is an enjoyable day, filled with delicious food and all are welcome.

Join us between 10am and 3pm every Friday at the Drop-In Centre kitchen.

### Oz Harvest food delivery

We receive an Oz Harvest food delivery each week, and often receive lots of different fruits, vegetables, frozen meals, frozen meat and treats for all to take.

This is available on a Friday after lunch at the Drop-In Centre.





## Expression of interest: Oz Harvest's NEST program



### OZ Harvest's NEST Program (Nutrition Education Skills Training)

A fun & easy way to learn healthy eating habits and cook simple, low-cost meals!

#### **Join us for 6 weeks of:**

- Fun interactive educational activities
- Practical cooking classes
- Sharing a meal together

#### **Starting JULY**

**When:** Mondays, 2.5 hours per session

**Where:** Drop-in Centre - 1/8 Bromham Place, Richmond.

#### **Limited Spaces**

**Must be able to commit to all 6 weeks**



If interested to join or would like more information, please call Open Place and ask to speak with Shaye 1800 779 379.



## Social support groups (SSGs)

### Gippsland SSG

We have had plenty to celebrate in Gippsland over the last few months with birthdays in September, October and November and plenty of delicious cake.

We ended 2024 with a great Christmas celebration at the Sale Greyhound Racing Club with a Christmas meal and a festive table with chocolates, candy canes and bon bons. We had a raffle that ended in much laughter and hilarity with rules being made up on the spot and we thank David for being such a good sport and letting his friend Ray go home with the shortbread that he had his eyes on all afternoon. We really missed our members that could not make the day due to illness and hope they are feeling better and recovering well.

Shaye and Liz hope that group members were able to spend some time with people who mean the most to them over the festive period and found moments of joy, peace, and connection. May 2025 be a happy, safe, and healthy one for everyone.



### Bacchus Marsh SSG

BMSSG have our group on the first Monday of every month. We have been lucky to have some new members join our group. We recently enjoyed a very merry Christmas group in the month of December, where we watched some morning melodies and the entertainer on the day was Elvis. Everyone enjoyed the songs and entertainment which were followed by a lunch, where we were lucky enough to have the room all to ourselves.

We didn't have a group in January, but our group in February was a barbeque while the weather is still good and a planning day to decide as a group what we can do for the next few months.

We are all looking forward to another year of activity-filled groups.







## Donald and District SSG

The Donald and District SSG meets on the fourth Thursday of every second month. Our group members come from a very large area across the Wimmera. Members travel quite long distances to get to the group (up to 2 hours). As a group we spread the outings across the region.

In the last few months, the members enjoyed their October outing to the Halls Gap Zoo, where our group members had an encounter with a dingo! Group members said this was by far their most favourite outing thus far. This was followed by lunch at the Halls Gap Bakery, followed by a famous 'Halls Gap ice-cream'.

Our Christmas get-together and lunch was at the 'Palace Hotel' in Warracknabeal.

Contact Sharon on 0417 067 910 for information about joining our group.



## Bendigo SSG

Bendigo SSG meet on the third Thursday of each month except January.

In the last 3 months we have had a barbeque, our regular meeting at Long Gully and a fabulous Christmas lunch at the Windermere Hotel in Kangaroo Flat.

New members are welcome. Give Open Place a call to be on the mailing list 1800 779 379.







## Ballarat SSG

Ballarat SSG meets on the second Tuesday of each month from February to December. In the last 3 months we have had a barbeque at Lake Wendouree where we had to navigate an unexpected tree lopping operation and find a new barbeque area to use. What a drama... but we all managed to find each other and have a nice barbeque lunch.

We also had a meeting at our usual meeting place the RSL hall where our group members received their glazed pottery that they had made in previous meetings. They turned out brilliantly thanks to Emma glazing them all.

In December, our Christmas lunch was at the Robin Hood Hotel. Group members all had a chance at dressing up and playing Santa. Emma spoiled everyone with personally-made Christmas pottery.



## Preston SSG

The Preston group has had an unusually long break over the summer, but we're looking forward to regularly meeting up again throughout 2025!

In September, the group met at the Preston Library for a consultation and discussion with Richard, our Community Education Coordinator. This was a great opportunity for our group to voice their opinions and suggestions on what information needs to be at the forefront when informing the community about Forgotten Australians. October saw our group enjoying lunch at the Junction Hotel in Preston. In place of our regular November gathering, many of the group attended the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Apology event held in Richmond – a wholesome day that had a unifying and supportive atmosphere.

We recommenced our groups in February 2025. They will continue to take place on the third Friday of every month, and we welcome any new members who are interested in joining!





## Warrnambool SSG

Warrnambool SSG meet on the first Wednesday of each month (excluding January).

This is what we have been up to in the past 3 months. In October we had our normal meeting at the Archie Graham Centre in Warrnambool. In November we have had a barbeque in Port Fairy, followed by some fabulous local Timboon ice-cream. Then – for those inclined – we spent much too long in the Port Fairy op shop helping each other find bargains. In December we had our Christmas break-up lunch at the Warrnambool Hotel.

Please get in touch with Annie or Sharon if you would like to be on the mailing list.



## Frankston SSG

The Frankston SSG finished off 2024 with a couple of exciting outings. In October, we took the ferry from Sorrento to Queenscliff. Though the wind certainly kept everyone on their toes, the sun shone brightly, and the ocean views were majestic! We also enjoyed a delicious lunch at the ferry terminal.

December was Christmas party time, so the group came together for a meal at Beach 162. It was lovely to see everyone there and enjoy some great food together. Happy New Year to all our Frankston members and we are looking forward to another year of wonderful outings.

The Frankston group runs on the first Friday of each month. If you would like to attend, please call Open Place on 1800 779 379.





## Shepparton SSG

The sun shone in September for a barbeque gathering at Victoria Park Lake, where the group were joined by Tracey and welcomed Kristine, who recently joined Open Place as Client Services Coordinator.

In October we had a relaxed catch up for a light lunch at the North Shepparton Community and Learning Centre and planned for the couple of busy months ahead. In November we had a fantastic feast at King City in Shepparton. It was such a brilliant turn out, welcoming new faces and catching up with familiar friends. With the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Apology being in November, we were heartened to see so many of you come together in Shepparton as supporters of each other.

December was party time! The Shepparton and Wangaratta/Wodonga groups came together for an end of year lunch at the Benalla Bowls Club.

There was a great turn out of so many from both groups; thank you all for the big effort to get together. We acknowledge the service was slow due to kitchen staff illness on the day and want to thank you all for your patience and the kindness you showed the staff. During the wait times, we had a great laugh together as Cameron and Di called the bingo numbers and the lucky winners received hampers and prizes. Well done everyone!

Thank you for your continued support of each other. We hope you all had a peaceful break over the holidays, and we look forward to the New Year ahead together.



## Horsham SSG

The Horsham SSG enjoyed some different activities in 2024 including bowling, as well as some great lunches.

In October there was a barbeque by the beautiful Wimmera River in Horsham. It was a windy day but a great setting with an amazing dessert as you can see below! The group ended the year with lunch at the Vic Hotel – a favourite place where the food and service are always great.

We are looking forward to planning the year ahead.

Horsham SSG welcomes any people registered with Open Place who are interested in joining the group to call Open Place on 1800 779 379.







## Geelong SSG

The Geelong SSG catches up on the second Wednesday of the month (except January). We meet bi-monthly at the Grovedale Neighbourhood House and the other month we go on an outing. If you live in the Geelong area and wish to join our SSG, please give Annie a call on 0427 695 600 (Monday to Thursday) or Sonya on 0499 020 029.

Sonya has settled into the Geelong SSG, is getting to know the members and enjoying the fun and games of the group.

In September we went out for lunch at St. Lords Bistro but unfortunately, we forgot to take photos. October was fun and games back at the Grovedale Neighbourhood House where we played bingo and enjoyed a good catch up with one another. In November, we met at Eastern Park where we enjoyed sharing the space with a rather large group from Melbourne. They brought along music and their cultural food which they were happy to share with us. It was a fun day for all.

Our Christmas lunch was held at Leopold Sports Club, and it didn't disappoint. We enjoyed a 2-course lunch, did Kris Kringle, had some door prizes and before we knew it the day was over.



## Dandenong SSG

October saw our last meeting at the Edinburgh Community Hall, as in 2025 we've started at a new home base at Noble Park Community Centre.

We finished up 2024 with a festive buffet lunch at Lynbrook Hotel, which is always a hit. The morning started with freshly baked scones, some Christmas gifts were exchanged and we all left with full tummies after enjoying a feast.

December of course was the Open Place Christmas party – a great day had by all with Dandenong filling up at least a couple of tables with Christmas cheer.

For our first meeting back in 2025 we christened Noble Park Community Centre. It was a great turn out with some old members returning and some new faces. 2025 is looking like a fabulous year ahead for the Dandenong SSG!





## Wodonga/Wangaratta SSG

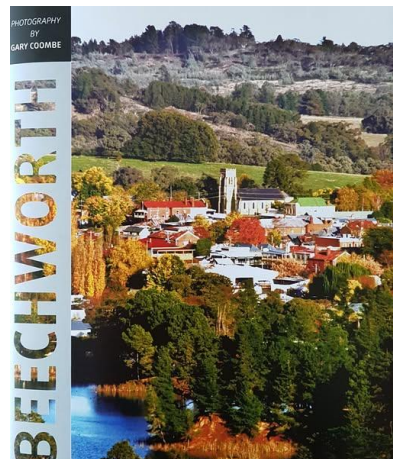
October was a sad month for the Wodonga/Wangaratta group with the passing of Roy Janetzki. Roy and his wife Rhonda were long term members of the group and had strong connections with many Forgotten Australians, and the Vietnam Veteran's community. On behalf of everyone at Open Place, we pass on our condolences to Rhonda and family.

During October and November, we took full advantage of the 'outdoors' weather and enjoyed a cruise around Lake Mulwala, and a barbeque at Sumsion Gardens. Despite a few challenges actually finding the meeting point both times, we managed to get there in the end!

In December, the Wodonga/Wangaratta and Shepparton groups came together for their first joint Christmas lunch at the Benalla Bowls Club. Thank you to everyone who attended and connected with one another. A big shout out to everyone for being so patient with the kitchen service and showing the staff you're understanding during this period. The bingo game was a HIT and congratulations to the lucky winners!



We also want to mention group member Gary Coombe's recent achievement of having his book of historical photographs of the Beechworth area accepted into the Archives at the State Library of Victoria. Congratulations Gary on this recognition of your work!







## Creamy chicken pesto pasta recipe

**Serves 4**

### Ingredients

- 350g penne pasta (or pasta of choice)
- 300ml light cream
- 1/2 cup basil pesto
- 3 spring onions, sliced
- 1.5 cups skinless shredded roast chicken
- 1/2 cup drained sun-dried tomatoes, thinly sliced
- 1/3 cup finely grated parmesan cheese
- Thinly sliced green onions, to serve
- Crusty bread, to serve



### Method

#### Step 1:

Cook pasta in a saucepan of boiling, salted water, following packet directions, until tender. Drain, reserving 1/4 cup liquid.

#### Step 2:

Return pasta to pan over medium-low heat.  
Add reserved liquid, cream, pesto, onion, chicken and tomato.  
Stir to combine. Cook, stirring, for 1 to 2 minutes or until heated through.

#### Step 3:

Divide between bowls.  
Top with parmesan and onion.  
Serve with bread.



## Suggestions

We welcome any suggestions from you on how we can improve our services to better suit your needs.

Maybe you have some ideas for our social support groups, newsletter, Richmond Drop-In Centre, or our workshops/activities.

Contact us and let us know.

We would love to hear from you!

## Contact us

If you would like **information** about your current services or want to share your **suggestions**, find out how Open Place can **support** you, or **subscribe** to receive this newsletter by email, please contact us.

- Free call **1800 779 379**
- Visit [openplace.org.au/contact-us](https://openplace.org.au/contact-us)
- Email [info@openplace.org.au](mailto:info@openplace.org.au)
- Write to us at:

**Open Place**  
**Suite 1/8 Bromham Place**  
**Richmond VIC 3121**



We acknowledge the pain and loss of childhood experienced by Forgotten Australians and we recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.



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.



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