

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 50 | July 2026

OPEN PLACE

Support Service for Forgotten Australians

Relationships
AUSTRALIA · VIC

Welcome to our July newsletter

A note from Michelle McDonald, Senior Manager Open Place

After a warm summer and beautiful autumnal days filled with falling leaves, winter has arrived. Winter illnesses have already hit some of the staff at Open Place. So, take care out there!

In April, the Alliance for Forgotten Australians (AFA) held their forum in Melbourne and attended the 'National Aged and Community Care Roundtable for Forgotten Australians Forum — A New Chapter in Ageing'. Several Open Place staff attended and approximately 35 of our Forgotten Australians, as well as representatives and Forgotten Australians from across Australia. The week ended with a small morning tea at Open Place to mark the end of International Care Experience Month and the Day of Remembrance.

Simon Gardiner, the previous Open Place Manager many of you know, joined us for morning tea and provided a brief reflection on his time at Open Place and the Life Stories Project.

Maree Holt is your Victorian Forgotten Australian Board member representative. If you would like to hear more about these or any of AFA's activities, please let us know at Open Place and we will arrange for Maree to be in touch.

In this edition

Former residents' reunions	3
Listen to Open Place Newsletters with our website accessibility toolbar	4
Ballarat Orphanage Children's Home	6
Open Place Christmas Party	7
Team updates	9
Thread Together	16
Free Financial Counselling at Open Place	16
20% off vehicle registrations	17
Social Support Groups (SSGs) ..	18
Recipe	24
Contact us	25

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 | 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.



A Life Stories project completed by AFA several years ago has recently seen a collection of approximately 30 Life Stories becoming part of the Manuscript Collection at the State Library of Victoria, ensuring those voices will be preserved for generations to come.

To explore the collection:

1. Visit the State Library of Victoria website: <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/>
2. Search for “Forgotten Australian Life Stories”.

Access is available on-site at the library only. For assistance, contact the library on (03) 8664 7002.

We have also received some good news that the Victorian Redress Scheme is being extended until 31 December 2026, providing an additional 6 months for people to apply.

If you or anyone you know would like further information, please contact Open Place and ask to speak to someone about Victorian Redress or read about the Scheme at <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/redress>





Former residents' reunions

A message from OzChild about the Melbourne Orphanage Reunion 2026

OzChild, formerly known as the Melbourne Orphanage, warmly invites all its former residents and care leavers to attend the annual Melbourne Orphanage Reunion on Sunday 15 November 2026.

This special gathering provides an opportunity for care leavers to reconnect and spend time together with others who share a part of the same history.

As OzChild marks 175 years, we would be deeply honoured by your presence. It would be a meaningful opportunity to recognise and acknowledge the experiences and voices of those who remain an important part of OzChild's story and history.

Whether you have attended the reunion previously or this will be your first time, you are warmly welcome to join us.

If you would like to receive an invitation, please contact Judi Vanderheiden by Friday 18 September on (03) 9695 2200 or email jvanderheiden@ozchild.org.au

You'll also find this information on the Open Place website: openplace.org.au/external-events

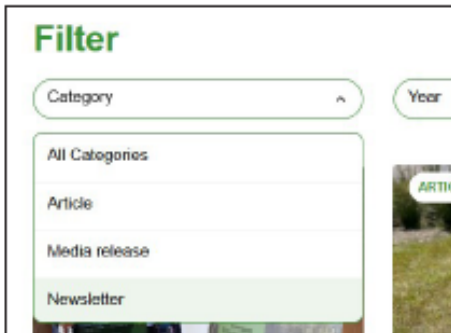


Listen to Open Place Newsletters with our website accessibility toolbar

1. Scan the QR code or visit openplace.org.au/news



2. Click on 'Category' and then 'Newsletter'



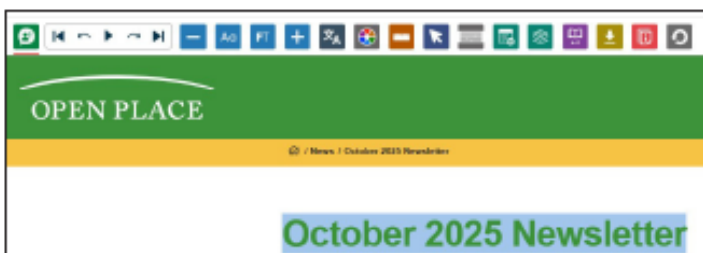
3. Click on the article you want to read / listen to.



4. Click on the 'Accessibility and Languages' button at the top of the screen.



5. A toolbar will appear at the top of your screen. Now, you can hover your cursor over any text on the website and the website will read it out loud.

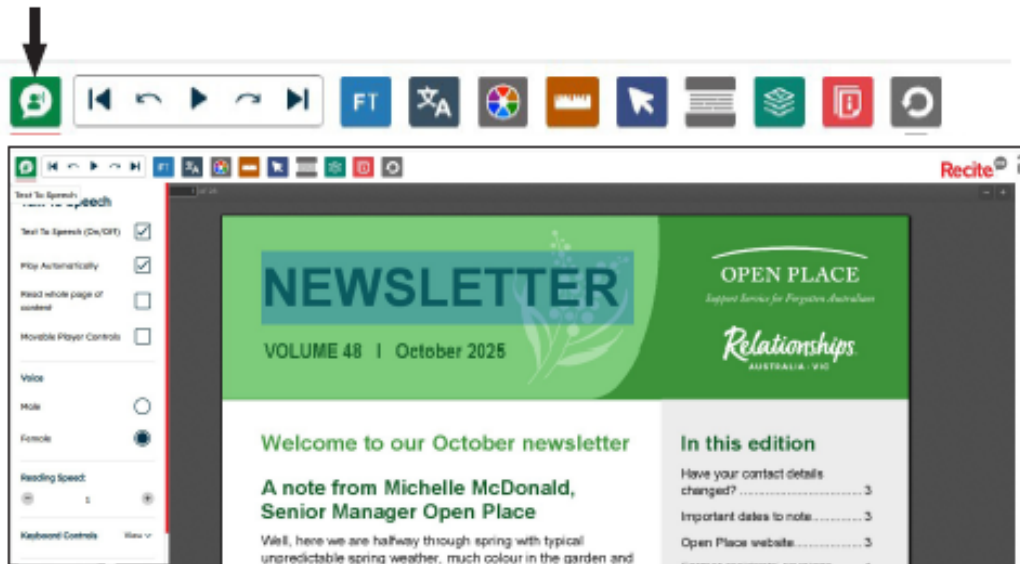




- 6. Click on the green button at the bottom of the article to open the newsletter in a new window. Sometimes it takes a little while to load.



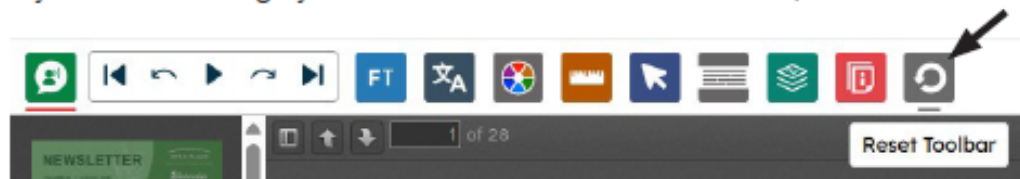
- 7. Put your cursor over the piece of text you want to listen to. The website will read it out loud.
- 8. If you want to change the reading speed, voice or other settings, click on 'Text To Speech' icon.



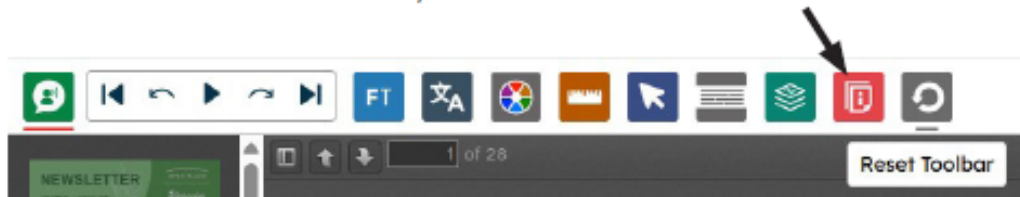
- 9. You can also change other settings, such as the size of the text and your cursor, and the colour of the elements on the page. We encourage you to experiment and find what works best for you.



- 10. If you want to change your view back to how it looked before, click on the 'Reset Toolbar' icon.



- 11. To learn more about the toolbar, click on the 'Toolbar tutorial' icon.





Ballarat Orphanage Children's Home

Opening of the Memorial Garden

On Saturday 16 May, I was privileged to be invited to the opening of the "200 Victoria St Heritage interpretation", to officially open the memorial for the Ballarat Orphanage / Children's Home. When the old orphanage / children's home site was sold to developers in 2010, the council and developers agreed to assist with an onsite memorial. It's taken 16 years... but its finally finished. Many of the original passionate former residents who were involved with council meetings to have recognition at the site have long since passed but left to fight on for the memorial were former residents Deb Findlay, Frank Golding and Joyce Kendall. The ceremony was well attended despite it being perishingly cold and I'm so glad I was able to share Edith's blanket. I walked around the memorial after the ceremony and a cup of tea and thought to myself... they have done a fantastic job.

There are many parts of the memorial around the old site... including near the former schoolhouse which is now a supermarket. The old toddlers' block still stands and is now a childcare centre, and outside it are some cubes with nursery rhyme paintings which were inspired by the "Henderson Paintings". A lot of thought has gone into the creation. Each round dot shown in the photo below represents one of the 4500 children who went through the home.

Please have a look next time you are in Ballarat.

Sharon Guy





Open Place Christmas Party

The Open Place team invite you to attend the

Open Place Christmas Party 2026

We would love to see you and your plus 1, however, places are limited so please RSVP as soon as possible on (03) 9421 6162 or free call 1800 779 379

When: Saturday 5 December 2026

Time: 10am – 3pm

**Where: Malvern Town Hall
Corner Glenferrie Road and
High Street, Malvern**

You must be registered with Open Place.

**Unfortunately, no children (under 18 years)
or animals will be permitted entry.
Registered service animals allowed.
Proof of registration must be provided.**



Healing Together – Men’s Group



A 4-week therapeutic support group in Ballarat for Forgotten Australian men.

- Foster a group connection based on shared experience.
- Encourage a deeper understanding of self.
- Develop better ways to cope with the impacts of trauma.

Dates

4 x weekly sessions on Wednesdays:

- 5 August 2026
- 12 August 2026
- 19 August 2026
- 26 August 2026

Time

11am–1pm

Where

In person in Ballarat. Venue to be advised.

Cost

Free of charge.

Express interest

Please call 1800 779 379 or email openplacecounselling@openplace.org.au by Wednesday 1 July 2026.



Team updates

Community Education team

Well, it's heading towards mid-year and so much has happened!

In the last Newsletter, I updated you about the **'to be seen'** Community Education Report and Priorities launch in November 2025 (a report of your words!), and that I was heading out once more (third time) to all 13 Social Support Groups around Victoria, to provide you with copies of the report, and 5 copies of the updated **Supporting Forgotten Australians** flyer - to help you identify. Well, I'm very happy to tell you that the third tour is almost complete. I only have one group to go and over 500 reports have already been distributed. If you don't have a copy of the report or flyer, you can find it in the **Resources** section of the **Open Place** website <https://www.openplace.org.au/resources/> or send me an email at rdove@rav.org.au and I'll send you physical copies.

I have been encouraging Forgotten Australians to use these resources to identify as **a person who spent time in an institution as a child (a Forgotten Australian)** when you are preparing to go to hospital (or any other place required), so they know you may have extra needs due to the trauma you live with. During the consultations, this is one of the main things you asked for: to be able to identify as a Forgotten Australian, and for it to be treated seriously.

So, what else has been happening? Lots.

I am currently working closely with our Learning and Innovation (training) department at Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) to develop a training package about the history and needs of Forgotten Australians. The plan is for this Forgotten Australian training package to be used by all RAV staff and placed on our Open Place website so that other organisations can use it to train their staff. Once live, you will be able to access it too — and even send a link of it to people or places you believe should be accessing it. It can be another way for you to identify, and train up the services you are using, so they will provide you with properly informed support.

During the consultations, you said that universities need to know about **Forgotten Australians**. For the past 3 months, I have been working closely with the Master of Social Work Course at Latrobe University (Aged Care and Palliative Care electives) and have provided recorded presentations to more than 150 students focusing in on the history and needs of **Forgotten Australians**. There has been a great deal of interest, and according to the course administrators, it has sparked a lot of interest!

I didn't get to tell you in the last newsletter, but I was invited to guest speak for 45 minutes to the Grand Round at the Austin Hospital in Heidelberg. This was an incredibly great opportunity that few get to do. All staff and services attached to the Austin are invited to attend. So, from all over the hospital attendees came and listened to the history and needs of **Forgotten Australians**. Many were moved to tears. There was one **Forgotten Australian** in the audience — an employee — who came up and talked to me in length afterwards. She was very pleased that this presentation had happened.



Right now, I'm working with a few media sources to get the history and needs of Forgotten Australians out into the wider world. I won't mention the sources until the media coverage happens, but I will tell you that one of the journalists is the daughter of a Forgotten Australian. The other is attached to a major international news brand. I'll report more in this newsletter when the pieces are published so you can see them for yourself.

Did you hear that the Federal Member for Melbourne, Ms Sarah Witty MP, visited us at Open Place? She met with several Forgotten Australians who told her about their experiences as children. She was very interested, and moved, and then recently provided a speech to the Federal Parliament about Forgotten Australians saying "...we need to do more." She is now on the list at Open Place as a 'Friend of Forgotten Australians.' It is important to have influential people fighting to raise awareness, and we have a few.

Lastly, I wanted to reassure you that I am still meeting with Forgotten Australians on a regular basis – especially those who are working hard to get better outcomes: the advocates; the influencers; the vocal. I do this because I need to make sure that the information I am providing out there comes from you — and not me. I cannot speak for you, but on your behalf. I am also encouraging you to speak up — because the world will not properly know who Forgotten Australians are unless it comes from you. Over time, there will be more projects and programs, and opportunities. There's more happening than I have listed here, but I only have so much space to write. Take care and best wishes to you all. Stay strong.

Historical Records team

Hi everyone,

In our last newsletter update, we spoke about the Genealogical Society of Victoria and the services they offer to those conducting family history research. We recognise that many people are undertaking their own family history research, and for some, this can feel like a daunting task. With so much information available online, it can be difficult to know where to begin, which sources are reliable, and what resource networks already exist within your community.

Recently, the Records team met with the Local and Family History Librarian at Yarra Plenty Regional Libraries to learn more about the archival collection held at Ivanhoe Library, as well as the genealogy research and resource groups that meet within library spaces. These groups utilise onsite archives, free genealogy subscription websites, and general library facilities, while also providing opportunities for community connection in warm and welcoming spaces. We encourage anyone interested in undertaking their own family history research to contact their local library to learn more about the resources and services available.

The team has had a very busy quarter, with an increasing number of people requesting assistance to access records, as well as information and support relating to family searches. We would like to acknowledge that our waiting times for support have increased. In addition, waiting times for accessing records have also increased across many state and non-state record-holding agencies Australia-wide. For many people, it is now taking upwards of 12 months to receive records, and we acknowledge the significant impact these delays can have. We sincerely thank you for your ongoing patience and understanding during this time while we continue to advocate for improved access to records.



Health team



Open Place health funding guidelines

This document outlines guidelines in relation to the funding you may choose to apply for during the 2026-27 financial year (1 July 2026 – 30 June 2027).

These guidelines were prepared by Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) Open Place in conjunction with the Department of Families Fairness and Housing (DFFH) to support the consistent delivery of health brokerage to Forgotten Australians. Health brokerage is allocated on a needs basis, following an assessment of needs and supports. These guidelines were developed to ensure equitable access for over 6000 registered Forgotten Australians. Our Health Brokerage team will work with you to tailor a package that can best support your health needs.

Before you access a service or seek reimbursement, please contact the Health Brokerage team to confirm available funding. The Health Brokerage team will make every effort to respond to health requests within 1 to 2 weeks, however at peak times, this can take longer.

In the 2026 – 2027 financial year, based on your health needs you may be able to access:

Funding Type	Standard Health Funding
Who may access	Forgotten Australians
Package may include	<p>Up to \$1250 for standard health funding for:</p> <p>Medical expenses: This is for medical services <i>not</i> covered by Medicare where payment can be made directly to the medical provider. For services that have a <i>Medicare gap</i>, you will need to pay full costs on the day, and Open Place can reimburse you for out-of-pocket expenses. <i>Please note:</i> Private health insurance excess fees are not covered.</p> <p>Optical expenses: This includes prescription glasses and prescription sunglasses. <i>Please note:</i> There is a \$600 limit for optical expenses.</p> <p>Hearing aids, mobility aids and equipment expenses: The Health Brokerage team will assist you to access available subsidies and assistance. Health brokerage funding may be utilised to top up these amounts.</p> <p>Allied Health expenses: This covers treatment with a dietician, podiatrist, physiotherapist, osteopath, myotherapist remedial massage therapist and chiropractor. The Health Brokerage team can support you to work with your GP to initiate a GP care plan or mental health plan as needed.</p> <p>Homecare expenses: This support is designed for short term medical conditions that require immediate support at home, including meals on wheels, home cleaning, district nursing and My Aged Care package payments. For long term or permanent medical conditions, the Health Brokerage team will link with your local council, NDIS or an Aged Care Package provider.</p> <p>Pharmaceutical expenses. This covers pharmacy accounts which have been established by Open Place for medical prescriptions and webster packs only. <i>Please note:</i> Health Brokerage can only contribute to one pharmacy account per person and does not include over the counter items. Reimbursements will not be provided for pharmaceutical expenses except when dispensed via a hospital stay/visit.</p> <p>Dental: Please talk to the Health Brokerage team before your first dental appointment, to confirm available brokerage. If after your first appointment, more dental treatment is needed, please send an itemised plan to Open Place for further brokerage assessment. The Health Brokerage team will try to link you with a local community dental service/ have you placed on a priority list if you wish. <i>Please note:</i> DFFH has identified dental health as a priority area so additional funding of up to \$1000 per financial year may be available. This is subject to a lifetime dental expenditure limit of \$5000, from January 2010 to the present.</p>



Conditions of Health Brokerage	<p>Health funding can go towards any number of the expenses listed above. Reimbursements will only be made for amounts over \$20. You may submit multiple receipts that add up to \$20, except for pharmaceutical expenses.</p> <p>Please note, health brokerage is not allocated on a per person basis and is not cumulative across financial years.</p>
--------------------------------	---

Funding Type	Medical Accommodation and Transport
Who may access	Forgotten Australians and/or carers supporting them
Package may include	<p>Up to \$250 for Medical Accommodation and Transport</p> <p>This package covers Forgotten Australians from regional and rural areas who are required to travel 100km or more to attend medical appointments (round trip). This includes hospital visits and specialist appointments in the Melbourne metropolitan area or your nearest regional centre.</p> <p>In the first instance, the Health Brokerage team will explore government funding options such as the Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme (VPTAS) which is designed to help Victorians who must travel a long way for specialist medical treatment by subsidising their travel and accommodation costs.</p>
Conditions of Medical Accommodation and Transport	<p>This funding is available to Forgotten Australians who live in regional and rural Victoria (that is, not in the Melbourne metropolitan area). This funding may also be used by the partner, family member or carer if they are supporting the service user during treatment.</p> <p>Before you attend the first appointment with the health provider, please contact the Health Brokerage team to confirm available funding.</p> <p>Please provide a copy of the appointment documentation when seeking approval for Medical Accommodation and Transport funding.</p> <p>Please provide invoices and/or receipts when seeking reimbursement for Medical Accommodation and Transport expenses.</p> <p><i>Please note:</i> Once a reservation for accommodation has been paid, changes cannot be made to the booking.</p>

Find and Connect:

If your time in 'care' was less than 6 months in Victoria, or took place interstate, you may access up to \$1000 health brokerage (lifetime total) in certain circumstances. Please contact the Health Brokerage team if you are unsure whether this condition applies to you.



Service Navigation and Advocacy team

Change of team name

The Coordinated Support team, which includes Drop-in and intake, has changed its name to the Service Navigation and Advocacy team. All members of this team are now titled Support & Advocacy Workers.

This change was made because it was felt that 'service navigation and advocacy' better describes the work done by the team. This team works in partnership with service users to help navigate complex government systems and related support services, including the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Housing, Home and Community Care Program for Younger People (HACC PYP) (VIC), Aged Care, and Services Australia/Centrelink. Further areas of support that may need navigation could include financial hardship/financial counselling, gambling, family and domestic violence, homelessness, legal advice, and public health —to name a few.

Service navigation and advocacy could include:

- support with referrals and linkages to external services — we can then partner with you to help navigate these services
- provision of necessary information
- provision of a support letter to advocate for you to access the services you need
- support to pay for a bill, material aid or essential items
- emotional support.

Team members of the Service Navigation and Advocacy team include:

Shaye Silver	Drop in & Intake/Service Navigation & Advocacy
Keegan Tarrant	Drop in & Intake/Service Navigation & Advocacy
Brigitte Mathot	Service Navigation & Advocacy
Ebba Lochert	Service Navigation & Advocacy
Annie Fell	Service Navigation & Advocacy
Tracey Anderson	Health/Service Navigation & Advocacy

Salvation Army Gambling Support Service

Our Service Navigation and Advocacy team recently connected with the Salvation Army Gambling Support Service and wanted to share information about this valuable resource. The service provides free and confidential support for anyone affected by gambling, including financial counselling, therapeutic counselling, advocacy and practical support.

We learned just how common gambling struggles are, and how often they exist alongside trauma, homelessness, alcohol and other drug use, stress, isolation and mental health challenges. Gambling often begins with good intentions and feelings of hopefulness, however, the way it is designed can create an addictive cycle — becoming a way to cope with stress or to try and undo previous losses. Over time, this cycle becomes very difficult to break, and many people experience shame or avoid asking for help. We understand this cycle is not the fault of the person gambling, and that gambling is designed to keep people trapped in it.



Gambling can look different for everyone and may include pokies, sports betting, online betting, Tattslotto and more. There also does not need to be a certain level of financial loss or crisis before someone can access support.

Support is available not only for the person gambling, but also for partners, family members and loved ones affected. Anyone concerned about gambling struggles is welcome to speak with the service.

Financial counselling is often a good starting point and can help people manage debts, bills and financial stress, while therapeutic counselling is also available. Most appointments are over the phone or online, with relatively short wait times.

If you have questions or would like support to connect with the program, a Support & Advocacy Worker from the Service Navigation and Advocacy team would be very happy to help.

You can also contact the Salvation Army Gambling Support Service directly on (03) 9653 3250 or gamblingsupport@salvationarmy.org.au

Redress Support team

Important news about Victorian Redress for Historical Institutional Abuse

The Victorian Redress for Historical Institutional Abuse scheme (VRS) has been extended.

Applications can now be submitted up until the end of December 2026 (it was originally scheduled to close in June 2026).

Open Place Redress Support Workers have supported over 400 Forgotten Australians to complete their applications for VRS. Our team has an in-depth understanding of the process and provides compassionate support tailored to your specific needs and circumstances. We will walk with you through every step of the process.

We would encourage any Forgotten Australians considering applying to VRS to contact Open Place as soon as possible, to make sure we can support you in a timely manner.

General information about Victorian Redress for Historical Institutional Abuse

If you experienced abuse and/or neglect as a child in institutional settings in Victoria prior to 1990, you can apply for redress.

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

- lived as a child (before the age of 18) in a Victorian institution for at least 6 months (in total) before 1 January 1990
- experienced physical, psychological, or emotional abuse or neglect in the Victorian institution.

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

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



(If you have received a prior payment from certain schemes or institutions, the payment may be deducted from the \$20,000).

For more details, visit <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/redress> or call Open Place on 1800 779 379 and ask to speak with a worker about Victorian Redress.

Drop-in Centre

Tuesdays and Thursdays: 10am – 4pm

Fridays: 10am – 3pm

How we can help at Drop-in:

- Support, advocacy and service navigation
- Social and recreational activities
- Help with completing forms and applications
- Free monthly haircuts
- Free podiatry (by appointment)
- Support with bills
- Someone to have a chat with
- Laundry, shower and toiletries
- Meals, snacks & tea/coffee
- Information sessions

Friday cook-up

Every Friday, anyone who is a registered service user can enjoy a delicious, hearty meal with dessert. It is an enjoyable day, filled with delicious food and all are welcome. Join us between 10am and 3pm every Friday.

Oz Harvest

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.

Free activities

- Women's 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
- Podiatry: Offered every third Wednesday of the month (by appointment only) from 1pm to 3pm
- Tuesday Fun Walk: Every Tuesday from 1pm
- Movie Thursdays: First Thursday of the month from 1pm
- Art Zone: Free art supplies every Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm
- Victorian Public Tenants Association: First Thursday of the month from 11am to 12.30pm

We are hoping to add more activities and information sessions to the Drop-In space in 2026. Keep an eye out on our website and future newsletters for more information.

For activity updates between newsletters, visit openplace.org.au/events



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 visit <http://threadtogether.org> for more information.

Locations: Richmond, Ballarat, or Wangaratta (Vic), Brisbane (Qld), Maylands (WA).

If you are interested in attending a location in Victoria or would like to learn more, please call Open Place on 1800 779 379.

Free Financial Counselling at Open Place

Open Place is pleased to offer **financial counselling appointments** at the Drop-in Centre, in partnership with Uniting Victoria and Tasmania.

Financial counselling is a free, confidential, independent and non-judgemental service that helps people manage money worries, understand their financial situation, and work through options when dealing with debt or financial stress.

A qualified financial counsellor may be able to support you with:

- bills and debt
- credit cards and loans
- fines and government debt
- budgeting and managing expenses
- understanding your options and rights
- negotiating payment plans with creditors
- accessing hardship programs and referrals.

Financial counsellors cannot provide investment advice, pay bills, or take over finances.

Bookings are required.

When booking, Open Place staff will ask for some basic information to help ensure the financial counsellor is prepared to best support your needs during the session.

To find out more or make a booking, please contact Open Place 1800 779 379 and ask to speak with **Shaye or Keegan**.



If you are unable to attend an appointment at the Drop-in Centre but would still like support, referrals for appointments via **phone or Zoom** can also be made to Uniting.

There are also a range of financial counselling services available across Australia, and we are happy to help explore other options with you so you can access support as soon as possible.

20% off vehicle registrations

From Monday 1 June to Friday 31 July 2026 Victorians can apply for a 20% rebate on their vehicle registration payments. This will save the average driver up to \$186 per vehicle on their 2025–26 vehicle registrations.

Eligibility

The rebate is limited to 2 light vehicles per person. Eligible vehicles include:

- cars
- wagons (4WD)
- station wagons
- motorcycles
- utes
- vans
- light trucks.

The rebate applies to eligible vehicles registered under an individual's name for the period of 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.

How to apply

Applications are open from Monday 1 June to Friday 31 July 2026. You will be able to apply via the Service Victoria app or website.

More information

<https://service.vic.gov.au/find-services/transport-and-driving/registration/regio-rebate>

Please feel free to contact Open Place if you need any support with this.



Social Support Groups (SSGs)

Bacchus Marsh SSG

We have been out and about over the last couple of months.

Some of the group carpooled to Ballarat and spent the day at the Botanical Gardens. We had coffee and a couple of us purchased some beautiful plants to take home.

We enjoyed a lovely lunch at the Golden Fleece in March. In May, we had lunch at the food court in Melton and then went and saw "The Devil Wears Prada 2" movie, which was lovely.



Ballarat SSG



The Ballarat SSG meet on the second Tuesday of each month. We meet bi-monthly at the RSL hall in Sebastopol where we enjoy a light luncheon and a get together. We alternate meetings with outings in the Ballarat district. In March, we enjoyed a BBQ at Lake Wendouree. The weather was perfect and the swans were well behaved and left us alone. We were having such a good day I didn't get photos.



In April, we had Richard Dove from the Community Education team come to talk about the work he has been doing and provide copies of the "to be seen" report. Our next outing is to Morning Melodies where we plan to dance up a storm. Give Open Place a call if you would like to be on the mailing list.



Bendigo SSG

If you live in the Bendigo area and have been thinking of coming along, please give Open Place a call to register your interest. We meet bimonthly at the Long Gully Community Centre.

In March, we enjoyed a big day out in Echuca where boarded the PS Canberra, a 113-year-old paddle steamer for a 1-hour cruise along the tranquil Murray River. We enjoyed taking photos of the captivating views while relaxing in the calm and serenity on this historical maritime vessel. We then met for lunch at the Caledonian Hotel where the staff greeted us warmly and provided efficient service to end a great day out.



In April, we were back at our community centre in Long Gully and in May we have plans to go to Morning Melodies at the Bendigo Club. Watch this space.



Shepparton SSG

Following the February meeting at the North Shepparton Community & Learning Centre, where everyone brought suggestions and chatted about what worked well or not, we've gone full steam ahead into an enjoyable and busy few months. Thank you everyone for the feedback and ideas.

In March, the group met at the Mooroopna Golf Club for a lovely lunch, taking in the view of the golf course on a beautiful sunny day.

The group came out in great numbers and great spirits again in April for our yearly visit to King City in Shepparton.

We were back to the Community Centre in May for a hot lunch and a good chat with Richard Dove, Community Education Coordinator at Open Place. Richard brought the recent Community Education publications for everyone to take home and distribute around local and relevant services.

We look forward to seeing those who can make it out over the winter months.



Dandenong SSG



Dandenong SSG meets on the final Wednesday of every month. Due to unavailability at the previous venue, we will be trialling our new 'home base' at the Paddy O'Donoghue Centre from August onwards.

Our first group back for 2026 was lunch at the Noble Park RSL. In March, we danced away the morning at Morning Melodies at Club Noble, followed by lunch. In April, we played Bingo with lunch. You are welcome

to come alone or bring a plus one. Our staff Ebba and Biraj will be there to help should you need anything. We have plenty more get-togethers planned for the year, so if you live in Dandenong or surrounding suburbs and would like to join us, please contact Open Place.



Frankston SSG

The Frankston group kicked off 2026 with a lovely barbeque at the George Pentland Botanic Gardens. In June, we hopped on the chair lift at Arthur's Seat for some incredible views from the highest point of the Mornington Peninsula. The Frankston group runs on the first Friday of every month. If you're interested in attending, please contact Open Place reception to us know.



Donald and District SSG

The Donald and District SSG meet on the fourth Thursday of the month and we meet bi-monthly. Group members come from a wide area including, St Arnaud, Donald, Beulah and Horsham. In March, we have had an outing to Beulah where we had a BBQ. It was all under cover, but a bit chilly, so we lit the open fire to keep warm. Then while we had a cuppa and vanilla slice we put on some 1950's songs for our members to "guess the artist". It was a relaxing and enjoyable day all around. In April, we visited the new Kookie Factory in Donald, where we were very spoiled with some Kookas Kookies followed by a very nice lunch at the Donald Hotel. Our next outing will be in St Arnaud. New members are very welcome – give Open Place a call if you would like to be on the mailing list.



Geelong SSG

If you live in the Geelong area and wish to join our Social Support Group, please give Open Place a call to register your interest. We meet bi-monthly at the Grovedale Neighbourhood House.



In March, we had a BBQ lunch at Queens Park in Highton. Although the weather was a little wet it didn't deter our gang. Luckily, we had a rotunda to shelter us from the occasional spots of drizzle during our lunch and fortunately, the rains held off giving us enough time to get a group photo.

In April, we were back at The Grovedale Neighbourhood House where the group welcomed Brigitte from Open Place in Richmond who was standing in for Annie. Easter eggs were in abundance, and Sonya delivered an impromptu trivia game for eager participants to ensnare a basket. The level of general

knowledge in our group was astonishing, especially knowing there was a chocolate prize! Sadly, it was also the last time Max Turner would attend our group. Max was a regular, who liked to chat and enjoyed a chuckle. On that day, he chatted to Sonya about his love of dancing, recalling the Saturday night dances, in a bygone era, dancing the Lindy hop and the jive.



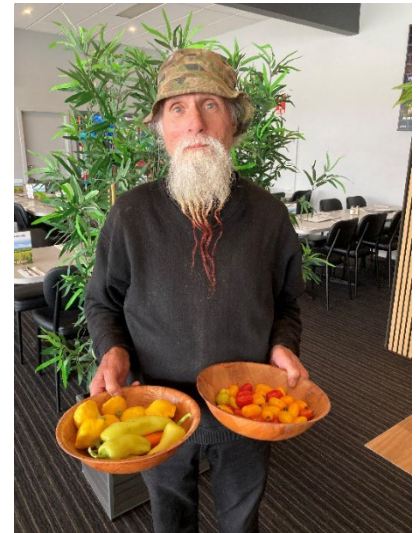
'Partner dancing is better than the dancing that goes on now', he recollected wistfully. Wonderful to think now, that living life is something that Max will be remembered for. Annie and several members of the SSG attended Max's funeral.

In May, we will be gathering at The Gateway Hotel for an all you can eat smorgasbord. A day of indulgence is assured.

Gippsland SSG



So far this year, the Gippsland group has enjoyed lunches out at the Bowls Club and local Chinese restaurant, and a visit from Richard Dove, Community Education Officer. Michael has continued to share his home grown produce with the group which has been much appreciated. Thank you to Ray for the recent delivery of eggs for the drop in to enjoy. We have celebrated our monthly birthdays. Sadly, the group was recently informed of the passing of one of our members. Shane will be missed and remembered fondly.



Preston SSG

The Preston SSG has had a lovely start to 2026, enjoying a variety of outings and shared lunches together.

In February, the group made the most of the beautiful weather with a relaxing picnic in the park. March saw members gather at the Northcote Library meeting room for lunch and an informative discussion with our guest speaker, Richard, Community Education Coordinator, who spoke about the final stage of the consultation project involving social support groups across Victoria. In April, the group enjoyed a fantastic day aboard the Melbourne Tramboat cruise. Travelling along the Maribyrnong River, members disembarked for a delicious lunch at Anglers Tavern before cruising back to Docklands.

Most recently, in May, the group came together to enjoy an "all you can eat" buffet lunch at the Roxburgh Park Hotel.

We look forward to many more enjoyable gatherings and activities throughout the year ahead!





Warrnambool SSG

If you live in the Warrnambool area and have been thinking about coming along, please give Open Place a call to register your interest. We meet bimonthly at the Archie Graham Centre.



In March, we met at Lake Pertobe where we enjoyed a BBQ lunch and a catch up on a sunny day. A few of the fitter members of the group went for a stroll along the beach while the rest of us relaxed, enjoying a good chat and a cuppa.

In April, Richard Dove came along to our community centre to update us on his work with educating organisations on who Forgotten Australians are and also provide us all with a copy of the “to Be Seen” Forgotten Australian’s Community Education Report and Priorities.

In May, we are heading to Terang to the local pub for lunch and a catch up with each other.

Wodonga/Wangaratta SSG

In March, we were back at our home base at the Victory Community Hall in Wangaratta. The group enjoyed lunch and planned for the year ahead. In April, we met at the Kinross Woolshed. We had no takers for a game of bowling, but the lunch was fabulous.



April was also a sad month for the whole group, as we learnt that a long-standing group member, Bill Flemming, had passed away. Bill was a much-loved member of our group, and he will be deeply missed. He had a unique sense of humour and a gift for telling stories about his life that kept us all entertained. One story many of us will remember was how he insisted he could remove cement using only a straw—classic Bill.

In May, the group was back at Victory Community Hall, where the Community Education Coordinator attended to provide everyone with a copy of the *to be seen* Community Education Report and Priorities, as well as copies of the *Supporting Forgotten Australians* flyer, which supports Forgotten Australians to identify when attending a service or organisation. The report and flyer are a product of the original consultation which took place in 2024 and 2025. Everyone was giving the opportunity to provide feedback.



Recipe

5-ingredient chicken and mushroom pasta bake



Serves 4.

Ingredients

- 375g penne
- ½ hot roast chicken, meat coarsely shredded
- 490 jar creamy mushroom sauce
- 120g baby spinach
- 250g shredded mozzarella

Method

1. Preheat oven to 200 degrees C. Cook the pasta in a large saucepan of boiling water following packet directions or until al dente. Drain well.
2. Combine pasta, chicken, mushroom sauce and spinach in a large bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Spoon into a 2.5L baking dish. Sprinkle with mozzarella.
3. Bake for 20 mins or until top is golden brown and pasta mixture is heated through.
4. Serve immediately.



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
- Email 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 First Nations peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways of Australia. We support their right to self-determination and culturally safe services.



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