

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 49 | March 2026



OPEN PLACE

Support Service for Forgotten Australians

Relationships
AUSTRALIA · VIC

Welcome to Open Place: our March newsletter

A note from Michelle McDonald, Senior Manager Open Place

The 2025 year came to end with another joyful Christmas celebration at the Malvern Town Hall for many of you. I hope you enjoy the photos later in this newsletter and perhaps if you've never been, you might want to consider attending this year's event!!

Summer has now passed, and the autumnal colours and climate await us.

Sadly, heatwaves and bushfires have become a far too regular part of our summer. It is important that you take extra special note of weather reports, and I hope everyone with a mobile phone or computer has the Vic Emergency app downloaded or website address saved, and keeps an eye on and understands the warnings.

Unfortunately, we have needed to cancel some Social Support Groups and appointments when there have been extreme or catastrophic weather warnings in areas where travel was planned. I know this can be disappointing, but your safety and that our Open Place staff is paramount.

In this edition

Have your contact details changed?.....	4
Notes for your calendar.....	4
Weather advice for Social Support Groups and outreach	4
Were you at ...???	4
Reunions	4
Community recognition	5
Christmas party photos	6
Team updates.....	13
Recipes.....	25
Contact us.....	26

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.



National Memorial Update from the Department of Social Services

Source: Elm Place Newsletter

The design for the National Memorial for Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse (National Memorial) was

[officially announced by the Australian Government](#) on 12 November 2025.

The Australian Government Department of Social Services (the Department), in partnership with the National Capital Authority and the National Memorial Advisory Group, is leading the establishment of the National Memorial on Acton Peninsula in Canberra. This initiative responds to a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

SUPERSENSE STUDIO was chosen to lead the design for the National Memorial, which embodies protection, strength and enduring connections, and offers a space for healing and reflection shaped by the voices of victims and survivors.

Construction of the National Memorial is scheduled to start in 2026 and to be completed in 2027. To learn more about the design, please refer to the National Capital Authority website on the National Memorial. Visit www.nca.gov.au/environment/projects/current-projects/national-memorial-victims-and-survivors

We encourage you to keep up to date with progress on the National Memorial by visiting the Department's website on the [National Memorial](#). Visit www.dss.gov.au/national-memorial-victims-and-survivors-institutional-child-sexual-abuse

If you would like more information about the memorial and the design selection process, read the frequently asked questions on the Department's website. Visit www.dss.gov.au/national-memorial-victims-and-survivors-institutional-child-sexual-abuse/resource/national-memorial-frequently-asked-questions.



Tasmanian Memorial

On 19 November, Tolosa Park in Glenorchy became the site of a new memorial, unveiled in honour of the anniversary of the National Apology to Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants.

The Apology acknowledged the profound harm suffered by children placed in institutional care, including neglect, abuse and the lifelong impact of being denied love, family and belonging.

The memorial, designed by Forgotten Australians in partnership with Glenorchy City Council, occupies a site chosen with care, aligned with the tower of Dominic College, once the location of Boys' Town, linking the space directly to the history of institutional care in the area. The event brought together community members, advocates, supporters and government representatives to celebrate a milestone in the long campaign for a meaningful place of reflection.

Set in peaceful bushland, the ceremony was both reflective and uplifting. Cody, a Palawa man, delivered a Welcome to Country, and two Forgotten Australians, shared powerful stories that deeply moved the crowd. Forgotten Australians from the north of the state also travelled to attend, with their practitioner offering heartfelt words on their behalf, leading into the unveiling of the memorial.

Guests were invited to wear white as a show of solidarity with Forgotten Australians, a simple but powerful gesture that speaks to making their stories visible and honouring those who fought for recognition after years of silence.

The Alliance for Forgotten Australians will be meeting in Melbourne from 27 April to 30 April and will attend the National Aged and Community Care Roundtable for Forgotten Australians forum during this time, to coincide with International Care Experience month.

Maree Holt is the Victorian Board member on AFA and if you would like to share any ideas or hear more about the Alliance please email Maree at info@openplace.org.au and we will pass on your details.

Warmly,

Michelle McDonald



Have your contact details changed?

If you have had a recent change of address, email or phone number, please check with reception to see if we have your current details on file.

Notes for your calendar

Open Place will be closed from Friday 3 April until Monday 6 April, inclusive, for the Easter weekend.

Weather advice for Social Support Groups and outreach

Please be advised that when weather is forecast as extreme or catastrophic we may need to cancel Social Support Groups/outreach appointments. This is to ensure the safety of service users and staff.

Every effort will be made to advise of any cancellation as soon as possible.

Were you at ...???

Gordon Boys' Home

Peter Hicks ('Hicksy') is putting a call out to anyone who was in Gordon Boys' Home. If you would like to connect, please call Open Place on 1800 779379 and we will pass your details to him.

Reunions

St Vincent's Boys' Home Reunion 2026

Did you live at St Vincent's in South Melbourne in the 1970s or 1980s?

You are warmly invited to a reunion of former residents on Thursday 30th April from 5 to 8pm, at the site of the former home, at 237 Cecil Street, South Melbourne.

It will be an opportunity to reconnect with others, tour the building, visit the Heritage Centre and look through photos. Refreshments, including pizza, will be provided in the Heritage Centre.

For more information or to RSVP, please contact Jasmine Murphy on 9257 2257 or by email at jasmine.murphy@mackillop.org.au



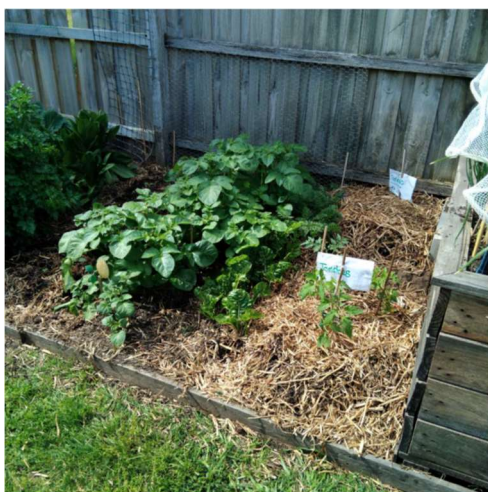
Community recognition

In celebrating community work done by Forgotten Australians, we encourage you to send us photos and information of any good work you may have done to be shared in the newsletter.

Garry McPherson's veggie garden

Garry has created this vegetable garden for the residents of his local Community units. All the residents use the veggies and are grateful.

Garry pays for all this himself; he enjoys gardening. He also keeps most of the residents front gardens tidy and does extra if asked.



Above: Garry in the garden
Left: Garry and his sister, Lillian



Christmas party photos

















Team updates

Community Education Team

Happy New Year everyone.

You may know by now that the launch of the **'to be seen'** Community Education Report and Priorities took place in November 2025, but what you may not know is I will be making my way around Victoria to **all 14 Social Support Groups** once more.

This will be the third tour. I've done this, because face-to-face is really the only way to get to know Forgotten Australians properly; to build trust; and to ensure that you know you've been heard.

The first tour was the 'consultation'.

The second tour was to give you an update on the upcoming report, and to provide you all with 5 copies of the **Supporting Forgotten Australians** flyer for services and organisations, which was developed from your words.

The third tour, which is taking place now, is to provide you all with a physical copy of the report; and 5 copies of the second version of the **Supporting Forgotten Australians** flyer; and to provide you with a chance to give more input on the direction of Open Place Community Education.

I'd like to provide you with a little bit more information about the report. The **to be seen** report was all about capturing your voice, and developing priorities (aims) from your words, so that there is a clear way forward. They are called 'The Six Priorities.'

Almost all my work will be geared towards making these priorities come true. Together, with your voice, a path has been created. But it is mostly up to you whether it comes true or not. I will continue to do my part, and I encourage you to do yours – that is, to find the strength to identify as a Forgotten Australian, a Care Leaver, a person who spent time in Australia's institutional 'care' system as a child; whichever way you want to say it.

I will be calling you Forgotten Australians, because that is the name I've been given to work with, and it is the one that most of you have told me represents you. I acknowledge it doesn't represent everyone.

If you'd like a copy or copies of the **to be seen** report or the **Supporting Forgotten Australian** flyers, email me at rdove@rav.org.au and I'll send them to you.

If you are a Forgotten Australian and would like to be an advocate for the needs of **Forgotten Australians**, please also contact me.

Please look after yourself and look after each other.



Historical Records Team

The Records Team is back in full swing after a busy end to 2025 and a restful holiday break. As interest in records and family searches continues to grow, we would like to thank you for your patience while we work through your requests.

While much of our work focuses on supporting Forgotten Australians one-on-one, the Records team also participates in state and interstate networks, training, and advocacy. These external opportunities help us stay up to date on how other organisations and record holder agencies across Australia are working to improve access to records and family search services. We often come away with new ideas about how we can provide you with the best possible support.

Involvement in these networks also supports the creation of new resources that reflect the real experiences of Forgotten Australians. A great example of this is over the past several years Open Place has been involved in research that informed a new guide about using DNA, developed by Dr Jenny Connick and her team at the University of Melbourne. The guide is called ***Making Informed Choices About Using DNA***. We would highly recommend looking at this guide if you are considering exploring your own heritage through DNA. The guide is available on the Open Place website, and if you receive this newsletter by email, you can also find it at:

<https://socialequity.unimelb.edu.au/news/latest/making-informed-choices-about-using-dna>

You can also read more about the earlier research here:

<https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/Getting-support-for-opening-the-Pandoras-Box-of-DNA-testing>

For those interested in researching their family history, the Genealogical Society of Victoria (GSV) can offer budget friendly tips and support to its members. At the Research & Education Centre in Melbourne you can work with experienced volunteer research assistants and benefit from a wide range of supportive special interest groups, workshops, classes and knowledgeable individuals. Being a member of the GSV does require a membership. To learn more about the GSV and membership options, visit <https://www.gsv.org.au/> or find more about budget friendly research tips visit <https://www.gsv.org.au/blog/no-budget-family-history-gsv-can-help-you>

Counselling Team

Our Counselling Team has been working hard to make sure all Forgotten Australians and their family members have access to counselling in Victoria and across Australia. We have a small team of counsellors who can see people in person at our Richmond office, or work with people over the phone or via Zoom. We can also support people in regional and rural areas find suitably qualified private counsellors in their local area and can help with the cost of the sessions. If you would like to know more about the Open Place Counselling program, you're welcome to call us at Open Place and ask to speak with a member of the Counselling Team.

In team news, Kate Derrig has moved on from her position as Counsellor at Open Place. Kate worked at Open Place for nearly 5 years and was a committed advocate for Forgotten Australians. Kate's clients often commented on her non-clinical approach to counselling, which put people at ease; especially those people who have had negative past experiences with formal counselling and mental health services. Kate always worked hard on behalf of her clients to get the best outcomes. She was also a long-term co-facilitator of the Frankston Social Support Group and will be missed by all the regulars there.

On behalf of everyone at Open Place, I'd like to thank Kate for her dedication to Forgotten Australians and wish her all the best with her future.



Redress Support Team

Our Redress Support Team is going full steam ahead supporting people to apply for both the National Redress Scheme, and Victorian Redress for Historical Institutional Abuse.

The Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Redress for Historical Institutional Abuse program will stop taking applications in June this year (2026).

The Victorian Government is offering Redress for Victorians who experienced abuse and/or neglect as children in institutions before 1990. Redress has been set up to recognise and acknowledge what happened, and the harm caused.

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

Redress includes: 1) a payment of up to \$20,000 2) a personal acknowledgment or apology 3) up to 20 counselling sessions.

Eligible people will be able to choose one or all these options.

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

Support is available to applicants, at any stage of the process.

Find out more, visit <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/redress> or contact Open Place.

Drop-In Centre

Tuesdays and Thursdays: 10am – 4pm

Fridays: 10am – 3pm

How we can help at Drop-In:

- Support, advocacy & 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 & 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

Pick your Party Fit Event

In partnership with Thread Together Richmond, we wrapped up December with another awesome day! Thread Together Clothing Hub hosted a special event for Open Place service users, giving everyone the change to choose a brand-new outfit for the Christmas party... completely free!

Thread Together is an incredible external service that collects brand-new, unsold clothing from fashion retailers across Australia and redistributes it to people who need it most.

With food, hairdressers, makeup artists and a photobooth available, it was such a fun day and plenty of people walked away Christmas party ready.

We're hoping to bring it back in 2026! If you're interested, let Shaye or Keegan know on 1800 779 379. More details will be available later in the year.





Social Support Groups (SSGs)

Bacchus Marsh SSG

Bacchus Marsh SSG went to Morning Melodies for Christmas lunch and there was lots of singing, dancing and laughter.

We are off to the Ballarat Botanical gardens in February, and everyone is looking forward to having a picnic in the gardens and doing some brainstorming and planning for the coming year.



Ballarat SSG

Ballarat SSG meets on the 2nd Tuesday of each month from February to December. In September, we went to the 'Flying Horse' for a fabulous lunch, then we our usual get together at the RSL Hall in Sebastopol, In November, we met up with the Geelong SSG to go to the Werribee Zoo. Our Christmas function in December was at the Ballarat Golf Club. We had a Kris Kringle and raffles, and no one went home without a prize. In February we are meeting at the RSL Hall and each March, we usually head to Lake Wendouree for a relaxed BBQ.





John is a member of the Ballarat SSG, resident joke teller and self-taught artist.

Here he is at our February gathering with several of his paintings that he bought along to show the group.

Bendigo SSG

If you live in the Bendigo area and have been thinking of coming along, please give Annie a call or text on 0427 695 600 or Sharon on 0417 067 910 (Monday-Thursday).

In November, the group were invited to Colleen’s home (fellow group member) for a BBQ lunch. Colleen has a beautiful garden, fishponds and a lovely outdoor entertaining area – the perfect place for our gang to come together, share a meal and enjoy the surrounds. David and Leonard cooked up a storm on the BBQ and Dolly baked some of her yummy cakes to share with all and showed us her latest very own handmade baby knits.



Our Christmas get together was held at the Axedale Tavern, a historical hotel established in 1855. Unfortunately, we didn’t get to enjoy the beer garden and its unique features due to the weather forecast of 43 deg so inside the venue we went. We managed to decorate our own private space with lots of tinsel & Christmas cheer. It was a great day of gift giving, nice food, fun and games.

In February, we will return to Long Gully Community Centre for lunch and a catch-up.





Dandenong SSG



Dandenong SSG aims to meet on the last Wednesday of each month. We have had to change the date on occasion, however, due to availability at our new home base: the Noble Park Community Centre. We also change the date when we attend Morning Melodies (held on a Tuesday).

We welcome new facilitator Biraj who is from the Counselling Team. Biraj has joined Ebba as co-facilitator of the group.

Our final get-together for 2025 was a Christmas-themed buffet lunch at the Lynbrook Hotel. Unfortunately, we didn't manage to get an entire group photo but have one of a few people who attended. In 2026, we hope to head out for some fun excursions and take many more photos!

Donald and District SSG



The Donald and District SSG meets bi-monthly, on the fourth Thursday of the month. Our group members come from a wide ranging rural areas including St Arnaud, Donald, Beulah and Horsham.

In October 2025, we had lunch at the Palace Hotel in Warracknabeal, and for our Christmas break-up group in November, we had a lunch at the Grampians Hotel, followed by a very special encounter with the giraffes and rhinoceroses at the Grampians Zoo.





Frankston SSG

The Frankston SSG ended the year with a lovely Christmas lunch at the Lynbrook Hotel. We are looking forward to another year of outings and catch-ups. 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.



Geelong SSG

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).

In November, the Geelong & Ballarat SSGs combined to share an outing together. We had a great day out at the Werribee Open Range Zoo. The weather was perfect. We enjoyed a picnic lunch and a cuppa before we explored the zoo and its magnificent animals. The free safari adventure bus tour feels like you are in Africa with giraffes, zebras, rhinoceroses and other exotic animals roaming in large open spaces. If you haven't been to this zoo, do yourself a favour and head along!

We celebrated Christmas at Leopold Sportsman's Club and did we have a great day! The venue is a favourite of ours where we have our own private space to celebrate the festive season together. Gift giving, door prizes and a good feed were some highlights of the day.

In February, we returned to Grovedale Neighbourhood House to welcome a new year.





Gippsland SSG

We met for Christmas lunch at the Rosedale Hotel and enjoyed a traditional Christmas meal, which was a fun and festive way to end the year. The group welcomed new members on the day and many jokes from the Christmas crackers were shared. Liz and Shaye wish the group a very happy, healthy and safe new year. We are look forward to another wonderful year of laughs, fun and connection throughout 2026. We begin the year at our home base, the Sale City Band Hall for lunch.





Horsham SSG

The Horsham SSG met at the Nati Pub in Natimuk, the week after the grassfires came through. It was heartbreaking to see that a few houses in the main street didn't survive. Our thoughts were with them.



Lucky for us, and for the owners of the local pub, it was miraculously left unharmed and thus we were able to enjoy some amazing hospitality, as well as providing us with the opportunity to support the embattled township with our presence and, economic contribution.

Our newest member, Grahame, attended for the second time, and we are proud to say that our little group is growing. Vida and Jason generously brought along a boot full of some homegrown vegetables for everyone to take home. After a spirited conversation, we all went home with a smile on our faces. It was Grahame's turn to choose our next place to meet, and he chose the Horsham SSG favourite: the Vic Hotel in Horsham. Good on you, Grahame!

Preston SSG



The Preston SSG wrapped up 2025 with a lunch at the Northcote Library in October and a delicious 2-course lunch and some singing to Morning Melodies in November at the Darebin RSL. We'd like to thank the group members for a lovely 2025 together!

Anybody wishing to receive flyers for upcoming Preston groups is welcome to give us a call and put their name on our mailing list. Upcoming 2026 groups will include some fun activities, outings, and luncheons, including a BBQ in the park to kick off the year, a buffet lunch and even a tramboat cruise down the Maribyrnong! We look forward to catching up with the group again soon. The Preston SSG takes place on the third Friday of every month.



Shepparton SSG



The Shepparton SSG enjoyed a lovely Christmas lunch at the Mooroopna Golf Club and were fortunate to also have enjoyed Morning Melodies which were being performed. We had a large turnout of over 40 people attending which was wonderful. We had a break in January, however, were back into it in February where we met at the Community Hub for lunch from Subway. It was great for everyone to laugh, joke and enjoy each other's company.

Warrnambool SSG



If you live in the Warrnambool area and have been thinking about coming along, please give Annie a call or text on 0427 695 600 (Monday-Thursday). New members are most welcome or if you've been to the group in the past and want to come back, the door is always open.

We were looking forward to going back to beautiful Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve for a BBQ picnic in November. We expected it to be a lovely Spring Day as it was November. Unfortunately, it was a cold day and rain was forecast, but we went ahead with our plans anyway. Luckily it didn't rain! We enjoyed a lovely day together amongst the trees, the cute koalas and the cheeky emus.

In December, we celebrated Christmas at the Warrnambool RSL. The RSL is a great venue with a view of the ocean. Ebba from the Coordinated Support Team in Richmond came along to join the group to celebrate the festive season. We had a fun day together giving gifts, playing games and enjoying a lovely meal.

In February, we are back at the Archie Graham Centre to catch up, enjoy some lunch and a cuppa.



Wodonga/Wangaratta SSG

In October, the Wangaratta and Wodonga Social Support group visited the wonderful Caffeine N Machine café in Rutherglen. They enjoyed the free motorcycle museum, lunch and the delicious desserts.



In November, we were back at our home base at the Victory Community Hall in Wangaratta. The group enjoyed the warm weather and a BBQ lunch.

In December, we celebrated Christmas at the Kinross Woolshed. This was a great venue for our group. We had a festive day and enjoyed Christmas lunch and Christmas bingo together.

In February 2026, the first group of the year was sadly cancelled due to Country Fire Authority (CFA) warnings for extreme fire danger in the region. Hopefully in March the group can meet and plan for the year ahead.



Recipes

5-ingredient Easter marshmallow bubble slice

Ingredients

110g jar unicorn confetti sprinkles

5 cups puffed rice cereal

125g packet speckled milk chocolate Easter eggs, chopped

100g butter, chopped

200g vanilla marshmallows

Method

Step 1: Grease a 20cm x 30cm slice pan. Line base and sides with baking paper, extending paper 2cm above edges of pan on all sides.

Step 2: Reserve 2 tablespoons of the confetti. Place puffed rice, chopped chocolate eggs and remaining confetti in a large bowl. Stir to combine. Place butter in a medium saucepan over low heat. Heat until butter is melted. Remove from heat. Stir in marshmallows, returning to low heat until smooth and combined. Stir marshmallow mixture into puffed rice mixture. Stir to coat well.

Step 3: Press mixture firmly and evenly into prepared pan. Scatter with reserved confetti. Refrigerate for 2 hours or until set

Step 4: Cut into 16 bars. Serve.





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.