



ALLIANCE FOR
**FORGOTTEN
AUSTRALIANS**

LIFE STORIES PROJECT: FINAL REPORT

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A WORD FROM A FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIAN

None of the officials I met with or whom I got letters from have ever joined the dots. Most of them, if not all, regard what happened as being in the past, an aberration that can be placated with a few words and a token redress payment.

And that is the burden I carry every day. I know there is no one who can make right what happened to me or make it go away. These are no heroes in this story. There is no cavalry coming over the hill. There is just me.

From Bob's¹ story

¹ Not his real name.

Executive Summary

The **Life Stories Project** ('the Project') has made it possible for 60 Forgotten Australians to tell their life story. The completed stories have been printed with photos and documents. Each Forgotten Australian has received 20 copies of their story. The Forgotten Australian is the owner of the story and decides who should receive a copy of their story.

The Project was made possible by a grant from the Department of Social Services (DSS) to the Alliance for Forgotten Australians (AFA). The grant was initially made for a year (1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021) but was extended twice. The Project finished on 30 June 2022.

The Project had the following aims:

- enabling and empowering participants, via storytelling, to claim or reclaim their identity;
- assisting participants, via storytelling, in their emotional and psychological recovery; and
- assisting participants, via storytelling, to reconnect with family.

AFA commenced this Project with an awareness and a sensibility of the value of life story work, but also the risk. The Project must do no harm. The Project firmly believed that *“the act of constructing stories is a natural human process that helps individuals to understand their experience and themselves.”* (Pennebaker and Seagal, 1999, p 1243).

The Project developed a model for storytelling that ensured the support and wellbeing of participants. The Project recruited and supported a group of writers with knowledge of and experience in working with Forgotten Australians.

The Project successfully met its target of 60 completed stories.

Feedback from participants and writers suggested that the Project met its objectives. This report contains some suggestions (“lessons”) for future life story activity with Forgotten Australians.

Acknowledgements

AFA acknowledges all those who participated in the Project, first and foremost, the Forgotten Australians for their courage and wisdom. We also thank the writers for their skills and sensitivities and the Find and Connect service network for their support.

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Beginnings

The **Life Stories Project** ('the Project') was made possible by a grant from the Department of Social Services (DSS) to the Alliance for Forgotten Australians (AFA). The grant was initially provided for one year (1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021) but was extended twice. The Project finished on 30 June 2022.

For many years AFA has been aware of the importance for Forgotten Australians to be the interpreters and owners of their own story and of their history. This was the primary driver behind the successful AFA submission for funding for the Life Stories Project. The submission had this to say:

The estimated 500,000 Forgotten Australians, care leavers and Former Child Migrants are 60 years of age and upwards. Many are experiencing old age and preparation for, or fear of aged care and death. A part of this preparation is attempting to come to terms with their experience, explaining it and leaving a record of it for their families or significant others. Many have been seeking or have found the records of their time in 'care'. Others have no written records and only memories remain. Such records as exist are often wrong, or offensive, or expressed in institutional language. Records often don't match memories. Many people have never told the story of their period in 'care'. Some do not wish to do so; others have not found the language or opportunity.

With the establishment of state and territory records tracing services, Commonwealth Find & Connect support services, and increased attention to the importance of identity, Forgotten Australians would like to make sense of what has happened to them, describe it in their own words, claim an identity, and hand over their version of their life to their families.

While some Forgotten Australians are skilled and literate, others will need support to write the story of their life.

Initiatives similar to the Life Stories Project are becoming more common in palliative care settings. They are also beginning to be offered on a fee-for-service basis. These initiatives usually rely on a reasonable degree of literacy and familiarity with technology on the part of the person whose story is recorded, or their family. Due to the circumstances of their childhoods, Forgotten Australians, care leavers and Former Child Migrants are a distinctly different group.

A number of Forgotten Australians do not read or write or do so slowly and with difficulty. Many do not have access or are unable to use computers. Many have problems with hearing and eyesight, often due to premature ageing, or the abuse they received as children (children were beaten around the ears and eyes). They may have early onset dementia, or their thought processes are compromised through past substance abuse. And many are also articulate, funny, talkative, reflective, and wise.

Many Forgotten Australians have few, if any, photographs of their early years. Such images are rare and precious. The interviewee may like to have these incorporated into their life story.

Aims of Project

The Project had the following aims:

- enabling and empowering participants, via storytelling, to claim or reclaim their identity;
- assisting participants, via storytelling, in their emotional and psychological recovery; and
- assisting participants, via storytelling, to reconnect with family.

The Project was supported by the “lived’ experience of Forgotten Australians who make up the membership of the Alliance for Forgotten Australians. The Alliance commenced this Project with an awareness and a sensibility of the value of life story work, but also the risk. The Project must do no harm. The Project firmly believed that “the act of constructing stories is a natural human process that helps individuals to understand their experience and themselves.” (Pennebaker and Seagal, 1999, p.1243). There was a conscious decision that telling one’s life story is a normal progression for an ageing adult as they look back over their life. Forgotten Australians do not need to be cossetted, just because their childhoods may have created challenges for their adulthood. Story telling needs to take account of these challenges but not shy away from them.

The story of the Project is how these challenges were met.

Targets

DSS set a target of 100 completed stories. The Project quickly learned that setting time frames for this work was problematic; stories from initial contact to final product took many months. In two instances, 18 months was required to complete the storytelling task. This must be remembered in future life story activity. The original notion as outlined in the submission that a story could be told in two or three sessions, over a four-week period to a volunteer such as a social work student was, in hindsight, a significant miscalculation.

As the Project proceeded both AFA and DSS realised the time for each life story needed to be extended, and the targets were adjusted accordingly. A target of 60 completed stories was set. This has been achieved.

Length of Project

The Project was initially funded over 12 months. During the first few months of the Project, it became clear that responding to the number of inquiries, the time that each story would take to complete and the need to recruit a capable group of writers would take more time than originally envisaged. The Project was extended for a further 12 months (two 6-month blocks). The Project ran over two years. Additional funding was not required.

Project uptake

All State and Territory Find and Connect services advertised the Project in their newsletters. All were sent copies of a flyer and brochure for distribution. Information was provided to Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) and a number of Victorian heritage services such as MacKillop Family Services contacted the Coordinator and subsequently also advertised the Project. There was a rapid take up of referrals.

Ninety-eight Forgotten Australians inquired about the Project. Of these, 60 Forgotten Australians completed their story.

Participants in the Project came from across Australia. There was a diverse background of participants, including those from the Stolen Generations and Former Child Migrants, with the majority being Forgotten Australians.

STATE/TERRITORY	Inquiries	Completions
Victoria	44	33
Queensland	25	13
New South Wales	17	7
Western Australia	7	<5
South Australia	<5	<5
Tasmania	<5	<5
Australian Capital Territory	<5	<5
Northern Territory	<5	<5
TOTAL	98	60

Participants began their story telling process in order of date of inquiry, unless a participant had a serious life-threatening illness.

The Coordinator maintained a record of all inquiries, contact details and the progress of participants as they moved through the Project.

Participants who completed their story each received up to 20 printed copies of their story.

A **Snapshot of the Life Stories Project** (Appendix 1) provides details of how these inquiries were distributed through the life of the Project, including those who withdrew from the Project.

Process of Project

Preparatory work

A Project Coordinator was appointed in early June 2020. The first weeks were spent developing program material including: a flyer and brochure for distribution, principles and process of storytelling tailored for the circumstances of Forgotten Australians, a template for each story, information and prompt questions for participants and a consent form (Appendix 2).

As the Project developed, clarifications and amendments were made to these documents following feedback from early participants and the Find and Connect services. As writers/facilitators/enablers (referred to as 'writers' throughout this document) were recruited in August and September 2020, material was developed that outlined the role and responsibilities of both writers and AFA. This material included a confidentiality form.

Two significant program documents were developed in these early days: **Principles of Life Stories Project** and **Processes of Life Stories** (Appendix 2).

A participant feedback form was developed in December 2020 (Appendix 2).

The **Principles** document made these essential points:

- The process is driven by Forgotten Australians, their needs and preferences.
- Forgotten Australian participants understand that their involvement in the Life Stories project is voluntary. Participants choose to be involved. Participants may withdraw at any time during the Life Stories process. The content of their story is determined by the Forgotten Australian.
- The privacy of the interviewee as well as the writer is paramount. The Life Stories Project is bound by the Privacy legislation in all states and territories. All writers must sign a confidentiality agreement.
- The Forgotten Australian participant owns all draft copies and the final copy of their Life Story.

The **Processes** document described how the Project would set about its tasks. The key features were the time limits (an hour) for each conversation, open ended and flexible approach to the number of conversations, a maximum word limit (6,000 words), the voice of the Forgotten Australian should be evident in the story, additional material could be incorporated and a maximum of 20 final copies, printed in a template, would be provided.

Much time and thought was spent on the issue of recording. Advice from a number of other life story activities (Eastern Palliative Care and COTA Victoria) suggested that recording and developing a transcript following an interview was an important method of capturing the words and the language of a participant. The consent form specified that recording may be undertaken however would be destroyed at the end of a participants involvement. In the early days of the Project some recording was done (using a mobile phone or a recording device purchased by AFA).

Most writers preferred to work without recorders and relied on note taking and usually rapid write-up of the conversation (see below). No 'word for word' transcription of recordings was undertaken by any of the writers.

Orientation to Life Stories Project

Initial information about the Project was distributed via circulation of the flyer, word of mouth and Find and Connect services. Initial contacts and follow ups were managed by the Coordinator.

All initial conversations were with the Coordinator (by phone). In this initial conversation the parameters of the Project were outlined, including process of collecting information, privacy, the possible use of a recording device, length of story, ownership of story, issues that may arise (including available support), and use of other material such as written material (records), tapes, and photos.

The Coordinator discussed possible adverse impacts of storytelling with each potential participant. Information was sought as to the availability of a support person for each participant. The availability of the local Find and Connect service for support was encouraged. This point was reiterated in the written advice that was sent to potential participants:

- *As discussed on the phone with you, please keep in mind that going back to past events may raise some issues. It is important that if issues arise you have someone to talk to about these issues. This may be a special friend, a family member or a counsellor. Your Find and Connect service will be able to help you find support if it is needed. Simon or your writer can provide contact details.*

As a result of the interest and rapid uptake in the Project, the Coordinator informed potential participants that there was likely to be a period of waiting between returning a consent form and being contacted by a writer. Potential participants were also informed that they may be matched with a writer other than the Coordinator.

At the end of the initial conversation, and if the Forgotten Australian wished to continue, the Coordinator mailed/mailed a copy of the information brochure, **Notes for participants and prompt questions** and a **consent form** (with reply paid envelope) (Appendix 2). The key messages from the Notes are reprinted below.

- *You are going to spend some time with a writer preparing your life story. It may take several sessions, working together, to do this. It is likely that these sessions of about an hour will be spread over some weeks and even months. This is your opportunity to talk about the things that have been and are important in your life.*
- *After every session, the writer will write up your conversation, either from the notes made by the writer and/or from the recording. This will be sent back to you either via email or by post. When you next meet you will go through, with the writer, what has been written and, together, you can make changes.*

- *Keep in mind who it is that you want to read your story. And remember that these questions may only scratch the surface of your story. These questions are intended to help your story telling not to restrict your story.*

A signed consent form was an acknowledgement by the Forgotten Australian of the recording process and the commitment by the Project that the created life story (whether a draft or completed) belonged to the Forgotten Australian.

Once the Coordinator received a signed copy of the consent form there was a second conversation between the Coordinator and the Forgotten Australian. Arrangements were made for continuing contact until the participant was matched with a writer. Support arrangements with the local Find and Connect service, if necessary, were again canvassed.

The matching of each participant with a writer was managed by the Coordinator.

Outline of storytelling process

The Coordinator made the preliminary linking arrangements between a Forgotten Australian and a writer. The writer contacted the Forgotten Australian to discuss their preferred process for storytelling (distance and COVID-19 inevitably restricted these options).

The writer reiterated that each session (conversation) would be no more than an hour and that the task of the writer would be to write up the conversation and then send it to the participant for review. The writer canvassed whether the participant had any material they wanted to bring to the story (ward records, own writings, newspaper clippings, etc). The writer suggested that 6-8 sessions may be necessary, of an hour each, and could be spread over many months. However, the word limit (6,000) would determine the amount of content produced.

The pace of storytelling was determined by the Forgotten Australian. Interviews were spaced, rarely occurring more frequently than three weekly. See section **Impact of storytelling** for discussion of timing of interviews. Flexibility was always important.

Amendments and additions were made as the story progressed. Participants were also reminded to think about the place of any photos/documents in the final publication.

Editing and liaising with the designer and then the printing tasks, was managed by the Coordinator, in conjunction with each participant and sometimes the writer. A draft printed copy was always provided to the Forgotten Australian and the writer for final review and final changes. On occasions the writer would work on final changes with the Forgotten Australian. A maximum of 20 copies and a PDF (allows extra copies to be printed at Forgotten Australians' expense), if requested, were provided to each participant.

The process of story telling

The preferred process of storytelling and the writing of each story has been outlined above. However, within these parameters the telling of each life story followed many paths.

The most common pathway (60%) was a simple narration, assisted by the prompt questions that provided a chronological structure, for example "I was born on XXXX date..."

Commonly these conversations would be spread over 6-8 sessions (sometimes more, rarely less). Often there were weeks in between sessions. Each write up, either contemporaneously from notes taken or from a recording (rarely), would take between 2-3 hours. On occasions, the participant would take the notes/text provided by the writer and discuss content and emphasis with siblings and friends for affirmation.

The second pathway (20%) was by narration supplemented by notes provided by the Forgotten Australian. Notes were either handwritten or included in an email(s) and were often a stream of consciousness. These notes varied in length from a couple of pages to notes containing many thousands of words, or in one case over a hundred emails with thoughts jotted down. On two occasions lengthier handwritten notes were converted into a word document to enable easier incorporation into the story text. Considerable conversation and editing were required to avoid repetition and to clarify meaning and intent. All drafts were reviewed by the participant.

The third pathway (20%) was again narration supplemented by a copy of a statement to police/Royal Commission/legal representatives or (rarely) a ward file, and/or a significant amount of material containing family search results, newspaper clippings and letters from agencies. These sources of information added richness and context to the Forgotten Australian's story but took considerable time for the writer to absorb and incorporate into the story.

Three participants provided lengthy life story narratives in word document format. The Coordinator helped with editing to meet the word limit and offered advice about structure and emphasis.

For many, unremarkably but poignantly, their story highlighted a lack of family and childhood photos. Two stories contain no photos. Only two participants wanted to use their ward and/or care records for details of their childhood. The inadequacies and deficiencies of the 'official' care record appears to be now well recognised by Forgotten Australians.

A small number of life stories were based on documentation other than text. A participant who had developed a love and a talent for photography choose to tell her story through images linked together by a brief narrative. Two other stories were based around reproduced images of artwork (paintings and sculptures), again linked together by a brief narrative. Poems were a feature of a number of other stories.

On average it took between 20 to 30 hours to get each story to final print. This included the work done by the Coordinator in preparing the final text and the design and printing work.

The role of the writers

The original submission for funding identified the important role to be undertaken by the writer who would engage with each Forgotten Australian. It was noted that *'an intensive and personal engagement with the interviewee is reflected in the costing for this proposal.*

For example, drafts may need to be read aloud to interviewees. People are unlikely to read their story on a computer and return a draft with track changes.'

The submission also noted that *'interviewers will need to be sensitive, empathetic, stoic, and prepared to hear tough stories. It will not be a task for the faint-hearted.'*

This observation was prescient. The survey completed by the writers highlights the demands of the role.

The Coordinator began two stories in the first weeks of July 2020 to gauge a sense of how well the proposed story telling process would work and to assess the demands of storytelling on both the participants and the writer. This “mini-pilot” indicated that:

- The process worked well (hourly sessions, with mostly a rapid write up, review by the Forgotten Australian) but was likely to involve many more sessions than had been previously envisaged - with 6-8 sessions being more likely rather than the originally proposed 2-4.
- The demands of storytelling on the Forgotten Australian were significant. The Coordinator was fortunate to have had a previous relationship with both of these two early participants; engagement and trust were well established before the storytelling began. The Coordinator was also relatively well informed about the history and circumstances of those who had experienced institutional care.

The submission flagged that a possible source of writers could be volunteers from oral history projects and social work courses. The experience of the “mini-pilot” suggested that this was somewhat optimistic and misplaced. It was clear that the aims of the Project (and the interests of the participants) could only be served by a targeted recruiting of experienced practitioners who had worked with and were sympathetic to the circumstances of Forgotten Australians. The Project recruited writers who were empathic, non-judgemental, could listen and who were able to differentiate. Each writer needed to take on the role of enabler, not therapist; the feelings aroused by and the trauma of many of the stories were those of the participant, not the writer.

Recruitment and use of writers

Ten writers were recruited; with one exception all had experience of working with, and an understanding of, the circumstances of Forgotten Australians.

Writers were either all professionally known to the Coordinator or referred and recommended by a Find and Connect service. Writers were located in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia.

Writers were required to provide current national police and Working with Children checks. Writers signed a confidentiality agreement. Writers were provided with a document outlining AFA’s role and responsibility and the roles and responsibility of the writer (Appendix 4).

Some writers for a variety of reasons did more work than others; personal circumstances and responses to the work being significant factors. All writers were linked to at least two Forgotten Australians and all writers facilitated the completion of at least one story.

As the writers' survey responses suggest, life story work is both rewarding and at times, arduous. Some writers were happy to manage two or more stories at the same time. Others preferred just one. Most preferred a break between stories. A writer, just like a Forgotten Australian, needs space between narrations for reflection and perspective.

Evaluation: feedback from the surveys

A survey asking questions about the quality of the process and outcome was developed (Appendix 2). This was sent to Forgotten Australians who had completed their life story.

Another survey was sent to the writers asking about their experience of being involved in the project and suggestions for future projects of this sort (Appendix 5).

Feedback from participants

Summary of feedback from participants

The 60 participants who completed their story were asked to complete a brief survey (via reply paid post). A copy of the survey is attached (Appendix 2). Thirty out of 60 surveys (50%) were returned.

Not all survey returns contained comments. Comments that were made have been transcribed and are provided in Appendix 3. Many of these comments, like the stories, contain a powerful depth of feeling. For most, storytelling was not easy. But for those who were able to persevere and complete their story, the comments reflect an easing of a lifelong burden and relief for the opportunity to be supported and listened to, as their story unfolded. The returned survey responses were overwhelmingly positive.

The Project was regarded as being **helpful**, for example: *'Words cannot describe what this means to me and the thought of being able to hold something and say, "this is what happened to me, and this is who I am", not only is priceless but it makes me feel believed.'* This sentiment is repeated again and again and suggests that one of the Project aims, the enabling of Forgotten Australians to reclaim their story and identity, has been achieved.

The Project was regarded as being **respectful**, for example: *'Definitely very respected'* and *'She was kind and had compassion'*. The Forgotten Australians were engaging with writers who knew about the circumstances of a childhood spent in care/in and out of care and who were able to offer a non-judgemental and compassionate sounding board.

The Project was regarded as being **safe**, despite the memories that were being relived, for example: *'FELT SAFE. But sometimes I felt invaded but it made me feel better, and I felt safe telling my story to a certain degree but also scared. Some parts were extremely harsh and I was saddened by them'*. These and other comments say something important about the

courage of each Forgotten Australian as they undertook their life story work and the importance of being contained and supported in this process by a skilled writer.

Participants were largely **satisfied** with the presentation of their story, for example: *'Very moved my story is recorded on paper and very happy with the layout, colour, text effects, everything. Such clever people! Thank you. Oh, and the designer did a wonderful job with my poor-quality photos'*. The sense of validation and worth given to participants by a professionally designed and high-quality production that contained their work was particularly commented on.

The Project would be **recommended** to other Forgotten Australians, for example: *'This is a difficult question because it brings back memories that you want to forget. However, in some ways sharing your story unburdens you, yet you are still left with the memory'*. This insightful comment sums up the continuing challenges faced as a result of the adverse childhood experiences of Forgotten Australians and the importance of skilled support when recounting their story. Future life story projects must keep this challenge at front of mind.

Impact of storytelling

Sixty percent of initial inquiries progressed through the stages of storytelling to end with a printed final story. Life story work, in any circumstance, is strenuous (conversation with coordinator of [Beyond Words](#) – a not-for-profit community of volunteer biographers who enable people in aged care to tell, write and publish their life stories). It takes time, commitment, personal organisation, emotional and psychological strength and courage. Everything that is known about the life experience of Forgotten Australians would suggest that the capacity (not the intent) of many Forgotten Australians to go through this process would be tested. The process would be confronting for many.

The participant feedback provides some insights into how confronting but rewarding the story telling process has been. Some general comments can be made. Most storytellers appeared to enjoy the narration aspects of the Project. The value of the engagement with a willing, non-judgemental, and empathic listener cannot be overstated.

However, the impact of reading the events of one's life, written on a page, can be profound. For many participants this required a process of slow absorption that led to a gaining of perspective (e.g. this is about me; this is me talking about often terrible events that happened to me. What has this suffering meant as I look back on my life?) Sometimes the writer could reframe the progress of a life to highlight the strength of character that has enabled survival and achievement. Survival can be valued because of the possibilities it provides. Reframing and then processing takes time and, in part, explains why some stories took over 12 months (and longer) to complete.

Providing a draft of the story, for review and reflection following each conversation, became a valuable tool in walking with a Forgotten Australia through their life. The value of storytelling, in the end, returns to meaning: a coherent story connects events and provides purpose and meaning (Baumeister and Wilson, 1996). Meaning, for all of us, can be found in

so many aspects of our lives: children, a relationship, finding family, acquisition of skills and recognition, reconciliation via redress and an apology.

On the whole Forgotten Australians appeared to value the telling of their story to a competent listener. The staged writing of the story, in bite-size chunks, provided the opportunity for the experiences of the past to be digested in modest amounts. The survey responses of those who have been through this process suggests the listening to and the writing of a story, in itself, was valued. Many Forgotten Australians felt better for having been given this opportunity. The final printed product was valued as a gift to the writer's children and a tangible record of one's life, but the process was in itself important. Perspective, understanding and validation flow from this process.

As previously discussed, for many Forgotten Australians embarking on their life story can be like entering 'tiger country'. There is some literature (including Denborough 2005, Hancox 2012) that discusses the importance of marginalised communities asserting their claim for identity and recognition. But this assertion for a "sense of coherence and meaning" (Harms 2015, p 107) brings challenges. The most obvious and dangerous challenge is, of course, further traumatising. Harms (2015) notes that there are varied approaches to working with people who have lived through traumatic events and who are seeking to develop a narrative of their life. All these approaches take time. Potential participants may need significant time to prepare for a 'dive' into the past, need to be assured of emotional safety and have the support to process the revisiting of traumatic events.

The conversion rate of completed stories to initial inquiries suggest that many were ready to begin. This readiness was matched by the quality of engagement between Forgotten Australian and the writer, providing both safety and support.

Understanding the circumstances of those who did not complete their story

Forgotten Australians were not at a point of readiness - to embark on a narration of their life was a bridge too far. Recognition that the timing was not right often coincided with upheavals in current life circumstances. Reasonably many Forgotten Australians made the decision not to continue. A writer's comment is perceptive '*... it is important to put things into context as the fact that they started the Project was a huge step for many and not finishing was okay too. We all have things we have not followed through on in life for whatever reason*'.

Of the 98 Forgotten Australians who inquired about the Project, 37 of these did not complete their story (one story is still in progress at the time of writing this report). There was no formal survey of those who didn't complete their story, but some observations can be made. Excluding the four inquiries that were out of scope [request for money to make a film (two) and for resources to publish existing and lengthy stories (two)], there were three categories of "non completion".

The largest group (n=16) consisted of those who inquired and spoke to the Coordinator and who then ***received a consent form*** and an information pack but ***did not proceed*** further.

These were followed up by letter/email and phone. Many did not respond to this follow up. Those who did respond stated that their personal circumstances made it difficult for them to participate and/or, interestingly, their family did not think it was a good idea.

The second group (n=6) consisted of those who had **returned a consent form** but **did not proceed further**. Follow ups were as outlined above. This group too suggested that their circumstances had changed and the demands of life story work were not for them. It is worth noting that most of this group (admittedly small) had a lengthy wait before the Project could match them with an available writer. One can speculate that if a link between participant and writer had been made more expeditiously then maybe story telling would have commenced.

The third group (n=11) consisted of those who **returned a consent form and commenced story telling**. This group of participants was spread across six writers. The majority were followed up by the Coordinator. There are some tragic stories here. Illness and infirmity, imminent death, shame and fear that their story might cause embarrassment to their family and catastrophic life changes made it impossible for some to continue. Others chose to withdraw as they decided they had the capacity to tell their story themselves and wanted scope for a longer version.

Feedback from writers

Process

The writers found the structure of narration (each session limited to an hour, a write up, further discussion and the word limit) helpful and containing. For example:

- I was very happy with having the structure of 1 hour phone contact, write up and then going over what was written. It helped contain the whole process and helped with boundary setting as otherwise I am sure some people would not have been able to finish. It helped contain the trauma from spilling out too much and gave me enough time to work out in any one session if I needed to spend more time checking in with the person before ending the phone call.*
- Yes, useful. These sessions were often intense and emotional and it was good for both the writer and participant to have breaks between sessions to recover.*

Impact

Writing and facilitating took its toll. The two comments below highlight this.

- It might be different for each writer but the whole process in my experience involved a big commitment and investment and strong focus on engagement and forming a meaningful relationship based on trust, mutual respect and love (agape). I also underestimated the effects of vicarious trauma so that would be something to be mindful of.*
- I didn't expect the project to take as much energy as it did. I don't think I would continue as a writer if working but in another capacity (maybe admin) if available.*

In almost the same breath writers also acknowledged the importance of the Project for both Forgotten Australians and themselves. For example:

- I really enjoyed helping to create a written record based on real life experience. I would have loved to do more and I am grateful for the opportunity to be involved in the life stories project.*
- It has been a privilege and great honour to help these wonderful people tell their stories of resilience and survival despite all odds.*

Support and debriefing

In the light of the above feedback, it is worth looking at the writers' views about the importance and availability of support and debriefing. Two 'face to face' meetings of writers living in Victoria were held. There were two zoom meetings. The Coordinator maintained individual contact with writers. The survey responses suggest that the Project, while providing adequate support and debriefing on an individual basis, could have done more to facilitate group debriefing and discussion. COVID-19 certainly impeded group gatherings.

Samples of feedback include:

- I was happy with the level of communication with coordinator as if I had issues I wanted to discuss or needed support I reached out as required. That worked for me.*
- I think there could have more writers 'get2gethers' as a way of providing debriefing/group support (hampered, of course, by covid).*
- I felt supported and was able to speak openly about any concerns I had with the process.. In ... cases [where I experienced issues] the coordinator was very empathetic and encouraging.*

Further observations from the writers are included below in a discussion of future life story work.

Lessons from the stories

The lessons from these stories are not new. Much has been written and is on the public record about the childhood experiences of Forgotten Australians and the adult life consequences of these experiences. There have been many inquiries, for example, Forde Inquiry-Queensland (1999), the Commonwealth Senate Report, "Forgotten Australians" (2004) and most recently the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2014). There are a number of published and credible personal accounts of a childhood spent in care. Oral history testimonies are available in the National Library of Australia.

The content of the Life Stories are no different from the findings of the many inquiries. They recount stories of children born into poverty, of families suffering the trauma of war, the presence of violence, of debilitating mental health and of family separation, and then of the "care" system and the State, stepping in as 'in loco parentis', deficient in resources, skills, accountability and kindness and often actively brutal.

Some of the stories tell of brutal institutional care.

I have terrible memories of that place. We were dirty and hungry all the time. I can't talk about my suffering there. The days there were long and cold and harsh. Terrible things happened to us.

And of benign neglect.

Institutional life for children was pretty much the same everywhere. We slept in dormitories, we ate together, we went to the school within the orphanage. It was an enclosed self-contained existence. It would have been special to have someone put their arms around you to give you a big hug, to sit on someone's knee, to have a story read to you and to be tucked into bed with a good night kiss. Oh yes, how special that would have been!

There was one contrary view:

I had a wonderful time at [institution name]. The Brothers looked after us well, and there were lots of kids to play with.

Common to many of these life stories (there are a few exceptions) is the stark reality that damage done to children lasts forever and will often ripple through generations. Many stories tell of intimate relationships with partners and children blighted, sometimes through generations, as a result of damage and trauma from institutional care and other adverse childhood experiences.

I think back to all that has happened to me. There is one thing I always come back to... it is the fact that I didn't matter. I didn't matter to the State, to my mother, to my father or my family. Not one person ever stepped in and fought for me. All I ever wanted was to matter...to someone.

Many of the stories describe the lifelong shame:

I have told my family only a little bit about what happened to me as a child. It's weird. Even though none of what happened to me was my fault, I feel ashamed of the abuse I suffered. In some strange way I feel as if I brought it on myself. I have struggled with feelings of shame all my life.

And:

We have always felt shame at talking about these things. I didn't want anybody to know. We were made to feel we were not clever, not important and simply not good enough. And most important of all we were abandoned. We have spent our lives always trying to fit in. It has taken us a long time, almost a lifetime, to understand that we ARE good enough.

Some of these stories conclude with a resilient optimism. Life itself is an offering that can be celebrated in many ways:

- Reconnection with long estranged children offers solace:
I still worry about not being good enough and not being able to help my son and his family if they really need it. I know now where this feeling of inadequacy and powerlessness comes from. But I know too that I will do whatever it takes to protect and nurture my son and his family. I think he knows this too. It's a wonderful bond.
- The enduring love of a partner:
My husband has been so supportive of all that I carry. He has said to me numerous times that I have had a bad childhood and that he will do everything he can to make sure I have a great adulthood. I am stronger because of him and the courage he has given to me to believe that I am worthy.
- Time and perspective:
I am 81 years old. I look back over my life. I think life has been cruel in many ways. I have friends and activities in a seniors group. I like hearing from my children and how their children are going. The little boy who arrived at the Fremantle docks in 1952 has come a long way.

And for many the anger still remains:

I am still waiting for redress. It's been 20 months since I put my claim in. I am not surprised. The money would make a difference but do Governments really care? The mean way the redress scheme works (or doesn't!) suggests that they don't care at all. The scheme ought to be for children who were physically abused as well as sexually abused. And the delay is a joke. How much more does the Government need to find out about Westbrook and Riverview? There have been so many inquiries... They are just waiting for us to die...

Our history is characterised by our inability to examine the less savory aspects of our past. One of the least examined parts of our history is our treatment of vulnerable families and children and how our collective neglect and, at times, cruelty has rippled through generations. Many story tellers are perplexed at the continuing indifference of the broader community to the lasting impact on children of systemic disadvantage, neglect and frequently brutality. Their stories are a plea for recognition and an entreaty that needy families and children today should not have to endure these preventable sufferings.

My abuse happened to me nearly 60 years ago. It is still happening to the kids in care today. These are the kids who, like me, come from poor families.

The stories add to the increasing weight of testimony that argues for sustained and systemic policy and practice changes so, as a society, we can humanely care and support our vulnerable children and families.

Lessons for future life story work

Leadership and ownership of the Project matter

This Life Story Project matters because uniquely it has been led by a national advocacy agency (Alliance for Forgotten Australians) and the story telling and its content and the memories and their meaning has all been determined by Forgotten Australians. Forgotten Australians have chosen to participate; some have chosen to complete their story and others have chosen to withdraw. Each story is owned by the individual Forgotten Australian. Each Forgotten Australian decides what to do with their story. Some have chosen to share the story with close family and friends, others have chosen to provide copies to the agencies and institutions who cared for them as children. Some have consented to place their story in a collection to be housed in the State Library of Victoria (see below). A few are quietly holding their story, waiting for the right moment to share it with children and grandchildren.

A framework for life story work is essential

Denborough (2005) notes the importance of providing a framework for “*receiving and documenting the testimonies of those who have been subject to trauma, violence and abuse.*” The Project has developed a model (as described above) that is powered and controlled by the Forgotten Australian. With skilled writers (working as enablers and facilitators) and working within the model’s parameters, the Project has demonstrated that it can both contain and illuminate distress while responding flexibly to individual circumstances. This assertion is supported by the participants’ feedback (Appendix 3). The Project makes no claim for the therapeutic value of storytelling nor will storytelling bring about closure:

I am still the scared and lonely little boy. I have spent a lifetime looking for a place that is safe. How am I to get peace?

But it does provide a structure for storytelling and for the development of a narrative. It strives to do no harm and, at the end of the process, there is a tangible and permanent written record that belongs to the Forgotten Australian.

Specific writer skills are important

To undertake this work and engage effectively with Forgotten Australians requires a specialist set of skills and experience. The Project’s experience suggests that there are three fundamental requirements:

- An understanding of the circumstances of Forgotten Australians. It is not helpful to be in a state of shock and/or disbelief when some of the childhood experiences are recounted.
- An ability to listen, without judgement and without leaping to “therapeutic” solutions. It is not helpful for example to suggest “that it all happened a long time ago.”

- An ability to absorb often shocking information while retaining perspective and differentiation. A sensitivity to bring an emotional session to an end without being dismissive of what has been discussed is also required.

Life story work is not therapy but it does require significant listening skills, empathy and the ability to contain and divert.

One writer reflecting on her work with the Project suggested the following:

'Writers for a Project like this need to come with a combination of skills:

- *Prior experience in working with vulnerable groups, preferably with the group with lived experience whose stories are to be written.*
- *Good writing skills, including an interest in presenting an engaging narrative.*
- *Good listening skills*
- *Patience!*

The writers need (and in this case have benefited from) the active support and backup of a project coordinator who knows the cohort for whom the writing is being done and has experience in casework and/or counselling.'

Another said:

'If the Project was to be picked up by another organisation it would definitely to my mind have to include people who understand what it was like for people in care and accept and acknowledge that awful things did happen. This has to be a given. The writers would also need to implicitly understand the difficulties, challenges and trauma faced by Forgotten Australians and accept their idiosyncrasies and ways of coping and behaving.'

More deliberate support for writers

The importance of support for writers has been mentioned above. Future life story work may need to consider an increase in the amount of group and support network activity. Support needs to be more intentional. Swain (2015) recommends a place for a network that regularly meets and normalises vicarious trauma rather than pathologizing it. Swain quotes Bell (2003, p.520) who suggests that an important factor in minimising vicarious trauma is the *“belief that they were in the right place and that that what they were doing was valuable and successful.”* This is how one writer expressed this sentiment:

'I felt honoured to use my limited writing skills to record the lives of people who have really struggled to make a life for themselves. It seems a small thing to produce a simple story with photos, but the written word remains forever, and the document creates a lasting monument to their courage as children who survived without the strength of a family structure.'

Demand continues for life story activities

There is a continuing demand for life story activities within the Forgotten Australian community. The Coordinator took calls up to the end of June from services and Forgotten Australians seeking information about the Project. Word of mouth was the best form of advertisement and the vast majority of inquiries in the last 12

months came from Forgotten Australians who had spoken to participants and seen a final copy. The Project has complemented the creative writing and associated programs run by some of the Find and Connect services at Lotus Place, Wattle Place and Open Place. It is likely that these activities will continue to generate an interest in life story work.

Project limitations and constraints

DSS was clear at the outset of the Project that funding was not recurrent. DSS was sympathetic to the nature of the task being undertaken by AFA. This understanding allowed the Project to spread over two years. This allowed the Project to develop policies and procedures, create a small pool of specifically skilled writers and hone a model to receive and document testimony from Forgotten Australians.

In light of the non-recurrent funding parameters the project must be regarded as a pilot. Inevitably, pilots, with a limited lifespan, may not be able to develop sustainable systems and structures. And this Project was no different. It was not able to:

- Provide consistent access into the Project and then timely response to the service request from a Forgotten Australian. Entry into the Project was stopped in December 2020, then reopened in a limited fashion in May 2021, before effectively closing in December 2021. The Project is aware that there are many Forgotten Australians who would have liked to have participated. Many Forgotten Australians waited for many months on a waiting list before the Project had the capacity to work with them.
- Ensure an ongoing recruitment, training and support program to sustain an expanding group of writers. Recruitment of writers was based largely on the professional contacts of the Coordinator. An expanded group of writers with appropriate skills would require ongoing and systematic recruitment, training and support activities, ideally spread across Australia. If the Project is to be reactivated then attention must be paid to either providing the resources for a small agency to establish this infrastructure or embed the Project within an agency, with this infrastructure.
- Devolve the multiple roles undertaken by the coordinator position. The coordinator role undertook the following roles: policy and programmatic development, coordinating design work, initial advertising and contact work with Find and Connect services, development of the model for the recounting of life stories, responding to all initial inquiries and all follow ups with Forgotten Australians, 45% of writing of the completed stories, development and maintenance of a recording system, all recruitment and ongoing advice and support of writers, linking work with Forgotten Australians and other writers, liaising with designer for all stories, proof reading for majority of stories, blogs (3) for Find and Connect web site and liaison with the State Library of Victoria. Reasonably, this was a pilot program so there were significant

advantages in these tasks all being managed by one person. However, over a longer program life, this span of responsibilities may not be sustainable on the same level of resourcing.

Endings

Many Forgotten Australians, in adult life, have faced a lifetime of exclusion, of transience (in geography and relationships), of conflict with authorities and of poverty. Telling their story to someone who believes them and being able to name the fear, the anger and the grief that originates from many years ago can provide relief. It may also assist with an integration of loss, grief and anger into everyday life (Reynolds 2012).

The telling of the story reclaims some of an individual's past. It can shape a commentary that connects their past, their present circumstances and future aspirations. Story telling can often provide a continuity of explanation that threads together events and feelings.

The trick, of course, is to be able to tell the story. Two things may stand in the way:

1. To tell a story you have to have language, an ability to use words and a wanting to understand the context of your life. As Salman Rushdie says, *Those who do not have the power over the story that dominates their lives, the power to retell it, re-think it and change it as times change, truly are powerless because they cannot think new thoughts* (2017 p.41). The Life Stories Project hasn't waved a magic wand that makes people literate word smiths and confident of their narrative. Story telling can only happen if people feel safe and believe they will be listened to. So, the Project has taken time with people. The Project listened, encouraged, took notes, rephrased, enabled, prepared drafts and redrafts, suggested connections and structure and sometimes words. All this happened over many sessions and sometimes over many months.
2. And even if one is gifted with the ability to use language and words, it takes courage to face down the gorgon of traumatic childhood memory and to reshape memory so that it no longer exercises control over your life. It takes courage to assert that my life, with its trials and tribulations, has meaning and that my life matters.

This courage, in the main, stems from the drive to (re)connect to family. Most of our Forgotten Australians were separated from parents and siblings for long periods of their childhood. Many came from fractured families and rebuilding family relationships (any relationships) has often been fraught. As people get older a coincidence of life events eg. the birth of grandchildren, moving away from a destructive partner or the threat of a terminal illness, can draw some families together. A completed and printed story becomes a personal testament. It provides evidence of a life lived and of a voice that is no longer silent.

Life Story Collection

The Project originally sought to give a voice to and the opportunity for individual Forgotten Australians to tell their story. But these individual voices also have a collective power. A number of Forgotten Australians made it clear to the Coordinator that they wanted their story preserved on the public record. AFA responded to this suggestion and approached the

State Library of Victoria to explore whether the Library was interested in housing a Life Stories Collection that would be available to the public. The State Library and the Project developed a consent form (Appendix 6). To date 40 Forgotten Australians have signed a consent to allow their story to be included in this collection.

The value of life stories

The novel, *The Dictionary of Lost Words* (2020), concludes with these words: *"Words define us, they explain us, and on occasion, they serve to control or isolate us. But what happens when words are not recorded?"*

And this thought can be extended: what happens when lives are not recorded, particularly those lives which have existed on the margins and may lack the means to use words and language to create a record?

Forgotten Australians have something important to say about how, as a society, we treat and value our children. If their voices are not heard then a significant aspect of our social history will go unnoted and unnoticed. If the ripple effects of intergenerational poverty and exclusion continue to be unattended to, then the gap in equity of opportunity for social, economic and political belonging and connection will continue to grow. Our most vulnerable children will continue to suffer.

The Life Stories Project has demonstrated that an informed, carefully constructed and compassionately delivered program can bring much joy and relief to those who have often been shamefully neglected and excluded by our society. There is a place for further Life Story Projects

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Appendix 1: Snapshot of Life Stories Project work

The table details the progress of life story work from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2022. The status of some of the **Withdrawn** columns became evident only over time and after follow-up by the coordinator.

As the table shows, **60 stories** were **completed** from **98 inquiries** over the duration of the Project. The majority of inquiries (67%) were in the first six months. Inquiries slowed over time because twice the Project put a block on referrals, owing to the amount of incoming work and the uncertainty of Project extensions and its future.

Date	Story complete	Draft print	Story commenced	Awaiting link to writer	Initial inquiry	Not complete &/or withdrawn	Out of scope	TOTAL
July 2020	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dec 2020	0	3	15	27	17	0	4	66
June 2021	18	3	22	11	13	9	4	80
Dec 2021	37	13	10	0	16	10	4	90
June 2022	60	0	1	0	0	33	4	98

Key

Complete stories: Stories that have progressed to final print

Draft print: Draft copy of print sent to participant & writer for review & amendment

Story commenced: Participant is linked to writer for purpose of storytelling & writing

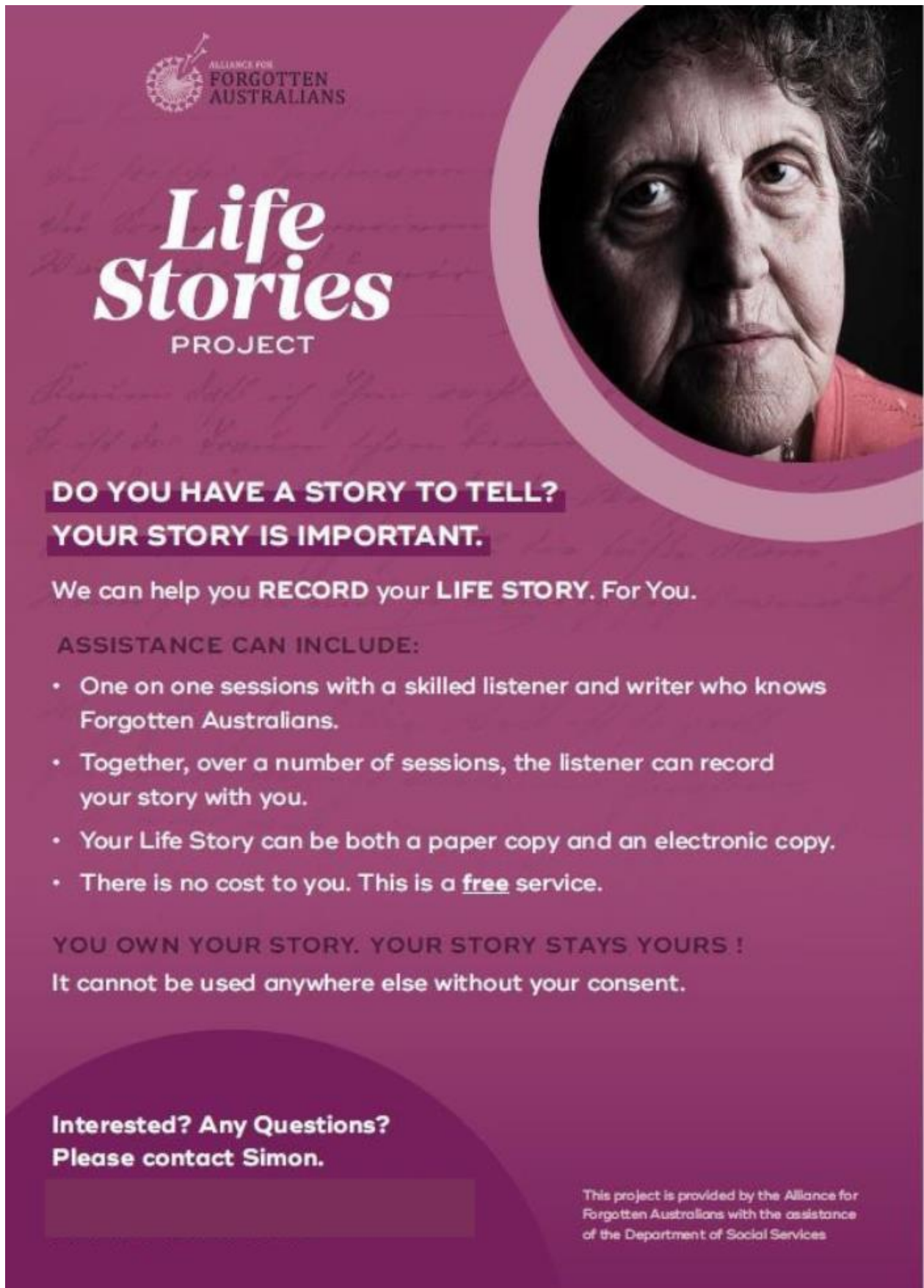
Awaiting link to writer: Participant waiting for writer to become available

Initial inquiry: Initial conversation with coordinator. Sent consent form & package of information. Follow ups from coordinator where appropriate

Not complete &/or withdrawn: Discontinued for multiple reasons & during various stages of the Project, including consent not returned, consent returned, commenced story. Follow up where appropriate by coordinator. After contact attempts from coordinator & no response over 12 months or more, inquiry considered to have been withdrawn (See discussion in body of report for more information)

Out of scope: Requests for service were unavailable within the parameters of Project (e.g. request of funding for a film)

Appendix 2: Life Stories Project flyer

A flyer for the Life Stories Project. The background is a deep purple color with faint, handwritten-style text in a lighter shade. In the top left corner, there is a logo for the Alliance for Forgotten Australians, which consists of a circular emblem with a sunburst and the text 'ALLIANCE FOR FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS'. To the right of the logo, the text 'ALLIANCE FOR FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS' is written in a clean, sans-serif font. The main title 'Life Stories' is written in a large, white, serif font, with 'PROJECT' in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it. On the right side of the flyer, there is a circular inset photograph of an elderly woman with short, dark, curly hair, looking slightly to the right with a thoughtful expression. Below the title, the text 'DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL? YOUR STORY IS IMPORTANT.' is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Underneath this, the text 'We can help you RECORD your LIFE STORY. For You.' is written in a white, sans-serif font. A section titled 'ASSISTANCE CAN INCLUDE:' is followed by a bulleted list of four points: 'One on one sessions with a skilled listener and writer who knows Forgotten Australians.', 'Together, over a number of sessions, the listener can record your story with you.', 'Your Life Story can be both a paper copy and an electronic copy.', and 'There is no cost to you. This is a free service.' Below the list, the text 'YOU OWN YOUR STORY. YOUR STORY STAYS YOURS ! It cannot be used anywhere else without your consent.' is written in a white, sans-serif font. At the bottom left, the text 'Interested? Any Questions? Please contact Simon.' is written in a white, sans-serif font, with a rectangular box below it for contact information. At the bottom right, the text 'This project is provided by the Alliance for Forgotten Australians with the assistance of the Department of Social Services' is written in a small, white, sans-serif font.

Principles of Life Stories Project

Purpose

The Life Stories Project provides an opportunity for Forgotten Australians to tell the story of their life or parts of their life. Making a record of one's life and telling of some of the events in one's life is saying you matter and your life matters.

There are many Forgotten Australians who would like to have a life story record. Some may need assistance in undertaking this task. The Project is intended to help those who may find this task a little daunting.

Principles

- The process is driven by Forgotten Australians, their needs and preferences.
- Forgotten Australian participants understand that their involvement in Life Stories is voluntary. Participants choose to be involved. Participants may withdraw at any time during the Life stories process. The content of their story is determined by the Forgotten Australian.
- The privacy of the interviewee as well as the writer is paramount. Life Stories Project is bound by the Privacy legislation in all states and territories. All writers will sign a confidentiality agreement.
- The Forgotten Australian participant owns all draft copies and the final copy of the Life Story.
- The Forgotten Australian participant, as the owner of their story, chooses who can read and have access to their story.
- Written consent is sought from the participant in order to record each interview. Recordings are destroyed once the life story process is completed or the participant withdraws from the process.
- The writer will, as far as possible, use the words of the Forgotten Australian. Editing will be confined to punctuation, maintaining clarity, minimizing repetition and if necessary, providing some structure. It is vital to preserve the voice of the Forgotten Australian, not the literary style of the writer.
- The project must 'do no harm'. Before embarking on the telling of the 'life story' the Project coordinator will discuss with the potential Forgotten Australian participant the possibility that sometimes reliving experiences of the past can raise issues. The coordinator will check that the Forgotten Australian has support people available. It is also the experience of AFA that, as adults, Forgotten Australians have their own lived experience of support and of their support needs. Ultimately, they make the choice about when and where they might be directed to find support.

Further information is available from ...

Process of Life Stories Project

The purpose of this document is to provide an outline of the Life Stories Project. In the current Covid climate all contact with the coordinator and other writers will be by phone. Participants are encouraged to seek advice and support from their local Find and Connect service. The Life Stories Project brochure provides basic information for potential participants and for services.

Please read this document alongside the document titled **Principles of Life Story Project**

Outline of pre-story telling process

- Initial information about the Project is provided by the flyer, word of mouth or Find and Connect service. Initial contacts and follow ups are made to the coordinator via the Life Stories mobile phone number or email address.
- All initial conversations are with coordinator (by phone). In this initial conversation the parameters of the project are outlined, eg. process of info collecting, the possible use of a recording device, length of story, ownership of story, issues that may arise (eg. is support available?), use of other material eg. written material (records), tapes, photos.
- At this point the coordinator will assess the impact of storytelling on the Forgotten Australian. Possible adverse impacts of storytelling will be discussed with each potential participant. Information will be sought as to support person available to the Forgotten Australian. The availability of the local Find and Connect service for support is encouraged.
- The coordinator will inform potential participants that there is a lot of interest in the project. There is likely to be a period of waiting between returning consent form and being contacted by a life story project writer. Potential participants are also informed that they may be matched with a writer other than the coordinator.
- If the Forgotten Australian wishes to continue the coordinator will mail/email copy of information brochure, *Notes for participants and prompt questions* and *Consent form* (with stamped self-addressed envelope).
- Consent form is an acknowledgement by the Forgotten Australian of the recording process and the commitment by the Project that the life story produced belongs entirely to the Forgotten Australian.
- There is a second conversation between the coordinator and the Forgotten Australian, following receipt of consent. Arrangements are made for continuing contact until participant can be matched with writer. Support arrangements with Find and Connect service are again canvassed.
- The matching of participant with writer will be managed by coordinator.

Outline of storytelling process

- Following an introduction by the coordinator of writer to Forgotten Australian, the writer contacts Forgotten Australian to set up arrangements for storytelling. This initial conversation will include likely number of sessions, other material that can assist the story. Experience suggests between 6-8 sessions are necessary, of an hour each and may be spread over 4-5 months or longer. This may not be sufficient and additional time may be required. However, the word limit (6,000) will determine the amount of content. The Forgotten Australians needs to be reminded that the conversation may be recorded and that the recordings will be destroyed once the process has finished.
- Interviews need to be spaced. Recent experience suggests that fortnightly to every three weeks provides some space. This needs to be discussed at initial Forgotten Australian-writer

contact. A flexible approach is needed.

- Write up of interview material. Incorporate other material as requested and as available. Provide draft written copy to participant after every session. Spend time next session going through copy. And amending as needed at request of participant.
- Participants are reminded to think about the place of any photos/documents in the final publication.
- Editing and printing tasks, in conjunction with participant, will be managed by the coordinator. A maximum of 20 copies and a printer's PDF (allows extra copies to be printed at Forgotten Australians expense) will be provided to each participant.

Flexibility

The telling and recording of life stories and experiences is not new to either Forgotten Australians or to some of our Find and Connect services. This project is intended to complement some of these endeavours. Some Forgotten Australians may already have a text written and are seeking assistance in either editing or publication. The Project can assist with this, keeping in mind the word limit constraints that the Project has.

Forgotten Australians and Find and Connect services are encouraged to speak to the project coordinator, Simon Gardiner, to explore ways this Project can complement current story telling activities.

Documents

- Brochure** with details of project
- Consent form** to be signed and returned by Forgotten Australian prior to first conversation
- Notes for participants and prompt questions** to be sent with consent form
- Principles of Life Story Project.**
- Process of Life Stories**
- Confidentiality agreement** signed by writer

Information for participants and prompt questions

You are going to spend some time with a writer preparing your life story. It may take several sessions, working together, to do this. It is likely that these sessions of about an hour will be spread over some weeks and even months. This is your opportunity to talk about the things that have been and are important in your life. Initially your contact with the writer will be by phone. At some point our Covid restrictions may be behind us and it will be possible to meet face to face.

With your agreement the writer may record your conversation. This may help to keep track of all the detail. No one other than the writer will have access to it. And when your story is completed the Alliance for Forgotten Australians undertakes to destroy the copy of the audio file. If you are willing to participate in the Life Stories Project and to have your conversation recorded, please sign the agreement, and return it to Simon Gardiner in the stamped addressed envelope.

After every session, the writer will write up your conversation, either from the notes made by the writer and/or from the recording. This will be sent back to you either via email or by post. When you next meet you will go through, with the writer, what has been written and, together, you can make changes.

Your story will be a maximum of about 6000 words; that is about 12 A4 pages. It can be less than this. You can include in the printed version some relevant photos and copies of documents.

When you are satisfied with your story, Life Stories Project will arrange for it to be printed. It will have your name and the title you wish on the cover. You will receive a maximum number of 20 copies. There is no cost to you.

You remain the owner of your story. It cannot be used in any way, by any individual or organization, without your permission.

The Project has a number of writers available who can help with your story. If a writer other than Simon is to be involved Simon will discuss this with you. You may choose not to use an alternative writer, in which case Simon will proceed with your story.

You may withdraw from the Project at any time and any writing that has been done will be returned to you.

As Simon has discussed on the phone with you please keep in mind that going back to past events may raise some issues. It is important that if issues arise you have someone to talk to about these issues. This may be a special friend, a family member or a counsellor. Your Find and Connect service will be able to help you find support if it is needed. Simon or your writer can provide contact details.

Attached are some questions that may help you to start and develop your life story conversation.

Simon can be contacted on: ...

Email: ...

Life Stories Project: prompt questions for participants

You are about to start your Life Story project.

Below are some prompt questions for you to think about before talking with your writer. There is no need to write any notes, although if that helps please do so.

Keep in mind who it is that you want to read your story. And remember that these questions may only scratch the surface of your story. These questions are intended to help your story telling, not to restrict your story.

The prompt questions are separated into two categories: **broad** and **specific**

Broad questions

These are the sorts of questions that many of us ask about our lives. The answers to these questions are different for everybody. Your response to these questions may be brief, but just giving them some thought before you start will help you and the writer to develop and record your story.

Some prompts:

- What do you want people to know about your life?
- What do you want people to know about you?
- How would you like to be remembered?
- How would you describe yourself?
- What events are important to tell people about?
- What are some of your achievements?
- What are/have been some of your challenges?
- What do you think when you look back on your life?
- Do you have a message for your family and friends?

Specific questions

Beginnings

- What is your earliest memory of your childhood?
- Do you have siblings? Where and when were you born?
- How would you describe your childhood? Living arrangements?
- As a child did you ever wonder what your life would be like?

- What was school like? Friends? Subjects?
- How old were you when you left school? Where did you live?

Adult life

- Talk to me about work? Where? What?
- What interests did you have?
- And relationships? Children? Good times? Not so good times?
- Living arrangements? Family?
- Events in your adult life that were good/not so good.
- What are you proud of doing in your life?
- Did you get into trouble when younger?
- What would you now say to your younger self?

People

- Who have been/are the (most) important people in your life?
- Who has been good/kind to you/ In what way(s)?

Lessons and learnings

- What have you learnt about yourself from challenges that you have faced?
- What are the qualities that you would like others to know about you?
- Looking back what are your strengths?
- How do you think your childhood experiences have influenced/affected you as an adult?
- What do you believe? What are some of your beliefs? How have these helped you in your life?

Legacy

- What would you do differently as a young person?
- If you could talk to younger people what advice would you give them?

Participant Consent

I agree to participate in the Life Stories Project. I understand that my conversation with the writer of my life story may be recorded for the purpose of ensuring accuracy of detail of my story.

If any recording of my conversation, for the purposes of my life story, is made I understand , when my involvement with the Project is finished, all recordings will be destroyed. I also understand that because of privacy, there may be some restrictions on my use of names in my story.

Copyright of my life story remains with me. My story cannot be used for any purpose without my permission.

Name:

Signed:

Date

Survey/feedback form for participants

The attached form seeks feedback about your experience of telling your story and participating in the **Life Stories Project**.

Everyone who has completed the Life Stories Project is invited to provide feedback.

Feedback can be anonymous, so you feel comfortable providing honest feedback without being identified.

There are several ways you can give feedback. You can choose an option that suits you best:

- 1. By phone.** Once you receive the letter inviting you to complete the feedback form contact Boris (contact details below) and he will arrange a time to do this over the phone.
- 2. By mail.** Once you receive the letter inviting you to participate, complete the feedback form and return it in the stamped self-addressed envelope. Choose this option if you would like your feedback to remain anonymous.
- 3. By email.** Once you receive the email inviting you to participate, complete the feedback form and send back to Alliance for Forgotten Australians by return email (address below).

How to complete the form

Please tick the relevant boxes for each question. Please add any additional comments in the space provided – this will help us improve the project for future participants.

There is space on the next page for your name. Do not fill this in if you wish to remain anonymous.

All participants who provide feedback, whether by phone, mail or email, will receive a **\$25 Coles Myer voucher** for their time. Please provide an address on the next page for voucher delivery.

Further information and assistance can be gained from:

Executive Officer, Alliance for Forgotten Australians
Postal address: PO Box 374, Camberwell VIC 3124
Phone: ...
Email: admin@forgottenaustralians.org.au

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK FORM

1. How **helpful** did you find the process of telling your story?

VERY UNHELPFUL UNHELPFUL HELPFUL VERY HELPFUL

Comments:

2. How **respected** did you feel as you told your story?

VERY UNRESPECTED UNRESPECTED RESPECTED VERY
RESPECTED

Comments:

3. How **safe** did you feel as you told your story?

VERY UNSAFE UNSAFE SAFE VERY SAFE

Comments:

4. How **satisfied** are you with the booklet that has been produced about your story?

VERY UNSATISFIED UNSATISFIED SATISFIED VERY SATISFIED

Comments:

5. Would you **recommend** the Life Stories Project to other Forgotten Australians?

YES NO

Comments:

6. Is there anything we can do to make the experience better for other Forgotten Australians?

Address for gift voucher:

Name of Forgotten Australian (optional):

- THANK YOU -

Appendix 3: Participant feedback data

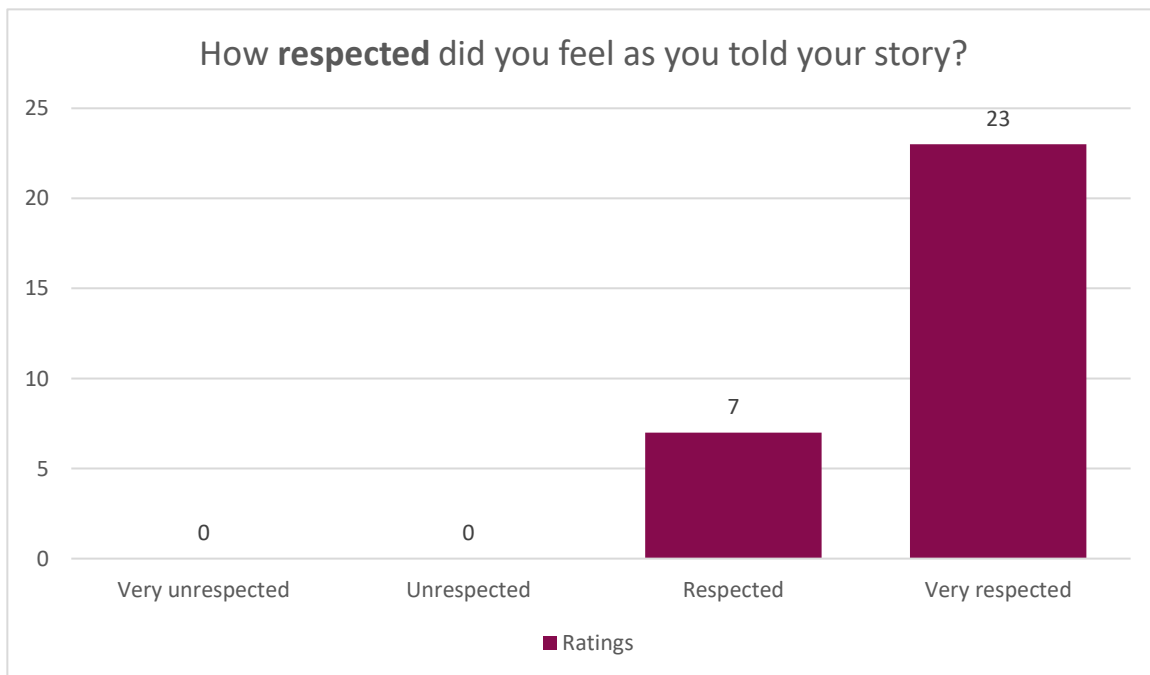
As the report has noted 60 participants completed their story. Of these, 30 completed and returned a feedback form (reply paid post).

Survey ratings for the Project are depicted below. This data is drawn from the 30 responses to the Participant Feedback Form in Appendix 2.

Helpfulness of the process

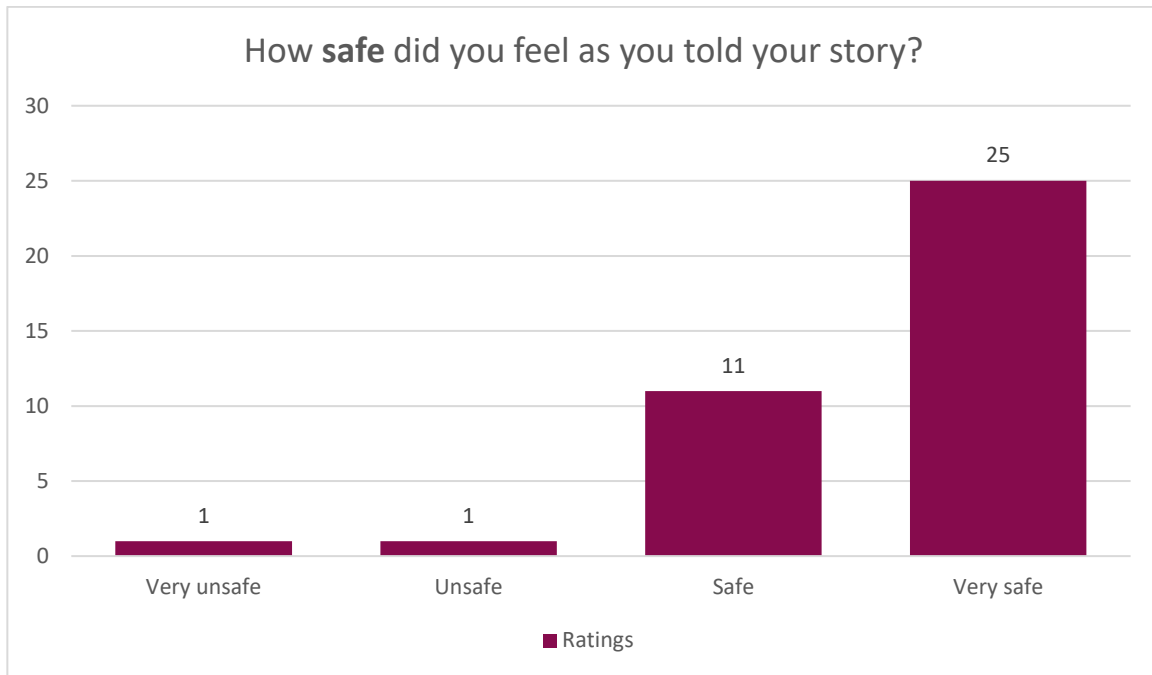


Respect during the process

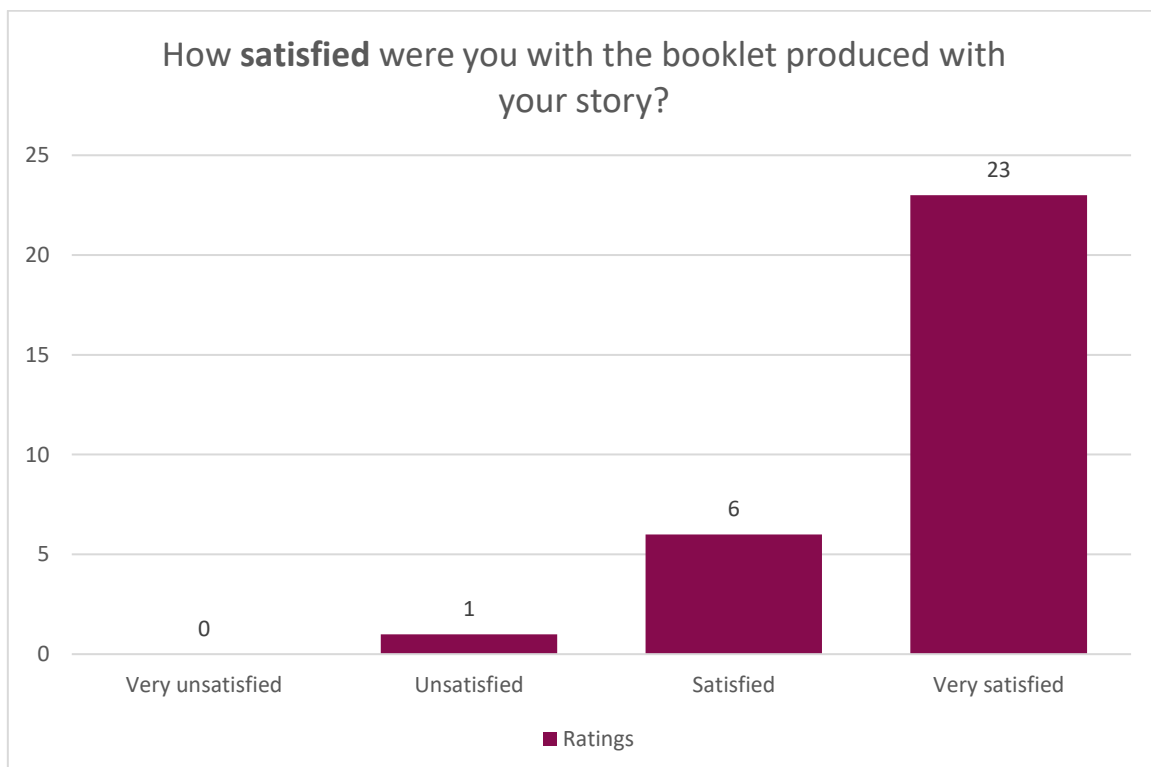


Safety during the process

(Two participants ticked two boxes safe/unsafe and very unsafe/very safe)

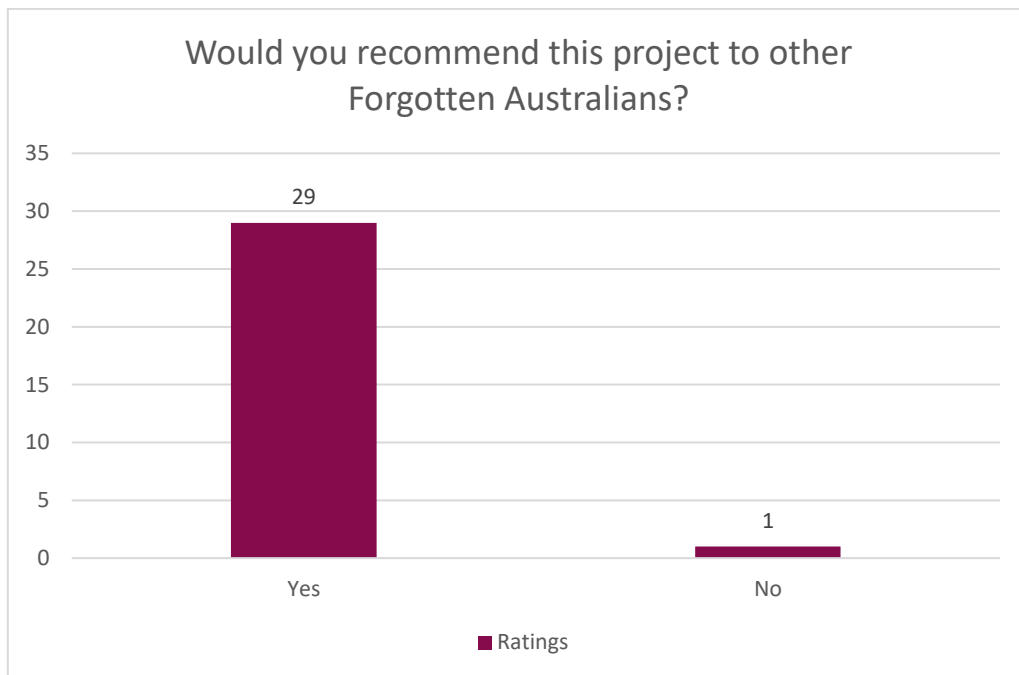


Satisfaction with the final book



Recommendation of the Project to other Forgotten Australians

(The participant who did not recommend the project advised they found the story telling challenging. It had brought up many issues. They were intensely grateful for the opportunity and relieved that they had something to show for her their life, but couldn't recommend this experience to others in case it was harmful)



Appendix 4: Writers' confidentiality agreement

I am about to undertake some work with the Alliance for Forgotten Australians as a writer in the Life Stories Project.

I understand my role is as a listener, a recorder, and a writer of the stories of Forgotten Australians.

I understand that each story is owned by and belongs to the Forgotten Australian who tells it.

I undertake to keep all the details of conversations I record and listen to and the final story confidential. The Forgotten Australian will decide how his/her story is to be used.

I acknowledge that I have read the Alliance for Forgotten Australians code of conduct and I agree to abide by this code.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Role of AFA and role of writers

Organisational arrangements and expectations between AFA and writer

Each writer will:

- Provide AFA with a copy of a ***national police check or a current Working with Children check***. DSS regard Forgotten Australians as ‘vulnerable adults’ and their ‘Working with Vulnerable Peoples’ guidelines, require national police check/working with vulnerable persons/ children to be completed on everybody that undertakes work with ‘vulnerable adults’. Simon can forward you a copy of the national police check form if you require one. AFA will reimburse your costs. Please note that this form requires 100 points of ID which must be certified by a designated person (list is quite broad and is contained in the completion instructions). Please forward the returned police check to Boris, Executive officer, AFA.
- Be willing to provide two referees to AFA who are familiar with the work of the writer.
- Provide AFA with a signed ***confidentiality agreement***. This is attached. Please return the signed confidentiality form to Boris
- Be prepared to discuss their work and their concerns with the coordinator, Simon, and be prepared to follow the principles and the processes of the project as outlined in relevant documents.
- Be familiar with the history and circumstances of Forgotten Australians. AFA will provide a link to the DVD-Forgotten Australians (on AFA web site). AFA will provide a copy of the booklet, Forgotten Australians, to each writer.

AFA will:

- Provide payment on an hourly rate. The hourly rate has been fixed at \$45.00. You will need an ABN to allow AFA to pay direct into your account. AFA will also need your bank account details. Please let Simon know if you need an invoice template and/or an itemised temp plate for recording hourly activities.
- Meet the costs of purchasing where necessary a recording device. Each life story conversation/interview between a Forgotten Australian and a writer may be recorded (see **Process of Life stories** for further detail). AFA will discuss with each writer their preference for recording device. This may mean a specific Life Stories mobile phone. AFA will provide an honorarium of \$50 per story if you choose to use your own phone. Please talk to Simon about your requirements.
- Undertake all initial work with Forgotten Australians including initial conversation, sending out of material and the consent document. AFA will inform all Forgotten Australians that another writer may be involved. AFA will make introductions between each Forgotten Australians and the writer. AFA will manage the design and printing arrangements of each booklet.
- Convene an introductory zoom meeting for all writers to discuss the role of the writer. Further zoom meetings will be held on an 6-8 weekly basis to provide collegial and practice support.
- Provide support and debriefing. Some of the stories you listen to may be distressing and trigger some strong emotions. Simon and myself will in the first instance provide this support.

Only when you are comfortable with the project guidelines and processes will you be allocated a story and a Forgotten Australian. Simon will help with the introduction. It may be useful if you provide a very short biography that explains your interest and commitment to Forgotten Australians. Initially each writer will begin with one story.

Boris
Executive Officer, Alliance for Forgotten Australians

Appendix 5: Writers' feedback survey

The following questions were asked of the writers.

Training and Preparation

1. Do you feel you had a good understanding of the overall aim of the Project? Do you feel your experience, skills and orientation to the Project were adequate to complete the task of life story writing for Forgotten Australians?
2. Do you feel that the documentation generated by the Project was a useful guide to the practice of life story writing with Forgotten Australians?

Structure

3. The Project suggested that engagement of writer and participant should be contained (eg. each session no more than an hour, then a write up, then another session and so on). Was this a useful way for storytelling to proceed? Did it impede or aid the process of storytelling?
4. Do you have any comment on the word limit (6000) and/or the standardised template design that was used for each completed story?

Resources

5. Are there any additional technologies or resources that would have made it easier to complete these life stories?
6. If a choice had been available, would you have preferred in person or phone or zoom contact with participants? Is there a particular mode that appears more effective?

Communication and Support

7. Were you satisfied with the frequency and clarity of communication with the Project (coordinator and AFA)?
8. Were your support and debriefing needs adequately addressed by the Project (coordinator and AFA)?
9. Were there any significant issues that arose with participants while completing these stories? Do you have any advice about how such issues could be better managed?
10. If such a Project was to be further funded (not necessarily by DSS) do you have any advice about the recruitment of writers and the training and support needs of these writers?

Additional comments

11. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Appendix 6: Consent to placement of life story in State Library of Victoria Collection

In order to have your life story included in the State Library of Victoria Life Story Project collection you need to agree to one of the two options below.

Please tick the box of the option you consent to and sign where indicated.

Option 1

I consent that the printed paper copy of my life story will be placed, as part of the Life Story Project collection, in the State Library of Victoria.

I understand that the paper copy of my life story can be used for research and study purposes only. It can only be read it cannot be reproduced. I retain my copyright. Readers of my life story will be required to sign a confidentiality form. People who sign the form will be granted access to my story on the condition that names and specific locations cannot be disclosed in any output that is created as a result of reading my life story.

Please tick box above if this is your choice.

Option 2

I consent that the printed paper copy of my life story will be placed, as part of the Life Story Project collection, in the State Library of Victoria for purpose of research, study and education.

I understand that my story may be shared, meaning that it may be copied, adapted or redistributed and that State Library Victoria are authorised to provide copies to users for research and study purposes.

I understand that my story may be displayed, shared or distributed for Library purposes such as exhibition, online access and promotional purposes.

I understand that I retain my copyright. If my story is shared and adapted I must be acknowledged as the author and given credit. I understand that my story will not be used for commercial purposes. Please tick box above if this is your choice.

Life story participant:

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Signature of library representative: