



Victorian Government abandons child abuse survivors

The State Government and Berry Street are walking away from the only support service available for Forgotten Australians in Victoria.

The announcement of closure was made to staff on Tuesday 8th October by Berry Street CEO, Mr Michael Perusco. Mr Perusco stated that the Open Place program no longer fits with the agency's new strategic directions.

Lyn Langanke, a former staff member of Open Place and a Forgotten Australian, described the action as 'callous in the extreme. Forgotten Australians are being thrown under the bus again. Staff and Forgotten Australians are absolutely stunned and distraught by this decision'.

Maree Holt, a Forgotten Australian and a regular user of Open Place said:

'I am what I am today, mentally and physically, because of my past. I want to feel safe....We are all exhausted...We need a safety net. I can go to Open Place and not feel I need to explain anything. I can just be me...We need a place like Open Place to stay in existence to reaffirm and state who we are.'

Boris Kaspiev, Executive Officer of the advocacy group Alliance for Forgotten Australians said: 'Why are we asking Maree and the thousands of other Forgotten Australians, who use Open Place, to once again fight for a service that for 10 years has built up trust and credibility? Forgotten Australians need support and affirmation, not further rejection and abandonment.'

Forgotten Australians (also known as 'care leavers') are the survivors of Victoria's twentieth century institutional care system. Forgotten Australians survivors figured prominently in evidence given to the *Betrayal of Trust* inquiry and to the recent Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. At these inquiries the survivors spoke of childhood deprivation and brutality that has led to life long suffering. It is estimated that there are 80,000 Forgotten Australian survivors in Victoria today.

Open Place is the statewide service that has supported Forgotten Australians for 10 years. The service has more than 4,000 Forgotten Australians on its books, provides a network of counsellors and counselling across Victoria, provides a record searching and family searching function for more than 300 Forgotten Australians a year, a case work and support service that brokers health services that would otherwise be unavailable, and runs support groups across Victoria. Open Place receives funding from the Victorian Government and is managed by Berry Street. It has been the subject of four external reviews over the last 10 years, all of which acknowledged the importance of the program.

Contact: Boris Kaspiev, Executive Officer, phone 0419 854 980