

The future of Open Place: stock take mid-December 2019

Berry Street announced on 8 October that:

- Berry Street would no longer serve as the provider of Open Place.
- DHHS would undertake a consultation and a co-design process in order to ***create a new service and to seek a new provider.***

The task facing Forgotten Australians and friends and supporters of Forgotten Australians and Open Place was either:

- to reverse the Berry Street decision or
- to seek to change the DHHS message and positioning from one of closing Open Place, creating a new service and finding a new provider
- to one of affirming the Open Place 'one stop' integrated service model and to seek a new provider with the service (and staff) remaining as intact as possible.

How has our campaign fared?

Both the President of the Board and the CEO have received a dozen or so letters from senior figures (past and present) in the sector and in academia chiding the decision makers for ignoring the history of Forgotten Australians and the role played by Open Place.

Berry Street has remained intransigent, at least publicly. There has been no dialogue and responses to letters have simply repeated the media release. Not losing face is an important component for many of our corporate leaders. Sadly the Berry Street leadership is not immune from this characteristic.

DHHS too has been confronted with a considerable backlash, particularly concerning the decision to reinvent the service model wheel. Meetings with the Minister, members of the Opposition and senior DHHS bureaucrats, an avalanche of anguish from Forgotten Australians and supported by letters of support from well-placed sector figures, for the 'one stop' integrated service model of Open Place, has achieved much.

Forgotten Australians have actively participated in the consultations, created badges, opened a Facebook site and led a protest march to Berry Street on the date of the anniversary.

This pressure and advocacy has led to changes in messaging and positioning, which are reflected in the November DHHS FAQ. This recent FAQ replaces the October FAQ. The changes, which ***replace the word 'service' with the word 'provider'***, are noted below.

DHHS is to be applauded for making this messaging and positioning change, which emphasises a shift to a new provider rather than the creation of a new service.

Current activities

Consultations with Forgotten Australians and key stakeholders have been completed. Much effort has gone into the consultations to ensure an outcome that overcame the danger of a 'complaints-based consultation'. Forgotten Australians have stood up and defended their service. They too are to be applauded.

Co-design of the new service is underway with Forgotten Australians being part of the process.

The search for a new provider continues with contact being made with likely and suitable agencies.

An advanced tender notice has gone out and the tender proper will be available in mid-January with a provider in place by end of March.

What happens to Open Place staff and assets etc will be in the hands largely of the new provider.

Conclusion

It has been a tumultuous three months for Forgotten Australians and staff at Open Place.

It has been so unnecessary. However, as in most things, we need to look for the good.

The good is that Forgotten Australians have taken up the fight. They have not meekly accepted being passive victims of another injustice; unlike when children they have not accepted their lot.

We go the Christmas break with more optimism than we may have expected in early October. It is now more likely than not (although there is no guarantee) that the integrated service model, developed by Open Place, will be sustained. And that too is a good thing.

Happy Christmas to you all. And thank you for putting up with my missives and updates.

Simon

12 December 2019

Changes to FAQs: comparing October version to November version

When will Open Place close? (October)

Open Place will close in June 2020. The Department of Health and Human Services (the department) will work with Berry Street Victoria to support the continuation of services until then.

When will Berry Street Victorian cease to operate Open Place? (November)

Berry Street Victoria will cease to operate Open Place in June 2020. The Department of Health and Human Services (the department) will work with Berry Street Victoria to support the continuation of their services until then. Open Place is funded by the Victorian and Federal Governments.

Will there still be a dedicated Victorian service for Pre-1990 Care Leavers? (October)

Yes. The Victorian Government and the department remain committed to providing ongoing support in recognition of the lifelong impact of the care experience. A **new service** will be announced and established next year that will commence when Open Place closes.

Will there still be a dedicated Victorian service for Pre-1990 Care Leavers? (November)

Yes. The Victorian Government and the department remain committed to providing a dedicated support service in recognition of the lifelong impact of the care experience. A **new provider** will be announced next year that will commence on 1 July 2020.

What else will the department use to identify and develop the new service? (October)

We will draw on the nine years of experience and learnings from Open Place by talking to Open Place staff and people registered with Open Place to help identify and develop the **new service**.

What other information will the department use to identify the new provider? (November)

We will draw on the nine years of experience and learnings from Open Place by talking to Open Place staff and people registered with Open Place to help identify the **new provider** and develop the future service.

When will the new service start? (October)

It is expected the department will begin work to identify a new provider in January 2020 and work to announce the new provider in March 2020. The chosen provider will then work with Pre-1990 Care Leavers and key stakeholders to establish the new service which is expected to be fully operational by the time Berry Street Victoria close Open Place in June 2020.

When will the new provider start? (November)

It is expected the department will begin work to identify a new provider in January 2020 and announce the new provider in March 2020. The chosen provider will commence on 1 July 2020 and will work with Pre-1990 Care Leavers and key stakeholders to develop the future service.

Who do I contact if I have concerns about what the decision to close Open Place means for me? (October)

If you are concerned about the decision to close Open Place, please contact Berry Street Victoria by using their [contact form](https://www.berrystreet.org.au/contact-us/form) <<https://www.berrystreet.org.au/contact-us/form>> or calling (03) 9429 9266.

Who do I contact if I have concerns about what Berry Street Victoria's decision means for me? (November)

If you are concerned about Berry Street Victoria's decision, please contact them by using their [contact form](https://www.berrystreet.org.au/contact-us/form) <<https://www.berrystreet.org.au/contact-us/form>> or calling (03) 9429 9266.