

Child Abuse survivors protest outside Berry Street

Background

Open Place, the state-wide support service for Forgotten Australians, is closing in June 2020. Despite pleas from Forgotten Australians and their supporters there is no guarantee that the service that has built up trust and credibility with the Forgotten Australian community, for nearly 10 years, will continue in its current form. "Closure" is still the language of choice used by Berry Street (the agency that manages the service) and Department of Health and Human Services who provide substantial funding.

Forgotten Australians are the adults who, as children, were brought up in institutional care. The "care" experiences of Forgotten Australians were the subject of many of the public hearings of the Royal Commission into institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

We wanted to show Berry Street and the department that we care about our service, we care about our staff and we care about each other. We chose to protest on the 10th Anniversary of the National Apology to Forgotten Australians. This was the Apology that said: ***We will remember you. We will look after you.***

The protest

It was very simple. We met at Open Place. There were about 30 of us. We gathered a few placards and posters with individual letters that could make up messages and then, together, we walked over to Berry Street.

We met some friendly policemen on bicycles. We saw a police divisional van just up the road. We waved and they waved back.

We arranged ourselves so that our signs, *Forgotten Again* and *Save Open Place* could be seen from the Berry Street building.

Allan had arranged a microphone on the steps of Berry Street. Simon spoke. Then Allan and Richard sang about being "abandoned and lost again but we had each other and together we could save Open Place". We liked Allan's chorus and his image of Mr Powerboots.

FORGOTTEN AGAIN,

DON'T LET THE PROMISES FADE;

TEN YEARS AGO THEY GAVE US HOPE

DON'T LET IT FADE AWAY.

Chorus

DO YOUR JOB & PROVE YOU CARE

WE'RE FORGOTTEN AUSSIES, WE'RE STILL HERE

WE DON'T NEED MORE COMPLICATIONS

WE NEED OUR OWN OPEN PLACE

WE NEED OUR OWN OPEN PLACE

Spoken SO PLEASE... Mr POWERBOOTS....

DON'T THROW US OUT... WE ARE A GOOD FIT..

WITH HONESTY..... COMPASSION

& ... COMMON SENSE ... (WE WILL PREVAIL) x 4

It was lovely to see the young people, the Y Changers who know about being in “care”, come out and support us. We felt good that they would come to listen and meet us. One of them said: “That’ll be us in 30 years’ time.”

All the time we kept shuffling our posters with an individual letter on each poster; *Forgotten Again* would suddenly become *Save Open Place*. It was quite funny. We got it right most of the time.

Then heaps of us spoke: Maree, Judy, Jane, Violet, Tammy, John.

We spoke about childhoods, betrayal, loneliness and shame. We spoke about hope.

We spoke about Open Place and why it is important to us.

These are some of the things we said or felt or thought as we stood on the steps of Berry Street. Apart from the Y Changers the building may as well have been unoccupied.

Some of us spoke about our childhood. Sometimes I wonder how long is a childhood? Not that long when I look at the years after. It’s just that this childhood never seemed to end. And then it did. Suddenly.

And then life went on. Sometimes it seemed life went on and left me behind. There was a life to live. But how?

Family? Scattered.

Home? A dream

Job? Sometimes but backbreaking.

Friends? From where?

New family? Gone.

I live each day. Every day I wake up. And it’s waiting for me. My childhood. It’s a breath just waiting to be taken. It is a fear, a gnawing ache. It is a fear of the day, of the uncertainty of each day. It is an ache for solace and security. I pray for peace. I keep my counsel. I am tired. Every day.

And I survive. Each day. I have a brilliant smile. A quick tongue. I keep my distance. They say: "She does so well."

My childhood has never ended. I come to Open Place and I feel safe

Some of us spoke about betrayal. There have been many betrayals over many years; betrayals from those who were meant to care. When we left the institution we realized we were on our own. It was terrifying. Many of us were exploited and abused after we left care. We have been promised the world; we have had a national apology, we have had parliamentary inquiries including a Royal Commission. For most of us our lives are unchanged; don't make promises you won't keep.

And now the place we feel safe, where we can trust and where we can be ourselves, you want to take that away too.

We have dealt with things in life that you can never dream of. We will survive.

Some of us spoke about loneliness. And making friends and keeping relationships. It is very hard to make friends and keep relationships when mistrust sits deep within us. How do you trust? It begins as a child. It's difficult to trust when as a child you wait for your mother to visit and you wait and wait...she never comes. It is easier sometimes just to keep some distance. You know that that way you'll never get hurt again.

Some of us spoke about shame. For a long time I could never talk about my childhood and what happened to me. I thought it was my fault. I still think of the scared little boy and how close he still is to me. Why would anyone want to know this little boy? Open Place has been important to me. It has helped me meet other people who had similar childhoods. I know it is not my fault. It helps me to talk with a counsellor from Open Place.

Some of us spoke about hope. Life is about hope. Open Place and what it stands for gives us some hope.

And so for all these reasons we came to the steps of Berry Street. We are sorry you were not able to come out and listen to us. Maybe if we came another day you would?

As we walked back to Open Place for lunch and a chat we met two policewomen on police horses. We patted their horses. They took some flyers and we told them what we had been doing. And they listened.

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