

2002 FINDING YOUR STORY COMMUNITY FORUMS

RAMAHYUCK DISTRICT ABORIGINAL CO-OPERATIVE

117-121 Foster Street, Sale

Date: 23 April 2002

Time: tba

Contact: Sandra Loudani, tel (03) 5153 2672

DANDENONG & DISTRICT ABORIGINAL CO-OPERATIVE

3 Carroll Avenue, Dandenong

Date: 14 May 2002

Time: 10.00 am

Contact: Lois Atkinson-Farrant, tel (03) 9794 5933

NJERENDA ABORIGINAL CO-OPERATIVE

1 Law Court Place, Echuca

Date: 4 June 2002

Time: tba

Contact: Karlene Dwyer, tel (03) 5480 6252

WINDA-MARA ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

21 Scott Street, Heywood

Date: 25 June 2002

Time: tba

Contact: David Walter, tel (03) 5527 2051

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Cover and inside: Colleen Howell, a member of the Stolen Generations, was reunited with her family in Alice Springs in January after almost fifty years. Photograph courtesy of the Geelong Advertiser



GOING HOME

Colleen Howell was taken from her mother and father at the age of about three. She can't remember her mother's face or the man that took her away from home. Now almost fifty years later, she has been reunited with a family she never knew in a place she does not remember.

Going home to Alice Springs in January, Colleen finally met seven of her ten brothers and sisters. She only found out about these siblings when she saw a copy of her birth certificate at age twelve. Tragically Colleen's mother, father and two older sisters have passed away. One other sister has stomach cancer. Colleen felt that the trip back to her mother's country would help her to come to terms with the loss of her parents and assist her to build bridges with the family that remains.

Colleen's journey of discovery was guided by Merryn Edwards, Spiritual and Emotional Wellbeing Counsellor at the Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative in Geelong. Travelling on the train to Alice Springs with Colleen and her daughters Ammie, Meagan, Renee and cousin Gerry Laughton, Merryn says the combination of nerves and excitement was almost too hard to bear. It had taken four years for the family to reach that point, four years since Ammie had approached a teacher to ask for help in tracing her Aboriginal past.

Colleen says that 'It has been a rollercoaster ride from start to finish... but then I think a lot of people were not as lucky as me'. She was referring to the adoptive parents who raised her after she had spent many years in children's homes. Colleen's adoptive mother saw the family off on their journey, a gesture Merryn says was very emotional.

Initially, Merryn, Colleen and her family spent some time in Alice Springs meeting tribal elders, aunts, uncles, cousins and learning of the Arrernte culture. They then travelled to the Bungalow (Telegraph Station) where brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins – all of whom Colleen was meeting for the first time – were waiting under a big gum tree. Recalling that day, Merryn says the walk from the car to the waiting family was the longest walk of their lives. Colleen's face apparently had a look of contentment as she said, 'I am home'.

The Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce first met Colleen and her daughters at the Taskforce's community forum at the Wathaurong Co-op last October. Ammie read from a diary she had been keeping about her mother's journey to find the family she had lost such a long time ago. Moved by Colleen's story and recognising that it is shared by many other members of the Stolen Generations, the Taskforce followed her progress and is pleased to share her remarkable story.

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WHAT'S ON IN 2002?

Koorie Taskforce goes online

The Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce is launching its own website, accessible via Public Record Office Victoria's website (www.prov.vic.gov.au).

The Taskforce site will:

- publish news and updates on Taskforce and related activities
- provide details of the 'Finding Your Story' community forums including dates and venues
- run copies of forum reports from round one in 2001
- carry downloadable copies of the Taskforce newsletter *Bringing Them Home*. (Users will also be able to join our mailing list online.)
- include an extensive range of links to government, non-government and Koorie organisations and resources

We expect the site to be operational by the end of April 2002. Meanwhile you can view the last three issues of the *Bringing Them Home* newsletter, and/or join our mailing list, at www.prov.vic.gov.au/nletter.htm

Finding Your Story community forums

In the first half of 2002 the Taskforce will be holding four more community forums. The purpose of these forums is to inform the Victorian Koorie community about what records are kept relating to them and how they can be accessed. The forums are also an opportunity for the community to raise any issues they may have about access to these records.

Last year over 250 people attended the Taskforce forums in eight regional and metropolitan locations across Victoria. This year the forums will continue to be held in rural and regional communities as well as in metropolitan Melbourne. See page 4 for details.

Response to 2001 Finding Your Story community forums

The Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce is compiling a comprehensive response to the first round of community forums, held in 2001. There were many common issues raised in the forums and the report will be centred around these. The issues include the need for culturally appropriate counselling services and the implementation of the *Bringing Them Home* report recommendations. The report, where possible, answers questions and responds to issues raised. Where questions did not relate directly to the Taskforce's purpose (to improve access to records), they have been passed on to the appropriate Minister or government department. Copies of the report will be forwarded to the Victorian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the Premier of Victoria.

Workshop for Stolen Generations community workers

The Taskforce is also planning to host a one-day workshop for Victorian Stolen Generations and Emotional and Social Wellbeing community workers on 18 June 2002. The workshop will focus on providing information to these community workers about what records are kept, how they can be accessed, and how to prepare clients for what they might (or might not) find. Some travel assistance will be offered to workers from rural and regional areas.

Further details will be published as they are finalised. If you have any queries or would like to register your interest, contact Victor Briggs, Taskforce Research and Administration Officer, on tel (03) 9285 7927 or email victor.briggs@dpc.vic.gov.au

