

# Lotus Times

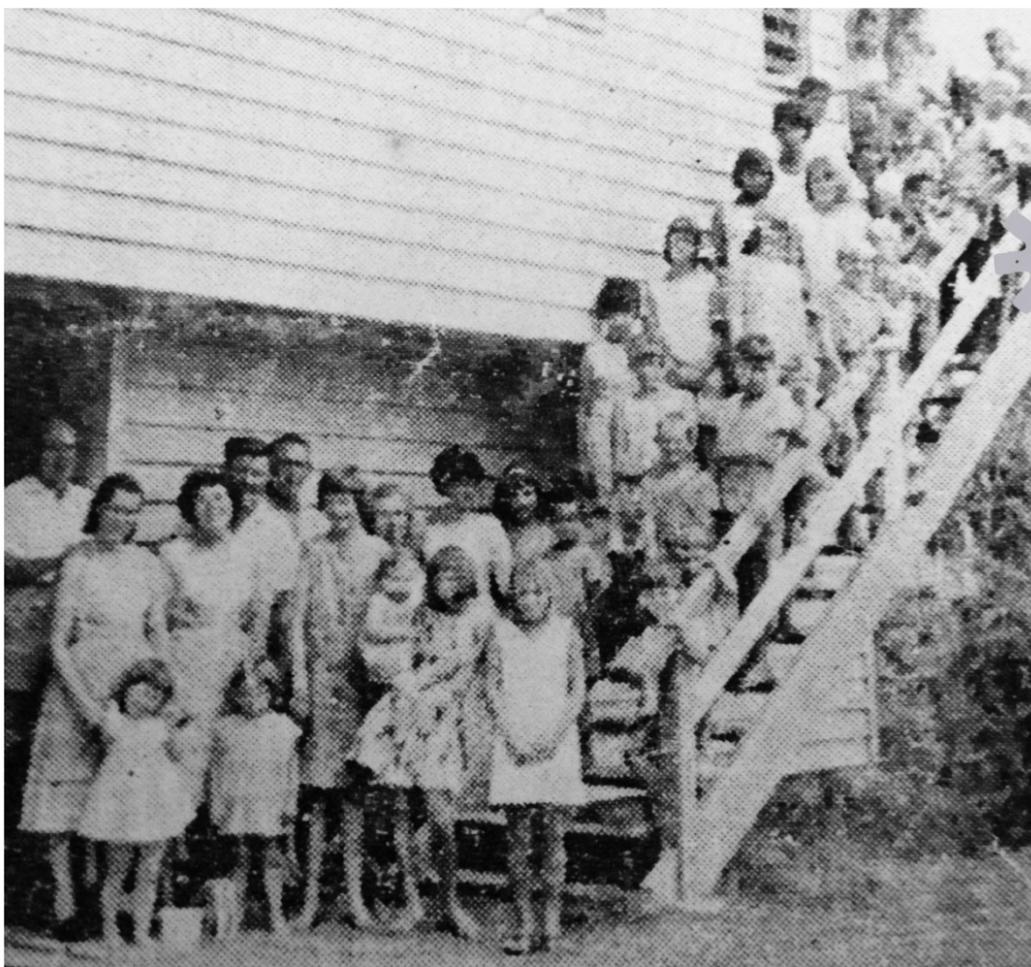
HISTORICAL ABUSE NETWORK NEWSLETTER

QUEENSLAND • VOLUME ONE ISSUE ONE | NOVEMBER 2017

The Historical Abuse Network works collaboratively with people who experienced abuse and neglect in institutions, foster care and detention centres. We acknowledge their courage as they move from adversity to hope in seeking public recognition, justice and redress.

This newsletter is written by members of the Historical Abuse Network, for members of the network, their supporters and professionals serving them.

**In this issue** • Leslie Lyster's story • Inside Story – My Experience with Lotus Place Brisbane • Alliance for Forgotten Australians by Marlene • HAN reference Group Updates • Child Migrants Update • Remembrance Day Snapshots •



## Find and Connect – Deborah Rose

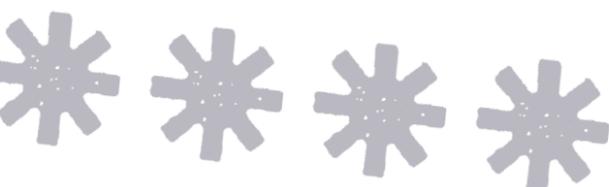
Just a brief introduction of myself. I was a Ward of the State of Queensland for some 16 years. I spent time in institutional care, home care and foster care over these years. I was never reunited with my parents and grew up meeting my siblings along the way.

Sound familiar?

To people who are wondering whether or not to access their records from the relevant Department, some might think, 'why bother, others have been tracking down their information for years to no avail.'

I accessed my file some 25 year ago through the Freedom of Information Act and believe it was a positive step towards self-discovery and also helped me answer some ongoing nagging questions.

Having access to my file gave me some validation of the events of my early childhood. Although, over the years I have not kept my records in-tact (it gets messy!) and in fact I have recently reapplied through Find and Connect to access my file again.



Thankfully it has been a seamless process with assistance from Lotus Place.

My motivation for going over my file again is to achieve a life-long dream to share my story with those who, like me, got so terribly lost in the system. I feel I have been finding my way out forever and know how difficult this process can be. For those wanting to access their records please contact Find and Connect.

**Above**  
*Left – Bethel Children's Home, Dalby, Deb Rose front of picture second left*  
*Right – Deb Rose as a Child*

## Leslie Lyster Find and Connect

**I currently live in Victoria and have come to Rockhampton because I wanted to honour my father.**

As a child I was placed at Neerkol in 1948 and left in 1962. I think that everybody wants to know where they come from and that they belong to somebody. This is why I started searching.

It was with help from Lotus Place and a few other people that I was able to find my father and learn of what happened to two of my sisters. I have just driven 2,100 kms to put some flowers on my father's grave, so that when people go past they will know that he was loved by someone.

**(continued on page 3)**



# Letter from Karyn

The Historical Abuse Network (HAN) has achieved many things over the years, it is a great time for *Lotus Times* to be transformed to a member-run publication as – The HAN Newsletter. So it is with a lot of pride that we have released the first edition of the HAN Newsletter, organised and written by members of the HAN Writing Group with editing and design supported by Micah Projects.

All articles have been carefully written by members of the Writing Group who are located all over Queensland. The group met several times to draft

and select stories and design the layout of the Newsletter. Every article reflects the personal stories and experiences of members, all offering inspiration and hope. Whether that be in encouraging you to find and connect to family members, or to join other network members to advocate for your rights, or attend events facilitated by Lotus Place.

If you have a story to share or would like to join the Writing Group, please get in contact by emailing [han@micahprojects.org.au](mailto:han@micahprojects.org.au). I hope you enjoy

reading this first edition as much as I did, and I look forward to reading many more editions in the future.

Regards

*Karyn Walsh*

Karyn, Micah Projects

**Lifeline**  
13 11 14

**Royal Commission**  
1800 09 93 40

**Find & Connect**  
1800 16 11 09



## Brisbane Remembrance Day Ceremony, September 2017

The 2017 Brisbane Remembrance Day was held on the Rooftop Terrace at GOMA (Gallery of Modern Art) this year. A traditional Welcome to Country and dancers were followed by Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk's announcement of the establishment of a Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce. The Hon. Shannon Fentiman MP also presented at this fully attended event.



Leslie Lyster at his father's grave

## Leslie Lyster Find and Connect

(continued from page 1)

### The Journey

I know that I had parents and that I didn't fall out of the clouds and I wanted to know who they were and why I went to Neerkol. I had already got my file from Children Services when I made contact with Lotus Place. I did this after the Government in their wisdom allowed us to have them through the Freedom of Information (FOI) process.

When I got them back, to my surprise and horror three quarters of the pages were blacked out. There were big white square blocks on the page and I thought this was strange, I am supposed to be getting information. So I rang the FOI people up and asked why. They said that even dead people have the right to privacy and they couldn't give me the information I was looking for, even though the people had passed. When they said they couldn't tell me because it would breach someone's privacy I thought, "Why, they were 60 years old at the time and I was 4". They are probably dead now. Key people in my life were denied to me. So I got my brother to apply for his file and everything about me was blocked out of his – even though we are brothers. I didn't understand why. Why did they do this? What possibly could a three and half year-old child have done that meant he was incarcerated? I think they don't let us see because they don't want us to sue them for wrong doing.

It was important for me to know why I was there. I knew what happened in the home (orphanage), as I lived it. My whole gripe about the FOI, is that it wasn't worth the paper it was written on as it told me lots of other rubbish but not the things I wanted to know. I think it was because I was a State Boy, and not regarded as a citizen of Australia, like they owned me. We were all branded, like we had committed some offence against the state. They decided to charge my mother money to keep us and then she skedaddled and that is when we became state wards.

When I read the files, I was disappointed, there was a lot of stuff that I knew, I didn't have to have that in writing – like the boarding out, it was slavery. We would stand there and they would come along and feel your muscles and look at your teeth and the next thing you know; you were banged off to some place on a train. I knew all of that, but my expectation was that I was going to find out who

I was and where I came from. The file had the police officers number and name but everything else was blocked out. Little bits are left in between and then it was a flash or a glance of what may have been in there.

As an adult looking back, I can see that I was brought up in a non-caring environment, I didn't have any emotional responses, I knew that I belonged to somebody, and that somebody must have cared about me or thought about me, so I set out to find out who I belonged to.

The files did say that a Nurse Donaldson brought us down from Townsville on the train and took us to Neerkol. The police report says we were neglected and the system of the day made it easy for them to do. My mum and dad weren't married.

I did find out when I read the file that my Dad tried to get access to us but he was denied. I think it was Children's Services that denied him access. My files said he threw an ink well at a police officer when he couldn't see us and he was charged in the Townsville court of petty sessions to make restitution for the police officers uniform, for resisting arrest and bad language. He was fined 10 pounds in 1948. This was the same year I went into Neerkol and I think he was fighting for us. He told the judge it was due to drink and that the system wouldn't allow him to see his children. I could see that he was persistent and that is how he eventually did get to see us, I think the Bishop of Rockhampton assisted him. He would take us out once a year for a day trip (it was wonderful), at the time he was living in Surrey Hills in Sydney. This was a wonderful experience for me, we would go out on the rail motor. I can see he made an effort to see us.

I was frustrated with the FOI process and know that they can read information about me on their computer screens but I can't see it. I had hope for a while and then it was snatched away. I decided to do some more work on my own. I didn't find out why I was in care but I did find out that my Dad was trying to see us.

### Finding my Family

#### My Sisters and Nephew

At the time of my birth my de-facto father, took my older sister and gave her to another family and told her to not do anything. They were under strict instructions to not let Mum know. Years later she went to Jigsaw and found me. After this I decided to find the rest of my family and I went to Queensland Adoptions to find my baby sister.

I wanted to find out if my baby sister was alive or dead. I was nine years of age when the Nuns told me she was gone. I never knew what happened

to her and it took 40 years before I found out. She had been blacked out of my file, when I rang the FOI I asked them to confirm if she was alive or dead but they wouldn't tell me. My only memories of her were when she was a baby.

I found out in a roundabout way that she had survived Neerkol and had been adopted in 1952 and that she now lives overseas. I went to the Adoptions Department and as a coincidence, her son (my nephew) was also searching for her. One of the staff that worked at Adoptions saw that we were both looking for the same person and got our permission to share details. We both ended up getting information and when we compared it, he got far more than me. I think all the bits were denied to me because I was a State boy and he was a private citizen. When we met we shared what information we each had and this is how I found out how and why they changed her name and that she was adopted. I am pleased she didn't have to suffer Neerkol and had a reasonable life. I found out she was sent to Gladstone (this was in my nephews information), all that I got was that she had been sent to a Central Queensland coastal town. I have never met her though.

#### My Father

Lachie from Lotus Place in Brisbane found my father for me. He died in 1968. I had been chasing ghosts before I spoke to Lachie. I had his birth registration from Melbourne and then Lachie found him - I am ever so grateful for him doing this. Lachie found out he died in Yeppoon and was buried in Rockhampton. Then Leigh from Lotus Place in Rockhampton went out to the cemetery and found the grave. She sent me a photo – all the way down to Victoria. This is why I have come to Rockhampton now with my wife and eldest son. I wanted to put things right and it now feels like a closure for me. It is a sense of belonging, that I am connected to someone, that I didn't fall out of the clouds. It is about my own self-preservation. I encourage other people to do this, you may not like what you find but everyone is entitled to a mum and dad. It has been difficult emotionally over the years, when I had my own children, they became my whole world and everything revolved around them. That I belonged to them now. I love being a family man.

I am 73 and I still have not found my mum, though it does keep me young, running around.

I think the Government is fearful we are going to sue them, but really, I just wanted to know where my mother was and where my father was and this was denied me. Freedom of information is a lot of rubbish, there wasn't the information I was looking for. I encourage anyone who is looking to do so and I hope my story may help you.



# Inside Story - My Experience with Lotus Place Brisbane

Dennis Dodt as a child and now

I am a Former State Ward of Queensland from the age of 5 years back in 1965 until I received my Official Release papers in 1978 when I was 18 years of age. I have been accessing activities and support from Lotus Place since the late 1990's which used to be known as the Esther Centre.

Originally, I came to see Mark and Karyn for help with three issues. Firstly, to confront the Church about the many abuses I experienced during my time in care. I also wanted to try and get the Statute of Limitations Law changed as I had been involved in criminal proceedings against the Government and the Church that were statute barred in the courts. Also, I was wanting to be involved in creating a one-stop meeting place for former state wards like myself where services and activities could be accessed.

My issues with the Church were eventually resolved in 2003. Thankfully the meeting place was created after the Forde Inquiry and Lotus Place Brisbane was born. Then, years later the Statute of Limitations Law was changed in Queensland and several other states. This came as the direct result of the recommendations handed down by the current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the submissions from myself and many other victims' experiences.

One activity that I have been accessing at Lotus Place is Mindful Movements. These sessions have been great for my general health, especially for my mind. At Mindful Movements I learn and practice skills so that I can relax and ease the tensions that I create in my body throughout the day. A great activity well worth trying!!

Heidi who is a Find and Connect worker at Lotus Place helped gather and compile all my records from my time as a state ward. Heidi's help saved me a lot of time and stress involved in getting my records.

Another fulfilling activity that I am regularly involved in is our Remembrance Day celebrations. I love this day as it reminds me how far I have come, and helps me to reflect and remember those people who have passed on and still miss today.

Lotus Place workers have been a great source of emotional and academic support when I have been making submissions to many different investigations I have been involved in, like the Forde Enquiry, the Senate Report, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and the Ex-Gratia Process with the church. I have appreciated all their help and support reading over my writings to help me write more clearly and express what I want to say.

I wish to pass on my wholehearted thanks to every worker that has ever supported me (too many to be named) or will work with me in the future.

Dennis Dodt.

If you would like to hear more from Dennis, please watch - *Lotus Place: Creating justice, Responding to injustice* at [www.micahprojects.org.au/](http://www.micahprojects.org.au/)



Bundaberg members of HAN at the Remembrance Day Ceremony, September 2017



Marlene Wilson as Master of Ceremonies at the Moonlight Magic Dinner Dance in 2014

## Alliance for Forgotten Australians by Marlene

I am an Indigenous former State Ward of Queensland, on and off from the age of 2 to 19 years. My mother was Stolen Generation and my father was an Indigenous Forgotten Australian. I've been in state institutions, multiple church institutions, foster care, kinship foster care and a remand centre for girls – which is a prison (and I hadn't even broken the law). I'm a survivor of all forms of abuse, including physical, psychological, spiritual and sexual abuse.

I am a member of the Historical Abuse Network HAN Working Together Reference Group, a Board member of Alliance for Forgotten Australians (AFA), a member of the HAN Newsletter Writing Group and a full-time community volunteer with West End Community House, Brisbane. I'm also recognised and respected in the Indigenous community and I'm a member of multiple Indigenous groups in Brisbane.

The Alliance for Forgotten Australians is a national alliance that works in partnership to advocate for and promote national policies and high quality services in each State and Territory tailored to meet the needs and interests of the estimated 500,000 Forgotten Australians. AFA strongly encourages inclusion of Forgotten Australians in service, planning and delivery. Further details of AFA's Vision, Mission, Identity and Values can be found on the AFA website ([www.forgottenaustralians.org.au](http://www.forgottenaustralians.org.au)).

Some useful resources on the website are the draft Manifesto for the national redress scheme, and 'What Forgotten Australians Want' from a national redress scheme for survivors of abuse in institutional and out-of-home 'care'.

Following the Minutes from the last AFA Meeting on the 27th and 28th of June, a number of letters have been sent by the Chair of AFA, Caroline Carroll OAM to Justice McClellan AM, the Attorney General, Senator the Hon. George Brandis QC, and the Minister for Social Services, the Hon. Christian Porter.

AFA has welcomed the announcement in the Australian Government's 2017 Budget of \$33.4 million funding for a Commonwealth Redress Scheme for Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse. We also feel that it is an important step in bringing justice and healing to those who have suffered in 'care'. We know that nothing will replace a lost childhood, nothing will ever compensate for the pain we suffered in the institutions which were supposed to look after us. As we age our journeys may become smoother if we can have access to counselling, if we can afford to attend to our mental and physical health, and if the damage that has been done to children who were alone in the world can be acknowledged.

Sometimes I feel like pinching myself when I realise the significance with being a member

of the AFA Board. Never in my life did I think that my life experience would be valued and that I could use it to educate, inform and advocate on a national scale. Let alone being effective as part of the State Historical Abuse Network Reference Group helping to change laws and government policy.

Each time I attend an AFA meeting I get to meet and develop relationships with other Forgotten Australians from all around our country. Finding out that we are all coming from similar experiences and following the same path together is so reassuring to me. All we want is to be recognised, heard, believed, and to help make a difference for children today and in the future.

I'm looking forward to your responses and the upcoming editions to follow.

Marlene Wilson.

For more information on AFA head to [www.forgottenaustralians.org.au](http://www.forgottenaustralians.org.au)



# HAN Reference Group Updates



Brisbane members of the HAN Reference Group with local federal member Terri Butler MP

## What's doing in Brisbane?

– Dennis Dodt

I am Dennis, a Former State Ward of Queensland and a current member of the HAN. Working Together Reference Group. This group is made up of Former State Wards, Forgotten Australians, Care Leavers or Out of Home Care members who meet every month, working together with our service providers from Lotus Place and Micah Projects on areas of interest to our State-wide community.

The current group has agreed to keep this group closed until the end of the current Royal Commission which is in late December 2017. We will be looking to include new members in the New Year.

Our recent focus has been on the making of submissions to the issues papers that have arisen from the current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We have also been doing ongoing advocating around the Unfinished Business Document and the Framework for Justice Paper that we developed within the Reference group. We use these two documents when meeting with the State and Federal Government ministers. This advocating and lobbying work with Governments is ongoing and very satisfying.

*"...advocating and lobbying work with Governments is ongoing and very satisfying."*

## Central Queensland Happenings – John Burrows

Well, here in Rockhampton we have morning teas every Tuesday and lunches once a month. At our lunches we have guest speakers - that gives us lots of information about what is happening around town and what services we can use. It is good to see a lot of new people coming into the centre now. And they are all lovely people and we welcome them.

A few of us have been doing Child Safety Officer Training and we have also done some training for Central Queensland Indigenous Development (CQID) for their staff and foster carers. It is good to be able to tell new workers about what we experienced.

We have also got a group in Bundaberg for people down in Wide Bay area who Selena sees once a month.

We had wonderful Remembrance Day ceremonies this year in Bundaberg and Rockhampton.

Until next time, John.



John Burrows



John Burrows and Leigh Packett writing for the HAN Newsletter

*"... guest speakers give us lots of information about what is happening around town and what services we can use."*



23 April 1938: Four child migrants arrive at Fairbridge Farm School in Molong, NSW. From left: Ted Gamsley, Mary Simpson, Clara Park, Cyril Lord.

# Child Migrants Update

by Brian Laing

From 1947 to the 1970's, over 7,000 child migrants were sent to Australia from the United Kingdom and Malta. The British and Australian governments, under the Immigration Act, arranged for all of these children to be placed in institutions rather than in foster care or being adopted. Many Former Child Migrants were deported to Australia without their parents consent and told they were orphans. I was 10 years old in 1951 when I was sent to Fremantle, West Australia and placed at Fairbridge Farm in Pinjarra.

The Minister for Immigration was the legal Guardian of all Child Migrants and Evacuee Children until the child turned 21. The Minister also controlled any 'Estate' the Child may have possessed. This is clearly stipulated in the Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Act 1946, Clause 6.

## Compulsory Banking

Many child migrants were forced into labour once we were of high school age. For me, I was forced to do farmwork from the age of 13. I never received schooling at the high school level. From the 1920s, Trust Accounts were formally established by Child Welfare. Many of us were told that our 'employer' would send back 50% of what we earned, and this money would be paid into a bank account. This did in fact happen, and I was supposed to receive it when I turned 21, but I am yet to see any of the money.

Later, I went to Vietnam, representing Australia in the war. Many of us did this. We may have served in the Australian military and fought for Australia in Korea or Vietnam, or both; but when we wanted to claim Social Security Benefits, we were told we were aliens, and, if we couldn't prove how we arrived in Australia, we would be deported!

Being part of the Historical Abuse Network has allowed me to reconnect with other child migrants through lunches, meetings and get togethers, and to advocate for our rights. Right now, the British Government has provided \$2 million to Australian child migrants to allow them to travel back to the UK to reunite with family. More information here: [www.childmigrantstrust.com/news](http://www.childmigrantstrust.com/news)



At the Child Migrants get together at Lotus Place



The Child Protection Week Awards



Brian Laing with Child Protection Week Awards



## Rockhampton Remembrance Day Ceremony, September 2017

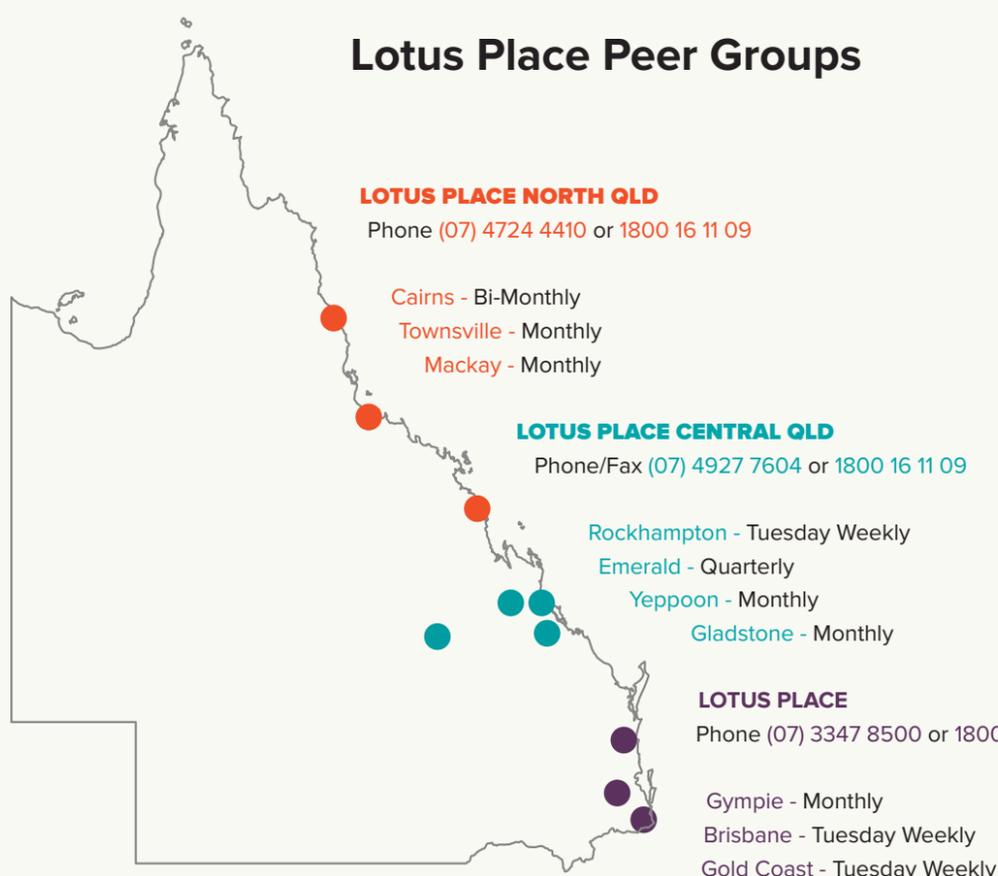


Outside Parliament House during the Child Protection Awards ceremony

*“Your realities are no longer able to be called lies, a psychiatric condition, the over-active imagination of a child or scurrilous lies. Your intent has always been to create justice and we applaud your courage and determination.”*

– Quote from an excerpt from Karyn Walsh’s Tribute to Historical Abuse Network (HAN) and all individuals who have experienced abuse in institutions, foster care and detention centres.

## Lotus Place Peer Groups



We'd love to hear from you!

If you have a story to share, we would love you to be part of the next HAN Newsletter Writing Group for our April edition next year. Please email [han@micahprojects.org.au](mailto:han@micahprojects.org.au) for more details.

### CONTACT US



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FOR PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCED ABUSE  
IN INSTITUTIONS, FOSTER CARE & DETENTION

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