

# Mia Mia

ABORIGINAL HOUSING VICTORIA  
MESSAGE STICK NEWSLETTER | DECEMBER 2013



## Interviews with our Elders

Their thoughts and recollections on Aboriginal housing



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## Owen Donald rejoins the AHV Board



Dr Owen Donald

DR OWEN DONALD was appointed to the Board of Aboriginal Housing Victoria on 25 October 2013. He also served on the Board from 2007 to 2009.

Owen has wide-ranging experience in housing policy and management. He was

Chairman of the National Housing Supply Council since its establishment in May 2008 to its demise on 8 November 2013. At the same time, he was a member of the Commonwealth Government's Urban Policy Forum and the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Social Housing and Homelessness. He was also a consultant to several government agencies in the development of affordable housing strategies, ways of financing and managing social housing, and reform of property and tenancy management in remote Indigenous communities.

In a previous role as Director of Housing in Victoria, Owen encouraged and supported the development of AHV as an independent housing provider and exemplar for Indigenous community-managed housing in Australia. He was also Chairman of

the Housing Minister's Advisory Committee that comprises the CEOs of the Commonwealth's, States' and Territories' housing authorities. Between 2000 and 2004 he was the CEO of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

Now in his early 60s, Owen's career spans roles in the private and public sectors and academia. He is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and has held a variety of governance roles over the past 20 years, including Chair of Barwon Health and Board membership of Southern Health, Homeground Services, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and the Melbourne Port Corporation. In the more distant past, he was a member of the Audit Committee of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

Owen says that his return to AHV is motivated by his ambition for AHV to grow the size and quality of its housing stock and its capacity to progressively house people. He wants to see AHV achieve a reputation for consistently excellent management, engagement with the communities it serves, and peerless response to the housing needs and wishes of Aboriginal people.

## NZ Conference tackles indigenous homelessness

FOUR AHV STAFF MEMBERS attended the VISHN (Victorian Indigenous State Homelessness Network) Homelessness conference held in New Zealand.

Tracey Winmar (Team Leader), Charlotte Dillon (Southern Housing Officer), Pauline Smith (Grampians Housing Officer) and Steph McStay (Gippsland Housing Officer), visited the North Island staying at the local Marae (an indigenous communal or sacred place) in each region. Our first trip was to the Waipareira Trust where we talked about housing with the National Urban Maori Authority (NUMA).

We were looking at the plans and strategies implemented by the local Maori authority to consider whether any could be useful to address the housing shortage in Victoria.

The group then travelled to Hamilton, to observe five new retirement homes being unveiled by the Minister for Whānau Ora (Family Health), Tariana Turia. These particular properties will be used to solely house elders.

Another great initiative was underway with the Korowai Aroha Trust who were transporting houses on to available land to provide accommodation for women and children.

In the last of the regions visited, the VISHN group were welcomed to an ancient homestead by Rueben Porter, who is a current Far North Mayoral candidate. He is exploring housing options such as building rammed-earth homes - a revived ancient building technique using raw earth materials. This particular home was built using only locally sourced materials from the land. A project to build another three homes now has NZ government support.

The trip to New Zealand has improved the teams awareness of the similarity of problems Indigenous people from all over the world are facing and has broadened their approach to tackling the housing shortage in Victoria.

# Our Elders speak on Aboriginal housing

THIS EDITION WE WOULD LIKE TO INTRODUCE the first of a series of feature articles on the thoughts and recollections of Elders about Aboriginal housing in our Community. First up, we interviewed **Aunty Fay Carter**, a Yorta Yorta/Dja Dja Wurrung Elder who is very well known and respected for her work in our Community.

## **Aunty Fay, what changes have you seen in Aboriginal housing over the years?**

Two things that come to my mind first are that AHV now looks at providing houses in better locations and is also looking at larger homes because of large families. For me personally, I moved into my AHV home after my retirement 6 years ago. At that time I was living with my daughter when I found out about the opportunity to get accommodation through AHV. They rang me to come out and take a look at my unit - I was really happy about that. And for me, as an aged person, it's given me back my independence. I think having that and your own space is very important - and I've still got lots of family around that I can draw on.

As part of my community work, I sit on the Aboriginal Family decision-making meetings with VACCA (Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency) as an Elder, when at-risk children and their families are assessed. I've found that a lot of the problems in these situations are because they haven't got appropriate housing. I think Aboriginal housing availability has had a positive impact in these situations.

## **Before AHV existed, what was it like to obtain rental accommodation?**

I used to work as a Welfare Officer with the Aboriginal Advancement League and we found it so difficult to get accommodation for Aboriginal people in the mainstream. They were all tarred with the one brush. If an agent had problems with an Aboriginal family, they would never let another one in.

I can remember one instance there was a family trying to rent this property and they were saying, "oh no, it's gone, sorry, you're too late". So we sent our non-Aboriginal secretary from the League, Kath, down to have a go. They handed her the key and said, "oh yeah, you go and have a look at it" (*laughs*). So, we found them out!



**Aunty Fay Carter**

## **What do remember about the early days of Aboriginal housing?**

I was raised in the 1930s and 40s on what they call "the flats" of the Goulburn River.

I always refer to where we lived as "my mission" because when people walked

off Cumeragunja Mission in 1939, because of the strict conditions there, they then lived as fringe dwellers in camps and make-shift accommodation.

I always thought our people were taught to be welfare recipients, you know, ring the bell, queue up, get your rations, get your blankets. And they used that hand-out situation to control people as well. Our people weren't allowed to speak their language, weren't allowed to practice their cultural activities and if they were caught doing that, they had their rations cut.

I lived on "the flats" until I was 14. Slowly there was a transition to other accommodation for my people in the Goulburn Valley area. They built cement dog boxes and they called it "Rumbalara", that's how the Rumbalara of today began. They moved people off "the flats" into these basic dormitories which were just cement walls with doors and windows cut out ... cement floors. It was preparing people to live in a "real house", you know, that seemed to be the thinking behind the government then.

And then gradually, over time, the Ministry of Housing moved families from Rumbalara into public housing. I can remember my grandmother got a Ministry home in Mooroopna - she thought she was in a palace!

## **How important is your home to your family and cultural needs?**

Well, this is a 2 bedroom unit and I've got 5 grandchildren, some who live at Swan Hill, so the spare bedroom allows me to have them over for weekends and holidays. I also have a granddaughter living on campus at uni, and she comes and stays quite often. So that's important I think, to have some space to accommodate family.

For me having other Elders each side of me makes me feel safe and secure - and their



# Meet our staff: 2013 AHV Team Profiles

## The Tenancy Management Team

THE AHV TENANCY MANAGEMENT TEAM is here to provide you, our tenants, with a high level of customer service through not only our office-based Customer Service Officers but also on the ground, locally, through our Aboriginal Housing Officers who will meet with you on a six-monthly basis to discuss your concerns and our service standards.

The Tenancy Team also handles important processes such as housing applications, waiting list management, policy management and fixed rent reviews.



**Back row:** Allan Jones, Steve Esler, Rex Rudd, Amanda Strudwick, Laurie Gatto, Michael Calvert, Stephanie McStay, Steve James, Lulu Chung and Julie-Anne Jenkins.

**Front row:** Kevin Atkinson, Lina Miao, Priscilla Williams, Kym Williams, Debra Shortis, Pauline Smith, Danny Chatfield, Tracey Winmar, Maria Scerri, Tashiana Chengubraydoo and Maria Cunningham.

## The Asset Management Team

ANY SOCIAL HOUSING ORGANISATION can only fully meet the needs of its tenants by establishing a core portfolio of quality homes, managing them well, maintaining them effectively and making sure stock is grown according to the needs of its tenants. This is the role of the AHV Asset Management Team.

To meet the demand for Aboriginal housing across Victoria, the AHV Asset Team purchases and develops properties for our people. It also coordinates cyclic maintenance and upgrade programs as part of a financially responsible strategy. Ongoing, quality, ad-hoc and after hours maintenance services are a large part of the Asset Team's day-to-day work.



**Back row:** Russell Sturtevant, Tony Broaders, Danny Fitzpatrick, Trent Hill, Peter Hartney, Karen Mercieca and Sandy Molnar.

**Front row:** Karen Schlemitz, Glyn Doherty and Kelly MacDonald.



# Shepparton tenant wins Aboriginal Carer of the Year Award

AHV IS PLEASED TO CONGRATULATE our tenant, Greater Shepparton carer, Debbie Yarnold on winning the Aboriginal Carer of the Year Award at the 2013 Robin Clark Memorial Awards.

The Victorian Government awards take place in Child Protection Week each year and recognise the significant contribution made by volunteers, individuals and groups in the children, youth and family services sector.

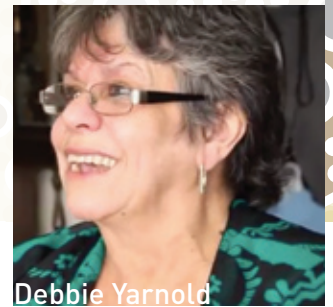
The Victorian Aboriginal Carer of the Year category focuses on a carer who provides home-based care for Aboriginal children and young people who are unable to live with their parents. Specifically, the selection panel assesses strength of linkages to Aboriginal culture; responses to their physical, emotional, cultural and social needs; and commitment to their best interests.

Debbie took responsibility for the care of her five grandchildren nearly 18 years ago, despite

her suffering from osteoarthritis for most of that time. She is a proud and humble winner, who says her real reward as their Nana is, "knowing they're safe, knowing they're getting an education, knowing that they're getting brought up with morals and manners."

Brushing aside her own disability, Debbie reckons, "my kids are keeping me from being all rusty!"

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and State Member for Shepparton, Jeanette Powell, also congratulated Debbie. Mrs Powell said, "I have met Debbie who is a wonderful caring person who provides those in her care with a safe, loving home and I am delighted she has been honoured for her commitment."



## Our staff graduates

### Certificate IV in Social Housing

AHV IS COMMITTED TO PROVIDING quality training and development for our team. This strategy is aimed at providing our tenants with the best possible services and facilities.

In conjunction with Swinburne University and our Community, the Certificate IV in Social Housing Course was developed to meet Indigenous Housing needs and uphold cultural standards. This course was designed specifically for Housing Officers who work within our Community and it has been wholly funded by AHV.

The course involved workshop and practice-based modules. Projects, content assessments and activities were designed to be relevant for the participants' workplaces in the social housing sector. Social housing and indigenous mentors added guidance and direction in all aspects of the learning process.

Skills and knowledge acquired will benefit both AHV and individual participants, alike.

From increased levels of qualified staff, consistent work practices and ensuring legal commitments for our organisation - to a nationally recognised qualification and increased job satisfaction for our staff.

We are pleased to note that of 16 graduates, 9 were AHV staff. The course extended over 18 months, from March 2012 culminating with graduation in October 2013.

At an official presentation on Wednesday, October 16, at AHV Head Office in North Fitzroy, graduates were officially awarded their certificates and sashes by Lucy Brownless and Janice Gunstone from Swinburne University. AHV Tenancy Manager, Debra Shortis and AHV Director, Graeme Austin, were also on hand to congratulate the proud achievers.



----- TRACKED FROM PAGE 3

visitors and families include me. You know, that was our greatest asset, when I was growing up, that extended family environment. It was a community family that looked after you.

### How do you find the quality and services provided by AHV?

My home is well-built, it's compact, easy to look after with a little backyard. I've got a good size garage, which is sometimes not too good because every one says, "have you got room in your garage to stick something?" (*laughs*). But that doesn't worry me, it makes you feel good that you can do that for them. And I've got a little garden shed there. I have pride in my home and keep good care of everything.

I've had to call Maintenance a couple of times and I've found them to be very good. They

respond very quickly. I had a couple of issues with the heating which was a very simple thing, just changing the battery (*laughs*). But I know how to do that know!

### In your opinion, how important is AHV to the Victorian Aboriginal Community?

When I think that this (home) is owned by one of our own organisations, that makes me feel good - in that they've (AHV) achieved so much and grown to a stage where you can feel proud, really! You know, there is a stigma that goes with Government housing. Because this property belongs to our body, our organisation, it just removes that stigma. That it's not welfare housing, it's them (AHV) providing housing for their people.

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS with our readers about Aboriginal housing over the years we'd love to hear from you. Contact your Housing Officer to find out more.**

## AHV staff engage in Cultural Awareness Program

TO FURTHER ADVANCE AHV'S VISION and to ensure our staff are able to provide culturally appropriate services, they have engaged in the "Our Place" Cultural Awareness and Competence Program on November 12 and 13 of this year.

This program transforms teachings into effective practices of respectful engagement. Ones that empower, strengthen relationships and assist staff to work closely with our Aboriginal communities across the state.

Key objectives of the program are to:

- Provide a better understanding of culturally appropriate practices.
- Provide a platform of knowledge to assist management and understanding of Aboriginal Housing.
- Provide the appropriate responses to decision making for Aboriginal Housing needs.

The program was delivered in two parts. Part one focused on the historical journey of our Aboriginal community and the impact of colonisation through European contact. The social and socio-economic impacts upon our community through that journey, the struggles undertaken and the achievements made in response.

This module also touched on Aboriginal understanding of land connection through association of groups, language and cultural practices.

Part two of the program was largely about practical application of teachings to workplace processes and procedures to develop strong individual competencies for our staff to fulfil the aspirations of AHV's role and vision.

The program was delivered by Dr Doris Paton, a Gunai/Monaro Ngarigo woman. Dr Paton is a mother and grandmother whose family lives in Gippsland. She has worked extensively throughout the State delivering a range of programs.



## Our Holiday Season closing dates

THIS YEAR, AHV HEAD OFFICE will be closed for the holiday and festive season over the following dates: December 23 until December 27, 2013. Reopening on Monday, December 30, 2013.

If you have an emergency during closure dates our Maintenance Lines will still be available - through our After Hours Emergency Service - see page 8.





# Secret Kids' Business



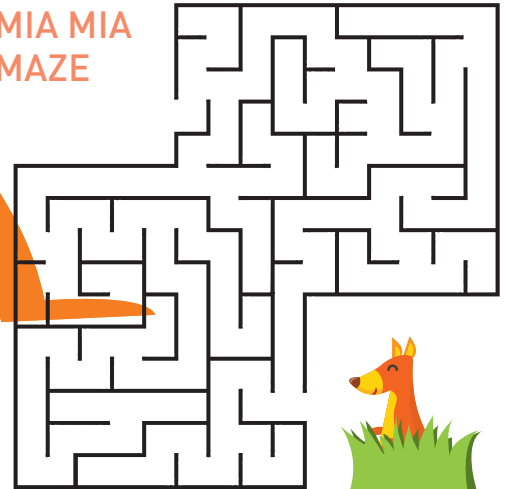
## ABORIGINAL WORD SEARCH

B U S I N E S S U M  
 Y O R T Y O R T A O  
 M U R N O N G F E O  
 P O C T C E W O M R  
 E O B R C V A O U A  
 E Y S N E H O T T B  
 E N A S A E K B U O  
 P D X L U O K A W O  
 H I A T X M L L H L  
 I G I Y N I G L O W

BUSINESS  
 CREEK  
 DANCE  
 EMU  
 FOOTBALL  
 GALAH  
 MOORABOOL  
 MURNONG  
 POSSUM  
 YORTYORTA



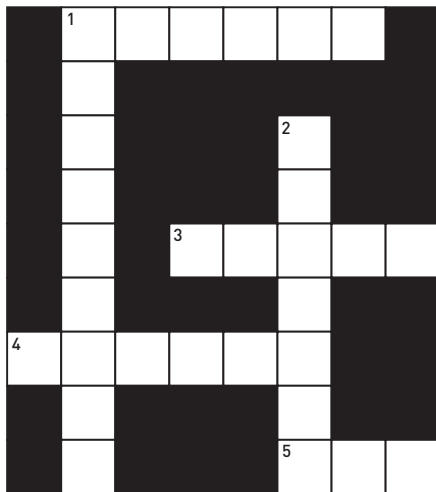
## MIA MIA MAZE



Help Big Red find her lost joey.

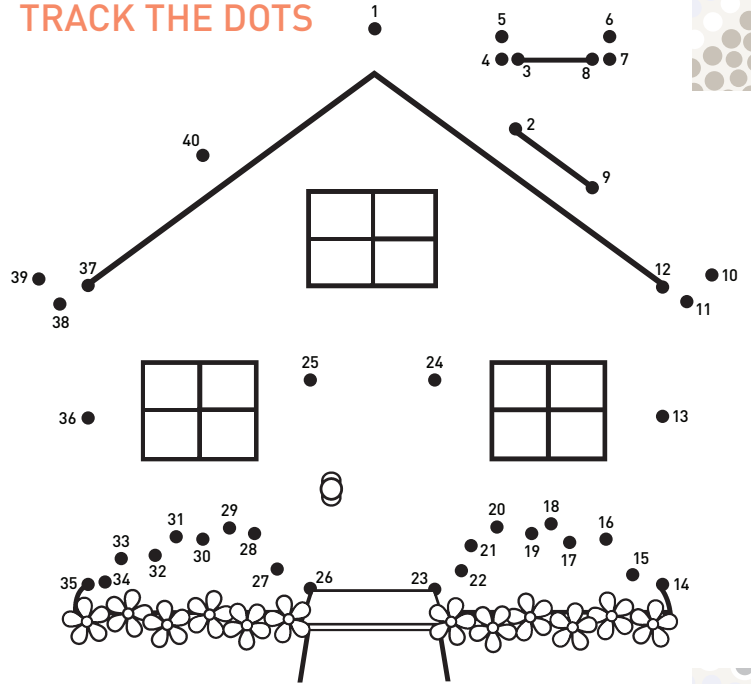


## MIA MIA CROSSWORD



- Across**
1. Aboriginal word for a "house".
  3. This big river flows through Wurundjeri Country.
  4. This cute furry animal lives in a burrow.
  5. Kangaroos like to do this.
- Down**
2. Aboriginal footy.
  3. An Australian plant with red flowers.

## TRACK THE DOTS



## DEADLY COLOUR-IN





## TENANT Yarn



### What is "Temporary Absence"?

Temporary Absence may be approved under special circumstances for a maximum of 6 months. AHV will consider special circumstances for sole tenants such as the need to enter a nursing home, respite care or rehabilitation.

If your absence, due to special circumstances, incurs further accommodation costs, you may be eligible for a reduced rent charge.

If special circumstances do not apply, a tenant must still seek approval for their extended absence, e.g. an overseas holiday.

You must direct your request for all Temporary Absence to the AHV Tenant Manager through your Aboriginal Housing Officer.

You can view further details of our policy on Temporary Absence from our website at: <http://ahvic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/AHV-Chapter-6-Temporary-Absence5.pdf>

For all your repairs and maintenance needs please call one of the following AHV Maintenance Lines:

**General metro: (03) 9403 2166**

**Regional: 1300 664 392 (cost of local call)**

**Emergency after hours:  
(03) 9403 2171**

## AHV faces



Lee Ann Wortley

HI, MY NAME IS LEE ANN WORTLEY. In June 2013 I was privileged and honoured to secure my current position with Aboriginal Housing Victoria as Team Leader of the Tenant Facilitation Team.

I was born in Mount Isa Queensland where I

spent most of my younger years, later moving to Brisbane to continue my secondary schooling.

I come from a very long line of strong Aboriginal women - as my Nana is one of them - and we are Wangkamadla women. My Nana and Granddad's lands are west of Mt Isa and we all have very strong connection to country. Both are now gone but never forgotten.

I am a proud single mother of 4 children and a Nana of 2 beautiful granddaughters (from my son's family) who still reside in Queensland.

In 1992, I moved to Hopevale Aboriginal Community, where I met and married my children's father. There, I worked as a family resources officer and a sports and recreations officer for 3 years living outside the community on our land. Later, we moved to Millaa Millaa, which is on the Atherton Tablelands. Living there for 16 years, my focus was on raising my children.

Moving back to Brisbane in 2003, I began my work career at Indigenous Services, dealing with Native Title Service. I was there for 9 years and worked for several Indigenous organisations, including Indigenous Community Volunteers and the Indigenous Land Corporation. As a member of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Advocacy Services, I served as a Director of the Board for a term of two years. I'm excited to now be part of the AHV team and look forward to providing housing assistance to my sisters and brothers across Victoria.



Aboriginal Housing Victoria

**Hours of Business:** Monday to Friday, 8:30am – 4:30pm. **Address:** Narrandjeri House, 125-127 Scotchmer Street, North Fitzroy, VIC 3068. **Telephone:** (03) 9403 2100.

**Fax:** (03) 9403 2122. **Email:** info@ahvic.org.au **Aboriginal Housing Victoria** is a not-for-profit organisation that works to deliver accessible, affordable, appropriate and secure housing to meet the social, cultural and economic aspirations of the Victorian Aboriginal Community.