



# **Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce**

**Final Report**  
**January 2012**



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## Foreword

In a modern and civilised society, access to public records that document important aspects of an individual's past and enable them to connect with both their personal and their family history is regarded as a human right; not a rationed privilege. It was in this spirit of open-minded cooperation that the Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce came into existence in February 2001.

The Taskforce was established as part of the Victorian Government's response to the *Bringing Them Home: report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (the *Bringing Them Home*) report. The essence of its purpose was in response to Recommendation 23 of the report to 'establish Records Taskforces in each state and territory to assist members of the Stolen Generations in tracing their families'.

For this final report from the Taskforce, it is appropriate to reflect on some key milestones over the course of the last decade: substantial initiatives aimed at providing that essential assistance.

In 2001 the *Finding Your Story* Community Forums were held at locations throughout Victoria: an important first step in informing communities about the existence of records held by government and non-government bodies and how to access them. Perhaps more importantly for the Taskforce, these forums provided a much clearer understanding of the barriers to access facing communities at a local level.

In 2005 a resource to assist Stolen Generations members find information on the location of their records was published. *Finding Your Story: A resource Manual to the Records of the Stolen Generations in Victoria* contained valuable information on where records are kept, how to access them, and how to understand their contents. It is gratifying to see that this well-used resource will shortly be updated and made available fully online: one example of an initiative that will continue beyond the life of the Taskforce.

In 2006 the Taskforce published the *wilam naling ... knowing who you are ... Improving Access to Records of the Stolen Generations* report to the Victorian Government. This report provided clear and practicable solutions to the barriers still facing Indigenous people searching for their personal records. From this report came a profusion of activity: the development of the Common Access Guidelines to improve and enhance Indigenous people's access to records across the disparate recordkeeping agencies, now adopted for implementation by Connecting Home is one very notable such activity. Another is the *Know Your History, Preserve Your Culture* training programs that have been highly successful in promoting awareness of Victorian resources available for Stolen Generations family research, held across Victoria in 2007 and again during 2010 and 2011. Supporting these activities the Koorie Index of Names database facilitates access to government records and provides links for Indigenous people searching for families, culture, land and community.

As the Taskforce reaches its tenth anniversary it is an appropriate time to report on and acknowledge the full spectrum of activities and milestones achieved under the auspices of the Taskforce; and also to hand the baton to those organisations that will continue the many initiatives commenced during this period, as the Taskforce publishes this its final report. While a great many positive changes have occurred in the last decade there continues to be a real and pressing need for organisations to work effectively together to improve access to records and to address other barriers to access for Indigenous people.

A measure of success of the Taskforce is that there are projects that will continue beyond this point; that will continue to deliver services to, and reduce barriers for, Indigenous people; that will empower them to take the necessary steps to fill gaps in their past and to progress through the stages of healing, reunion and participation.

I take pleasure in delivering this final report of the Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce and wish the participating organisations the very best in their continued work for the community.

**Jason Eades**

**Chairperson,  
Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce**

## Executive summary

This is the final report of the Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce.

Since its launch in 2001, the Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce (“the Taskforce”) has been a major initiative of the Victorian Government’s response to the *Bringing Them Home: report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (the *Bringing Them Home*) report. The Taskforce was established as a response to Recommendation 23 of the Report to ‘establish Records Taskforces in each state and territory to assist members of the Stolen Generations in tracing their families’. To this end the Taskforce has been active in addressing access barriers facing Indigenous people.

In 2006 the Taskforce published the *wilam naling ... knowing who you are ... Improving Access to Records of the Stolen Generations* report to the Victorian Government. This report was the product of extensive community consultation. It envisaged an overall framework for improving access to records of the Stolen Generations and suggested clear and practicable solutions to the major barriers facing Indigenous people searching for their personal records. With the *wilam naling* report providing this framework, the primary focus of the Taskforce has subsequently been to support and oversee the implementation of the recommendations of that report.

Key issues identified by the Koorie community in the *wilam naling* report focused on the major access barriers to information. These include a lack of awareness in Stolen Generations and Koorie communities about the existence of records, their whereabouts, people’s rights to access records and the support services available.

The Victorian Government (through Aboriginal Affairs Victoria) provided grants to fund various *wilam naling* initiatives to address the majority of the community identified access barriers highlighted in the report.

The Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) Koorie Index of Names database has now become a successful and well utilised resource which has indexed over 110 files consisting of 17,390 pages, and recording 13,872 individual names increasing accessibility to government records in PROV’s collection and providing links for Indigenous people searching for families, culture, land and community.

A long held goal of the Taskforce was the production of a resource to assist Stolen Generations members find information on the location of their records which can be dispersed across various organisations and government departments. *Finding Your Story: A resource Manual to the Records of the Stolen Generations in Victoria* (published in 2005) contains valuable information on where records are kept, how to access them, and how to understand their contents. Currently under revision, it will be republished in 2012 as an online resource on the PROV website.

A high priority project was the development of Common Access Guidelines to improve and enhance Indigenous people’s access to records across the disparate recordkeeping agencies. Through extensive consultation and input from Taskforce members and key stakeholders, a set of nine Common Access Principles has been developed and incorporated into a Memorandum of Understanding. These core Common Access Principles will be fundamental to reducing barriers to better records access to Stolen Generations members across government and non-government recordkeeping agencies.

Since the formation of the Taskforce, options for culturally sensitive supported release of records and information have increased. Several Taskforce member organisations now provide Healing and Case Management programs, counselling and supported information release programs.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) Family Information Networks & Discovery (FIND) unit has developed a program and procedures manual for staff inclusive of Former Ward procedures ensuring records and information are managed in a sensitive manner. FIND has also developed and implemented a set of practice standards designed for use by community service organisations in Victoria. The Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework developed by Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is a set of practice standards for community service organisations in Victoria, designed to improve service delivery and welfare outcomes for Aboriginal children and their families.

FIND also works actively in supporting Stolen Generations and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by adoption, wardship or other family separation. Working with a range of Aboriginal agencies FIND provides a no fee service for Indigenous clients to assist them to access personal and family information, records and support.

Much work has been done to improve awareness and promote resources and organisations that provide access to records about and to Stolen Generations. PROV's *Know Your History, Preserve Your Culture* training programs have been highly successful in promoting awareness of Victorian resources, records and programs available for Stolen Generations family research. Delivered in partnership with several Taskforce members throughout metropolitan and regional Victoria, Indigenous groups are now directly contacting PROV to request the program in their community. The success of this program has been the opportunity for groups to hear and have access to the major archival, collecting and support organisations in the same forum. Government and non-government agencies have made significant inroads in offering better services to Indigenous people seeking access to personal records. This will only improve as agencies adopt the Common Access Guidelines & Memorandum of Understanding.

These achievements reflect the energy and collaboration of many people and organisations across the public and community sectors. Taken as a whole they have greatly improved the ability of Stolen Generations to understand about the existence of, and have appropriate access to, an important part of their recent history.



## Introduction

The Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce was established by the Victorian Government in 2001, in response to Recommendation 23 of the 1997 *Bringing Them Home: report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (the *Bringing Them Home* report). The report advised state, territory and Commonwealth governments to establish and fund records taskforces to address the vital issue of providing access to records relating to Indigenous people's stories, and particularly the records that might help members of the Stolen Generations to trace their birth families and histories.

Launched on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2001, the aim of the Taskforce was to provide part of the Victorian Government's response to the recommendations of the National Inquiry.

The original Terms of Reference of the Taskforce are set out in the *Bringing them Home* report. These were to:

1. Develop common access guidelines to Indigenous personal, family and community records as appropriate to the jurisdiction and in accordance with established privacy principles;
2. Advise the government whether any church or other non-government record-holding agency should be assisted to preserve and index its records and administer access;
3. Advise government on memoranda of understanding for dealing with inter-state enquiries and for the inter-state transfer of files and information;
4. Advise government and churches generally on policy relating to access to and uses of Indigenous personal, family and community information;
5. Advise government on the need to introduce or amend legislation to put these policies and practices into place.

The Taskforce was formed through cooperation between Public Record Office Victoria and Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and incorporated wide representation from the Koorie community, government and non-government organisations that hold records relevant to the Stolen Generations.

The Taskforce also aimed to foster co-operation between record-holders and record-searchers to address the obstacles facing Indigenous people wishing to access records relating to themselves and their families.

Since its inception the Taskforce has been comprised of representatives from a range of government agencies, community services organisations and service providers to the Stolen Generations.

Organisations that have had representation on the Taskforce since 2001 include:

- Aboriginal Affairs Victoria
- Anglicare Victoria
- Melbourne Museum
  - Bunjilaka Aboriginal Centre, Melbourne Museum
- Children's Welfare Association Victoria
- Centre for Excellence in Child & Family Welfare Inc
- Connecting Home
- Department of Human Services:
  - Archival Unit



- Adoption Information Services
  - Freedom of Information Unit
  - Koori Health Unit
  - Indigenous Initiatives Unit (Child Protection & Juvenile Justice)
- Department of Justice
  - Registry of Births Deaths & Marriages
  - Indigenous Issues Unit
- Koorie Heritage Trust
- Link-Up Victoria
- MacBeth Genealogy Services
- MacKillop Family Services
- National Archives of Australia
- Public Record Office Victoria (Secretariat)
- State Library of Victoria
- Stolen Generations Victoria
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
- Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)
- Victorian Aboriginal community Services Association Limited (VACSAL)
- Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS)

## Early Taskforce initiatives

Throughout 2001-2002 the Taskforce undertook a number of research and community consultative initiatives involving government and non government record holders and service providers to the Indigenous community. The Taskforce consulted with Koorie communities across the state via “Finding Your Story” community forums to share information about accessing records and to provide a venue for communities to raise any issues they might have about finding, using and accessing records for the Taskforce to address.

The “Finding Your Story” Community Forums’ aim was to inform the Koorie community about what records relevant to their search for their stories are kept by government and non-government bodies, and how they can be accessed. These forums also provided an opportunity for the community to raise issues or concerns about access to their records, and share their own experiences in finding their stories that might be of use to others. The *Finding Your Story Community Forums Summary Report* was published in 2001 to document the findings and outcomes of the Forums.

### ***Finding Your Story: a Resource Manual to the records of the Stolen Generations in Victoria***

***Finding Your Story: a Resource Manual to the records of the Stolen Generations in Victoria*** outlined services and resources to help members of the Koorie community access their records. It was published in 2005 in response to issues raised by the community about records access.

This included the need to:

- Develop awareness of different record keeping systems within government departments and agencies;
- Provide information about costs incurred by members of the Stolen Generations seeking information from government departments and agencies;
- Produce a directory specifying the nature of records held by various agencies and access procedures; and
- Develop promotional and educational materials to assist raising community awareness of records issues.

*Finding Your Story* provides a comprehensive and cohesive resource of government and non-government record and archival collections in Victoria relevant to the Stolen Generations and their families. It seeks to assist in breaking down the barriers that surround access to records. Finding Your Story provides a useful and practical resource, written and presented in a clear, concise and culturally appropriate manner which was achieved by extensive consultation and input from Koorie user groups.

### ***Public Art Commission***

Also in 2005 a Taskforce initiative, in conjunction with Public Record Office Victoria, was to commission a major artwork to make the Victorian Archives Centre an inviting place for Koorie people to visit. Vicki Cousin’s piece *Untitled 2005*<sup>1</sup> was selected as a piece of work that would reflect PROV’s role in preserving Victoria’s archival heritage and making public records accessible. The three etchings are on permanent display in the VAC foyer to ensure PROV is ‘an inviting and culturally appropriate place for Koorie people to visit’.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2 for Vicki Cousins’ interpretation of her artwork.

## The 'wilam naling' report

Improving access to records was identified as one of the most critical issues for Indigenous people. Information they contain can be vital in reconnection to family, community and establishing identity.

In June 2006 the Taskforce was funded by Aboriginal Affairs Victoria to publish a report to the Victorian Government: ***wilam naling ... knowing who you are ... Improving Access to Records of the Stolen Generations***. Coming from the Boon wurrung/woi wurrung language, *wilam* means 'place/family/kin' and *naling* means 'to know'.

The primary objective of the report is stated thus: *to effect change in Victoria so that every Indigenous person is able to access information that will help them to establish their family background and their place in the Koorie community. It acknowledges that records are an important way for people to find out and know who they are.*

Key issues identified by the Koorie community in the *wilam naling* report focused on the major access barriers to information. These include a lack of awareness in Stolen Generations and Koorie communities about the existence of records, their whereabouts, people's rights to access records and the support services available.

Specifically, the following issues were identified:

- A lack of name indexes to make locating records easier
- The dispersal of records across a range of government and non-government organisations
- Discrepancies between access policies of government and non-government record holding Organisations
- A lack of options for Indigenous people to receive culturally appropriate supported release of records
- Restriction of access to identifying third-party information, due to strict or narrow interpretations of privacy and freedom of information legislation that are not culturally appropriate
- Extremely limited access to information and support for Indigenous people in custody (many of whom have been directly affected by child removal)
- The higher cost of record searching for people in regional Victoria
- Difficulties accessing records held by institutions in other states.

The report provided a framework to improve access and reduce barriers to records held by Victorian government and non-government agencies.

Since the publication of this report the primary focus of the Taskforce has been to support and oversee the implementation of the recommendations from the report.

Appendix 1 details the full set of wilam naling recommendations.

The following section details the achievements of the Taskforce against those recommendations which fell under the jurisdiction of the Taskforce.

# Wilam naling: Summary of Achievements

## **Recommendation 1**

*That Victoria establishes a new access framework for records affecting Indigenous people.*

The 2006 *wilam naling...knowing who you are: Improving Access to Records of the Stolen Generations* report recommended the establishment of a new access framework in Victoria for records affecting Indigenous people. This included 'the universal adoption of Common Access Guidelines by all record-holders to govern the release of information to Indigenous people'. The report also recommended that a 'series of memoranda of understanding be established with service providers and government and non-government record-holders that will regulate the processes for release of information'.

## **Results Achieved**

Public Record Office Victoria received funding from Aboriginal Affairs Victoria to undertake a project to develop the Memoranda of Understanding for Common Access Guidelines for implementation by Connecting Home Ltd (replacing Stolen Generations Victoria Ltd in March 2010). This project included extensive consultation, participation and input with Taskforce members and key stakeholders:

- Aboriginal Affairs Victoria
- Connecting Home
- Department of Human Services
- Koorie Heritage Trust
- Link-Up Victoria
- Museum Victoria
- National Archives of Australia
- Public Record Office Victoria
- Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages
- State Library of Victoria

The final MoU provides a framework for an Information and Referral Service through Connecting Home Ltd and incorporates nine key Common Access Principles to support records access to Stolen Generations members:

**Principle 1:** The right of every person, upon proof of identity only, to receive a copy of all records found relating to them.

**Principle 2:** No application or copying fee or any other charge to be imposed.

**Principle 3:** Applicants will receive all relevant records within a 45 working day period from the date all access conditions are met, with any failure to comply subject to review and appeal.

**Principle 4:** A person denied the right of access or having any other grievance concerning his or her information to be entitled to seek a review and, if still dissatisfied, to appeal the decision or other matter free of charge.

**Principle 5:** The right of every person to receive information, both orally and in writing, at the time of application about Indigenous and other appropriate support and assistance services available in Victoria.

**Principle 6:** Every applicant will be advised of the nature and context of the information requested and the possibility of distress that may result from accessing their records.

**Principle 7:** Upon request, applicants will be entitled to have their local Stolen Generations support network, e.g. service provider, counsellor or case manager, involved in the process of locating and releasing records.

**Principle 8:** Every applicant has the right to receive all personal identifying information about them, including information which is necessary to establish the identity of family members (e.g. parent's identifying details such as name, community of origin, date of birth). This is subject to relevant legislation.

**Principle 9:** Parties to this MoU will work collaboratively to identify and address policy and procedural barriers that adversely impact upon a person's access to records as identified in Principle 1.

## **Recommendation 2**

*That Public Record Office Victoria undertakes an indexing project of all relevant Victorian records in its custody to produce an Indigenous name index.*

Acknowledging that the very nature of the arrangement of archival records provides a barrier to access, the creation of useable name indexes to assist locating relevant records and making the process easier has been a high priority.

## **Results Achieved**

Public Record Office Victoria undertook a major project to index relevant Victorian records in its custody and to produce an Indigenous name index. The index (known as the Koorie Index of Names, or KIN), is an ongoing project which enables Aboriginal people to not only find information about themselves, but also to find out more about their families and their country.

A number of record series were identified as having great potential personal value and cultural significance to members of the Stolen Generations, as well as the wider Indigenous community in Victoria. Particular attention was given to prioritising improved access to records for people affected by past government removal policies. These include the nineteenth century Aboriginal Protectorate records and the Aboriginal Welfare Board from the mid-twentieth century.

While these records were identified as significant, they were an under-utilised resource, largely due to there being no name index and the difficult and time consuming process of finding information within them.

The KIN database was created using the Microsoft Access application with searchable fields and is based on the National Archives of Australia “*Bringing Them Home*” Index.

The KIN database includes:

- Names of Aboriginal people
- Names of non-Aboriginal people related to or associated with Aboriginal people
- Names of missions and institutions where Aboriginal people were placed
- Places where Aboriginal people have lived or visited

The project was led through PROV’s Koorie Records Unit, and included the recruitment of volunteers to index the names.

At the time of drafting this report the KIN project has indexed over 110 files consisting of 17,390 pages, and recording 15,506 individual names increasing accessibility to government records in PROV’s collection and providing links for Indigenous people searching for families, culture, land and community.

The KIN database was officially launched at the Victorian Archives Centre in Melbourne on Friday 19 December 2008, by Community Development Parliamentary Secretary Ms Lily D’Ambrosio on behalf of Minister Richard Wynn.

The KIN database is accessible to the public only in PROV’s Reading Rooms located at the Victorian Archives Centre and the Ballarat Archives Centre.

## Launch of KIN Database 19<sup>th</sup> December 2008



KIN Project Officer Simon Flagg with Justine Heazlewood, Parliamentary Secretary Ms Lily D'Ambrosio and Taskforce member Jim Berg.



PROV KIN volunteers with certificates of appreciation for their work compiling information for the database.

### **Recommendation 3**

*That the Department of Human Services (DHS) undertakes an archival Arrangement and Description project on critical records relating to child removal to facilitate better access, including the creation of an electronic cross-referenced name index.*

The Department of Human Services is the most important government agency holding records pertaining to the removal of Indigenous children from their families.

### **Results Achieved**

The Family Information, Networks and Discovery (FIND) unit within the Department of Human Services assists people to access personal and family information, records and support about past Wardship and Adoption, and provides counselling information about Donor Conception in the state of Victoria. Normal registration fees for services to former Wards of State or Indigenous clients to access these services are waived.

FIND works actively with a range of Aboriginal agencies involved in supporting the Stolen Generations and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by adoption, wardship or other family separation. These agencies include; Care Leavers Australia Network, CLAN, Link Up Victoria, Koorie Heritage Trust - Family History Service, Open Place.

FIND has developed a program and procedures manual for staff inclusive of Former Ward procedures ensuring records and information are managed in a sensitive manner.

The DHS Corporate, Integrity, Information & Resolutions unit (CIIRu) also coordinates and manages enquiries in the area of FOI (Freedom of Information) and can provide records to people.

Additionally, the FIND program staff have completed "Building Aboriginal Cultural Competency" Training (a DHS training initiative).

#### Aboriginal cultural competence framework

The 'Aboriginal cultural competence framework' is a set of practice standards for community service organisations in Victoria, designed to improve service delivery and welfare outcomes for Aboriginal children and their families. Developed in conjunction with VACCA the Framework will guide mainstream Community Service Organisations in the development of management strategies, policies and direct practice which will provide better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

A guidebook discusses the principles and policy background of the Framework, which was developed as part of the service reforms of the Victorian Children, Youth and Families Act 2005. Chapters examine Aboriginal child removal policies, the importance of culture, the role of culture in resilience, culture as a human right, supporting Aboriginal self-determination, collaboration with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, engaging with clients in a culturally-sensitive way, and the new system for meeting registration standards for cultural competence. The 'Aboriginal cultural competence matrix' is included in an attached booklet, a check list of standards on the organisations' approach, actions needed, and feedback mechanisms. Cultural competence requires time and a whole-of-agency approach and should be considered a journey not a destination.



## Recommendation 6

*That the Victorian Government:*

- *take active steps to encourage nongovernment record-holders to open access to their records for Indigenous searchers wishing to reconnect with family or culture*
- *fund the development and delivery of information resources and training programs for non-government record-holding agencies*
- *provide resources in the form of grants to non-government record-holding agencies to undertake preservation, indexing and archiving projects of information relevant to members of the Stolen Generations*
- *ensure these grants are conditional upon the record-holding agency adopting the Common Access Guidelines and entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Information and Referral Service.*

## Results Achieved

### Training for non-government record holders

In 2007 PROV delivered 8 'Know Your History, Preserve Your Culture', free two-day recordkeeping workshops addressed aspects of recommendations 4 and 6 of the wilamaling report. The three main themes of the two-day workshop included:

- cultural awareness training for government record-holders
- training for non-government record-holders
- promoting good recordkeeping in Koorie communities

The program was delivered throughout regional Victoria including, Lakes Entrance, Warrnambool, Mildura, Swan Hill, Ballarat, Shepparton, Bendigo, Rosebud and Melbourne.

Due to its success the workshops were relaunched in 2011 as part of PROV's Koorie Archival Support Program. They were delivered in partnership with members of the Taskforce organisations who volunteered staff participation in the delivery of workshops throughout regional Victoria. Participating Taskforce members included presenters from:

Public Record Office Victoria, Koorie Records Unit

Koorie Heritage Trust, Koorie Family History Service

State Library of Victoria

National Archives of Australia

Museum Victoria

Connecting Home

Monash University

The two day workshops were designed to contain both practical advice and hands on experience in research and collections care:

*Discovering Your Past Through Records* provided an overview of resources available in Victoria for researching Indigenous family history and as well as healing programs, research and assistance programs.

*Caring for Your Collections* provided advice on basic care, preservation and cataloguing and included information on new innovative projects under development allowing Indigenous people to interact with official records online.



### The wilam naling Small Grants scheme

In response to Recommendation 6 of the wilam naling report, a Small Grant Scheme was developed for non-government organisations to better enhance, capture and preserve Aboriginal records.

Funding of \$39,000 for the wilam naling Small Grants scheme was provided by AAV to support community-based projects that recognised the importance of improving access and preservation of Aboriginal records.

In 2007, 13 non-government record-holding agencies received wilam naling Small Grants for a variety of projects including preservation, archiving and cataloguing, digitising and indexing.

In 2011 a further \$39,000 was granted to an additional 9 community organisations to continue work in the research and preservation of Indigenous history.

Overall the wilam naling Small Grants projects were successful in encouraging organisations to better improve recordkeeping structures. All of the projects increased accessibility and awareness of Indigenous material to the Indigenous community, while ensuring the preservation of the records.

#### Training for *Bringing Them Home* workers

Taskforce members also participated as regular presenters to raise awareness and provide information on how *Bringing Them Home* workers could access information and records vital to Stolen Generations people. A key resource was the *Finding Your Story* publication.

#### Koorie Heritage Trust

In 2007, the Koorie Heritage Trust became a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). As an RTO, the Trust aims to deliver nationally accredited qualifications to both the Koorie community and the broader non-Koorie community. The Trust also provides Cultural Awareness training and programs as well as information and tours for teachers and student groups.

Through the Koorie Family History Service the Trust provides client-based services to research genealogical information and build family trees. The development of a family tree database will be a valuable tool for Koories searching for family, cultural and historical knowledge.

## **Recommendation 8**

*That the Victorian Government release a policy statement which:*

- *commits the Victorian Government to the standards for records access set out in Recommendation 25 of Bringing Them Home, and implementation of a new access framework to help members of the Stolen Generations locate and access their records simply, efficiently and at no cost*
- *commits the Victorian Government to a national leadership role in the improvement of access to records held in different jurisdictions*
- *commits to the improvement of supported release of government records and integrated government services to assist Indigenous people, including those in custody, in re-establishing connections to family and culture.*

## **Results Achieved**

### The Trust and Technology initiative

The 'Trust and Technology: building an archival system for Indigenous oral memory' project (T&T Project) was an Australian Research Council Linkage project, with a partnership between Caulfield School of Information Technology, Monash University, Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies, Monash University, Public Record Office of Victoria, the Koorie Heritage Trust Inc., the Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce, and the Australian Society of Archivists Indigenous Issues Special Interest Group. The focus of the T&T project was on enabling Koorie communities to archive oral memory, and to engage with existing government and institutional archives on their terms. The T&T Project commenced in 2004.

Trust and Technology has its origins in a desire to build trust and understanding between the archives community and Koorie communities. It is based on a recognition that Koorie communities rely on sources of knowledge and methods of transmission that differ greatly from the knowledge frameworks of the wider community. The project's goal was to understand the implications for archives of this fundamental difference in knowledge systems, and to enable the development of alternative systems and services which reflect the priorities of Koorie communities.

The project was the vision of Jim Berg, Chief Executive Officer of the Koorie Heritage Trust from 1985 to 2003. In 2002 Mr Berg approached the Public Record Office Victoria and Monash University with the proposal for a research project which applied the perspectives of Koorie communities, recordkeeping practitioners and researchers to the challenge of developing trusted archival systems for Indigenous oral memory. This idea formed the basis of a successful Australian Research Council Linkage project: Trust and Technology: Building an archival system for Indigenous oral memory. Industry partners were the Public Record Office Victoria, the Koorie Heritage Trust Inc, the Australian Society of Archivists Indigenous Issues Special Interest Group and the Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce. Monash University was represented through the Caulfield School of Information Technology and the Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies.

Alongside these developments record keepers have begun applying digital information technologies to a range of scenarios, including projects to establish digital and federated repositories. Record keepers recognise, but are only just beginning to explore in detail, the capacity of digital information technologies to not only enhance accessibility of archives, but also to support new relationships between archival services providers and their clients.

In this context the Trust and Technology research project sought to understand the priorities of Koorie communities in relation to their own knowledge, and to consider new archival systems and services which embrace Koorie frameworks of knowledge, memory and evidence.

Stage three further developed one of the key outcomes of the earlier stages; the need expressed for a means of commenting on or contesting the version of events portrayed by records in archives. This has been called a Koorie Archival System. This is a variation of the project's original intention of prototyping a system for archiving Koorie oral memory.

PROV, in partnership with Monash University, Koorie Heritage Trust Inc and including National Archives of Australia for content, received funding from the Collaborative Internet Innovation Fund (cIIF) to develop the Koorie Archival System as an online space for Koorie community members and archivists to partner in arranging, describing and interpreting government records. The Koorie Archival System (KAS) Project aimed to create a shared, collaborative space to bring together and make accessible records relating to Koorie communities and individuals, including written records, oral testimony, photographs, audio and video recordings from government, community and personal sources.

The project aimed to create a collaborative, shared, accessible and transparent virtual archive of Koorie history via a Wiki, bringing together, enhancing and making accessible significant records for public use. Resources included written records, oral testimonies, photographs, audio and video from government, the community and personal sources. People will have the opportunity to add records and stories, annotate, interpret, edit, provide context and add personal views to content sourced from records, and to link them to related government records.

The project aimed to pioneer a model enabling archival institutions to work in partnership with communities in the development of equitable archival record management practices by shifting to a practice of user provided, owned and controlled content.

As a result of the Koorie Archival System, individuals and communities will have access to a greater range of archival information regarding Koorie history, heritage and culture, and Koorie people will be empowered to contribute to this valuable collection.

It will also enable Indigenous people a mechanism for challenging "official records", to set the record straight, comment upon the inaccuracies or limitations of official records, contribute family narratives that expand upon or give context to records in archives, and present their version of events alongside the official one. Through the site they will be able to annotate, interpret, correct, or provide context for information content sourced from official records.

This rich, multi-layered resource will support knowledge sharing, family link-ups, land claims, and regeneration of culture and communities. Koorie people will be able to add their records and stories and link them to related government records.

## **Recognition of achievements**

The work of the Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce has received acknowledgement and recognition throughout the media for a number of the projects outlined within this report. Of particular note are the following awards:

### **Australian Society of Archivists Mander Jones Awards 2006**

Category 1A: Publication making the greatest contribution to the archives profession in Australia written by or on behalf of a corporate body for the report:

wilam naling ... knowing who you are ... Improving access to records of the Stolen Generations: a report to the Victorian Government from the Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce, Department for Victorian Communities, Melbourne, 2006.

### **Arts Portfolio Leadership Awards 2007**

Arts Victoria recognises the achievements of individuals or teams who have contributed to the performance of the Arts portfolio. The Koorie Records Unit won in the category of Leadership in Community for its 2007 'Know your history, preserve your culture' workshops.

## **Moving Forward**

Issues still remain in regard to improving access to records in non-government agencies due to the dispersed nature of records and the material having not been fully catalogued and indexed. The following are initiatives that aim to ensure that the momentum achieved to date with these many projects will continue beyond the life of the Taskforce.

### ***The Victorian Aboriginal Advisory Group***

The Victorian Aboriginal Advisory Group (VAAG) was established in 2008 by the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV), the State Library of Victoria (SLV) and the National Archives of Australia (NAA). Membership also includes representatives from the Victorian Aboriginal community including Koorie Heritage Trust, Link Up Victoria, Connecting Home Ltd, Monash University and the general community. Meeting at least twice a year the VAAG also includes representation from the Victorian Aboriginal Community and will provide:

- advice to the NAA, PROV and SLV about projects that incorporate records or manuscripts by or about Aboriginal people held in these collections, and
- advice if required in developing access protocols.

Since its inception the VAAG has provided valuable information and input into the development of Cultural Sensitivity Statements, Online Access to Aboriginal Records, Digitising Indigenous records, and Access and Name Indexes. It is envisioned that the VAAG will assume the role of continuing to improve access to Indigenous records in collections.

### ***Connecting Home***

With the winding up of Stolen Generations Victoria Ltd in early 2010, the Victorian Government funded Connecting Home Limited to continue the support offered to the members of the Stolen Generations through assisting people to trace their family records; referral to other agencies; delivering presentations to schools and other community groups; and hosting events to commemorate significant days for the Aboriginal community.

Connecting Home is seeking formal adoption of the Common Access Guidelines MoU by relevant government and non-government recordkeeping agencies and to facilitate ongoing relationships with record holding agencies.

The Registry of Births Deaths & Marriages has confirmed that it is willing to support applications from members of the Stolen Generations and will engage with them on a case by case basis rather than via the MoU.

As part of the implementation of the MoU, Connecting Home anticipates that signatory agencies will formalise these access principles for Stolen Generations members, which will enable easier access to relevant records and information about themselves and their family.

Connecting Home also aims to be a key contributor to the development of sector-wide policy on issues of significance to the Stolen Generations including participation in a range of sector forums, advisory groups and projects representing the views and advocating for the needs of the Stolen Generations. These include (but are not limited to):

- Common Access Guidelines
- Who Am I Project
- Forgotten Australians Working Group

### ***Koorie Index of Names***

PROV will continue to incorporate names into the KIN database from series identified in the initial consultation and investigation stage. It is a strongly supported ongoing project utilising the PROV volunteer program.

KIN will continue to be promoted as a key resource for both Stolen Generations members and service organisations seeking to research and reconnect families.

### ***Training for Bringing Them Home workers***

PROV will continue to build upon the strong relationships which have developed between organisations and seek continued partnerships for training programs and resources for service providers.

Taskforce members regularly contribute training and promote awareness of record holding agencies through workshops and conferences. The Koorie Records Unit in conjunction with NAA continues to provide training and hands on practical experience to both Indigenous communities and service providers. Resources to support BTH workers will be provided with an updated version of *My Heart Is Breaking* to be republished in 2011-12. A revised version of the publication *Finding Your Story* will be made available online in 2012.

### ***Koorie Archival System***

Monash University has indicated a desire to continue to utilise the Koorie Archival System to support future research into collaborative online community spaces. This ongoing research would be in the form of a partnership with Public Record Office Victoria as the custodians of the Koorie Archival System. It has the potential to generate new projects that will further improve the mechanisms available for communities to engage with government records online in ways that are appropriate for their needs.



# Appendix 1: wilam naling recommendations

## TERM OF REFERENCE 1

### Develop Common Access Guidelines to Indigenous personal, family and community records as appropriate to the jurisdiction and in accordance with established privacy principles

**Recommendation 1:** That Victoria establishes a new access framework for records affecting Indigenous people. The framework should comprise:

- the establishment of an Information and Referral Service for members of the Stolen Generations wishing to locate their records, delivered by Public Record Office Victoria (Connecting Home)
- the Information and Referral Service entering into a series of memoranda of understanding
- with service providers and government and non-government record-holders that will regulate the processes for release of information
- the universal adoption of Common Access Guidelines by all record-holders to govern the release of information to Indigenous people.

**Recommendation 2:** That Public Record Office Victoria undertakes an indexing project of all relevant Victorian records in its custody to produce an Indigenous name index.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Department of Human Services (DHS) undertakes an archival Arrangement and Description project on critical records relating to child removal to facilitate better access, including the creation of an electronic cross-referenced name index.

**Recommendation 4:** That Victorian Government agencies using Freedom of Information (FOI) and Adoption Act processes to release information train their staff to identify what information is likely to be important to members of the Stolen Generations and the Koorie community, to appreciate the sensitivity of this information, and to understand the need for such information to be provided in a sensitive and supportive environment. In particular, that DHS, as the agency with the most relevant information:

- pro-actively promote to Indigenous clients wishing to access adoption records the option of having a support person of their choice attend the mandatory FIND interview
- develop culturally specific information resources for the FOI Unit and FIND's Indigenous clients
- continue in its efforts to develop policies and procedures to support clients accessing potentially distressing records through FOI processes
- explore the option of gazetting appropriate service providers to the Stolen Generations as 'approved counsellors' pursuant to the Adoption Act 1984
- continue to foster and develop relationships and communication processes with service providers to the Stolen Generations to deliver appropriate and quality services to Indigenous clients.

**Recommendation 5:** That the Department of Justice form a working group with Victorian service providers and representatives from agencies including the Department of Human Services and the Department for Victorian Communities to explore how to expand on existing work in the prison system to improve access to records for Indigenous people in custody.

## TERM OF REFERENCE 2

**Advise government whether any church or other non-government record-holding agency should be assisted to preserve and index its records and administer access**

**Recommendation 6:** That the Victorian Government:

- take active steps to encourage nongovernment record-holders to open access to their records for Indigenous searchers wishing to reconnect with family or culture
- fund the development and delivery of information resources and training programs for non-government record-holding agencies
- provide resources in the form of grants to non-government record-holding agencies to undertake preservation, indexing and archiving projects of information relevant to members of the Stolen Generations
- ensure these grants are conditional upon the record-holding agency adopting the Common Access Guidelines and entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Information and Referral Service.

## TERM OF REFERENCE 3

**Advise government on memoranda of understanding for dealing with interstate enquiries and for the interstate transfer of files and information**

**Recommendation 7:** That the Victorian Government demonstrate national leadership through initiating the process of improving access to records nationally and that the Victorian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, in his capacity as a member, place this issue on the agenda of the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

## TERM OF REFERENCE 4

**Advise government and churches generally on policy relating to access to and uses of Indigenous personal, family and community information**

**Recommendation 8:** That the Victorian Government release a policy statement which:

- commits the Victorian Government to the standards for records access set out in Recommendation 25 of *Bringing Them Home*, and implementation of a new access framework to help members of the Stolen Generations locate and access their records simply, efficiently and at no cost
- commits the Victorian Government to a national leadership role in the improvement of access to records held in different jurisdictions
- commits to the improvement of supported release of government records and integrated government services to assist Indigenous people, including those in custody, in re-establishing connections to family and culture.

**Recommendation 9:** That the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs include the development of good record-keeping and archiving skills in Indigenous community organisations as an integral component of the Indigenous Community Capacity Building Program.

**Recommendation 10:** That the Victorian Government fund a feasibility study to scope the potential to implement Recommendations 29a and 29b of the *Bringing Them Home* report, which relate to Indigenous repositories. This project should commence by assessing the extent and significance of records within Indigenous community control,

and will identify the resources required to develop the capacity of the Indigenous community to manage, preserve, store, index and maintain its records.

#### **TERM OF REFERENCE 5**

##### **Advise government on the need to introduce or amend legislation to put these policies and practices into place**

The Taskforce does not consider any legislative change to be necessary in order to improve access to records for Indigenous people in Victoria. The policy and process changes put forward within the 10 recommendations in this report will greatly contribute to an environment in Victoria in which members of the Stolen Generations and the wider Koorie community can locate and access government and non-government records quickly and efficiently, and with appropriate support.

## **Appendix 2: Vicki Couzens – artist’s statement**

Vicki Couzens

Untitled 2005, Mixed media on paper

This image is a depiction of a cell. It has a nucleus, ectoplasm, centrioles and mitochondria dna organelles. The Cell appears as a landscape, many people thought it might have been one of our local sites, Tower Hill. It is a map or a landscape of potential; of beginnings; of where our memories are held. In my belief system I believe that we carry our ancestral memories with us, waiting to be awakened. These memories are both on the physical and spiritual levels. It is these memories, this sense of belonging and connectedness which is the unique bond that we as Aboriginal people, have with our Country.

As humans we are created from cells – potential and possibilities. We grow in utero and are born; we then progress and develop in stages throughout our life. This development occurs on many levels – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. We move from infancy and childhood to young adult, adult and to maturity – senior status. Our growth in mental, spiritual and emotional capacities are parallel to and metaphorical to our physical passage through life; as we age we grow in knowledge and ability thus sayings such as ‘the getting of wisdom’; ‘the wisdom of the Elders’ etc.

In this context of remembering and keeping records this work fits with the role of PROV and its continuing work of ensuring that our memories are held for the future generations.

The works represent those stages, layers and levels of growth and meaning in our lives over all the aspects of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

They are metaphorical representations of both our inner and outer landscapes; the inner reflects and parallels the outer landscape or environment of our physical locality as much as it is a manifestation of how we carry out our daily lives.

The works remain unnamed to symbolize that there are no limits and that there is infinite possibility and potential – continuity and change – tradition and contemporary – old ways, new ways.

I dedicate this work to my Ancestors and those who have gone before – in their memory we live on, in their footsteps we follow!

Vicki Couzens 2005

Cover details adapted from Vicki Couzens *Untitled* 2005

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