

Opening Doors

A Community Leadership Program for Social Inclusion

February 2017 Program Bulletin

Edition #9-3

A Brand New University of The Third Age for Wheelers Hill

Establishing a new organisation is no small task. For Opening Doors graduate Judy Cox, the Wheelers Hill University of The Third Age has been a labor of love; a journey of community, partnership and social inclusion.

When Judy noticed a letter in her local newspaper in mid-2015, she couldn't have possibly anticipated where it would lead her. "It was written by someone living in residential care, who noted there really wasn't much available for retirees, baby boomers and seniors in the South East corner of Monash."

Contacting the author of the letter, Judy discovered a group of passionate, like-minded people, who shared her vision of creating a positive movement for retirees in the Wheelers Hill and Mulgrave areas of Monash. "It all happened very quickly", Judy recalls. "We knew we wanted to do something, and a University of The Third Age seemed like a pretty obvious choice!"

The U3A movement began in France in the early 1970s, and rapidly spread around the world. "The notion of a self-determining movement, where seniors can impart their wisdom and talents with people who are eager to learn... It's just fantastic. I'd attended another U3A earlier in the year, with a fascinating presenter. I immediately saw the benefits of not only learning in a whole new field, but meeting other really delightful, enquiring minds."

"One of the problems we have at the moment is this tsunami of baby boomers that are coming through, and they are going to expect the kind of quality of life they've had all the way through. There isn't this notion that 'granny puts on her apron at 65' and looks after things at home... These people are tech-savvy, they've worked with technology, and they're really going to want to keep moving. The motto of the U3A movement is 'life long learning', and that's exactly what we're all looking for."

The Wheelers Hill University of The 3rd Age launched in October 2015 to an overflowing room of more than 100 community members.



(Judy Cox and Patrick Morel, founding members of the Wheelers Hill University of The Third Age)

"The buzz was unbelievable", Judy recalls. "We expected a certain number, and the next minute we're dragging chairs out from the storage room!" Within weeks, classes were up and running and a dedicated group of committee members, teachers and volunteers saw things swing into action. There were a handful of classes to begin with, which has rapidly developed into a curriculum of more than 18 by mid-2016. "The diversity of classes and desired topics has just blown me away", Judy says.

Services for a healthier community. To find out more about Link Health and Community, visit us: <http://www.linkhc.org.au>

Life Long Learning

A New University of The Third Age for Wheelers Hill

"The ballroom dancing class has been a massive hit, as well as the monthly book club. We have a patchwork group, who've begun to design quilts and bags... Our French conversation class has been an absolute delight. We have an amazing yoga practitioner, and the class is already over-subscribed. The computer and iPad classes are huge hits, as well as the film appreciation society. We even have a class called Taboo Topics, which is an opportunity for to discuss big ideas and current affairs with like minded people. The great thing about U3A is anyone can lead a class, and anyone can join a class."



(Judy at the 2013 Opening Doors graduation ceremony with Anna Burke MP and program patron Jonathon Welch AM)



WHEELERS HILL
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

- Ballroom Dancing
- Book Club
- Patchwork
- The Science Series

- Yoga
- iPad for Beginners
- Walk & Talk
- Learn French

- Chinese for Travellers
- Film Appreciation Club
- Art Groups
- Singing Groups



**Proudly acknowledging the support of Opening Doors patron, Jonathon Welch AM
Founder of Social Inclusion Week and The Choir of Hard Knocks, as seen on ABC TV**

Life Long Learning

A New University of The Third Age for Wheelers Hill

Judy attributes much of the U3As success to community partnerships and networking.

"We've formed some wonderful relationships in Monash. There's the Indian Senior Citizens Association, local Probus groups, another U3A in Highvale, Oak Tree Hill Retirement Village, as well as others.. The list goes on.

"I really can't emphasise the value of strong community connections enough. It really is everything. Through Opening Doors, Alex (the program coordinator) suggested I get in touch with Link Health and Community. I had the pleasure of meeting Sally Ann-Nadj (Link's community engagement manager), who was so enthusiastic. She generously offered us a home at Link's Mulgrave site, which was an absolute blessing.. Because between you and me, my dining room table was starting to look pretty unusual."

Reflecting on her time in Opening Doors, Judy says "I have so many strong memories. The opening retreat was a wonderful experience; to be able to come together and get to know such an amazing group of people. Formalising past learnings was excellent too. But it's the networking processes which have really stuck with me. I think sometimes it might take people a while for that to sink in... But it's so critical. When something works because you know someone, that's incredible. It was also really powerful to visit the different locations at each session. It was great to visit Monash and Manningham Councils, the Blackburn Sikh Temple, Mulgrave Neighbourhood House...

"The whole experience was just incredible. It's opened so many new pathways for me, and honestly, it's one of the best models for community engagement and leadership I've ever encountered."



(Founding members of the Wheelers Hill U3A)



(The launch of the Wheelers Hill U3A in November 2015)



(U3A members honing their guitar skills at Mulgrave)



To find out more, visit <http://www.u3awheelershill.com> or contact President Judy Cox: U3AWH@linkhc.org.au | 8822 8376

The Black Dog

The Elephant In The Room: A Community Art Exhibition

Amaroo Neighbourhood Centre presents

THE BLACK DOG: The elephant in the room



Exhibit your Art, Craft, Music, Movement and Writings
of depression & anxiety.

The purpose of The Black Dog: An elephant in the room, is to break
down mental health stigmas, and educate the community about how
some people live with an elephant in their lives.

Amaroo invites the public to express themselves using Creative
Therapies to open up discussions about what it is like to live with an
elephant in the room, with a focus on depression and/or anxiety.

When:

Friday 30th September and Saturday 1st October 2016 9am - 4pm

A FREE Community Event

Contact Art Therapist Emma Finch (A.Th.R.)
on Email: epfinch64@gmail.com Mobile: 0415 278 580



In 2015, Opening Doors graduate Emma Finch launched The Black Dog Community Art Exhibition, exploring the lived experiences and stigmas of mental health in our community. In September 2016, the second Black Dog Exhibition was held, exploring the theme of 'The Elephant In The Room.' The exhibition attracted more than 160 artworks from more than 75 artists, and was attended by well over 500 people. The artworks ranged from paintings to photography, sculptures to craft and dioramas. The opening night was an incredible celebration of social inclusion and de-stigmatising mental illness. Emma has already commenced planning for the 2017 exhibition, and can't wait to see where the journey of The Black Dog takes her next.



To find out more, contact Tamara Grant at Amaroo Neighbourhood
Centre: coordinator@amaroonc.org.au | 9807 2625

Learning Through Collaboration

Visiting Leadership Victoria and State Parliament



The 2016 Opening Doors group visits Leadership Victoria with The Rivers and Ranges Community Leadership Program

On Thursday 15th September, our 2016 leaders joined with the Rivers and Ranges Community Leadership Program for a joint visit to Leadership Victoria and Victorian State Parliament. In the morning, Richard Dent (CEO, Leadership Victoria) presented a lively and challenging workshop on the ethics of leadership and stepping outside of your comfort zone. The two groups discovered their shared passions and what motivates them to drive change in their communities.



In the afternoon, the groups visited Parliament House, where they heard from State member for Oakleigh Steve Dimopoulos (*top right*), the speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Telmo Languiller, and the President of the Legislative Council, Bruce Atkinson (*bottom right*). The experience was an inspiring one for all involved, with many of the guest speakers reflecting on the role grass-roots leadership plays in driving lasting change in our communities. Opening Doors looks forward to working closely with the Rivers and Ranges program in the future.



Are you on Facebook? Search for Opening Doors Leadership and like our page to find out more about the program.

The Journey of a Gambler's Wife

Opening Doors 2016 Participant Sunenna Sharma

On Saturday 2nd July, Opening Doors 2016 participant Sunenna Sharma presented an incredibly personal story to the world. Launching her book, *The Journey of a Gambler's Wife*, represented the culmination of a journey; one of family, loss, violence, renewal and empowerment.

The event was attended by more than 60 friends, family members and supporters, and was a deeply moving and intimate afternoon. Reading passages from her book, Sunenna shared experiences of living with her husband as his problem gambling spiralled further and further out of control. This eventually escalated to a dangerous situation of domestic violence for Sunenna and her daughters, where safety took precedence above all else.

"We ran from suburb to suburb and state to state. However, I met wonderful, strong and courageous people who taught me so much about life and its lessons, and helped

me through adverse times. These amazing people helped me to become a strong and positive person. That determination helped me to write this book. I've created positive out of negative. Believe it or not, I reaped the benefit of hitting rock bottom."

Sunenna is also actively involved in *Three Sides of The Coin*, a project lead by 2011 Opening Doors graduate Judy Avisar. A performance group comprising people who have been affected by problem gambling, *Three Sides of The Coin* present powerful and interactive drama performances based on their own life experiences, and challenge audiences to think about the pervasive and predatory nature of the gambling industry.

From survivor to advocate, Sunenna's has had an incredible impact on her community, and can't wait to see where the next stage of her journey takes her.



Sunenna with World Vision CEO and anti-gambling campaigner, Tim Costello AO



To find out more about any of these initiatives or how you can get involved, please contact Opening Doors coordinator **Alex Mills** on 8822 8327 / amills@linkhc.org.au

Opening Doors 2016

Meet Our Leaders: Social Inclusion in Action



The 2016 Opening Doors Group at their opening retreat

Nicole Louise-Crooks, Maria Sandbach, Isabel Ho, Sunenna Sharma, Oanh Lam, Amir Abdi, Robyn Hall, Mari Mastoras, Yvette Ekman, Benetia McKenzie, Melody Knight, Annie Nguyen, Mhisti Rele, Michael Alexandrakis, Vivian Yin, Sebastian Ning, Amira Pylotis, Marija Odineca, Gayle Hardie (Global Leadership Foundation), Meagan Williams (Global Leadership Foundation), Alex Mills (Opening Doors Coordinator) Not pictured: Frances Gammino



In Conversation with Robyn Hall

2016 Opening Doors Graduate

Less than a year ago, Robyn Hall quit her job and her career to start a social enterprise. Woven By Society provides an opportunity for women from diverse backgrounds to create, connect, learn and share. We sat down with Robyn to discuss her project, her time in Opening Doors, and the journey she has been on over the past year.

What can you tell us about Woven By Society?

Woven by society was a concept that came together for me late last year. I've always had a passion for sewing and craft, and I loved the idea of empowering other women to share theirs too. It's really about giving women an opportunity to share their stories, but also their skills and craft in a comfortable environment, and where we can learn from each other as well as teach and share.

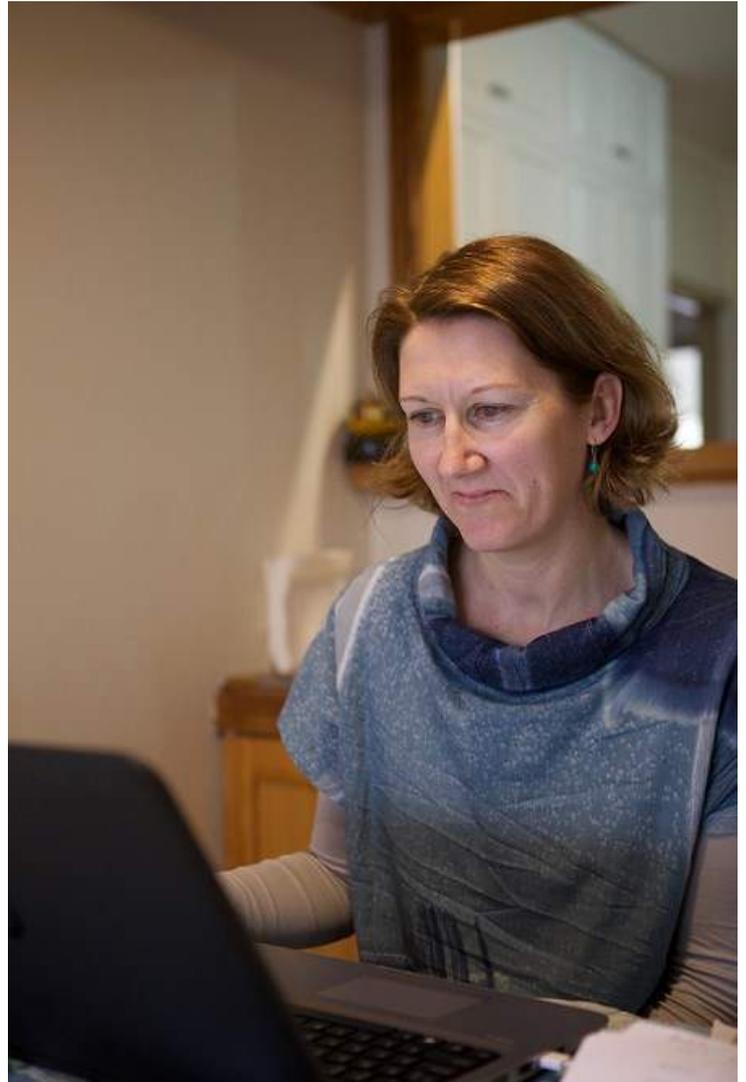
Initially I thought of it as a business... But once I started reading about the concept of a 'social enterprise', I realised that's really what it was. I loved the idea of giving back to the community I was working with... So anything that happens with Woven By Society now goes straight back into the community.

What was your motivation for creating WBS?

Really, I'd had a bit of a hard year at work. And I wasn't feeling I had the outlets that I needed... Whether that's the creative outlet or the freedom to grow as I needed to. I wanted to do something I was more passionate about ; something that could make a difference... And I really started to think about the role model I was being for my own children.

I was basically really down on myself... Because that wasn't who I wanted to be. And not who I wanted to be for my children. I didn't want to be the kind of parent who said 'you have to go out, get a job, earn your money, come home, and that's just the way life is. Even if you're not happy.' When I first started all this, people would say to me 'But you've got a good job!' ... But what's a good job if you're not happy?

I really wanted to show my kids that it's okay to take a risk, and to follow a dream... And that being a risk taker is actually a good thing.



Have there been any early highlights or successes?

A big highlight for me was completing my first workshop. I was really nervous about setting that up. Even though I've sewn for a long time, I had to get past the mental block of 'I'm not a professional teacher' ... But when I thought about it, I realised that's not what Woven By Society is about. If people wanted formal training, they could do a course at Holmesglen or RMIT.

This was more about community, empowering women, and being able to give something back. Plus, with craft, there's no 'right' or 'wrong' way to create ... Giving people the freedom to express themselves is so much more important. There's something very special about wearing something you've created yourself.

To find out more about **Woven By Society**, visit: <http://wovenbysociety.com.au/>

Or contact Robyn Hall: 0438 200 966 | info@wovenbysociety.com.au

In Conversation with Robyn Hall

2016 Opening Doors Graduate

Have you encountered any challenges?

(laughs) Umm... Continuing to believe in myself? Trying not to get down on myself when there are those little setbacks. I've always been very career focussed, and because I'm doing this all myself, I haven't got that 'team' behind me... At least in the traditional, corporate sense. So learning to trust myself has been quite challenging. But also quite empowering... Because hopefully, then, I'm leading by example.. Saying it's okay to make a decision and it's okay to make a mistake. And if you learn from those mistakes, it can be a really powerful lesson.



You recently started an on-line project. What can you tell us about that?

It's called Weaving Stories Through Craft. I was really inspired by the Humans of New York project on Facebook... And that idea that everyone has a story to tell. When I started all this, I honestly thought I was pretty average... Nothing extraordinary about my life. But then I realised that everyone has a story. It doesn't have to be devastating or inspirational... There can be something really powerful about the everyday stories that are relatable.



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In Conversation with Robyn Hall

2016 Opening Doors Graduate

So, Weaving Stories through craft is about interviewing everyday people, but using craft as the prompt; any craft item that is special to them. The response has been really incredible so far, not just from people connecting with the stories we've shared, but from people wanting to share their own. There's something quite special that happens when people are talking about an item that is really meaningful to them.

Those stories, big or small, can be quite powerful, I think. It's how we connect with each other. And I think it's how we build community too.

What advice what you give to other leaders who are thinking about starting something new?

Trust yourself. Believe in what you're doing. But make sure that you're passionate about it too. I think you have to be fully committed, but also don't feel backwards about asking for help. I think that's been a big lesson for me - that asking for help is okay. You know, the worst someone could say is 'no.' And that's okay. If you don't ask, you'll never know.

How have you found your time in Opening Doors this year?

Challenging and surprising. Challenging in that it's challenged me... When I first met everyone at the opening retreat, I thought 'I haven't got a story to tell.' I know it sounds weird, but I almost felt like I shouldn't have been there... Like everyone else had a better reason to be there than I did. So it really challenged my initial reaction and thoughts.

But as the program progressed, I realised the things I did have to contribute, and it's really opened my eyes to different skills that I might have, and skills that people look to me for that I didn't realise I had. The activity at the opening retreat where we shared strengths we had noticed in each other was really eye-opening... To see yourself as a leader through someone else's eyes. I don't think we give each other those opportunities very often. And the chance to spend this six months with such a diverse group of people I might not otherwise have met has just been... Well, amazing. I've learnt so much about myself as a leader.



Services for a healthier community. To find out more about Link Health and Community, visit us: <http://www.linkhc.org.au>



Opening Doors

2017

**Applications
Now Open!**



A Community Leadership Program For Social Inclusion

This program aims to increase connections for socially isolated people living in the areas of Monash, Manningham, Whitehorse and Boroondara

If you are passionate about making a difference in your community and would like to find out more about Opening Doors, please contact Program Coordinator Alex Mills

8822 8327 / 0448 308 052 / amills@linkhc.org.au

Congratulations to our 2016 Graduates!



The 2016 Opening Doors Leaders with Mayor of Monash, Cr Rebecca Paterson and very special guest Carly Findlay



Opening Doors Alumni Event

Celebrating 8 Years of Community Leadership

On Saturday 27th August, Opening Doors held its very first retrospective alumni event, attended by graduates from the eight years of Opening Doors Programs which have run since 2009.

The day was a wonderful celebration of the shared experiences, passions and achievements of our leaders. Some reconnected with familiar faces from their graduating year, while others discovered common passions with new faces.

The day represented the first of many alumni events to come, with the group expressing a strong interest in mentoring opportunities, developing their leadership skills further, and collaborating on community events and initiatives. The success of the event was driven by a dedicated group of Opening Doors graduates, including Judy Avisar (2011), Belinda Haydon and Geoff Lamb (2014), Emma Finch and Wafaa Beaini (2015) and passions of the broader Opening Doors collective.



To find out more about Opening Doors or how you can get involved, please contact Program coordinator **Alex Mills** on 8822 8327 / amills@linkhc.org.au

Opening Doors - Celebrating 8 Years of Transforming Communities

Since 2009, The Opening Doors Program has proudly produced:

- **138 graduates** who have the knowledge, skills, networks and confidence to take a lead in their communities
- **Over 75 innovative community initiatives** that build stronger, more inclusive and connected communities
- Over **12,000 community members** who are now engaged with their communities in new and positive ways
- A network of over **150 different organisations, businesses and groups** collaborating to strengthen communities through their support of The Opening Doors Program



Our very first group of Opening Doors leaders with social inclusion advocate and former Premier of Victoria, the late Hon. Joan Kirner (2009)

Gratefully acknowledging the support of our 2016 sponsors:

