

# Opening Doors



*A Community Leadership Program for Social Inclusion*

February 2018 Program Bulletin

Edition #10-3



## Celebrating 10 Years of Social Inclusion and Community Leadership

In 2007, a small group of health agencies in Melbourne's Inner East came together to examine the issue of social isolation. Research lead by The Inner East Primary Care Partnership made things clear: social isolation has strong links to poor health outcomes. A growing body of evidence suggested that experiencing prolonged periods of isolation can be compared to smoking a packet of cigarettes a day or consuming six standard drinks. The flow on effects to mental health are profound.

The other issue the research highlighted was that strong, inclusive communities are not built on what is broken. The traditional, interventionist model of identifying problems, gaps and issues in communities, then sending in the experts to 'fix' things simply doesn't work. The 'needs' and charity-based models of community building do not create lasting change.

Looking around the world, all of the best practice examples show communities building on their strengths: starting with what is strong, the things that are assets, and continuing to build from there. With the support of Global Leadership Foundation, Leadership Victoria and a group of passionate community health agencies, it was in this spirit that The Opening Doors Leadership Program was born.

The pilot program conducted in 2009 focussed on social isolation and ageing, but quickly expanded to address social isolation in all of its forms—a recognition that the issue cuts across traditional boundaries of age, wealth and circumstance, and can affect any one of us at any time.

Since 2009, Opening Doors has delivered nine successive leadership programs in Melbourne's Inner East, as well as two additional programs in the South East. The program has graduated more than 190 community leaders with the skills, knowledge, networks and confidence to create lasting change in their communities. These graduates represent more than 50 cultural and religious backgrounds, and bring passions as diverse as mental health, disability, LGBTIQ+ rights, positive aging, interfaith dialogue and many, many more.

In 2017 Opening Doors has a vibrant and thriving alumni group, with its graduates mobilising to organise workshops, social events, opportunities to further their leadership journeys and ultimately support each other in their visions. The program looks forward to welcoming future graduates into this ever growing community, and continuing to promote a society which is socially inclusive for all.

To find out more about Opening Doors or how you can get involved, please contact Opening Doors coordinator **Alex Mills** on 8822 8327 | [amills@linkhc.org.au](mailto:amills@linkhc.org.au)

# Growth Through Diversity

## Reflections from Opening Doors Coordinator Alex Mills

*In 2018, Opening Doors will celebrate 10 years of transforming local communities. As a decade of Opening Doors approaches, program coordinator Alex Mills reflects on his Opening Doors journey, and what he's learnt about the power of diversity along the way.*

In my early twenties, I found myself managing a record store. I never really had a clear idea of what I wanted to do once I finished high school, but as a young music nerd with a reasonably serious vinyl addiction, it was pretty much my dream job. Listening to music all day long, spending all of my money on records - I'm sure you can imagine how it went.

This all changed for me on one afternoon in 2007. I was handing one of our regular customers their change when my hands suddenly started to shake. I was overcome with the feeling I needed to escape, and that something terrible was about to happen. Several hours later, I would be told by my doctor that I'd had a panic attack.

I tried several times to return to the job I loved, but the same thing kept happening. I started to anticipate the attacks. I became anxious about the symptoms of the anxiety. Growing ever conscious of the impact I was having on my workmates, I eventually realised I had little choice but to quit my job. I spent the following two years grappling with agoraphobia, social anxiety, and the terrifying prospect of returning to paid employment. I felt lost. And if not for my close friends and family, I would have been completely socially isolated.

As part of my recovery, I started volunteering at my local neighbourhood centre, Dixon House. I'd been supporting their emergency food relief program for around 6 months when the centre coordinator put a flyer in front of me. "Opening Doors: A Community Leadership Program for Social Inclusion."

I scarcely thought of myself as a competent volunteer, let alone a leader! But with some gentle encouragement and wonderful conversations with Opening Doors coordinator at the time, Jane Oldfield, I decided to take the plunge.

My experience in Opening Doors 2010 completely changed my life. I was pushed way beyond my comfort zone, and found myself overcoming anxiety challenges I'd been wrestling with for years.

I met incredible, like-minded people from every background imaginable - people I might never have crossed paths with otherwise. There were encounters on my first day of the program which shifted my entire perspective.

There was Philomena, a fierce and tireless advocate for people with a disability. She educated me about issues of access, inclusion, and the unseen barriers wheelchair users face every day. There was Wang, a leader from the South Sudanese community, who taught me words in his native Dinka, and challenged my notions of what being Australian truly meant. And there was Peggy and Jacqui, who through sharing their experiences of depression and anxiety, reminded me that I wasn't alone.

More than anything, my experiences in the program helped me to answer a question I'd never thought to ask before: what was I truly passionate about?



*Jane Oldfield, Inner East coordinator of the Opening Doors Leadership Program from 2009 to 2011. Jane worked closely with the program's steering committee to develop the program's content, model and delivery*



*The graduates of the 2010 Opening Doors Program at their graduation ceremony, held at Hawthorn Town Hall on Thursday 28th October, 2010 (Alex pictured left)*



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



# Growth Through Diversity

## Reflections from Opening Doors Coordinator Alex Mills



In 2011, Opening Doors was looking for a new coordinator. I was encouraged to apply for the position, but like a scene from my first day at the program's opening retreat, I was overwhelmed with anxiety. This would be the first paid job I had applied for since quitting the record store.

When I was told I had been successful, I genuinely didn't believe I had it in me. "I still get anxious when I go to shopping centres. There's no way I can do this." These thoughts were still running through my head as I arrived for my first day on the job. On reflection, I might have temporarily forgotten what Opening Doors is all about: A diverse, inclusive community - warm, free of judgement, supporting people to overcome their challenges and realise their passions.

To date, Opening Doors has graduated more than 190 community leaders. Our youngest 19, our eldest 87. These leaders represent more than 50 diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. They have brought lived experiences of mental illness, disability, addiction, seeking asylum, domestic violence, homelessness, gender and sexual diversity, and an endless array of skills, talents and passions. Our graduates represent a community as diverse as could be found anywhere in the world, and they have been united by a single vision: a society where no one is left behind. One which is truly socially inclusive.

In our 2013 group, Sally and Lyn shared their personal stories, educating fellow participants on LGBTIQ+ rights and issues facing the transgender community. In 2014, Anthea and Rakia celebrated Ramadan with their group - for many, their first exposure to the Islamic faith. In 2012, Alan expanded his group's understanding of bi-polar disorder. That same year, one of his fellow participants Simone shared her experience as one of the first children with a disability to be integrated into the mainstream school system in Victoria.

In 2013, our group was welcomed into the Gurdwara Sikh Temple. In 2016, our graduate Amir shared his journey to Australia by boat, seeking asylum from persecution because of his disability. In 2017 Connie, who runs a dementia support group was able to connect with our 2015 graduate Emma, founder of The Black Dog Community Art Exhibition. Her participants' works were displayed on opening night. This same year, our 2015 graduate Mel would present to our entire group on her life as a carer of three children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

These stories could fill a book. There are hundreds of them. People connecting across culture, age, religion and lived experience, deepening each others' understanding of the barriers people face to participating in their community, and how we can overcome them together.

To find out more about Opening Doors or how you can get involved, please contact Opening Doors coordinator **Alex Mills** on 8822 8327 | [amills@linkhc.org.au](mailto:amills@linkhc.org.au)

# Growth Through Diversity

## Reflections from Opening Doors Coordinator Alex Mills

For me, this is the true power of social inclusion. It's not about communities working in isolation of each other. Our systems often dictate that certain funds will be allocated to strengthen 'that community' over there, while we'll take a different approach with 'this community' over here; one program for people with a disability, another for this cultural group. If there's one thing the Opening Doors journey has taught me over the past ten years, it's that genuine social inclusion means all of us, in it together.

Our graduates - this diverse cohort of social inclusion advocates - are working tirelessly in their communities. Day in, day out. But they are now equipped with the knowledge and learnings that can only come from a journey shared with people on different paths, united by a shared vision.

The world in 2017 can sometimes seem like a dark and isolating place, but thanks to my time with The Opening Doors Leadership Program, I've seen how the best of humanity can shine when we share our stories, celebrate our differences, and focus on the strengths and passions we have in common.

Our graduates spread this message on a daily basis. It has been an honour to stand alongside every single one of them, and I never cease to be amazed by their passion, dedication, selflessness and creativity. They are building the communities they wish to see, and creating space for all of us in the process.

I often think back to that day in 2010 when the Opening Doors flyer was placed in front of me. What might have happened if I'd pushed it away? This program has changed so many lives over the past 10 years, and I can't wait to see where the journey takes us next.

"A Community that does not have room for everyone has room for no one." - Mike Green

**Alex Mills is the Coordinator of The Opening Doors Program. To find out more about Opening Doors, visit the Link Health and Community website:**  
<http://www.linkhc.org.au>



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# Leading Through Collaboration

## *Visiting State Parliament and Leadership Victoria*



**The 2017 Opening Doors and Rivers and Ranges Leadership Programs with Premier of Victoria, The Hon Daniel Andrews MP**

On Thursday 7th September, our 2017 leaders joined with the Rivers and Ranges Community Leadership Program for a joint visit to Leadership Victoria and State Parliament. The groups were given a full tour of Parliament House, exploring both the history and processes which underpin local democracy. Both groups were joined by a variety of local MPs throughout the morning, who were eager to hear about the work of our leaders. During lunch, the groups were joined by Premier of Victoria, the Hon Daniel Andrews MP. The Premier spoke passionately about the importance of grass roots leadership, and congratulated our leaders on their commitment to social inclusion.

In the afternoon, the groups travelled to Leadership Victoria, where they participated in 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. Opening Doors looks forward to building on this wonderful partnership 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 Black Dog

## *Shadows and Light: A Community Art Exhibition*



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 October 2017, the third annual Black Dog Exhibition was held, with the theme 'Shadows and Light.' The exhibition attracted a record 300+ artworks from more than 130 artists, and was attended by well over 1000 people. The artworks ranged from paintings to photography, sculptures to craft and dioramas. The opening night was an incredible celebration of social inclusion and breaking down the stigmas surrounding mental illness.

Professional filmmaker Brett Campbell documented several of the contributing artists' journeys to opening night, culminating in a short documentary entitled 'The Art of Taming The Black Dog.' Emma hopes to officially launch the documentary in early 2018.



To find out more, contact Emma Finch at Amaro Neighbourhood Centre: [coordinator@amaroonc.org.au](mailto:coordinator@amaroonc.org.au) | 9807 2625



# Opening Doors 2017

*Meet Our Leaders: Social Inclusion in Action*



## The 2017 Opening Doors Group at Power Neighbourhood House, Ashwood

Sandra Schirripa, Debbie Lee, Lisa Sarris, Fareha Hafeez, Connie Wong, Carolynne van Der Cingel, Laila Chowdhury, Shima Ibuki, Amina Khatun, Ann Grant, Isata Victoria Mandoh, Samina Alam, Lourdes Sanchez, Mohamad Unus, May Liu, Bhagya Etta, Rosie Jenes, Sulaiman Lansana Mandoh, Julia Wang, Jaweed Mohammadi, Alex Mills (Program Coordinator)



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# Community Diversity Dinner

*Celebrating Harmony Day 2017 at Balwyn Community Centre*

In March 2017, Opening Doors graduates Amir and Maria (pictured right) hosted a diversity dinner for more than 150 community members at the Balwyn Community Centre. Held on Harmony Day, community members were invited to bring a plate of food, and to invite someone who might not usually attend a community event. From the youngest guest at age 6, right up to several in their nineties, the evening featured a choir, speeches from local community leaders and most importantly, an incredibly diverse array of food. The evening was a huge success, with many new friendships and connections formed. Amir and Maria hope to host more dinners in the future.



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# Opening Doors

2018

**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](mailto:amills@linkhc.org.au)



# Get Active, Get Involved

## New and Emerging Community Projects

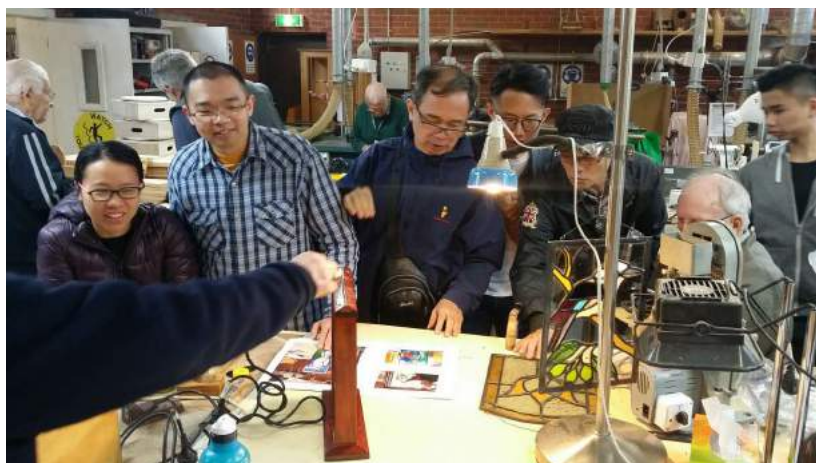
### Cup 'N Company: Social Inclusion in Ashwood and Chadstone



Cup 'n Company is a community based program where passionate volunteers visit local community members who may not have the social interaction that they may have had in the past. Volunteers should have good knowledge of local clubs / neighbourhood houses and groups, and a passion for connecting people with their community. To find out more, contact Opening Doors 2017 graduate Annie on 9807 3589.

### Build On The Rock: Connections for new Chinese Australians

Connecting newly arrived Chinese Australians with their community. From open days at local Men's Sheds to cooking classes and social events, Build On The Rock also has a vibrant community on the social media platform WeChat. To find out more, contact Opening Doors 2016 graduates Vivian and Sebastian: [therock.sebastiann@gmail.com](mailto:therock.sebastiann@gmail.com) / [therock.viviany@gmail.com](mailto:therock.viviany@gmail.com).



### Manningham Multicultural Carers Group



A warm and welcoming social group for carers from all backgrounds and walks of life. From social activities, dinners and excursions to offering shared knowledge and support in a safe and connected environment. The Manningham Multicultural Carers group was founded in early 2017 and launched to a crowd of more than 40 parents, families and individuals from across the Manningham and surrounding areas. The group is proudly supported by Interchange Outer-East, who deliver a broad range of services and social groups for carers across Melbourne's East. For more information, contact Opening Doors 2016 graduate Frances: 9758 5522 / [frances.gammino@ioe.org.au](mailto:frances.gammino@ioe.org.au).

### The Ability Wanderers in Monash and Knox

Ability Wanderers was founded in 2017 by passionate parents and carers of adults with disabilities. Our goal is to create a community space on acreages with dwellings, with the long term vision of becoming a community hub which fosters meaningful relationships and life skills. We plan to run classes and workshops on woodworking, organic farming, cooking, music and more. To find out how you can get involved, contact 2017 graduate Sandra on 0433 926 771 / [abilitywanderers@gmail.com](mailto:abilitywanderers@gmail.com).



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# Get Active, Get Involved

## New and Emerging Community Projects

### Bangladeshi Senior Citizens Club Victoria Inc.

The first of its kind in Victoria, this newly incorporated association is already growing at a rapid rate. Connecting Bangladeshi community members aged 65+ with each other and the broader community in new and meaningful ways. To find out more, contact Opening Doors 2017 graduate Laila on: 0411 820 196 or [bangladeshiseniorsinmelbourne@gmail.com](mailto:bangladeshiseniorsinmelbourne@gmail.com).



### Grow: A Creative Community

Opening Doors 2016 graduate Robyn Hall and business partner Sarah Munnings are creating an innovative new business support programme for makers involving: shared / individual studio spaces, community connections and networks, a resource library specific to handmade businesses, mentoring, retail options, group learning and much more. With a strong partnership developed with Link Health and Community, Robyn and Sarah hope to see Grow take off in 2018. If you are a maker or designer active in Melbourne's Inner East, please contact Robyn on 0438 200 966 or at [info@wovenbysociety.com.au](mailto:info@wovenbysociety.com.au).



### Different Journeys: Celebrations, Connections, Communities



Our mission is to empower young people with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) by providing them with a social platform that fosters an environment for them to create positive connections, feeling of inclusion, and linking families with services and support. To find out more, please contact 2015 graduate Mel Spencer on 0490 774 068 or at [differentjourneys@gmail.com](mailto:differentjourneys@gmail.com).

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](mailto:amills@linkhc.org.au)



# Opening Doors Alumni

## Connecting Our Graduates with Each Other

**Brett De Hoedt: Social Media for Community Groups**



Communications for good; not evil. This is the headline that greets you when you visit the website of Brett De Hoedt's Hootville Communications. Founded in 1999, Brett and his team have spent the past 18 years supporting not for profits, charities and the community sector to get savvy with their approach to marketing.

In addition to the lack of resources common in the sector, Brett believes community organisations often don't sell the good work they do as proudly as corporate, for profit organisations.

In November 2017, Opening Doors was proud to host Brett for an exclusive workshop on social media for community groups. Exploring everything from the most effective methods of online promotion to deciphering Facebook's complex algorithms, Brett shared his years of wisdom on mastering social media platforms, and debunking quite a few myths along the way.

The workshop was eye opening, informative and endlessly engaging - a hugely rewarding experience for all who attended. We look forward to working closely with Brett again in the future.



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# Opening Doors Alumni

## Connecting Our Graduates with Each Other

### An Afternoon with Jim Diers: Community Leadership in Action

On Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2017, Link Health and Community was proud to host Jim Diers: one of the world's leading voices on social inclusion, neighbourhood building and the asset-based approach to community development.

Running an exclusive workshop for graduates of Opening Doors, Jim took participants on a global odyssey; sharing countless stories of communities building belonging and inclusion – often during times of immense challenge or hardship. He also shared a wealth of knowledge and tools for creating, building or expanding effective community projects.

Throughout the workshop, Jim reiterated the importance of starting with what's strong in communities – not what's wrong. When we look for problems and deficiencies, we only end up identifying more problems. He also highlighted the importance of having fun: something he believes we often forget when we are engaged in community work.

Finally, he emphasised the importance of moving away from an 'us and them', 'client and service provider' way of thinking. He argued we should all see each other as neighbours and fellow community members, each with our own gifts to contribute. When those gifts are shared and everyone is given the opportunity to participate equally in their community, incredible things can happen.



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# 2017 Graduation Ceremony

*Celebrating the achievements of our leaders*



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# 2017 Graduation Ceremony

*Celebrating the achievements of our leaders*



The 2017 Opening Doors Leadership Program Graduates with Mayor of Whitehorse, Cr Andrew Davenport and very special guest Dr Susan Carland



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# Opening Doors - Celebrating 10 Years of Transforming Communities

Since 2009, The Opening Doors Program has proudly supported:

- **190 graduates** from diverse backgrounds who possess the knowledge, skills, networks and confidence to create lasting change in their communities
- **More than 100 innovative community projects** which aim to build stronger, more inclusive and connected communities
- Over **15,000 community members** who are now connected 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 Leadership Program



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



*Gratefully acknowledging the passion and support of our 2017 funders*