

A man wearing a McDonald's uniform, including a black cap and a grey shirt with a red stripe. He has a name tag that says 'Andy' and a large gold '50' graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Celebrating 50 years
of transforming lives
at The Bridge

 The Bridge



Contents

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

2010s

2020s

04	Foreword
05	Message from the Board and CEO
07	1970s: A strong beginning
08	1970s: Building a school
11	1980s: Consolidation and development
12	1980s: Innovation and reform
15	1990s: An era of expansion
16	1990s: Strengthening services
19	2000s: Growth and change
20	2000s: A new policy landscape
23	2010s: A time of transition
24	2010s: What's in a name?
27	2020s: Diversity and new horizons
28	2020s: Looking to the future
30	Collection of memories
34	Acknowledgements



Front cover features Andy Kazi who attended our Noble Park school in the 1980s (pictured page 10). He transitioned to Urimbirra adult service and in 1993 was one of the first 10 people placed in open employment through our service Job Match, now The Bridge Employment. Since then Andy has worked continuously in his job and is known as the "Fry Master" and is the longest serving McDonald's employee at his store. In recent years he qualified for the NDIS and enjoys other supports in his life outside of work.

In 2020 Andy had his 50th birthday, as did The Bridge.

From little things big things grow

In 2020 The Bridge celebrated 50 years of service to the community. This booklet has enabled us to mark the occasion by documenting The Bridge's history and sharing these wonderful memories with our community that started with a group of passionate citizens from the City of Springvale forming a committee to create a school that had at its heart the ethos that everyone can learn. Soon after founding the school, the committee expanded services to people who had finished school, becoming a significant provider of diverse services across a broad region of Melbourne's south east.

The Bridge has a rich history of delivering services to enable people living with a disability or from diverse backgrounds experiencing barriers to economic and social participation, to be included in work and community life.

Our reputation as a progressive, innovative provider whose focus is on the goals and needs of each person will ensure continued growth into the future.

Phillip Toovey
Retired CEO



Message from the Board and CEO

Whilst acknowledging our rich past, we will build on these foundations to continue our mission and vision over the next 50 years. Optimising inclusion in community life and employment will continue to be the underpinning driver of our purpose. For our latest updates and recent good news stories please visit our website www.thebridgeinc.org.au or follow our social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram.

Post COVID-19, we look to the future with renewed hope knowing The Bridge is adaptable, resilient, innovative and responsive to the community we support. By 2025 The Bridge will be considered a world class provider of community and employment services for people with disabilities and those who are disadvantaged.

Thank you to our staff and volunteers for your dedication. We hope you enjoy reading this history booklet that celebrates 50 years of transforming lives at The Bridge.

Mary-Jane Stolp
CEO

Jim Hall
President

Our purpose is clear that we're about inclusion and the more inclusive society is, the world is better.

Phillip Toovey,
2020 Oral History Interview



1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

2010s

2020s

A strong beginning

On 20 October 1970, a group of keen and committed community members met in the Supper Room of City Hall in Springvale. Their vision was to form a group that would build a centre for local people with a disability. The grassroots movement was led by local parents and Councillors and staff at the City of Springvale. In the early years, the support of the City of Springvale was crucial to securing funding and land in Callander Road, Noble Park. The Springvale Jaycees, the Ladies' Auxiliary and the local Apex Club were also key fundraisers and motivators for the community.

In this building phase, much went on behind the scenes, culminating in the opening of the school in 1974. As the decade wore on, the school grew, the scope of activities increased, and the committee made plans for an Adult Activity Centre.

1970s

The Council came behind it and it was a very strong funder...the community were wonderful and the service clubs...They reached out to the schools. The schools got behind it and pupils participated in the walkathon and it raised tens of thousands of dollars...it was absolutely wonderful.

Colin Dickie,
founding Committee Member
and Life Governor,
2020 Oral History interview

Anyone who's taken part in the development of Urimbirra can feel immense pride in what they've provided for the children...I haven't seen a better centre anywhere. I have great pleasure in declaring it open.

Premier Rupert Hamer,
The News, August 1974

1970s

Building a school

In the early years of The Bridge, thanks to the unwavering efforts of the committee and the City of Springvale, land was secured in Noble Park. In 1974, after much hard work, the school, then known as a Day Training Centre, was opened to 18 children. Principal Margaret McDonald led a team of five staff members. Students were able to participate in activities like swimming, cooking, music, movement, indoor play, speech and creative activities. The school also hosted respite care for infants.

The school grew quickly. By 1977 the broader approach to disability education had changed and it came under the responsibility of the Department of Education. The school still operates today, as Springvale Park Special Developmental School, on the site of the former Springvale High School.

The playgrounds are now fully developed and many visitors come to Urimbirra especially to see them. It is a pleasure to watch the children's natural joy in movement as they climb, balance, slide, swing, ride the bikes or play in the sand, promoting good health, physical fitness and developing sensory motor skills.

Margaret McDonald, Principal,
1976 Annual Report



1970

Inaugural meeting in October.

1971

Land at Callander Road, Noble Park, is purchased.

1974

The first 18 children start at the new school in February.

1975

Special Care section is officially opened in September.

1977

Education Department takes formal responsibility for the school from January.

1978

Property at Kuringgai Crescent, Noble Park, is purchased for respite care.

1979

Significant government grant is received for 'Springvale Apex' Adult Activity Centre.



1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

2010s

2020s

Consolidation and development

The 1980s saw much hard work come to fruition with the opening of the Adult Unit in 1982. In conjunction with families, the staff developed programs that included interstate trips, night classes and sporting activities. Early ventures into employment opportunities provided participants with a chance to learn manual, clerical and retail skills.

During this time, community support was still essential. Beyond the volunteer committee members and staff, many people, particularly parents, gave their time in all sorts of ways. Whether fundraising in the community to cover the shortfall between government grants and the costs of running programs, or supporting activities for their children, parents had an integral involvement in The Bridge.

1980s

(My wife) was one of those people involved in the fundraising... tin rattling, selling raffle tickets... which is such an integral part of our existence. The unsung heroes.

Joe de Souza,
Parent and Committee member,
2020 Oral History interview

1980s

Innovation and reform

The Bridge was at the forefront of participatory practice, when they formed a 'Centre Council' at the Adult Unit in 1983. This ensured participants were heard, alongside parents, committee members and staff. As the 1980s continued, participant voice in the organisation was strengthened through programs like 'Speaking Out', culminating in the development of the participant only 'Workers Committee', and their representation on the Committee of Management through two dedicated positions.

The Bridge also embedded a strong focus on individual planning for participants at this time. Driven by the need to create meaningful employment opportunities, The Bridge had taken an entrepreneurial approach to employment programs by engaging manufacturing industry clients in an 'open industry' program.

In 1988, in his first report for The Bridge, Phillip Toovey described recent legislative reform at a State and Commonwealth level:

(It) incorporates strong, clear principles to protect and promote the rights of people with disabilities. These legislative principles and procedures also underpin the manner in which services are provided... a long overdue foundation needed to help ensure services are of the highest quality.

Phillip Toovey, Program Director, 1987-1988 Annual Report

Our thanks to the Management of the Ashline Joinery for giving us the opportunity to show manufacturers and general industry that our trainees can successfully fulfill valuable tasks with industry.

Graeme Duggan, President, 1988-1989 Annual Report



1980s Timeline

1982

Urimbirra Adult Unit is formally opened by Premier John Cain in July.

1983

Property at 45 Callander Road is purchased for an independent living unit.

1984

Plans are developed for commercial ventures such as Recycling Market and Woodwork Station.

1986

Fundraising includes local pageants, and this year the Miss Parkmore Charity Queen was 'Miss Urimbirra', Melissa Jones, daughter of School Principal, Wendy Jones.

1987

Programs expand to include people with more complex needs.

1989

Entry into the employment training in open industry program with Ashline Joinery.



1990s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

2010s

2020s

An era of expansion

During the 1990s, The Bridge's open employment program expanded and went from strength to strength. In 1995, after being nominated by The Bridge, partner organisation Kenman Kandy won the Prime Minister's Employer of the Year Award.

It was a pioneering time for the sector. The widespread emphasis on deinstitutionalisation through the 1980s and into the 1990s, led to the creation of new service models with a focus on person-centred practice. In this period The Bridge's services were also extended to participants with more complex needs, including people from institutions (Caloola, Sunbury and Kew Cottages), who had relocated to new group homes in the south east metro area.

The 1996 merger with Westernport Adult Service Providers meant an expansion of reach and service provision.

To all parents, I wanted to say, if your son or daughter gets a chance to try and go for work, let them try. Their life will be changed, like it did for my son. I hope that is enough for you to understand how proud I feel about Giuseppe.

Maria Di Benedetto, Parent, 1990s promotion video

1990s

Strengthening services

In 1995, a decision was made to merge Urimbirra (as The Bridge was named at this time) with Westernport Adult Service Providers (WASP). While mergers had been encouraged by the Commonwealth (providing funding for employment services), the Committee of Management had taken the initiative to identify a suitable partnership and undertake negotiations. This would see significant change, ultimately resulting in stronger service provision.

Following the implementation of the merger in 1996, the organisation would be known and incorporated as South Eastern Disability Services. It meant a boost for community programs, with the Leisure Link Up service 'strengthening its position of being the leading Sport and Recreation funded leisure and recreation service for people with a disability in the Frankston, Mornington and Dandenong region.' (South Eastern Disability Services Annual Report 1996 - 1997).

The common ground that was found during negotiations between Urimbirra and WASP can only lead to strengthening our services to our clients and an increased capacity to sustain the quality services that Urimbirra has been proud of and noted for in the past...services will certainly be continuing in a very real sense and, I believe, improving as a result of this amalgamation.

Phillip Toovey, Executive Officer,
1995-1996 Annual Report



1990s Timeline

1991

Job Match, an open employment service, is launched.

1992

Birra Office Tek, a supported employment small business venture, opens in Springvale.

1994

The position of Executive Officer is created, as the organisation is restructured.

1995

Urimbirra and Westernport Adult Service Providers resolve to merge their organisations.

1996

Following the merger, Paramount Personnel is formed by amalgamating the Job Match and Work Support programs.

1999

Building of Kalimna day service commenced in Narre Warren.



1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

2010s

2020s

Growth and change

In the 2000s, The Bridge's employment programs flourished and community services kept growing. A highlight of this decade was the official opening in February 2000 of the purpose-built Kalimna Training and Community Support Service in Narre Warren. Programs at Kalimna complemented those running at Urimbirra in Noble Park, and offered life skills training, personal development, community participation and pre-employment training. Volunteers were recruited and trained to support clients in a range of community and centre based programs. Today, Kalimna is known as Webb Street, and continues to offer a range of community outreach services.

During this decade, there was substantial expansion of Disability Employment Services (DES), which supported those looking for work, those needing support to work, and also supported employers to find suitable employees.

2000s

I go to Kalimna and have been trying to find a job so I can earn some money and be happy. I have done work experience... 8 weeks at Bunnings...The staff are so nice and always helpful. Now I've got a job there - it's great!

Chris, Participant,
2009 Annual Report

2000s

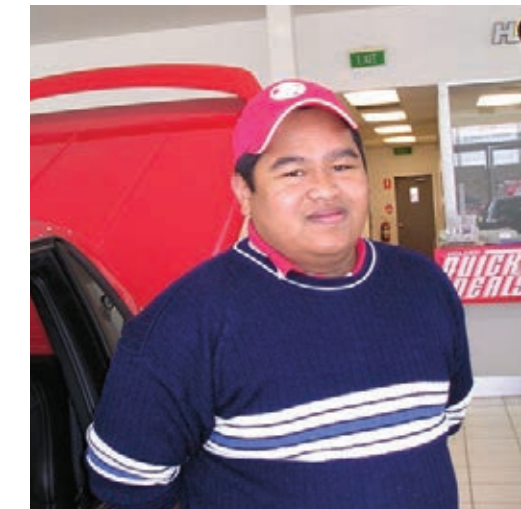
A new policy landscape

The new millennium saw extensive changes to disability services at both state and federal level. The Victorian Disability Services Plan (2002 – 2012) had a strong focus on flexible service provision based on individual need and nationally there were significant changes to employment services. The Bridge was well accustomed to being responsive to change, having navigated previous reforms as the policy focus on integration and deinstitutionalisation reshaped the provision of disability services.

In 2006, the Disability Services Act brought a new Quality Framework for providers and established the Victorian Disability Services Commissioner. Key policy discussions and initiatives in this era are also credited with laying essential groundwork for the eventual introduction of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Act* in 2013. The Bridge, along with many others in the disability sector, actively supported the development of the Scheme.

We believe the concept has a great deal of merit... The Board supports the campaign for this important reform and has committed some of its own funds to the cause.

Phillip Toovey, CEO,
2010 Annual Report



2000s Timeline

2000

Kalimna Training and Community Support Services is officially launched in February.

2000

'Becoming a Worker' pre-employment course is offered by Paramount Personnel.

2001

A pilot program for local school leavers looking for opportunities to achieve their goals is launched.

2003

The organisation changes its name from South Eastern Disability Services to Options Victoria.

2004

Labour hire services are offered to local companies.

2005

Significant expansion of Disability Employment Services begins across the South East region.

2007

The Hub Day Supports opens in Dandenong.



1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

2010s

2020s

A time of transition

The 2010s saw The Bridge manage the transition to the NDIS, as the federal government moved to fund individuals rather than service providers. Preparation for the fundamental changes to the delivery of services, became a key focus of the work of the organisation during this decade.

This period did not come without difficulty, as shifts in focus for funding meant The Bridge lost employment contracts during this time. But by the end of the decade, The Bridge Employment rallied, and new youth employment programs grew substantially.

More development was on the horizon too, as construction work started at the original Noble Park site, and plans to celebrate The Bridge's 50th anniversary were underway.

2010s

Our achievements to date are due to the efforts of many people and the valuable relationships we have with community groups; local, state and federal governments; businesses and employers; and so many others that support our cause; including the people who use our services, their families and carers.

Jim Hall, President,
and Phillip Toovey, CEO,
Annual Report 2014

2010s

What's in a name?

Over the years, the organisation has been known by a variety of names. It was familiar to many across the decades as Urimbirra, and more recently as South Eastern Disability Services and Options Victoria. By 2013, the organisation's programs were well known in the south eastern suburbs, with employment services under the name Paramount and various support services run through Kalimna, Urimbirra and The Hub. Leisure Link Up focused on sport, active recreational programs and community events.

In 2013, all of these services were unified under one name, The Bridge. Drawing the organisation together in this way aimed to make an enduring connection between the vision and mission, ideals and plans, and the services that made them happen. The newly energised community celebrated with a big launch event in December of that year.

10 years after becoming Options Victoria, we became The Bridge. And I don't think anyone has looked back. It's been very unifying internally, far more than we expected. And we're now well known in the community as The Bridge.

Phillip Toovey,
2020 Oral History Interview





1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

2010s

2020s

Diversity and new horizons

Over 50 years, The Bridge has become a more diverse organisation. Services now include group-based Day Services, Your Supports one to one service, group-based Getaways and activities after hours and on weekends, NDIS Support Coordination, Disability Employment Services, Youth Jobs Now! transition to employment services, Employment support for those who are disadvantaged and long-term unemployed and Supported Employment via Works, our state of the art warehouse and manufacturing service.

The Bridge is also developing the land originally purchased in the early 1970s. Over five decades, the Callander Road Noble Park site, known as Urimbirra, was home to many, and now has a new life as 37 townhouses, including accessible housing designed for NDIS participants, are built on the site called Park Grove.

The people of The Bridge continue to strive for a successful future and are ready to adapt to new challenges whilst focusing on the people we support and ensuring safe, quality service delivery.

2020s

The ultimate thing that we're involved in is getting people included in society. ...Everyone wants that, whether you've got a disability or not.

Phillip Toovey,
2020 Oral History interview

2020s

Looking to the future

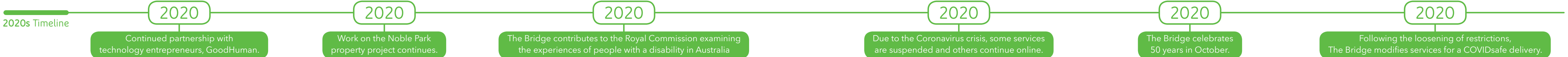
Looking through the archives at The Bridge there are boxes of photographs of participants, families, volunteers and staff, telling stories of fundraising, raffles, fashion shows and bike rides. We see records of people behind the scenes developing innovative programs, creating new spaces, and finding ways to adapt to changing needs. In 2020, the people of The Bridge banded together once again to deliver much needed services despite the challenges of COVID-19.

In achieving our purpose over the next 50 years we will continue to ensure effective governance, prudent financial management and accountability in all our work. Our strong workforce culture will ensure we remain driven by our values and respectful of each other and the people we support. We will collaborate to find creative solutions and long-term sustainability for The Bridge.

The Bridge has been a trusted partner to many people and we want to thank everyone who has contributed to our vision and look forward to your continued support as we thrive into the future.

Because I've been connected with the organisation for so long, I can travel to a site and I know participants and I remember being a support worker with them. I know their parents, I know their family members. It's not just that way with participants, it's that way with some staff as well. So it's the history, and those connections over the years that really start to mean something.

Carolyn Pabst,
Workforce Relations Adviser,
October 2020



Building progress
November 1973. At
this stage staff were
appointed.



Building commenced May 1973

Our land / 1½ acres \$18,000
Purchased December 1970

MARGARET M. MACDONALD,
PRINCIPAL.

Adults will benefit too

The minister further advised Peter Collins, that as soon as the treasury allocation for this year was confirmed, he would be in a

THE Deputy Premier and Health Minister, Mr Borthwick, visited Urriarra Special School, Noble Park, a part of the recent tour of Springvale by State Cabinet.

...said: "The Minister said he was ex-
pressed with the centre after the inspection.

Acknowledgements

The Bridge History Project began in mid-2019. With a plan to acknowledge 50 years of community service, the project began with research in the archives. My thanks go to the volunteers who helped in those early days: Fleur Morgan, Iffat Abbsar and Peta van Horick.

Many of the images included here came from the archives at The Bridge, but we also acknowledge those from Springvale Park Special Developmental School, the City of Greater Dandenong, The News, The Age, the Star News Group and Disability News.

Thanks to the experts at the State Library of Victoria, the Public Records Office Victoria, the City of Greater Dandenong and the Monash Heritage Centre; to those who participated in oral histories: Colin Dickie, Joe D'Souza and Phillip Toovey and to David Watson who designed this booklet. My gratitude to Jennifer Rose, who worked alongside me to support the history project in many ways, and who contributed to the writing of this booklet.

Finally to the staff at The Bridge, in particular Donna Watson, whose kindness and good humour made everything easy, to Mary-Jane Stolp, whose support kept the project moving as we adapted to the changes of 2020 and to Phillip Toovey, whose own history is wrapped up in that of The Bridge's history, and whose passion for this project made it a pleasure to put together.

Alicia Cerreto
Professional Historian



1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

2010s

2020s

Thank you

Many people have helped behind the scenes to make our organisation what it is today. From the committed group of volunteers who brought The Bridge into being, to those who helped with working bees, chaperoned bus trips and sold raffle tickets over the years, to all of our people and community who make us what we are.

Past Presidents

Fred Wachter	1970 - 1974	David Poole	1991 - 1996
Robert Luxford	1974 - 1981	Jackie Parton	1996 - 2000
Graeme Duggan	1981 - 1990	David Poole	2000 - 2005
Frank Gould	1990 - 1991	Damian Mitsch	2005 - 2012
		Jim Hall	2012 - current

Life Governors

Mr G Abraham	Mrs UT Deayton	Mr F Gould	Mr HD Luxford	Mrs N Phillips	Mrs MA Sutton
Mr C Barlow	Mr C Dickie	Mr PF Hubble	Mr AGR Mackay	Mrs V Poole	Mrs CE Wachter
Mr G Berryman	Mr G Duggan	Mr SB Ingham	Mrs J Marriott	Mr D Poole	Mr F Wachter
Mr L Cincotta	Mr KPT Dunham	Mr DA Jeanes	Mr KC Marriott	Mr T Roffato	Mrs GM Warner
Mr GD Cogan	Mrs VE Ericksen	Mr RG Jeffs	Mr GM Maynes	Mr AL Rose	Mr IGN Warner
Mr B Coleman	Mr R Fitch	Mrs J Judd	Mrs M McDonald	Mrs MJ Russon	Mr N Wickenten
Mrs R Cork	Mrs P Gilmore	Mr JW Kortum	Mrs G Meadows	Mr P Scarlett	Mr L Williams
Mrs S Coulter	Mr W Gilmore	Mrs D Lilley	Mr J Mickles	Mrs J Smetham	Mrs TL Williams
Mrs CF Davis	Mrs NS Goodwin	Mr A Lind	Mr IJ Morgan	Mr LT Smith	
	Mrs P Gould	Mrs J Lovett	Mrs DM Muir	Mr JJ Sutton	
		Mrs B Luxford	Mr P O'Brien		
			Mrs D Palmer		



Beyond 2020 - Urimbirra becomes Park Grove



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 **The Bridge**