

## **HISTORY of OM:NI NSW**

The original idea for structured groups for older men in NSW (the nucleus of the OM:NI concept) is attributed Jack Zinn in 1996.

### **Victoria: 2004 -2018**

OM:NI was brought to Victoria in 2004 from New South Wales where it began in the 1990s. Developments in New South Wales relevant to Victoria before 2004 are included here. A more detailed history of OM:NI in New South Wales is covered in a separate document.

**1999** - OM:NI was officially launched in Sydney on 19 October 1999 after some three years of development led by Jack Zinn and Walter Black who became volunteers with COTA NSW. There were two OM:NI groups operating in Sydney at the time of the launch. Jack was the initial Project Manager for OM:NI. Michael Keats was hired by COTA NSW and became the Project Officer for OM:NI. Jack and Michael began establishing more OM:NI groups in NSW.

**2000** - Balwyn Rotary in Victoria became interested in the developments in New South Wales as early as 2000 and contact was made with COTA NSW. A meeting was held in Melbourne on 16 November 2000 with Michael Keats of COTA NSW and Ted Gillies of Balwyn Rotary. A plan was developed to establish three groups in the Local Government Area of Boroondara. Unfortunately Michael Keats left the project at the end of 2000 and this initiative was delayed.

Much of the following is from the recollections of Bill Whitting, the OM:NI Project Officer at COTA NSW from 2001 to 2004, supplemented by notes from Dr Ray King of Wagga Wagga. Ray also became involved in 2001 and was a driving force in the development of OM:NI groups in the Riverina.

**August 2002** - Bill Whitting met Spencer Wanklyn, of the Narre Men's Group, at the Adult Learning Conference in Hobart and discussed men's groups and the possibility of establishing OM:NI in Victoria. The Narre Men's Group had been established independently of OM:NI in 2000 by Mike Downing as part of his position of Manager Business Services at the Narre Community Learning Centre.

**February 2003** - Bill Whitting visited Melbourne to attend, and speak, at a Mental Health Conference and also had a meeting with Patricia Reeve, Executive Officer COTA Vic, regarding the establishment of OM:NI groups in Victoria.

**2004** - Bill Whitting visited the Narre Men's Group with Spencer Wanklyn and had further discussions on setting up groups.

**17 March** - Ray King and Bill Whitting visited Melbourne and both spoke at a Men's Forum held at Hawthorn Town Hall organised by Sue Hendy of COTA Vic. From

Ray King *“On this day, COTA Vic and National Seniors, launched the Older Men’s Health Project at Hawthorn Town Hall.”*

2

An Older Men’s Health Project Statewide Reference Group was established by COTA Vic later in the year. The aim was to enhance the health and wellbeing of older men. One objective of the project was to set up a number of OM:NI groups in Melbourne. This initiative followed the offer made by the Balwyn Rotary Club to support a part time position to facilitate the development of OM:NI groups in Victoria. The position was to be located at COTA Vic and funding of \$46,000 per annum was offered by the Rotary Club. Ray King and Bill Whitting were invited to assist in conducting the launch. COTA Vic met the costs of the launch including Ray King’s fare.

Ken Davis and Bill Whitting visited COTA Vic to interview prospective applicants with Sue Hendy, Executive Officer, for the position of Project Co-ordinator. David Clunn was chosen to take on this role late in May 2004.

**16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> June** - David Clunn visited Sydney and Bill Whitting explained the OM:NI operation at COTA NSW. They visited OM:NI groups at Willoughby and Hornsby in Sydney and also drove to Wagga to meet with Ray King and sit in on the Wagga 1 group. From Ray King *“The new appointee to the position of facilitator, David Clunn, visited Sydney and Wagga Wagga for training. He attended an OM:NI meeting at Wagga Wagga on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> June and a ‘New Ideas’ gathering and was involved in discussions about the conduct of OM:NI groups. He was billeted in Wagga. The costs of fares and car expenses were met by COTA Vic.”*

**30<sup>th</sup> September** - Ray King and members of the Wagga OM:NI group (Ken King and Harry Smith) assisted David Clunn in conducting a public meeting to set up the first Victorian OM:NI group in Stonnington/Prahran(1)\*. This group met on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of each month. All visiting OM:NI members were accommodated by Ken Davis of the Rotary Club of Balwyn and travelled at their own expense.

(\* The numbers in brackets indicate the order in which groups were established in Victoria.)

**3<sup>rd</sup> November** - Ray King and other OM:NI members travelled to Melbourne at their own expense to assist David Clunn in running a public meeting to establish the Boroondara/Canterbury(2) OM:NI group. This group met on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays of each month.

**2005** - OM:NI groups were established by David Clunn at Croydon Hills(3) in Autumn, Box Hill(4) in October, Belmont(5) in November and Kooyong(6) in December. The late Richard Fisher was involved in the establishment of Croydon Hills and Box Hill groups. John Hogan took over the leadership at Croydon Hills when Richard died in 2008. Additional funds were obtained from the Department of

Veterans Affairs with a view to establishing groups in RSLs. Box Hill was the first of these and Greensborough came later early in 2006.

**2006** - David Clunn established OM:*NI* groups at Greensborough(7) in February, Brimbank/Sunshine(8) in May, Bannockburn(9) and Cranbourne(10) in November, and Warrnambool(11) and Hawthorn(12) in December. David invited members of existing groups to speak at the launches of these groups. Those involved in the leadership of these groups include Ken Young and Maurie Callow at Greensborough, Jim Thornley at Warrnambool and Ralph Johnson, from the Canterbury OM:*NI* Group, at Hawthorn.

David Clunn organised Quarterly Groups Gatherings at Kooyong in autumn and summer, Canterbury in winter and Greensborough in spring.

Balwyn Rotary was unable to continue funding the position of Co-ordinator beyond 2006. Facing an uncertain future David Clunn left COTA Vic for another position.

**2007** - To cover the loss of the Co-ordinator COTA Vic held quarterly meetings of Representatives from OM:NI groups to provide a forum to guide the development of the movement. In addition Group Gatherings were organised by the Greensborough OM:NI Group in March and November.

Some OM:NI members of the Statewide Older Men's Health Reference Group continued to meet with COTA Vic to guide the movement. They became members of the OM:NI Advisory Group (OAG) to provide an ongoing communication link between the groups and COTA Vic. During the year COTA Vic, with the OAG, developed an OM:NI Information and Resource Manual to cover operational issues in the absence of a Co-ordinator.

OM:NI groups were established in Casey(13) in March, Waverley(14) in May and Werribee(15) in October. The Casey Group was established by experienced peer educators from COTA Vic, John Douth and Bernie Bond. They used a different group launch model than the one used by David Clunn. It contained elements of the successful Challenging Ageing program developed by COTA Vic.

Waverley was launched by Debra Parnell of COTA Vic adopting a similar model to that used by David Clunn. Werribee was established independently by local men led by Adrian Cloonan. OM:NI people from Belmont and Greensborough assisted with the bedding-in process.

**2008** - Group Gatherings were organised by Kooyong in March, Brimbank (Sunshine) in June, Werribee in September and Banyule in December. COTA Vic held Representatives meetings in February, May, August and November.

OM:NI groups were established in Balla Balla(16) and Balwyn(17) in March and Banyule(18) in April. The Banyule Group was established as an off-shoot from the Greensborough Group.

The Greensborough Group had developed quickly in 2006 and ceased recruiting in 2007 to keep the group size down to an optimum. Later in 2007 it only took on new participants on the basis that they would help establish a new group. The new group was initially established in Rosanna but returned to Greensborough RSL later in the year because most of the participants lived closer or a similar distance to either venue. It then became known as the Banyule Group.

Balla Balla was developed by the Casey Group leadership team. Another group was developed in this area but absorbed into an existing group.

The Balwyn Group was established by Peter Hassett of the Balwyn Welfare Association with input from Ken Davis from Balwyn Rotary. Ken was the one who supported bringing OM:NI to Victoria as mentioned previously.

**2009** - Following discussions with COTA Vic it was decided the OM:NI advisory group would run future meetings of representatives. Meetings were held in May, August and November.

The Brentwood Park(19) Group was established March.

Four Victorian members of OM:NI attended the Annual General Meeting of the New South Wales OM:NI organisation held in Goulburn.

**2010** - Representatives meetings were held in May and November and a Facilitator Sharing day was held in March. The Thumbnail Project was undertaken to provide a sketch of the men involved in the movement and their thoughts on its value.

**2011** - OM:NI groups were established in Diamond Creek(20) in March, a second one in Balwyn(21) in May and Beaconsfield(22) in June.

John Douch was awarded Senior Citizen of the year for the City of Casey. As a result he was able to attend the National Men's Health Gathering in Perth in September and gave a presentation on OM:NI.

A Summary Report on the Thumbnail Project was issued in March. A Short History of OM:NI was issued in July. A submission supporting OM:NI was made in September to a Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Opportunities for Participation of Victorian Seniors.

Of the 22 OM:NI groups established in Victoria since 2004 some have ceased to operate as OM:NI groups. The Prahran and Bannockburn Groups became activities groups under the auspice of their Local Councils. The Sunshine Group ceased to operate in 2009 and the Waverley Group in 2011. The Kooyong Group has suspended operations this year and a re-launch is planned for 2012.

By November 2018, there were 24 established OM:NI groups in existence in Victoria with another six in the early stages of development. Details of those currently operating groups are listed in the section entitled "Groups and Locations".

Compiled November 2011 and reviewed/updated 2018