



Media Release

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INAUGURAL PUBLIC ADVOCATE'S AWARD

A genealogist, and a journalist who reported her work restoring the identities of people formerly housed in Victorian psychiatric institutions, are the recipients of the inaugural Public Advocate's Award.

The award was presented to State Trustees genealogist researcher Kath Ensor, journalist Andy Drewitt and Leader Newspapers, by the Minister for Community Services, Mental Health and Senior Victorians, Lisa Neville, at the annual OPA Volunteers Conference at Etihad Stadium today.

The award was created to recognise the work of an individual(s) and/or organisation, which highlights the plight of vulnerable Victorians.

In presenting the award, the Minister said that Kath Ensor, a genealogist researcher with State Trustees, was undertaking private PhD studies into the effects of institutionalisation when she became aware of a patient of the old Beechworth Asylum who had lost all information about himself and had been buried in an unmarked grave. His death certificate had no identifying information and simply read 'man unknown'.

"This inspired her to use her skills to help restore the identities of residents in Supported Residential Services, who had previously been patients of psychiatric institutions and who had lost some of their identity," the Minister said.

"Her work helped restore their links to family and childhood and assisted them move on in their lives."

Leader Newspapers journalist Andy Drewitt worked with Kath to tell the story of her work through the Diamond Valley Leader newspaper. He wrote an article called 'Man Unknown' and, also developed an online photographic exhibition and DVD about Kath and her work. The multi-media story was subsequently published in 11 Leader newspapers.

Kath Ensor's work included finding out why one resident had a fascination with buses by locating his childhood home which was on a busy bus route. Her work put him back in touch with happier times. Another resident's mother was killed in a car accident when he was young and he had lost track of where she was buried. Kath located her grave, which gave him some closure on a painful childhood memory.

Kath prepared booklets for the residents about their past lives, which included photographs and family history documents.

Nominations will be called for the Public Advocate's Award 2011 at the end of this financial year.

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