



Initiatives of Change
Australia

December Newsbrief



FROM VISION TO IMPACT: INITIATIVE OF
CHANGE AUSTRALIA'S 2023 JOURNEY
UNVEILED

Message from the Chair of the Board – Paul Ntoumos

As the year 2023 draws to a close and 2024 approaches, we find ourselves in a special season of reflection and celebration, honoring a remarkable individual who remains a beacon of freedom, compassion, and support for those often marginalized and forgotten—the ones who dwell on the fringes of our collective aspirations.

On behalf of the IofCA Board and the Operations Team, I extend my heartfelt wishes to you for a meaningful and peaceful conclusion to this year and a blessed holiday season.

May our most precious gifts to one another, our families, friends, and ourselves, be the offerings of peace and kindness. In a world filled with pressing local and global challenges—ethical and cultural dilemmas, environmental crises, economic uncertainties, technological advancements, and political tensions—we find ourselves at a crossroads. We are in dire need of fresh perspectives, open hearts, engaged leadership, and resolute action.

Amidst the distressing conflicts in the Middle East, Europe and many other parts of the world, as members of IofCA, we are committed to peace, social cohesion through trust and reconciliation for all affected parties and we stand to be catalysts for peace by challenging divisive thinking, shifting cultural dialogue and working to end cycles of conflict, starting with ourselves.

Can IofC Australia (IofC A) play a constructive role in this transformation?

Can we, as individuals and as part of IofC A, rise to the occasion and be counted among those who, not only are willing, but indeed are actively making a difference on the ground, promoting the values and a vision for the good, the true and the harmonious through our actions. Can we demonstrate this commitment in action, within our organization and movement.

What is required for IofC Australia to step into this constructive role both within our country and in our region

What kind of 'capacity' do we need?

I firmly believe that the wellspring of our own motivations and inspiration for action both personally and within our broader contributions to the world, must originate from:

1. A moral / ethical stand or a moral moving force and an inner moral vision
2. Leadership ie taking steps to meet the challenges of our times, whether on a personal, organizational, community or wider level
3. Expanding partnerships ie collaborating with other change agents or agencies to work for the good of the whole

And then being a 'Yes' to demands which are aligned with our own commitments to being agents of positive change, starting with ourselves, our movement and our organisation.

Our lives can be extraordinary and make a profound impact on the world around us, even in the face of numerous challenges.

Taking initiatives - whatever they are - that make a difference to others and to the communities we belong to - committing to something greater than ourselves, being bold and fully self-expressed in our actions, having our enthusiasm for change and transformation be contagious, we can create positive ripple effects.

Over the past year, our work at IofCA has expanded in areas such as First People Pathways, Ethical Leadership, and Healing and Reconciliation. Yet, we have also realized that there is a greater demand for our programs and events from participants and allies in the realm of change and transformation. In these critical times, no one advocating for a better world can afford to be complacent, as the saying goes, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few."

During this crucial period, I regretfully announce that Margaret Hepworth, our Executive Officer (EO), has tendered her resignation and will conclude her role on January 11, 2024. Margaret has brought immense dynamism, boundless energy, and a can-do attitude to her role, significantly advancing IofCA's work.

Among her notable achievements is elevating IofCA's profile in our work with indigenous communities and First People's leadership. She has been an outstanding leader in her capacity as Executive Officer, skillfully steering the IofCA Operations team, motivating them to excel in their service toward change and transformation. Margaret's spiritual demeanor, communication skills, and presentation abilities have inspired many to not only take interest in IofCA's work but also join as allies. She leaves behind a remarkable legacy.

In keeping with IofCA's fundamental principles of following one's inner guidance and taking action where called, Margaret will redirect her energy and focus toward empowering youth, nurturing personal leadership, and taking action to improve the world.

We will miss Margaret's leadership within IofCA, but we will not lose her. She has plans to collaborate with IofCA's work in her new endeavors.

We extend our best wishes to Margaret as she embarks on her new adventure of empowering youth and contributing to positive change and transformation.

A Word from the Executive Officer

Dear everyone,

As we gather with friends and family over the holiday period, we find ourselves in that challenging human state of not quite knowing how to handle our conflicting emotions. On the one hand, we reflect back over the year, acknowledging and celebrating our achievements, as you will read in this Newsbrief. On the other hand, we are deeply saddened and disturbed by events both globally and nationally, rising racism and 'othering' that make us question, 'Where is our humanity?'

We are proud at IofC to be a part of a global movement that actively works towards trustbuilding and peacebuilding, and we must know, that even amidst the turmoil, we are making a difference. We must cast out nets of hope; we must remain tenacious and vigorous in our actions.

In 1940, Charlie Chaplain wrote a speech, a call to end wars, a call to global humanity, that speaks through the decades and reaches our ears now. We can ask, what would happen if current world leaders would make this speech now? Yet he also tells us, "You the people have the power...the power to create happiness! You the people have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure."

You may have seen recent memes on social media, pictures of a heavily pregnant Mary, and a furrow-browed Joseph, desperately seeking refuge for a place to safely give birth to their child. Sobering captions read: "Somewhere in this world right now, this same thing is still happening."

Here are some questions to reflect on over this holiday period
How will you utilise your power to create happiness? To create freedom? How will you find your way to contribute to a better world?

In seeking the answers to these pivotal questions, I have discovered a personal calling that aligns with my deepest values and aspirations. It is with great excitement that I share my decision to move back into education, recognizing it as a powerful avenue to make a lasting impact on the world.

As I embark on this journey, I carry with me the lessons learned, the memories cherished, and the invaluable connections forged through IofCA. I am grateful for the support and friendship that has defined this chapter of my life.

Thank you for being a part of my journey thus far. I am excited about the possibilities that lie ahead and am confident that, together, we can contribute to a world that is brighter, more compassionate, and filled with the boundless potential of educated minds.

Sending you and your families many blessings,

Marg Hepworth





CELEBRATING OUR YEAR

As we say goodbye to 2023, let's reflect on the shared challenges and triumphs of our journey together. This year brought growth, lessons, and collective strength. Let's carry the gained wisdom into the promising horizon of the coming year.

In the realm of positive change, our narrative of growth has unfolded dynamically. Committed to transformative initiatives, our expanding programs, enriched database, and influential social media presence tell a powerful story of impact on lives nationwide.

Since 2019, we've experienced an 81% average program growth, reaching deeper into communities to address societal needs. Our database has flourished with a 60% increase, providing fertile ground for informed, data-driven decisions tailored to Australian communities.

In the digital landscape, our social media presence has become a fertile ground for dialogue, advocacy, and community building. Engaging 60,612 individuals, we amplify voices, fostering shared responsibility and unity.

Beyond statistics, our journey is about nurturing hearts and inspiring minds across Australia. We're cultivating a narrative of hope, unity, and collective responsibility for a better, more inclusive nation. In a nutshell we are changing lives.

Mia Nour - Marketing and Communications Manager

A short video to highlight the work for 2023.



CELEBRATING OUR YEAR



We are pleased to present Initiatives of Change Australia's Annual Report for the financial year 2022-23. This document highlights the impact we have achieved through the support of our dedicated community and volunteers. Together we have continued to work to create positive change towards building a more compassionate and inclusive society.

[Read the Report](#)

Land Sale

After long consultations among our members and a thorough negotiation process, IofC Australia has officially signed the sale of a portion of the land surrounding Armagh, our Australia-Pacific centre in Melbourne, marking a major step toward our shared vision.

The proceeds will be invested to help us reach a basic level of financial sustainability and fuel our mission for positive change long into the future. Let's celebrate this milestone together and use it as inspiration for the journey ahead.

The negotiations and agreement reflect the essence of unity and commitment that defines our community.'



In this photo, the purchaser Bing Xia (standing in the centre) and his cousin, having signed the contract, witness the signatures of property transaction consultant Patrick McNulty from Charter Keck Cramer (left) and Maurice Clisby for IofCA.

Reflecting on a Year of Impact: Explore the transformative journey with IofCA through our past Newsbriefs. (click on image to access)

From community empowerment to inspiring stories of change, dive into the highlights that shaped our impactful year.





FROM THE GRASSROOTS

What's Happening in the IofC Network: A View from South Australia

-Mike Brown

A theme of IofCA's recent National Gathering was 'revitalising the grassroots movement of IofC change-makers'. What does this look like in practice? And what is being done in various states?

I take a look at IofC's network in South Australia, and describe it in terms of 'a quality of life that is lived to bring transformation and healing', building community through a variety of 'fellowship' sharing groups, contributing to movements for change such as reconciliation and Creators of Peace, and participating from a distance in the organisation of IofC's programs and administration.

[Read more](#)

Barbara Lawler writes on the work that happened in Queensland this year.

Milestones reached this year:

- Great success on Amiel's inspired initiative to attend Pacific Australia Youth Association – Young Pacific Leaders Summit in Tonga 20-25 November 2023.

Ongoing projects:

- Peacebuilding initiative: the development of Peacebuilding initiative for our communities, along with a Community Building event for the Karen community in Brisbane. The team, especially Amiel continuously work towards justice, healing and reconciliation in Rwanda and around the anniversary of Genocide in Rwanda in April each year organizes an event in the Queensland Parliament in memory of those lost, and to commit to peace.
- Life Matters Taster Sessions: At the first session 30 people came consisting of a mixture of young people from the Logan area. It is fantastic to see the passion of Mu, Naome and Amiel who all spoke about their purpose for taking on Life Matters. There's an impressive group of young community leaders in Brisbane and Logan – a team waiting and ready to be built. Life Matters workshop will be held for the first time in QLD next year from 31 May to 2 June
- Trustbuilding: Friends were met through the IofCA trustbuilding work, the Turruk workshops, the YES campaign, will continue with the invitation of the Uluru Statement of the Heart, especially with truth-telling. Many of these conversations and initiatives are not directly Initiatives of Change but inspired by IofC.

Gratitude for an amazing team and all the known and unknown support we have had this year from new and old friends, for the building up of a team for which we say "onwards and upwards". We are aiming high and trust in an inspiring outcome. We're grateful for and enjoy the sharing of our own journeys of change, forgiveness, finding resilience and healing and have much to learn from one another.

Our Programs



FIRST PEOPLES PATHWAY

2023 started with hosting a Canadian First Nations Delegation as a prequel to the Global Indigenous Dialogue in IofC Caux Switzerland. The delegation included Lewis Cardinal, a Woodland Cree communicator from northern Alberta along with Chief Lee Crowchild, a respected Tsuut'ina environmentalist and ceremonialist. They sought to join and learn from the national conversation with Australian First Nations people, at a time when the shape and content of Voice and Treaty were being debated. Starting from Melbourne the delegation travelled to Wagga Wagga, Sydney, Arnhem Land and Cherbourg for a range of events.



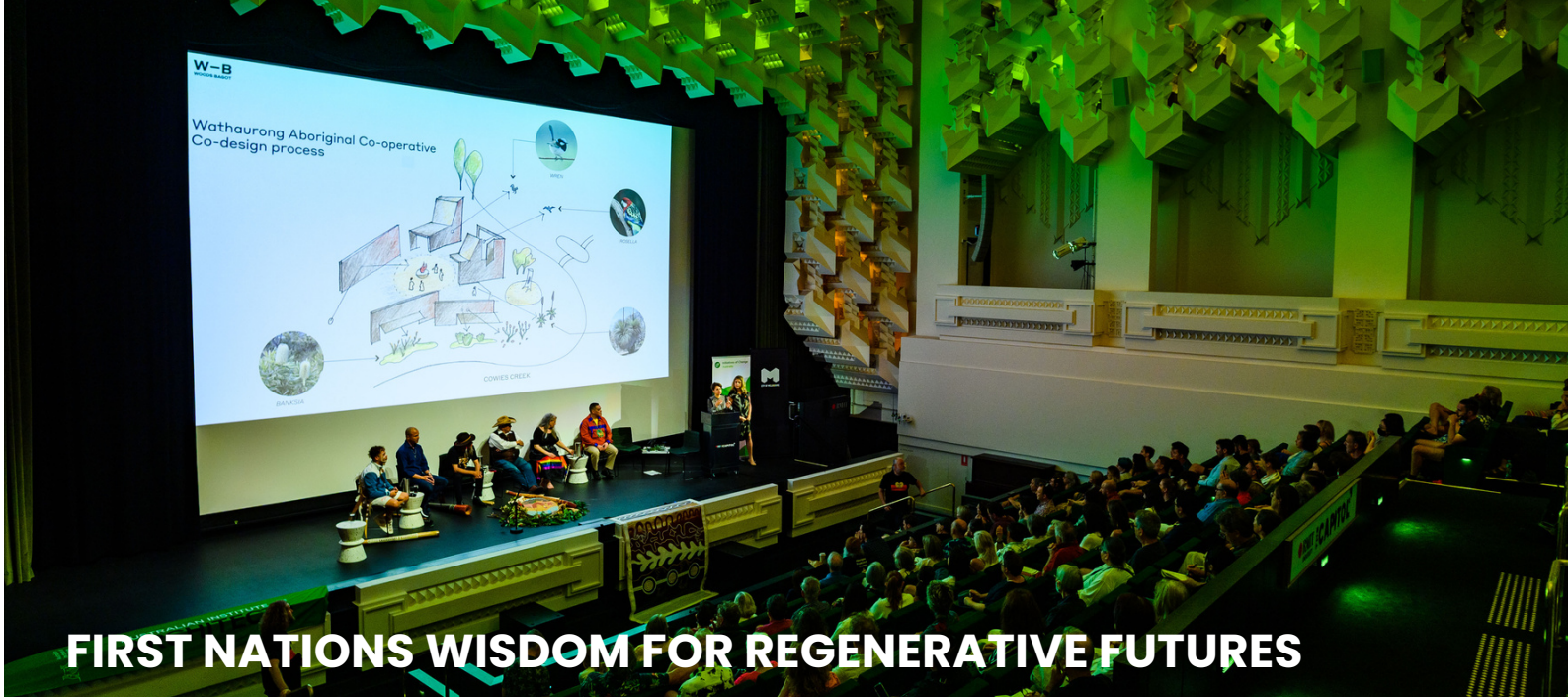
"The world needs the wisdom of the Indigenous peoples more than ever so that we learn how to live differently, together, under the lead of the Great Creator Spirit. We have to live in harmony with all that is."

Lewis Cardinal



**1,397 people
in 26 truth
telling
events**

- 10 community events
- 4 online workshops
- 12 events with local councils



FIRST NATIONS WISDOM FOR REGENERATIVE FUTURES

Exceeding expectations, First Nations Wisdom for Regenerative Futures made its mark as a memorable Melbourne event at the iconic Capitol Theatre on Sunday 19 February. The event was organised in partnership with the Sustainable Architecture Forum at the Australian Institute of Architects and indigenous elders from Australia and Canada. Together we explored deep listening practices that nurture First Peoples' relationship to place and the role of urban learning landscapes that are sacred, inclusive, and regenerative.



Resonating vibrations of the yidaki filled the theatre, First Nation Australians: Ash Dargan, Dylan Charles, Uncle Shane Charles, grounded us to a sacred space for deep listening.



TURRUK

9 MAY – 6 JUNE 2023

The fourth round of Turruk workshops, joining First Peoples led yarning circles with an army of allies, commenced on Tuesday 9 May with in-person and online participation.

Photo credits: Max Roux

5 workshops
150 participants



Thank you to the growing team who support and build this work, and above all to the First Nations speakers who have opened their hearts and voices in sharing their truth-telling with us all. As Uncle Glenn said, 'Important work is being done here.'

IofCA Community Supporting The Voice



IofCA represented alongside Senator Penny Wong, at Higgins' Voice to Parliament update, hosted by Dr Michelle Ananda-Rajah on Thursday 13 April

IofCA hosted both Thomas Mayo and Emily Holm, National Organising Director, Yes23 for the first "Steps to the Referendum" forum at Armagh.



'Steps to the Referendum' online forums were hosted by Uncle Shane Charles, Uncle Glenn Loughrey, Marg Hepworth and Kathryn Farrell in May, June and August.

The forums have had a great turnout with a strong yearning to understand how individually we can act from our hearts in raising awareness around the Voice to Parliament.

IofCA community on the Campaign trail around the country.





FIRST NATIONS EMERGENCE YOUTH SUMMIT

The Emergence Summit took place on Sunday 10 September with over 80 people both in person at Armagh and online. First Nations Emerging Leaders Kirstine Wallis, Nartarsha Bamblett and Leigh Saunders spoke on topics that are their spirits work.





Ethical Leadership

What do an investigative Afghan journalist, a Japanologist and author on Ikigai, a champion ice speed skater and a chiropractor who loves singing? They are all among the 14 participants in the latest Life Matters Workshop which took place over the Cup Day weekend 3-6 November in Melbourne.

A vital part of the Life Matters experience is the supportive community of volunteers – many of them former participants – who come together to make it happen. The tone was set by one of these volunteers on the opening night who spoke about how he had found positive life direction through the course at a time when he was feeling rather lost and without firm foundations in his life. The course had given him the will to mend some important relationships including the one with his Mum.

Life Matters weaves together times for participants to look inwards, reflecting on their gifts, strengths, values and relationships. Alongside this there are more outward focused times being inspired by the experiences of people like Prof. Paul Komesaroff, a medical doctor, philosopher and peace activist who has visited Gaza many times and promotes dialogue and reconciliation across cultural, racial and religious divides; and Peter Baynard-Smith who had felt called to a life of service with various not-for-profit organisations in developing countries after graduating as an engineer.

Each morning participants were introduced to the practice of inner listening to discern the deep inner wisdom that comes from beyond the thinking mind. This was one of the key learnings for several of the participants who described it as life changing. One told of how a few weeks later he was offered a job in another company with a much bigger budget, but in his time of inner listening he saw that it would be a mistake because they were not aligned with his values, so he declined the job.

Another recent immigrant to Australia wrote about how inspiring it was to hear the stories and struggles of other people: "Dwelling on personal traumatic experiences, especially workplace mistreatment, left me feeling hurt and powerless. I believed I wasn't good enough or I didn't have enough to give as I struggled in the competitive IT industry. Now, I realize that if we clearly know what is right, and firmly believe that we are living by the right values, then we will not so easily be hurt again. Strength emerges the moment when we recognize our adequacy. I decided to choose to shift my focus from dwelling in my own sadness to finding meaning in engaging with interesting, fresh and dynamic people from diverse cultures and backgrounds.

Mike Lowe

LM Workshop Melbourne , November 2023



LM Workshop Melbourne , March 2023



"Life Matters changed my life without teaching me, but it facilitated me to grow and finding meaning in my life."

- Life Matters Participant March 2023



Healing and Reconciliation

CREATORS OF PEACE CIRCLE

Creators of Peace Circles take place as a series of meetings led by two trained facilitators, who invite participants to explore several different themes around the broader concept of peace. Within the circle, each person puts her mind to the task of dissecting 'what peace means to me.' Participants practice deep and analytical thinking in a supportive group setting where everyone practices active listening while sharing their unique yet unifying stories.



A Creators of Peace Circle next to a river in South Australia in early June, facilitated by Jean Brown and Kirsty Argento.

“Understanding peace as active was powerful, and I’m coming to understand my role in that particularly in relation to forgiveness and inner listening.

- Creators of Peace Circle Participant

A creators of peace circle was held in St. Albans Melbourne, Victoria in June/July. This circle had an amazing blend of South Sudanese, Australian, Kenyan, and Cambodian women, who came together to learn, grow, and hold each other’s stories with care and compassion.

“This thirst for connection and openness to the healing journey brings great hope”



CREATORS OF PEACE EVENTS

CoP Retreat

CoP retreats give facilitators and CoP friends to gather in a more informal setting to share connect and reflect. The CoP retreat in Wilton NSW was home for three magical and reflective days in the bush for 15 CoP facilitators.



There was a strong desire to connect and reflect over the weekend at the retreat and to that end it was a resounding success. Very quickly a safe space to BE was established and each and everyone contributed in their own unique way with sincerity and love in their heart. Thank you from every corner of my heart to you all for your warm and friendly participation.

- Wendy Oughton

It was a rich time of learning and sharing and each of us came away grateful for the safe space and friendships that we have created.

- Bek Brown

In July 2023 at a day retreat in Wellington, South Australia, 11 women came together to explore 'The Art of Accompaniment.' The discussion centered around what it means to accompany someone and how it is different to friendship or mentoring. Participants identified the essential qualities of accompaniment such as compassion, empathy, being a good listener and asking helpful questions.



CoP Fundraiser

The 2023 CoP SA Fundraiser brought together 49 people and raised over \$ 2000. Big thanks to the amazing work of Bek Brown.





OUR INITIATIVES

Creating Space

Creating Space, an IofCA program, invites everyone to join our online gatherings every first Monday from 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm AEDT. All are welcome. Our aim is to connect, renew purpose, and foster a joyful, reflective atmosphere.

In this shared space, we address the challenges that can dim our inner light. Instead of dwelling on negativity, we practice stopping, letting go, being still, looking, and listening—realizing that nothing else is needed.

Since 2019, we've been meeting monthly, providing a supportive space to accept the world as it is.



Join us on this journey of calmness, clarity, and progress. Whether you've been with us since 2019 or are just starting, your presence is valued. Consider creating a similar group to contribute to a better world.

Creating Space is more than a gathering; it's a continuation of fellowship between National Gatherings. We appreciate the shared experiences, openness, and inspiration, fostering a spirit of honesty, unselfishness, purity, and love.

Join us in Creating Space for the world.

Soul Care



Soul Care ran twice per month throughout 2023 - an opportunity to explore spiritual themes together in-person at Armagh, the IofCA Centre in Melbourne. There was a small group of regulars, including one person who drove 90 minutes from Gippsland each time, and others who came once or twice.

Each session had a different theme which was explored through readings, discussion, music and meditation and sometimes some workshop-type exercises.

The themes included How to shift from Fear to Love; Working with our own Shadows; Finding our Centre in the midst of Chaos and Overwhelm; The Wisdom of Un-Knowing; How to Overcome Fear; Hope & Despair. At the end of each session there was a time of deep inner journeying to connect with the voice of wisdom that is beyond normal human consciousness.

Soul Care will continue in 2024



OUR COMMUNITY

At Initiative of Change Australia we are a community committed to personal and societal transformation. United by principles of integrity and collaboration, this army of people works together to drive positive change through dialogue, workshops, and community projects.

A heartfelt thank you is extended to the dedicated volunteers who comprise this army of people within IoFC Australia. Their contributions, marked by acts of kindness and unwavering dedication, are key component for our community's impact.

Beyond immediate communities, the collective efforts of this army of people create a ripple effect, bringing about positive transformation in society. In recognizing and expressing deep gratitude to the volunteers of Initiative of Change Australia, we acknowledge their pivotal role as beacons of hope, catalysts for change, and ambassadors of a brighter future. Thank you for inspiring us all to be part of the change we wish to see in the world.



COMMUNITY DINNERS

Community Dinners started in 2023 with the intention of strengthening our community, by offering space for people from diverse cultures and backgrounds to bring and share food with others, to have interesting conversations around the table and to be inspired by a short talk followed by music and dancing. The evenings have proved to be very popular and each time the ballroom has been filled to capacity and beyond with people leaving with full bellies and hearts having made new friends.





DAY FOR ARMAGH

In May and August the community came together to help "give back" to Armagh, the IofCA centre in Melbourne. There was repairing, restoring, polishing furniture and silverware, cleaning walls and floors, and outdoors in the gardens raking and bagging dead leaves, cutting back overgrowth and weeding garden beds.





NATIONAL GATHERING – RETREAT

The National Gathering-Retreat, held at Armagh from 17th to 19th November, brought together 40 people in person and an additional 15 online for a time of fellowship and in-depth discussions on the challenges facing IofC Australia.

During two sessions focused on post-Referendum Australia, we reaffirmed our commitment to supporting First Nations people in their ongoing pursuit of the Uluru Statement and state-level processes. Simultaneously, we agreed to enhance the experience and outreach of the Turrak trust-building program and explore story-sharing and truth-telling dialogues aimed at engaging 'mainstream' and multicultural Australians through a 'Listening for a change forums' format.

Other discussions centered around revitalizing the grassroots movement of IofCA changemakers, recognizing that effective communication with the network and harnessing their concerns and energies will require a range of approaches. The Board and the coordination team are currently evaluating the options and suggestions that have surfaced.

Additionally, the Board provided an update on the progress toward a new Constitution, which is nearing its final stage and will be presented to our members in the New Year.

As always, the National Gathering-Retreat meeting provided an opportunity for personal connections among our members, and the 'Family times' shared were greatly appreciated. We left the gathering feeling challenged and rejuvenated, filled with new hope and energy.

“Having first met ideas of IofC at 15, while still at school, I haven’t forgotten it’s transformative effect in those early years. And the choice to rekindle the inner spirit...which has led to an amazing journey... and continues to. That we’re in a state of progressive development...is a given.

This quote (from Marianne Williamson) sums up so much about life:

“In every community, there is work to be done. In every nation, there are wounds to heal. In every heart, there is the power to do it.”

-Nivanka Bhagvandas





HOW DO WE UNRAVEL HATE AND FEAR IN OUR WORLD?

On Tuesday 12th December at Armagh a diverse group gathered to address the critical question: "How do we unravel hate and fear in our world?" Led by Marg Hepworth, IOFC EO and an International Educator, Thought leader and a true voice for peace. The event unfolded as a transformative journey that explored the root causes of these critical emotions.

The diverse voices in attendance, representing various backgrounds and perspectives, engaged in an open dialogue that delved deep into the 'unravelling' process. Marg Hepworth's insightful conversation and interactive workshops, particularly focusing on her 'Almost Impossible Thoughts,' provided an exploration beyond the surface.



"In our shared exploration, we unraveled the knots of hate and fear, stitching together a story of unity. This event wasn't just talk; it was a journey we took together, peeling away layers of bias to illuminate the way toward a more compassionate future."

CELEBRATING MULTICULTURALISM

Initiative of Change Australia proudly celebrated multiculturalism throughout 2023, recognizing it as a powerful force for positive change. We believe that diversity is not just a coexistence of cultures but a source of strength that fuels innovation and resilience.

Through our events, programs and inclusive events, we provide platforms for dialogue and understanding, showcasing the richness of our collective heritage. Our commitment to fostering an inclusive environment extends to breaking down barriers, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and building bridges that connect us all.

Joy of Global Harmony in collaboration with Tongji Melbourne Alumni Association.



Iftar Dinner co hosted with the Afghan Australia Initiative



Autumn Peace Concert





INTERNATIONAL NEWS

World Forum hears about Trustbuilding

John Bond, Former Secretary, Initiatives of Change International and currently Strategic Consultant with IofC represented IofC at the three-day Forum, hosted by the Council of Europe. The forum brings about 1,000 community activists from across the world to meet with political decision-makers and debate solutions to the challenges facing democracies.

[Read more](#)



[Find out more](#)

Values-Driven Education in a Power-Driven World Rediscovering our Role and Purpose 8 January to 12 January 2024

This gathering calls upon educators worldwide to seek inspiration, exchange ideas, and create strategies that instil hope and purpose in our lives, as well as in the lives of our students and communities.

Let's join forces as change-makers, embarking on a collective journey to create a just, peaceful, and compassionate world, starting within our classrooms.

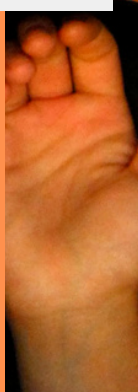
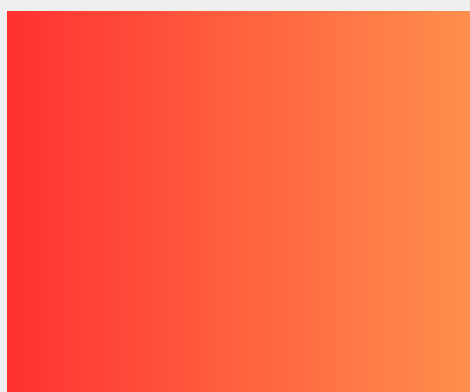
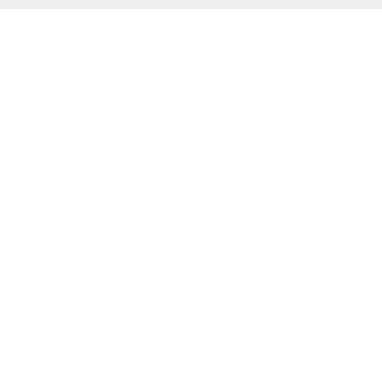
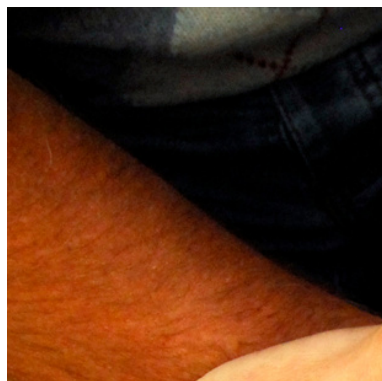
International Elders and Accompanying - Mentoring Program

The international Panel of Elders have mandated responsibility for maintaining the core spirit and values of Initiatives of Change. It's a positive and challenging experience with many opportunities for strengthening global teamwork through sharing learnings and challenges and taking time in quiet together to progress our business.

[Read Barbara Lawler's reflection.](#)



Initiatives of Change
Australia



Support Us

