



Initiatives of Change
Australia

March Newsbrief

MARCH 2024 ISSUE

NAVIGATING THE ERA OF AI
WITH HUMAN CONNECTION

A Word from the Chair of the Board – Paul Ntoumos

In the tumultuous world, in which we live today, we can often feel a sense of individual and collective despair. The barrage of global crises—from wars in Europe and the Middle East, natural disasters, societal inequities and environmental degradation—can easily have us question whether we can possibly turn things around and whether there is any hope for a brighter future.

Yet, it is precisely here that the principles of Initiatives of Change become most relevant and powerful.

We are a global movement dedicated to transforming society through personal change, fostering a culture of trust-building, ethical leadership, and sustainable living. At the heart of our philosophy, is the belief that in order to enable real and lasting change in the world, we must first begin with ourselves.

This process of self-examination and personal transformation is critical to overcoming the despair or inertia that the state of the world may instill in us.

By committing authentically and deeply to honesty, unselfishness, love, and purity of intent in our own lives, we can start to effect positive change in our immediate surroundings, where we have personal agency — be it within our families, our workplaces, or our communities.

The ripple effect, where personal change fuels community action and societal transformation, holds the hope and empowerment necessary to tackle the complex issues we face in the wider world.

Let us dream for a moment.

What power would my own transformation unlock? With that new power, what innovative solutions and breakthroughs could I bring to my personal life, my family, my communities and to the world?

The vision for a transformed world begins with us as individuals. It is a journey of overcoming despair through the power of hope, grounded in the belief that each of us holds the potential to make a significant difference. As we align our actions with the principles of honesty, unselfishness, love, and purity of intent, we not only find a path out of our own despair but also light the way for others and for a better world.

- Paul Ntoumos



Introducing Our March Newsbrief: Navigating the Era of AI with Human Connection

Mia Nour
Communications & Marketing Manager

In today's era of rapid technological advancement, Initiatives of Change Australia (IofCA) underscores the vital role of human connection. While technology offers avenues for innovation and efficiency, fostering empathy, understanding, and collaboration remains paramount. Through prioritizing human values and fostering inclusive dialogue, we ensure that our initiatives uphold human dignity and promote social cohesion.

With a focus on community engagement, education, and capacity building, IofCA cultivates connections across diverse communities.

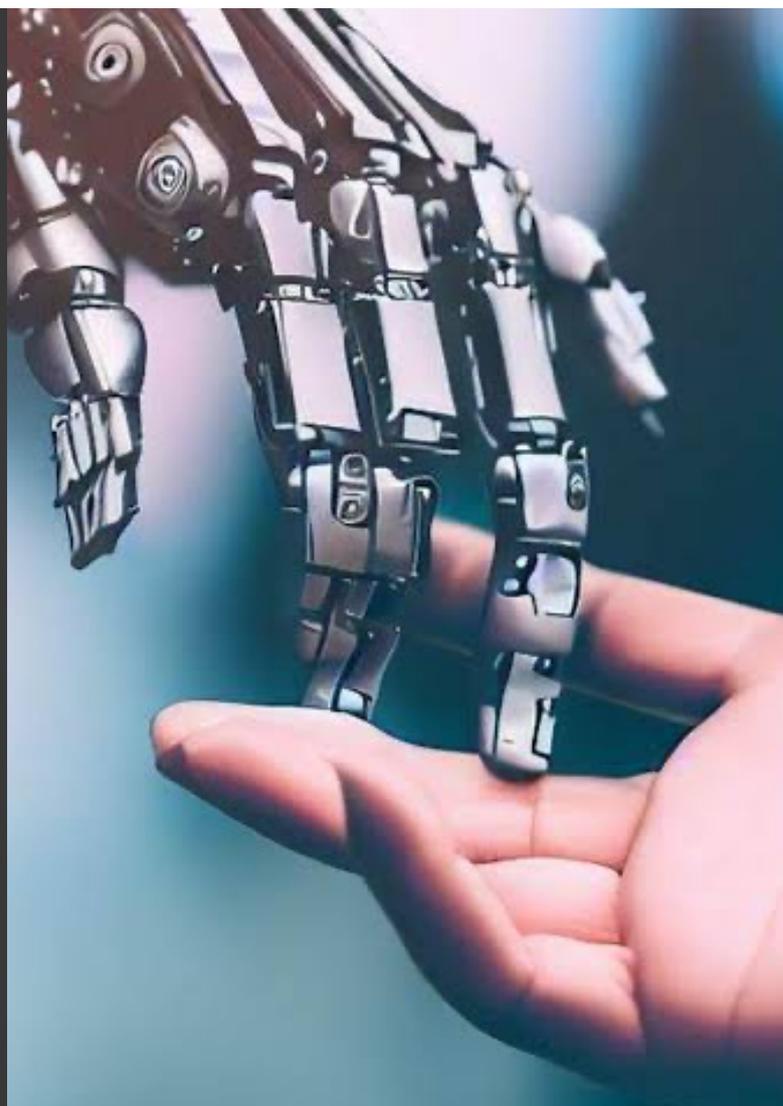
This empowers individuals and organizations to navigate the complexities of our technological age with empathy, integrity, and a shared dedication to positive societal transformation. Join us as we unveil our programs and delve into the essence of human connection amidst the technological landscape.

Explore how our initiatives foster empathy, understanding, and reconciliation, contributing to a future characterized by inclusivity, equity, and compassion. Stay tuned for captivating narratives, insightful reflections, and opportunities to engage with us on this journey of transformation.

“

Technology can facilitate human connection by enabling communication and networking across geographical boundaries. It cannot fully replicate or replace the depth and richness of face-to-face interactions and genuine human relationships. Human connection fosters a sense of belonging, community, trust, and mutual support, which are essential for emotional well-being, mental health, and social cohesion.

- AI





Ethical Leadership

LIFE MATTERS – VIC
MARCH 8-11

A Life Matters Workshop was held at Armagh over the weekend of 8 – 11 March.

“A life changing experience, the biggest change was in me and hopefully I will make a change somewhere in my family and community.”

“A life changing experience where you get to listen, share and learn from each other while having fun in the process and making meaningful connections with people from different walks of life.”

“It’s so helpful and healing “

“I loved the diversity, the personality and acceptance of my family group. We learned a lot from each other”





“

A place to discover more about yourself.

”

“

I have some steps to take in bringing change to myself in order to impact my family and community.

”







Life Matters QLD Taster session January 20

Life Matters QLD team held a taster session for prospective participants for the upcoming LM workshop to be held for the first time in QLD.

It was a fruitful session where potential participants in the LM workshop will embark on a transformative journey of self-discovery and community engagement.

We wish the LM QLD team all the very best for the workshop to be held from Friday 31 May to Sunday 2 June.

For more information and to apply please see here:

<https://au.iofc.org/life-matters-workshop-queensland>





Healing and Reconciliation

CREATORS OF PEACE

Creators of Peace - Jean Brown

Creators of Peace (CoP), a programme of International Initiatives of Change, started in 1991 as a women's initiative to empower women to create peace at every level of society, starting with themselves. In 2003, the Creators of Peace Circle was developed as their main methodology. CoP Circles all over the world are challenging women to:

- share responsibility for their part in the perpetration of conflict and in its resolution;
- break the chains of hate and revenge;
- build networks of forgiveness and friendship across racial, religious and social divides; and
- engage in creating peace at every level of society.

Designed to build community across the rich diversity of ethnicities and religions, it encourages the inner transformation of each individual in facing and repairing the divides in their own hearts; of blame, prejudice, unhealed trauma and fear.

From these journeys of release through self honesty and forgiveness, individuals are empowered to engage in peace creating authentically.

'Throughout my life I had opportunities to test and challenge my mind; Creators of Peace touched something very deep and gave me an opportunity and permission to go with my heart.'

- Prasanthi Hagare

'It's so tempting to sit at home, feeling I am the only one with problems. I am going to stand up and speak out...'

- Elizabeth Lugeye, Tanzania

'I'm committed to being a peace builder for the sake of the next generation. If I want them to be free of bitterness, then I need to be free of bitterness...if I want them to forgive others, then I need to forgive others. What seeds am I sowing in my home?'

- Rebekah Brown



First 'face to face' Peace Circle in Sydney post-COVID

Tanya Fox

I couldn't be blessed with a more wonderful group of women to work with in my first Peace Circle face-to-face post-Covid. This Circle was held over a weekend 9.30am-5.30pm, and a weekday evening 6-9pm, mid-February. This allowed comfortable sharing for our Circle of 10 participants.

What a privilege to work with such a passionate, loving, committed group of women willing to cultivate more peace within themselves and to the world around them. Some of them were already working in the field of Peace Building, others were students and graduates of the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at Sydney Uni - each one of them wanting to make their personal contribution in the field of Peace. Shoshana and I created a very safe container in which the women could share their personal stories openly, deeply and vulnerably.

They were received with compassion and love, and every person who shared felt held, loved, supported and heard.

A huge 'thank you' to one of the participants for providing her beautiful home, which also added to our being in a 'peaceful' environment.

"At my first Peace Circle, I remember some inner body wisdom rising up and out of my mouth: 'I want to own my story rather than it own me'. And in retelling it through a Hero's journey lens, I embodied more while owning it. Being able to share, hold space for the other participants during their sharings, and participate in the activities was priceless". - Tanya S.

"After years of volunteering for various NGOs, my coming to a Peace Circle felt like a natural move. Little did I know about the powerful experience it was going to be. However looking at ways to create and maintain inner and outer peace, the understanding of the phrase "Peace In Action" is what really struck me. A group of women of different generations, countries and walks of life, coming both together and individually, listening and supporting each other, looking at ways for each of them to create Peace. Shoshana and Maria's facilitation was creative and interactive, they smoothly led us into deep thinking with a sense of humour and a caring attitude. I am sincerely looking forward to the next one!" - Sophie N.



Photo Credit: Shoshan Faire

Why I'm involved in Creators of Peace

Delia Paul

In 2014, I took part in a Creators of Peace Circle at Armagh. Those stories remained with me. The woman, now living in public housing in Melbourne, who saw her male family members gunned down by militia. Another who caught the cargo train daily to school from a hardscrabble farming district far from town. A civil servant, an artist, and others.

It is all too easy to forget the reality of other people. We often do not know the experiences that have made someone who she is. When we know, then we may begin to understand better the intimate social dynamics of the larger forces that shape our lives. We may begin to treat in our life someone differently. We may make new choices about what we do with our time.

Personal change happens like plant growth — most often, slowly and unremarkably. For this to happen, we need watering, feeding and maintenance. One day, you look around and find that your dustbowl backyard of 2014 is now green and thriving in 2024. Creators of Peace Circles offer the space for that change to take place. Maybe some weeding of stereotypes? Some new planting of kindness?

Fast forward to February 2024, to a baking-hot weekend on the Murray River in South Australia. Hosted by Judy Schroeder at her 'River Connections' retreat, the time with Jean Brown and Shoshana Faire was a chance for some of us newbies to learn to convene Circles ourselves. Here we all are on the last day, with new friends and old.

Creators of Peace Circles are a chance to communicate with those who are different, when it is all too easy to retreat into the safe spaces of people who think like we do. They give us a protected space in which we can exercise our human capacities to make better choices than before. And they are replicable.

Wish us luck in our efforts to create new and diverse Circles — those tiny sanctuaries where we may encounter one another other, our own inner voice, our best and truest selves.



**CREATORS OF PEACE
FACILITATOR TRAINING
SOUTH AUSTRALIA**





Creating Space

Creating Space

David Clisby

Creating Space is where our community gathers online on the first Monday of each month, to connect, share some time in stillness and renew our sense of purpose in the world. We create a space for quiet reflection, deep listening and open sharing.

For the next few months we are reflecting on *FORGIVENESS & HEALING* so sorely needed in the world at this time.

In February Naome Rusera inspired us all with her reflection. Naome is a member of the Rwandan community and a part of IofC Queensland Life Matters team. Referring to the genocide in Rwanda she wondered how to forgive something that she had not experienced directly but had clearly experienced direct trauma from. She spoke of Prof. David Anderson-Hooker who suggested respecting complexity and seeking something beyond what is visible. Naome also mentioned Uncle Shane Charles (a First Peoples Elder) who described forgiveness as a full body experience, where your heart, your body, your soul and everything about you reconnects.

In March Dahlia Rera shared our second reflection on Forgiveness and Healing. Rera, as she is known to her friends, is a much loved resident at Armagh and a board member of IofC Indonesia. Rera shared that forgiveness for her is to heal herself, not others. She shared how IofC helped her with pain and trauma.

In April Amiel Nubaha of the Rwandan community will share his reflections on Forgiveness.

[Register here for Zoom link.](#)

First Peoples Pathway

2024 Turruk Launch

The Turruk community program for 2024 was launched at Armagh on Saturday 23 March. The event titled Forgiveness Circle was held in collaboration with Mana O Kahiko (MOK) and included a compelling traditional welcome, smoking and gift giving ceremony with movement and song. Participants were then invited into the ballroom for a conversation about the role of contemporary global Indigenous perspectives can play in healing Post Referendum Australia.

The weekend also included an afternoon with musical performances and sharing presented by Tin Camp Studios and Mana O Kahiko (MOK), supported by IofCA and an immersive and transformative Ho'Oponopono masterclass by MOK.

[Read a reflection of the weekend by a participant.](#)



Photo credit: Max Roux



Offering a Way Ahead

Mike Brown

After the accusations, vitriol, distortions and fearful exchanges of the Referendum campaigns, what we heard from seven First Nations speaking at a 'Forgiveness Circle' on 23 March felt like a door opening, offering a way ahead.

It was an Indigenous visitor from the Island of Molokai in Hawaii, Kawika Foster, trained for eight years in the wisdom of 51 generations he could trace, that set the tone right at the beginning. 'Forgiveness means to set to right our relationships with one another as human beings and with everything in the Universe. Every time we encounter anything that disrupts those relationships, that's what need to be set to right.' Though not many are talking about it, we've just been through a national disruption, haven't we? Warren Mason, Yuwaalaraay man from Tasmania, named it: 'The systems of change have let us down... This is such a hard country. People who migrate to this country don't know who we are. Can we forgive? Yes, but we need recognition of who we are – like here today, we have been given the space. Thanks very much for this opportunity... I feel privileged to speak.'

In fact, nearly every speaker thanked the audience 'for being here today' as one put it, 'and letting us share with all of you deadly mob'. Just being heard -- a 'voice'.

Uncle John Baxter is a cultural ambassador with the Brotherhood of St Lawrence, who 'took it upon themselves to run a very thorough YES campaign.' Why didn't it work? He didn't offer answers, except to say that 'going forward, we have to take on wholeheartedly to forgive.

If we carry on being angry, I don't think we have the understanding to gain the support of Australians... Are we having conversations with our elders? To forgive from the heart and be honest hopefully gives us the tools to be able to move forward. Through truth telling and treaty, we need to be having those conversations.' Yorta Yorta Dja Dja Warrung woman Ruth Langford grew up 'with a big mob of blackfellas' in Tasmania. She joined protestors, fighting on the lines to protect the forests from destruction. 'To support my anger I would drink, do drugs and fight, because I was so wild. I didn't know about forgiveness. The school system just taught about revenge, taught that to get the power you gotta learn to oppress.' She considers herself fortunate that 'the system sent me some slaps to side of the head... I am grateful they didn't pathologise me. I went to do inma (ceremonies) with women in Uluru. To be linked to country is a spiritual birthright.'

'We are all waiting for the government to save us, or the church, or someone,' she continued. But we know that the answers will be found 'only when we come back into right relation with each other and with the land'. She had dug into her 'white' Australian ancestry, identifying with anger after the death of one of their own and a massacre which followed. Challenging us non-indigenous, she went on: 'You have the capacity not only to forgive but to ask for forgiveness. Where is your responsibility? Take the burden off us to forgive first. We don't have always be the only ones to talk forgiveness.'



Photo credit: Gary Chan



Photo credit: Gary Chan



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Photo credit: Gary Chan



Photo credit: Gary Chan



Photo credit: Max Roux



Reflections

What is security?

Mike Lowe

What is Security? I've been reflecting on this question since hearing of the passing of Mosese Waqa an old friend of IofC and passionate advocate for a new understanding of human security for the Asia Pacific region. When we hear the words "national security" what do we think of? Is it military forces, weapons, borders with razor-wire fences? Or is it having a thriving local economy and food production? Is it having a population where diverse communities get along with each other and where conflicts are handled well and without violence? Is it a state where the sick and the vulnerable are cared for, regardless of their ability to pay?



Is it a nation that cares for country, for Mother Earth and the delicate balance of ecosystems that all life ultimately depends on?

For too long there has been an over-emphasis on military understandings of security. Decades ago there was a mantra I often heard in IofC circles: A nation's greatest security is the friendship and mutual support of her neighbours. Sometimes the response was: *"that's all very well for you to say, but you don't have to deal with THESE neighbours!"*

Mosese was right. We do need a new and broader understanding of human security. When we only focus on ourselves and what helps us feel secure, it isn't sustainable. Lasting security can only happen when we understand our interdependence with each other and the natural world and focus on building healthy relationships of mutual care and respect. This in turn requires moral foundations of integrity which builds trust and also on spiritual practices which can shift us from fear, greed and hatred to love, courage, compassion, humility and forgiveness.

This all aligns with the history and mission of IofC and each of us has a vital part to play in this.

A Transformative Journey: Reflections on Nuku'alofa 2023

Amiel Nubaha

Embarking on a remarkable journey to the heart of the Pacific, I found myself at the Youth Leadership Summit in Nuku'alofa, Tonga between 20 – 24 November 2023. Organised by the Pacific-Australia Youth Association, this summit aimed to unite emerging young leaders across the Pacific to foster collaboration on the vital themes of skills, security and sport. My experience at this summit was not only a testament to the power of resilience but also a profound exploration of the challenges and opportunities facing the Pacific region.

Initially faced with the great disappointment of an unsuccessful application, I found myself on the waiting list. Undeterred, I seized the opportunity with unwavering determination when eventually selected. The financial aspect seemed daunting, but as I reflected on the summit's significance, I realised that where there is a will, there is a way. Seeking support far and wide, I received partial funding from Initiatives of Change Australia and further financial assistance through a crowdfunding page.

Looking back, I recognised a familiar strength within me—the ability to aim higher and explore new possibilities even in the face of uncertainty. My life's journey, particularly through challenging times in refugee camps during my early childhood, taught me the importance of clinging to hope. In life, I have learnt that clinging to hope particularly in times of great uncertainties weaves a soft thread of resilience that carries us through challenges, revealing the extraordinary strength found in the ordinary act of believing in a brighter future. The summit solidified my belief that, when confronted with difficulties, perseverance and faithfulness to one's aspirations can yield remarkable outcomes.

The summit was a rich tapestry of workshops, presentations and site visits across the great Kingdom of Tonga, providing insights into the region's culture, traditions and opportunities. The experience prompted contemplation on Australia's national identity and its role in fostering relationships with Pacific neighbours. Surprising connections between Tongan and African music underscored the potential for ethnic communities in Australia to strengthen bonds with neighbouring nations.

An official welcome ceremony featuring Hon Rachael Moore, Australia's High Commissioner to the Kingdom of Tonga, emphasised the importance of heart-to-heart diplomacy. Her message resonated with the summit's focus on genuine friendships, trust and a commitment to shared interests—a crucial foundation for positive regional transformation.

Personally, the summit held significance given my background and the potential for individuals with diverse experiences to contribute to Australia's regional engagement. Our stories of survival and resilience, now part of Australia's broader narrative, can play a pivotal role in shaping the nation's diplomacy.

Looking ahead, I am eager to leverage on the friendships and experiences gained at the summit to continue contributing as a peacebuilder and role model in my community. With so many of the Pacific Islands represented in the diaspora in South-East Queensland, especially in Logan and Brisbane, I am looking forward to getting to know them, learn, share experiences and further enhance our trust and peacebuilding initiatives. The urgency to participate in Australia's regional role, informed by my recent experiences in India and Indonesia fuels my commitment to continue building bridges of trust. I am now working towards Life Matters program which will be held for the first time in Queensland.

The Future of lofC

Peter Thwaites

As we enter 2024 developments in the world are more threatening than I can remember in my lifetime.

Wars and civil wars are proliferating. So are tyrannical, criminal regimes. Millions of people are starving. Democracies are threatened from within by ruthless corruption. Even some of our great technological and economic advances are now proving to be a threat to the survival of the natural environment. Our vital channels of information and communication, IT and the Internet, are being increasingly used to clog our societies with lies and misinformation, in pursuit of commercial or political advantage.

At root these are not technological problems but human problems. They spring from our deep motivations and behaviour, and need a spiritual answer. The new World War which we find ourselves in is not primarily a war of arms but a spiritual war between falsehood and truth in which we are all participants.

lofC came into being with the idea that our world could be remade through a spiritual change in people. More than logic or argument, lofC aims to pass on a change of spirit through people who themselves have found a new experience and motivation. "Start with yourself" is its constant motto. A changed spirit is "caught, not taught". It is trained as we reflect on basic moral standards - honesty, purity, unselfishness and love- and as we seek to obey the still small voice that speaks to us in a time of quiet.

This is what the world needs today, I believe. But it must go beyond any one group, or religion. The spirit that the world needs can appear anywhere. We can seek it in all people, and when we find it we will sense that we share a common faith and a common goal and that we must work together.

This finding of allies is part of the future task of lofC. And it is already happening.





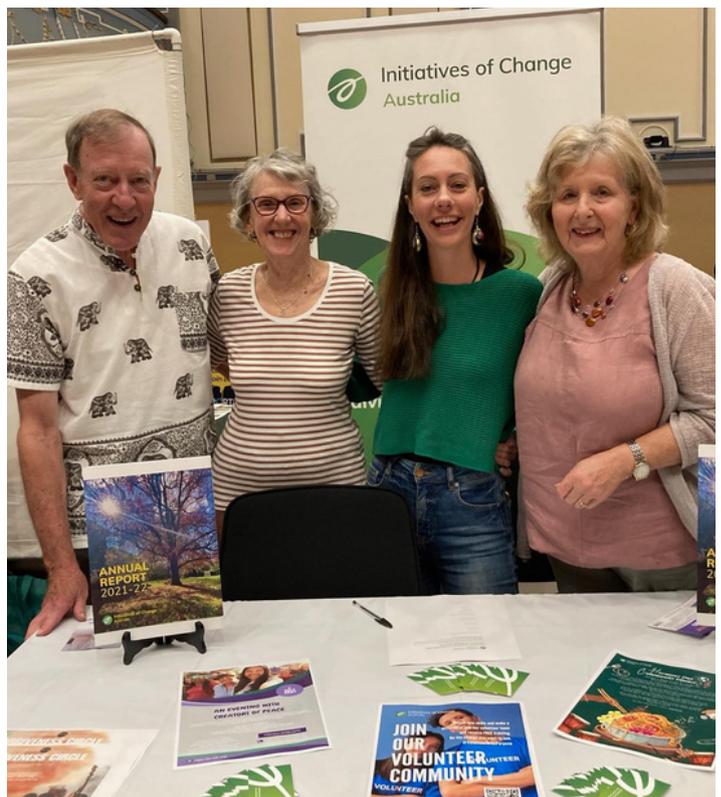
Building Community

City of Stonnington Volunteer Expo.

On 15 March IofCA community held a stall at the City of Stonnington Volunteer Expo alongside 47 other stall holders representing organisations across the city of Stonnington.

The IofCA community were able to interact with a wide range of people and sign up four future volunteers for IofCA.

It was also an opportunity to network with the diverse organisations present at the event.





Support Grassroots Peacebuilding with Indonesia

Five experienced trustbuilders and peacebuilders from IOFC Indonesia will be visiting Brisbane and Melbourne in May-June this year. This will be a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate building bridges of friendship and trust across our diversity, and cultivate unwavering people-to-people connections between IOFC branches.

We need your help to fundraise to cover the expenses of the group while they are in Australia.

Please see our [GoFundMe page](#) and support this venture.

