

Girls' Memorial Home

1922 – 1973

Other Names:

- Georgina House
- Central Mission Girls' Memorial Home

Details

The Girls' Memorial Home, in Fairfield, opened in 1922. It was a maternity home run by Wesley Central Mission. A toddlers home also operated within the home. Many of the young women's babies were transferred from the Girls' Memorial Home to the Methodist Babies' Home in South Yarra. In 1973, it became Georgina House, a refuge for victims of domestic violence. It was later converted for use as aged care accommodation.

The Girls' Memorial Home, a maternity home run by Wesley Central Mission, opened in 1922 in Fairfield.

Funds for the purchase of the property came from money inherited by Dr Georgina Sweet from her father. The home was situated in 'Carmelea', a building in Station Street, Fairfield that had formerly been the home of chocolate manufacturer, MacPherson Robertson.

The Memorial Home was a maternity home for single pregnant women. A.J. Derrick, the organising secretary of the Central Mission, noted that the Home 'would not actually bear that name', but would be known as the 'Central Mission Girls' Memorial Home'.

In its Annual Report from 1922, the Mission portrayed a genteel image of the Memorial Home and its inhabitants. The purpose of the Home was described as:

to help girls who, having been wronged, or tempted to mistake, and consequent trouble, have still their better nature uppermost, and if given timely aid and sympathy, will turn their faces again to the path of virtue and goodness ... The home is not for the habitual sinners or the hardened wrongdoers ... The Girls' Home will do its best work by being so far exclusive that daughters of Methodist and other respectable homes in such distress will find conditions that will not degrade but will uplift and help.

The home had capacity for 25 women, who were housed in large dormitories. Women generally came to the home in the late stages of pregnancy. Their babies were delivered at the Women's Hospital. Women living in the home were expected to do housework during their time there. In 1924 Central Mission secretary Derrick estimated that the women performed four to five hours work each day.

With the passage of the Adoption Act in 1928, the Memorial Home became a 'supplier' of babies to the Methodist Babies' Home in South Yarra. From this time many babies born to women living at the home were adopted, however some remained with their mothers. The Central Mission annual report of 1958 stated that, of the 75 babies born in that year, 53 were adopted, 17 remained with their mothers, and 3 "were unfit for adoption" and alternate arrangements made. In the initial years of the home the majority of mothers returned to the home with their babies following birth at hospital, including those with babies that were to be adopted out. However, by the

late 1950s babies who were to be put up for adoption did not return from hospital to the home with their mothers. Mothers and babies who were able to stay together typically returned to the home for about three weeks following the birth.

The Girls' Memorial Home also contained a toddlers home which provided temporary care to toddlers, primarily during periods of illness of their mothers where no other guardian was able to look after them. The 1958 annual report stated that during that year there were 18 such children who had spent time at the home. The report also stated that in some cases it provided permanent accommodation to children "from broken homes", and gives the case of a girl who had been living at the home for eight years. In 1958 there were, on average, six to seven toddlers in the toddlers home at a given time.

Swain and Howe's history of the Mission includes the reminiscences of a former resident of her time in this 'stately home':

Big grounds. I mean I love old homes and gardens and things but that was just, you know, walking into this place and shutting the gate and that was it until it was over ... The staircase ... Everybody remembers that staircase. We all had to clean it.

A doctor visiting the Home in 1936 expressed his concern about the women and babies there:

I regret I have to state that the atmosphere of the whole place at present is a reflection on a religious institution, the girls are miserable, look underfed and over-worked, and the babies show obvious signs of neglect. The girls are obliged to get up at 5am to do the laundry and are kept going all day ... I find that my instructions with regard to rest and diet are rarely if ever carried out.

Another comment by a former resident contradicts the image of the Home put out by the Mission – she felt that the women were treated 'like we had committed a dreadful crime'.

One woman who was at the Home in the late 1960s made a submission to the Senate inquiry into forced adoption. Upon admission, she was informed that she would be locked inside the Home during her stay and only allowed out with a day pass. On Fridays, the women were allowed on an outing to the shops together: "The local people would see a group of pregnant girls walking together and we knew that we were seen as shameful and without morals". She wrote that "During our confinement, myself and the other residents worked about 5 or 6 hours per day doing laundry, polishing floors, feeding coal into the 'donkey', and other domestic duties" (submission 118).

A report in 1970 to the Executive Committee of the Mission made reference to changing social attitudes towards single mothers, meaning that the Home could 'no longer pay its way'.

In 1973, the Home ceased operations. It became Georgina House, a refuge for victims of domestic violence. This service closed in 1989.

The records of the Girls' Memorial Home are held by the Uniting Heritage Service

Girls' Memorial Home was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* Inquiry (2012) as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

Gallery



Carmelea, 43 Station St, Fairfield

Description: This is an image of a building which was formerly the Girls' Memorial Home (1922-1973). The image was published in the Darebin Heritage Review 2000.



The Fairfield Home

Description: This is an image of the Central Methodist Mission Girls' Memorial Home at Fairfield. It shows a large, two-storey brick building surrounded by lawn and gardens. This image was published in *The Central Mission Report for 1940*. The title was taken from this publication.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Wesley Central Mission \(1893 - 1977\)](#)
Date: 1922 - 1973

Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)
Girls' Memorial Home was mentioned in submission 118 to the Inquiry Committee as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

Related Organisations

- [Methodist Babies' Home \(1929 - c. 1974\)](#)
Date: 1928 - ?

Related Legislation

- [Adoption of Children Act 1928, Victoria \(1929 - 1959\)](#)
The passage of the Adoption Act in 1928 meant that the Girls' Memorial Home became a 'supplier' to the Methodist Babies' Home.

Resources

- UnitingCare Victoria and Tasmania, *Uniting Church in Australia: agencies in Victoria delivering substitute care services*, April 2008
- Wilson, Rhonda, *Shelter: an oral history of Marjorie Oke Rooming House for Women*, 2007
- [Fairfield Girls Memorial Home \(1922-73\)](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance:* See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to Girls' Memorial Home
- Wesley Central Mission, Melbourne, *The Central Mission Report for 1940*, 1940
- Kalves, Irene, [Submission No 271 to the Senate Inquiry into the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices](#), 2011

Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

Records

- [Wesley Mission Victoria Records \(1902 - current\)](#)
 - [Records of Uniting - Connections \(adoptions and out-of-home care\) \(1910 - 2020\)](#)
 - ['Closed' Agency and General Correspondence Files \[Charities Board of Victoria\] \(1923 - 1983\)](#)
 - [Voluntary Children's Homes Files \(1921 - 1989\)](#)
 - [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
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