

# Allambie Reception Centre

1961 – 1990

## Details

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The Allambie Reception Centre opened in Burwood in 1961, on the former site of Kildonan Children's Home. It was the Victorian Government's main reception centre for children. Allambie could accommodate up to 90 children including (from 1964) babies and toddlers and by the 1970s its capacity had grown to 228 children. Allambie closed in 1990.

Allambie, a government-run reception centre for Victorian children, opened in Burwood in 1961, on the former site of Kildonan Children's Home at 70 Elgar Road, Burwood.

Allambie became the Department's main 'reception, treatment, classification and transit centre'. It was established to alleviate overcrowding at Turana, Royal Park.

Children who were State Wards also came to Allambie following a breakdown in home release, foster care or a children's home placement.

When it opened, Allambie could accommodate up to 90 children in four separate sections. Until the nursery opened at Allambie in 1964, it did not receive babies and toddlers (who were accommodated in the old nursery at Turana).

Social worker Edith Bennett (who later was Director of the Family Welfare Division in Victoria's Social Welfare Department) shared her memories working for the Victorian department when it took over Allambie in 1961:

*We had to name all the buildings. It was just big open dormitories as the Presbyterians had had it. Pretty drab, if you know what I mean. They had a storeroom stacked with hundreds of boxes of cereal that people had given to churches at harvest festivals. And they used to get shoes that the men made at Pentridge and were so heavy, and the children looked like little waifs ...*

*And it was new. I remember a great big battle with Mr Whatmore [Alexander R Whatmore, 1906-1977, former Director of the Department] about the freezing Melbourne winter. There was no heating in the toddlers' rooms and he said, "My grandchildren don't have heating in their bedrooms" and we had to convince him you see, that the grandchildren's mother went and covered them up with bedclothes. There was one staff on at night for 30 children and they were cold. And also these were miserable children, part of feeling secure was warmth. Now he fought me and rejected it and I put it up about four times, and he just wrote, "No". And then one day he came out and I walked out to the car with him. I said, "Mr Whatmore, at the risk of having my head chopped off, I'm going to ask just one more time. These children need warmth. The staff need warmth. They're going down with infections all over the place." He suddenly grinned and said, "Give me a ring in the morning". (Edith Bennett, interviewed in 1996 for the Australian Association of Social Workers)*

The Education Department operated a school in the grounds of Allambie although some children attended schools in the community.

A child's placement was decided upon by the Placement Committee, which met once a week. In 1962, the Committee comprised representatives of the Department (including the Director of Family Welfare) and Allambie staff (including the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, and Medical Officer).

According to Jenkinson, in the 1970s, Allambie consisted of three large sections: Waratah, Kurrajong and Mimosa: these accommodated groups of mixed age and sex which enabled sibling groups to be placed together. At Allambie, the Nursery section accommodated babies. 'Tecoma' accommodated up to 10 school-age boys and 'Heath/Cassia' accommodated 22 adolescent girls.

However, it would seem that siblings were not always kept together at Allambie. One former resident, who was at Allambie in 1974, made contact with the Find & Connect web resource to point out that she was separated from her younger brother.

*I would like to say that it is not correct at my time in Allambie in 1974 that siblings were accommodated together. There may have been three sections, I can't remember if there was or not but I do remember how upset I was that I could not see my younger brother. I was 6/7 and my brother was 4 and I clearly remember trying to see him in the play area for younger children, an area I was not allowed in because I was too old. I also remember the staff having no understanding of how upset I was about this when I got caught in the playground because it was the only way I could see him. I was not there for very long, I remember the school there and that it was very overcrowded, so much so that children slept on mattresses on the floor.*

Another former Allambie resident recalled sneaking out at night so that she could see her two younger brothers. In a comment on a post in the *Inside* blog, she wrote, "When we did get to play together we were on leads all the time ... I hated that place."

Overcrowding was a major problem at Allambie in the 1970s. A letter to the *Age* in December 1970 mentioned "the sorry conditions at Allambie":

*Though Allambie is called a reception centre only, it is fast becoming a permanent holding place for children, though not planned or geared to that role. The staff has to cope not only with numbers beyond their abilities and facilities, but with many children – e.g. the mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed – who should be having special care for their individual problems.*

In 1972, Allambie had a capacity of 228 children, but this was often exceeded. By the mid 1970s the number of children placed at Allambie reached an all-time high. On several occasions, over 300 children were in residence.

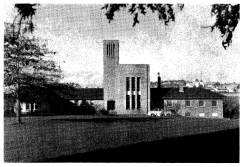
Overcrowding decreased as alternative reception and care programs were implemented by the Department. During the 1970s, changes in the structure of state-run facilities, including regionalisation of services, reduced the need for large-scale centralised reception centre like Allambie.

By the early 1980s, Allambie accommodated about 100 children. A review in 1985 recommended the closure of Allambie, and the redirection of funding to regional reception centres. The nursery at Allambie closed in 1986. Allambie Reception Centre closed in June 1990.

Allambie Reception Centre was mentioned in the *Bringing Them Home* Report (1997) as an institution that housed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families.

# Gallery

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## Allambie Children's Home, Burwood

**Description:** This image appeared in the Department's annual report for 1960.

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## New activities centre, Allambie

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report for the Social Welfare Department for 1975-6, p,21.

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## Enjoying privacy and quiet in Allambie's unit for adolescent girls

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report for the Social Welfare Department for 1974-5.

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## Typing is one of the school subjects for the older girls at Allambie

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report for the Social Welfare Department for 1974-5.

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## Grade 4 of Allambie school

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1974-5.

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## Grade 3 of Allambie school

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1974-5.

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## "Allambie" reception centre for children

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1973-4.

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### Scene from "Allambie" kindergarten

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1972-3.



### Scene from "Allambie" kindergarten

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1972-3.



### Children's skill course - "Allambie" Reception Centre

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1970-1.



### New nursery wing at "Allambie" Reception Centre

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1969-70



### Kindergarten in new nursery wing of Allambie Reception Centre

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1969-70



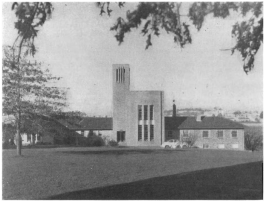
### Former site of Kildonan and Allambie, Deakin University, Burwood campus

**Description:** This is a copy of a photograph of a building on the Burwood campus of Deakin University. Situated on Elgar Road, the building was the former site of Kildonan, Burwood (1937-1961) and the former site of Allambie Reception Centre (1961-1990).



### Allambie - Deakin University, 149 Elgar Road Burwood

**Description:** This is a copy of an image of the former Allambie Reception Centre.



## Allambie Reception Centre

**Description:** This is a copy of a photograph that was published in the Department's Annual Report for 1964.

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## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Social Welfare Branch, State Government of Victoria \(1960 - 1970\)](#)  
Date: 1961 - 1970
- [Social Welfare Department, State Government of Victoria \(1970 - 1978\)](#)  
Date: 1970 - 1978
- [Department of Community Welfare Services, State Government of Victoria \(1978 - 1985\)](#)  
Date: 1978 - 1985
- [Community Services Victoria, State Government of Victoria \(1985 - 1992\)](#)  
Date: 1985 - 1990

#### Related Events

- [Committee of inquiry into allegations of neglect and maltreatment of young children, State of Victoria \(1966 - 1969\)](#)  
The Committee of inquiry into allegations of neglect and maltreatment of young children was established in response to a medical journal article published in 1966 about neglected babies admitted to Allambie Reception Centre.

#### Related Organisations

- [Illoura Children's Home \(1964 - 1984\)](#)  
The Victorian government opened the Illoura Children's Home in 1964, to alleviate overcrowding at Allambie.  
Date: 1964 -
- [Lady Dugan Children's Home \(1970 - 1976\)](#)  
The Lady Dugan Children's Home was established to ease overcrowding at Allambie Reception Centre.  
Date: 1970 - 1976
- [Turana \(1955 - 1993\)](#)  
The Victorian Government opened the Allambie reception centre in 1961 to address overcrowding issues at Turana and to separate neglected children from juvenile offenders.  
Date: 1961 -
- [Foster Care Westernport \(1979 - 1991\)](#)  
Sometimes children from Allambie Reception Centre spent holidays in foster homes provided by Foster Care Westernport.
- [Kildonan, Burwood \(1937 - c. 1961\)](#)  
The Victorian Government purchased the Kildonan site in Burwood and opened the Allambie Reception Centre in 1961.

#### Related Concepts

- [Stolen Generations](#)

## Resources

- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, [Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families](#), 1997. *Relevance:* Allambie

Reception Centre was mentioned in the Bringing Them Home Report (1997) as an institution that housed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families

- McKay, Darlene, [Open letter to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd](#), Inside: Life in Children's Homes and Institutions blog, 21 December 2009. *Relevance:* Darlene McKay spent her childhood in many homes, including Allambie Reception Centre in Burwood, Victoria. Here she shares a letter she wrote to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd
- Gordon, Michael, [Sorry not enough for stolen generations](#), The Age, 13 February 2010
- Community Services Victoria, Statewide Services Redevelopment Team, *Discussion paper on the redevelopment of services for children and young people in Allambie, Baltara and Winlaton*, 1986
- Willich, Ray, *Shadows of childhood*, 1978
- Willich, Ray, *The troubled ones: sexually and emotionally abused children*, 1979
- Hamilton-Byrne, Sarah, *Unseen, unheard, unknown*, 1995
- Behrendorff, Elizabeth, [Submission no 239 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- Guthrie, David, [Submission no 260 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- Bialestock, D., *Neglected babies: a study of 289 babies admitted consecutively to a reception centre*, Medical Journal of Australia, 1966
- Harrison, Stephen, [Submission no 401 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- Slatterie, Patricia and Blick, Jeanette, [Suffer the little children](#), Inside: Life in Children's Homes and Institutions blog, 26 October 2010
- *Allambie Reception Centre at 70 Elgar Road, Burwood*, The Age, 12 July 1990
- Spivey, Margaret, *Defying the gatekeeper: one girl's true story of resistance and rebellion*, 2010
- Coleman Architects Pty Ltd, [City of Whitehorse Heritage Review: Former Kildonan Children's Home, Elgar Road, Burwood, HO No. 249.](#), 16 March 2015 - current
- [Elgar Road, Site History Project - a Deakin University weblog](#), 2017
- [Allambie Reception Centre \(1961 - 90\)](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance:* See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to Allambie Reception Centre
- Lawson, Dean, [Support for 'Forgotten Australians'](#), Weekly Advertiser (Horsham), 23 December 2015
- [Ken Pound interviewed by Gwenda Davey in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 29 November 2010 - 13 December 2010
- [John Padfield interviewed by Sarah Rood in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\] \(2011\)](#), 2 November 2011 - 16 November 2011
- [Ron Thorpe interviewed by Helen Belle Curzon-Siggers in the Bringing them home oral history project \[sound recording\] \(1999\)](#), 19 September 1999

## Records

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

### Records

- [Victorian Government Wardship and/or Out of Home Care Records \(1864 - current\)](#)
  - [Child Information and Departmental Administration records, Turana, Baltara Reception Centre, Langi Kal Kal and Malmsbury Youth Training Centres, Melbourne Youth Justice Centre \(c. 1950 - c. 2005\)](#)
  - [Allambie records held by the Victorian Government \(1961 - 1990\)](#)
  - [Departmental Children's Homes Files \(1955 - 1987\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/allambie-reception-centre-2/>