

St Joseph's Receiving Home

1902 – 1985

Details

St Joseph's Receiving Home, Carlton, was established by Margaret Goldspink in 1902. In 1905 the Receiving Home moved to Grattan Street, Carlton, when it came under the management of the Sisters of St Joseph. It accommodated many thousands of pregnant women and also provided short term accommodation to infants. The Receiving Home closed in 1985 when it was merged with St Joseph's Babies' Home to form the new St Joseph's Babies' and Family Service in Glenroy.

St Joseph's Receiving Home was originally located on Barkly Street, Carlton. The Receiving Home was open to women of any denomination (in 1911, 20% of mothers at the home were non-Catholics).

Mrs Margaret Goldspink (nee Fitzsimons) was an important figure in the establishment of St Joseph's Receiving Home in Carlton in 1902. A prominent Catholic layperson working with women and children in the late nineteenth century in Melbourne, Goldspink was the secretary of the Ladies Association of Charity, founded in 1887 by Catholic women, when they learned that women were excluded from membership of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Before the Home opened, Goldspink, according to Archbishop Carr, had been more or less single-handedly assisting pregnant women for years.

St Joseph's Receiving Home was in Barkly Street, Carlton from 1902 to 1905. This property was situated in close proximity to Mrs Goldspink's own home, and the Women's Hospital. As an 'approved carer' under Victorian legislation, Goldspink also accommodated children deemed to be 'neglected' at the Barkly Street home. The Archbishop organised a management committee to assist Mrs Goldspink in the running of the Home in May 1902.

In 1905 the Receiving Home moved to Grattan Street, Carlton, when it came under the management of the Sisters of St Joseph. This property, at 90 Grattan Street, was even closer to the Women's Hospital.

Barnard and Twigg write of the expectation that mothers could seek refuge at the Receiving Home for the last months of pregnancy, have the baby at the Hospital and return temporarily to the Receiving Home before moving on to St Joseph's Foundling Hospital in Broadmeadows.

However, many of the mothers and babies did not take up this option. In 1906, the most popular (36%) path for women was to return home (or to a domestic 'situation') with their baby. As Barnard and Twigg point out however, the difficulties then faced by single mothers trying to support a child may well have resulted in the child going into some form of 'care'.

In 1906, 20% of women at the Receiving Home placed their baby in the care of a private nurse. (After the passage of the Infant Life Protection Act 1907, placements of this nature had to be made through the Department for Neglected Children.)

10% of the mothers went from the Receiving Home to the Foundling Hospital at Broadmeadows, along with their babies. None of the mothers from 1906 sent their child alone to the Foundling Hospital.

From their analysis of these 1906 records, Barnard and Twigg conclude that many women at the Receiving Home did not wish to be separated from their babies.

They point out that in the early years of operation at the Receiving Home, the Sisters kept detailed records of their residents, including the women's background and circumstances. Later, the recordkeeping changed as the Sisters 'became conscious of a need to provide anonymity'.

Extensions to the property were made in 1913, and Archbishop Carr laid the foundation stone in May 1914.

A mother, Anne Burrows, described her experience at St Joseph's Receiving Home in 1966, in a submission to the Senate inquiry into forced adoption. She wrote that at the Home, she was told "to take another name, that of a Saint, as I could not use my real name, in case one day I should meet a fellow inmate, socially or in the street, who might recognise me". Her submission continued:

Each morning all girls were lined up outside the [redacted]'s Office to go in, one by one. Each girl came out sobbing uncontrollably. I decided I would not be made to cry.

In the Office, I was told by the [redacted] what an evil girl I was, that I could never be a proper Mother to my baby and the Sisters of St Joseph would help me give my baby to a real Mother. I was harangued for some considerable time and felt my throat burn in my efforts not to cry ...

My job was to polish floors on my hands and knees for hours a day, heavily pregnant. When work was finished, all girls sat at a communal table in a big hall and were allowed to listen to the wireless and talk. Music on the "Hit Parade" of that era makes me physically ill, if I hear it today ...

The table comprised of girls about to give birth and girls who had given birth, but sent back to the Home to recover ... Daily, distressing tales were told, resulting in acute distress for all who suffered and for all who listened and saw the suffering of others (Submission 138, 2011).

In 1973, the Sisters of St Joseph opened the Terrace House project in Carlton. This project reflected the changing social environment. While St Joseph's Receiving Home still sheltered some pregnant women away from their family and community, others did not necessarily wish to conceal their pregnancy. The women at Terrace House were able to keep their jobs if they wished, and maintain contact with family, friends and boyfriends. The Terrace House was located nearby the Receiving Home in Carlton and could accommodate up to 5 women at a time. The project continued for 18 months, and 18 women used the service at Terrace House. According to Barnard and Twigg, the project ceased when casual employment became scarce in late 1974 and the number of residents dwindled as a consequence.

The Receiving Home closed in 1985 and merged with St Joseph's Babies' Home in Glenroy. From 1985 the organisation was known as St Joseph's Babies' and Family Service, in Glenroy.

In 1997, records of the Sisters of St Joseph were transferred to MacKillop Family Services. These included records of the various orphanages, homes and other residences run by the Sisters of St Joseph. While custodianship of the records about people in 'care' became the responsibility of MacKillop Family Services at this point, it was formally agreed that the intellectual property in these records would not change hands.

St Joseph's Receiving Home was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* Report (2012) as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

It was also cited in the report of the Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria. One mother shared her experience at St Joseph's in a submission:

My time at St Josephs was lonely and I was sad and very homesick and the two sisters in charge seemed to be indifferent to us all. I'm not sure what I expected but it was like I was invisible. They were very unapproachable and showed no kindness whatsoever. I managed to make some friends here but at the end of the day we were all alone (submission 37, quoted in Legislative Assembly, 2021, p.61).

Another woman's submission was about the experiences her mother went through:

At St Josephs, the nuns repeatedly told my mother she was dirty, not fit to be a mother and she had done this to herself. Not only this, she was told that she must work to make her keep. Heavily pregnant women being told to scrub floors, do laundry and sew, day in and day out, brings to mind images that you might see watching 'A Handmaids Tale.' But it was real, it happened to thousands of women, and the effects are still felt, and will continue to be felt until this is properly addressed (submission 106, quoted in Legislative Assembly, 2021, p.62).

MacKillop Family Services, representing the Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of St Joseph and Christian Brothers, issued an apology for historical forced adoptions in 2013: "We acknowledge the trauma of mothers separated from their children. We likewise acknowledge the pain experienced by children who were separated from parents and siblings" (quoted in Legislative Assembly, 2021, p.423).

Gallery



St Joseph's Receiving Home, Grattan Street, Carlton

More info

Chronology

- **St Joseph's Receiving Home (1902 – 1985)**
 - St Joseph's Babies' and Family Service (1985 - 1997)
 - MacKillop Family Services (1997 - current)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart \(1866 - current\)](#)
St Joseph's Receiving Home came under the management of the Sisters of St Joseph in 1905.
Date: 1905 - 1985

Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)
St Joseph's Receiving Home was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* Report (2012) as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.
- [Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria \(28 May 2019 - August 2021\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [St Joseph's Babies' Home \(1975 - 1985\)](#)
In 1985 the St Joseph's Receiving Home in Carlton merged with the St Joseph's Babies Home in Glenroy to become the St Joseph's Babies' and Family Service, Glenroy.
- [St Joseph's Foundling Hospital \(1901 - 1975\)](#)
Some mothers spent the last months of their pregnancy at St Joseph's Receiving Home, then went with their babies to St Joseph's Foundling Hospital.
Date: 1902 - ?
- [St Joseph's Nursery \(1959 - 1976?\)](#)
St Joseph's Nursery was opened while St Joseph's Receiving Home was undergoing renovations in 1959.

Related Legislation

- [Infant Life Protection Act 1907, Victoria \(1907 - 1915\)](#)
Some women at the Receiving Home would place their baby in the care of a private nurse. These arrangements were overseen by the Department for Neglected Children following the passage of the Infant Life Protection Act 1907.

Resources

- Senate Community Affairs References Committee, [Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices](#), 29 February 2012
- Murray, Suellen, John Murphy, Elizabeth Branigan, Jenny Malone, *After the orphanage: life beyond the children's home*, 2009
- [Heritage Display](#), MacKillop Family Services website, 2013
- Hamilton, Madeleine, [Shocking scenes from a teen pregnancy](#), Eureka Street, 15 December 2011
- Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, *A piece of the story : national directory of records of Catholic organisations caring for children separated from families*, November 1999
- Knowles, Marion Miller, [St Joseph's Receiving Home](#), The Advocate (Melbourne), 20 August 1910

Records

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

Records

- [MacKillop Family Services Records, Victorian institutions \(1857 - current\)](#)
- ['Closed' Agency and General Correspondence Files \[Charities Board of Victoria\] \(1923 - 1983\)](#)
- [Voluntary Children's Homes Files \(1921 - 1989\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/st-josephs-receiving-home/>