

Presbyterian Sisterhood Home

1909 – c. 1978

Other Names: • Sisterhood Home

Details

The Presbyterian Sisterhood established a maternity Home in North Fitzroy in 1909. Previously, it had run a refuge in Warrnambool, in western Victoria. The Presbyterian Sisterhood Home housed single mothers and their babies. In 1953, the Mary Dickens Hospital Wing, a small maternity hospital, was added to the Home. The Home operated until around 1978.

The Presbyterian Sisterhood Home was situated at 223 McKean Street, North Fitzroy. The Home, for unmarried mothers and their babies, operated until the late 1970s. It accommodated up to around 16 residents at a time.

In 1926, the Sisterhood reported that more than 1,000 mothers and babies had passed through the Home at North Fitzroy. In 1927, Miss KL Foster was the deaconess in charge of the Sisterhood Home.

In 1952, the Sisterhood announced its plans to build a small maternity hospital at the Home. The Mary Dickens Hospital Wing was opened in May 1953. A submission to the Senate inquiry into forced adoptions from a woman at the Home in the mid 1960s stated: "There was a fully equipped hospital at the home and if the doctor was available, we would have our babies there or go to the [women's hospital](#)" (submission 33).

An article from 1954 stated that the Presbyterian Sisterhood Home in North Fitzroy had accommodated 1500 girls. It reported that 'girls' stayed at the Home for a period of 6 months. During that time, they were taught mothercraft by Matron LG Envall, as well as housekeeping and craft work 'so that they may take up work when they leave the home' (*The Age*, 1 May 1954).

The Presbyterian Sisterhood 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. One submission said "The single mothers home was run like a jail ... The Home had high fences; everything was locked; we were not allowed to go out. I think some of the girls had visitors but that was regulated" (submission 33). Another describes the admission process after she arrived at the Presbyterian Sisterhood Home: "Alone with the matron in her office, the first thing was to find a name for me. I couldn't use my proper name. It had to be a fictitious name because it all had to be hush-hush. Someone might find out I was in a home for unmarried mothers! A lot of the girls used their second names ..." (submission 381).

A woman whose baby was born in 1963 wrote in her submission to the Senate inquiry that "All our mail was read going in and out". This practice meant that she never received a letter from a friend in Western Australia who had made arrangements that would have made it possible for her to keep her daughter (submission 33). Other submissions mentioned how mail was handled by the Home: "Any letters or parcels from home went to the Matron's private address, as they could not have the Home's address on them, and all the mail was opened" (submission 381). "... we were denied any contact with the outside world, the only contact we had with our family was by letter, our letters arrived with pages missing and some words blacked out ... I cleaned the office as one of my duties and often saw letters burning in the open fire" (submission 151).

Gallery



Presbyterian Sisterhood Home - the building from the street

Description: This is an image of the Presbyterian Sisterhood Home from around 1959. It is a digitisation of a slide that was used by the former Matron Grace Envall in presentations she made about the work of the Sisterhood.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Presbyterian Sisterhood \(c. 1900 - 1978?\)](#)

Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)

Presbyterian Sisterhood Home was mentioned in submissions 33, 151 and 381 to the Inquiry Committee as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

Resources

- [Dangers of overlapping \[letter to the editor\]](#), The Argus, 19 November 1909
- [Presbyterian Sisterhood: opening of the new Home](#), The Age, 12 November 1910
- [Sisterhood needs building funds](#), The Age, 1 May 1954

Records

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

Records

- [Records of Uniting - Connections \(adoptions and out-of-home care\) \(1910 - 2020\)](#)
 - [Records held by Uniting Church Archives \(1923 - 1994\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/presbyterian-sisterhood-home/>