

Geelong Female Refuge

1868 – 1928

Details

The Geelong Female Refuge was established in 1868 at Kildare, initially to house and reform ‘fallen’ women who had nowhere to live. By 1893 the Refuge accepted pregnant unmarried women who were prepared to have their babies at the refuge and remain for a further 12 months with their baby. By 1928 it had evolved into the Bethany Babies’ Home.

The objects of the Institution were: To provide a refuge for females who have fallen into vice, and who are desirous to return to the paths of virtue; To reclaim them from their evil courses, and fit them to become useful members of society and To assist in procuring them situations, or otherwise providing for them on leaving the institution. The Refuge was to be conducted on Protestant principles, and “applicants shall be admissible without reference to creed or country” (*Geelong Advertiser*, 18 November 1867).

In 1880, around the time that the Geelong Industrial School was closing, the committee of Geelong Refuge approached the Victorian Premier and asked for the use of some of the unoccupied buildings, as their premises were “quite inadequate” (*The Argus*, 4 September 1880). The government granted some buildings from the old industrial school to the Refuge’s ladies committee, to be removed, re-erected and repaired. What had been a large room at the Geelong Industrial School was divided into 6 sleeping apartments (*Geelong Advertiser*, 14 October 1881).

A report about the Refuge’s annual meeting in 1893 states that in June 1893 there were 14 adults and 7 infants at the institution. During the previous year, 11 women were discharged from the Refuge: 6 were placed in service, 4 were “restored to their friends” and 1 left voluntarily. One baby was adopted, and 3 infants left the Refuge with their mothers (*Geelong Advertiser*, 5 August 1893).

Like many institutions for single women, the Geelong Female Refuge had a commercial laundry. An account of the Refuge’s monthly meeting in May 1911 reported that a committee member had recently sent laundry to the Refuge and “had got it back done most beautifully”. At that time, the Refuge accommodated 10 adults and 7 infants.

In May 1927, the local paper reported on proposed changes at the Refuge:

*For some time the committee of the Geelong Female Refuge has been considering the advisability of establishing a Foundling Home in connection with the Refuge. It is felt that better work could be done if a home were provided in which babies could be cared for. Members of the Charities Board on Friday visited the Refuge, having been asked for financial assistance in establishing the proposed home. After inspecting the buildings, members of the Board asked that plans should be submitted, and promised favourable consideration. The opinion was expressed that there was a need for such a home in Geelong, as there at present existed no institution where infants could be received (*Geelong Advertiser*, 30 May 1927).*

In 1928, the Geelong Female Refuge became Bethany Babies’ Home.

Gallery



Geelong Female Refuge

Description: This is an image of the Geelong Female Refuge, taken in approximately 1888. It shows the refuge as a long, single-storey wooden building. Two women holding babies are standing on the verandah, and two toddlers are standing in the garden in front of the refuge.

More info

Chronology

- **Geelong Female Refuge (1868 – 1928)**
 - Bethany Babies' Home (1928 - 1977)
 - Bethany Community Support (1977 - 2023)
 - Meli (2023 - current)

Resources

- [Geelong Female Refuge/Bethany Babies' Home \(1868-current\)](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance:* See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to Geelong Female Refuge

Records

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

Records

- [Bethany Community Support Records \(1896 - 2007?\)](#)
 - [Records of Victorian Adoptions \(c. 1908 - current\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/geelong-female-refuge/>