

Sydney Home for Babies

1910 – 1911

Details

The Sydney Home for Babies was located at Waverley, in a large two-storey house on what was then called Nelson Bay Road and is now Bronte Road. Opened in February 1910 by Mrs Greig-Smith, founder of Sydney Norland Nurseries, it was 'founded for the care of infants who are poor and whose mothers have to support their infants ...'. Its slogan was 'To Save The Babies and to Help the Mothers' but within a year chronic gastritis had caused the deaths of a number of babies. The State Children's Relief Board prosecuted the Home for keeping infants without a licence and it was closed in late 1911.

The Sydney Home for Babies was founded by Mrs Greig-Smith, wife of a prominent Sydney dietician and was led by a board of women, a number of whom were married to doctors who were visiting physicians at the establishment. Dr Grace Boelke also sat on the board. Dr Boelke had been involved in the setting up of the Sydney Norland Institute, as was staff member Dr Harold Binney.

At this time, single mothers usually had to stop nursing their babies in order to support themselves and their child, and placed their babies in institutions and foster homes. However, substitute foods for infants were poorly understood and institutions and foster homes caring for babies experienced alarming rates of infant mortality. This home, created by members of the medical establishment, was intended to 'stem the waste of child life'.

It appears that mothers (and sometimes single fathers) put their babies in the home, to live, while the parents worked. Some paid maintenance for their children. The babies were cared for by a professional nursing staff, and visiting physicians, including Dr Donald Luker, Dr John Morton, Dr Harold Binney and the dietician Dr Greig-Smith, whose wife was the president.

In October 1911 the State Children's Relief Board's Boarding Out Officer, prosecuted Mrs Greig-Smith under the *Infants' Protection Act* for operating an establishment with two or more infants under the age of seven, without a licence. The cause of the refusal of the licence was the State Children's Relief Department's assessment that the home separated mothers from babies, and what was a high death rate. Mrs Greig Smith's assertion that the mothers needed to work, and that the death rate was exaggerated, was ignored by the Board's president and infant life protection campaigner, Sir Charles Mackellar, and by the government.

In November 1911 *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the Minister for Public Instruction had tabled reports from the State Children's Relief Board in Parliament. These reports contained distressing details about sick children being kept in contaminated wards and fed with unsterilised equipment. One baby had bed sores on its head. A woman called Mrs McDonald, of Commonwealth Surry Hills, reported that she had placed her baby niece in the Home in September 1911, but withdrew her three weeks later as the child was seriously ill. The baby died of gastritis. Further inspection showed that nine of the 12 children in the home needed proper nursing, but the young girls in training in the Home could offer no such experience. The report stated that, of 100 admissions since the home opened, there had been 17 deaths and the average length of stay was such 66 days.

Despite a the scandal caused by the Department's accusation that the wives of well-to-do members of the medical establishment of acting badly, the State Children's Relief Board argued that both this Home and the related Sydney Norland Nurseries required to be licensed to care for children under the Infant Protection Act. It refused to licence the Sydney Home for Babies and the Home appears to have closed immediately.

Gallery



The Sydney Home for Babies

Description: This is a copy of an image published in the 1911 Annual Report of the Sydney Home for Babies, it shows the outside of the Home.

More info

Related Entries

Related Legislation

- [Infant Protection Act 1904, New South Wales \(1904 - 1923\)](#)

The Sydney Home for Babies was closed because it was refused a licence under the *Infant Protection Act*.

Related Organisations

- [State Children's Relief Department \(1881 - 1923\)](#)

The State Children's Relief Department closed down The Sydney Babies Home, by refusing it a licence to care for children.

- [Sydney Norland Nurseries \(1908 - 1945\)](#)

Some of the people involved in launching the Sydney Norland Nurseries were involved in developing the Sydney Home for Babies.

Resources

- [Women's Conference at Sydney: Fifty-Two Societies Represented, Record of Great Social Work](#), The Mercury, 10 August 1911

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