

Kalimna Vocational Centre for Girls

1962 – 1977

Details

The Kalimna Vocational Centre for Girls, in Toowong, opened in December 1962. Run by the Salvation Army, it was on the site of the former Salvation Army Girls' Home, Toowong (which was demolished in around 1962). It closed 29 October 1977.

The Queensland state government met 75% of the cost to build Kalimna, which had a modernist design praised by an architecture critic in 1963: "Its requirements as a high security reformatory are masked by an exotic splendour of draped canopy and pierced block screens. This is a brilliant piece of corrective architectural psychology – the worst thing to do for the girls would have been to give them a reformatory that looked like a reformatory. The architects are to be commended for their insight" (John Dalton, quoted in *Architecture au*, 2018). Its design featured "decorative breeze-block screens as a way of de-institutionalizing the centre by creating verandah spaces that eliminated the need for prison bars on windows and allowed for the provision of natural light and ventilation". A Salvation Army pamphlet "Kalimna: lovely home" praised the building's design: "... nothing less like an institution could be conceived. A broad stairway from a quiet street leads up to an inviting doorway at which the Matron, Major Jean Geddes, awaits any interested visitors who may call" (pamphlet reproduced in *Goodna Girls*, pp.58-61).

In the 1960s, Kalimna was one of 3 denominational (ie, non-government) institutions in Queensland for the reception of 'delinquent girls', who were sometimes referred to as 'incorrigible'. The Kalimna pamphlet states:

But behind the pastel shades and delicately tinted drapes there is a passion to redeem the girls, all of whom are between fourteen and eighteen years of age and have been committed to the Army's care by the children's courts. All have been, or are in danger of being involved morally.

A former staff member from Kalimna gave evidence to the [Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions](#), stating that the time period a girl would stay at Kalimna was about 9 to 12 months. This period was determined at the discretion of the institution, not the court. The staff member said:

There was no order of the Court saying how long [the girls] would be incarcerated for. It was purely, as I said, at the discretion of the Army and I don't think there was any input or I don't think the Department had very much influence in determining when a child would be released. Therefore the Department did not have the discretion to release the girls, and this attitude seemed to be tolerated by the Department (p. 105).

According to the Salvation Army pamphlet, the Kalimna buildings featured an assembly hall, craft rooms, a gymnasium and a swimming pool. In its description of different sections of the Home to house girls at different stages of their time at the institution, beginning with the "intake suite", the Kalimna pamphlet provides vague details of a system of privileges and punishments:

'Suite' is perhaps the word which adequately describes this self-contained unit with all modern conveniences which can house five girls. Fastened to each bedroom wall is a small blackboard. Chalk is provided below. The temptation to inscribe graffiti on the walls magically vanishes when the means to write on an appropriate part of the wall is provided. Morning light has been known to reveal a list of boys' names chalked on the blackboard, or at other times a prayer: 'O God, let me go home on Friday'. But the desire to go home diminishes as the new girl realises the delights of her present home.

... The middle section of the Home takes twenty four girls and it is to this series of three-bedded rooms that the newcomer is transferred in due course. Each girl has her own built-in wardrobe and set of drawers. Each bed has its own bed lamp, and the delight and comfort of these rooms are such that a girl begins to take pride in her new surroundings. This is reflected in the care she bestows upon her room and its contents, for each girl knows that misconduct could mean relegation to the intake section once more.

The final stage is when the girl is promoted to one of the twelve single rooms in the hostel section. From here, if necessary she can go out to work during the day and in the evening return – not to her old neighbourhood where the odds were weighted against her, but to the unforced, unsanctimonious of the officers who have shown her such affection and for whom she has conceived a genuine affection in response (reproduced in Goodna Girls, p.60).

The authors of an article in an architecture journal from 2017 interviewed Robin Spencer, the architect who designed Kalimna. He stated that the "intake suite" described in the pamphlet was an area housing "what resembled five cells (one of which was padded) to discipline only the most 'difficult' girls. Spencer also said that the area described as a "gymnasium" was actually a commercial laundry, where the girls worked to help Kalimna meet its "bread and butter expenses" (Deasy & Leach, pp.288-290).

A footnote of this 2017 article contains a quote from Major Peter Farthing of the Salvation Army's evidence to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse on 7 February 2014, when he mentions the "intake suite":

If I can just waffle, we did have a correctional facility in Brisbane, called Kalimna, for girls who were sent by the courts. For some stupid reason, at some stage, the managers decided to have a holding room there. When girls arrived, they went in there to cool down, and they were there for a day or two. Now, that was terrifying, because so many women have come to us with claims because of that room. So it was a very stupid, damaging practice (Deasy & Leach, footnote 44, p.301).

Evidence was given to the Queensland Commission of Inquiry about the use of solitary confinement at Kalimna, which was known as 'pop' to the girls who lived there. Kalimna had 3 solitary confinement rooms located near the main building. The 1999 report stated that 'It would appear that at Kalimna some girls were required to spend significant periods in solitary confinement, usually for offences such as absconding or being violent' (p.145).

One former resident described her experience of solitary confinement at Kalimna:

If you were 'uncontrollable', they put you down in the isolation ward where there were six cells. They were all staggered so that we couldn't see or talk to each other and it was called 'POP' (place of punishment). There was a mattress on the floor and we had no toilet. They would take us for a shower in the morning, breakfast in the room, if you could call it breakfast. We'd be let out to go to the toilet three times a day and when the sun went down we had no lights in the room and that's where I stayed the whole time. I just lay on the mattress. Do you know how agonising that is to the soul of a child? It's just cruelty, out-and-out cruelty to children who had done nothing wrong, absconded from something they didn't like (Judy, Goodna

Girls, p.57).

The report noted that 'the difficulty of confirming or discounting the claims of former residents has been compounded by the paucity of surviving records held by the Salvation Army administration (p.146).

The [1999 report](#) of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions also stated that until the 1970s, residents of Kalimna received no formal education, as most girls were above school leaving age. It did introduce a full-time education program in the early 1970s. The Education Department closed the school facility in September 1977, prompting the closure of the Kalimna institution a month later (p.148).

Reflecting on the institutions for juvenile offending girls, the Forde Inquiry report concluded:

For much of their histories, the denominational training schools were large, impersonal institutions where the labour demanded of the girls was both arduous and monotonous, and not likely to significantly enhance their future employment prospects, and where solitary confinement was used to discipline recalcitrant inmates. The emphasis was on punishment, with little or no effort made to assist in the rehabilitation of the girls. However, these were institutions that received little government funding, which made it virtually impossible to implement a more individually focused treatment program or to employ staff more attuned to the problems and sensitivities of the girls. These institutions were components of a wider system that survived on a limited budget, and had done so for many years, and they quickly became redundant as essential improvements were made to that system in the 1970s. It is not surprising that many of the residents believed they were damaged by their experiences at these institutions (pp.148-149).

After the closure of Kalimna, the Salvation Army provided student housing on the site until 2016. In 2018, it was reported that the Kalimna buildings were to be demolished to make way for a retirement village.

Gallery



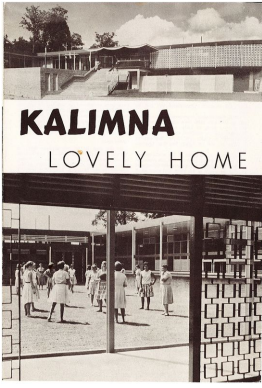
Kalimna Vocational Centre at Toowong, operated by the Salvation Army

Description: This image is from page 141 of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Child Abuse in Queensland institutions and the image is an Inquiry photograph.



Kalimna - dark hallway on lower level (note doorways are staggered)

Description: This image is from page 146 of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Child Abuse in Queensland institutions and the image is an Inquiry photograph.



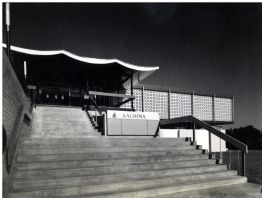
Kalimna: lovely home

Description: This is a copy of the front cover of a Salvation Army pamphlet, "Kalimna: lovely home". It was published to accompany an article in the *Architecture au* magazine in 2018, about the demolition of the Kalimna buildings. The original pamphlet is from the Salvation Army Heritage Centre.



Kalimna Reform Centre by E. P. and A. I. Trewern

Description: This is a copy of a photograph published in *Architecture au* magazine, to accompany a 2018 article about the demolition of the Kalimna building. The image was published with permission from the RAIA collection, John Oxley Library (State Library of Queensland).



Kalimna, Jephson St entrance, Toowong

Description: This is a copy of a photograph of the entrance to the Kalimna Vocational Centre for Girls. It was published in an article in the *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand* in 2017.

More info

Chronology

- Industrial School for Girls, Toowong (1907 - 1956)
 - Salvation Army Girls' Home, Toowong (1956 - c. 1961)
- **Kalimna Vocational Centre for Girls (1962 – 1977)**

Related Entries

Run by

- [The Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory \(1921 - 2018\)](#)

Related Events

- [Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions \(1998 - 1999\)](#)
The Commission of inquiry into abuse of children in Queensland institutions visited the site of Kalimna Vocational Centre for Girls.
- [Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, Parliament of Australia \(2003 - 2005\)](#)
Kalimna Vocational Centre for Girls was mentioned in Submissions 222 and 532 to the Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care

Related Legislation

- [Children's Services Act 1965, Queensland \(1965 - 2000\)](#)
The Kalimna Vocational Centre was licensed under the *Children's Services Act 1965* on 4 August 1966.

Resources

- The Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory, [*Submission No. 46 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care: The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territorial Headquarters \(VIC\), Appendix B, Eastern Territory Social Centres, A list of openings, closings and function*](#), June 2003
- Cleland, Sharon, [*Caring for the Children: A history of institutional care provided by The Salvation Army for Australian children and youth \(1893-1995\)*](#), August 2012

Records

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

Records

- [Salvation Army Australia, Records of Homes in the former Eastern Territory \(c. 1891 - 1990s\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/kalimna-vocational-centre-for-girls/>