

St Vincent's Foundling Home

1914 – 1971

Details

St Vincent's Foundling Home was run by the Sisters of Mercy from 1914 on the same site as the St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage in Subiaco. It housed infants and children up to six years old who were both wards and 'privately placed'. Once they turned six, girls were sent to St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage and boys to Clontarf or (from 1929) Castledare. St Margaret's Hostel was built as an extension of St Vincent's in 1918, and from 1947 the Home received child migrants from Britain and Malta. In 1971, St Vincent's Foundling Home became part of the Catherine McAuley Centre.

St Vincent's Foundling Home was a home for children under the age of six and it has been reported that many children who were admitted were unwell. The early reports submitted to the government record the number of children who died each year. The 1917 annual report of what was then the State Children Department (p.10) shows that 10 children died from causes such as meningitis, bronchitis or pneumonia, whooping cough, and 'entiritis'. Later government reports *Signposts* 2004, pp.470-471) also document the number of infants who died in the Home. As conditions for infants improved generally, these deaths were not as numerous as in previous years but in some years (as in 1926) up to four children died.

It was likely that the early years of St Vincent's Foundling Home were characterised by poverty, within the institution, not only among those children admitted. A letter of appreciation of the *The Daily News* Orphans' Christmas Cheer Fund in 1915 gives an insight into life at St Vincent's in the early days, showing that donations enabled the children to occasionally have extras that were not part of their daily experience:

As you desired, the money has been used for the purchase of toys for the little ones at the Foundling Home, and we are deeply grateful for your kindness in remembering them. Letter, 11 January 1916 published in The Daily News 2 December 1916, p.10

In evidence to the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the State Children Act Amendment Bill in October 1918, the Catholic Archbishop of Perth said that there were 76 infants in the Foundling Home, and described them in emotional terms as 'nearly all illegitimate', and often 'weaklings, everything possible having been done to destroy them before birth.' He said the children were generally sent to them by the Children's Court but that sometimes 'a mother comes along and tells a piteous tale, asking us to take her child, for which most often she promises to pay'. In those cases, the Archbishop said the church tried to pursue the father through the Children's Court to pay maintenance. He reported that these fathers usually paid 'a little at the start, and then they forget' but that some fathers were 'most faithful in the discharge of their obligation'.

In 1918, St Margaret's Hostel for 'unmarried mothers and their babies' was built as an extension of St Vincent's and in 1934 (*Signposts* p.471) a 'large and airy nursery and infirmary, together with an up-to-date kindergarten school' were added.

St Vincent's was a large Home. Government reports (*Signposts* pp.471-472) show that by 1921 there were 54 children in the Home and until 1948 there were around 50-60 children living there.

From 1947, St Vincent's admitted children who had been sent as unaccompanied child migrants from Britain and Malta.

A government report in 1952 (*Signposts p.473*) shows that St Vincent's was a starting point for children who could spend their childhoods in allied Children's Homes: 'When the children become of school age the girls are transferred to St Joseph's Orphanage and the boys to Castledare Junior Orphanage'. St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage, which is referred to in this quote, was alongside St Vincent's on the same plot of land. Castledare, was across the river in a southern suburb of Perth. Brothers and sisters who had been in St Vincent's were therefore separated by the time they reached school age.

Extensive renovations were reported in 1954 and in 1957 the annual report of the Child Welfare Department showed there were 152 children at St Vincent's at the end of the 1956-1957 year. Ninety two of these children were 'private admissions' (children who had been placed by family or others) and the private children far outweighed the number of children who were child migrants, wards or 'native wards' throughout the 1960s.

In 1971, St Vincent's Foundling Home became part of the Catherine McAuley Centre.

St Vincent's Foundling 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.

Gallery



St Vincent's Foundling Home, Subiaco [picture]

Description: This is a digital copy of a photograph of the front entrance of St Vincent's Foundling Home in 1953. It is from the State Library of Western Australia's collection of online images that were made available by the Historical Records Rescue Consortium Project supported by Lotterywest.



Immigration [St Vincent's Foundling Home dining room]

Description: This is a digital copy of a photograph of the dining room at St Vincent's Foundling Home in 1948. It is from the National Archives of Australia's collection of online images that were made available by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.



Immigration [St Vincent's Foundling Home dormitory]

Description: This is a digital copy of a photograph of a dormitory bedroom at St Vincent's Foundling Home in 1948. It is from the National Archives of Australia's collection of online images that were made available by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.



Foundling Home

Description: 'Foundling Home' is a digital copy of an undated photograph from the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea Archives and Heritage Centre. It shows a group of young children and babies in front of the St Vincent's Foundling Home. An approximate date range of 1914 to 1950s has been given, based on the children's clothing.



St Vincent's children

Description: 'St Vincent's children' is a digital copy of an undated photograph from the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea Archives and Heritage Centre. It shows a group of young children and babies in front of the St Vincent's Foundling Home. Also present are older girls, who would have been from the St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage. These older girls helped staff and sisters care for the children in St Vincent's. An approximate date range of 1914 to 1950s has been given, based on the children's clothing.



Subiaco Dormitory

Description: 'Subiaco Dormitory 2' is a digital copy of an undated photograph from the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea Archives and Heritage Centre. It shows a dormitory at the St Vincent's Foundling Home. An approximate date range of 1920s to 1960s has been given, based on the style of the dolls on the beds. It is possible that the picture was taken when the dormitory was decorated for a special event.



St Vincent's Foundling Home

Description: 'St Vincent's Foundling Home' is a digital copy of an undated photograph from the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea Archives and Heritage Centre. As it is a colour photograph, it is likely that the image dates from the 1940s or later.

More info

Chronology

- **St Vincent's Foundling Home (1914 – 1971)**
 - Catherine McAuley Centre (1971 - 1991)
 - Mercy Community Services (Inc) (1997 - 2002)
 - MercyCare (2002 - current)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Sisters of Mercy, Perth Congregation \(1846 - 2011\)](#)

Related Events

- [Fact-Finding Mission on Child Migration \(1956\)](#)
Ross Fact-Finding Mission [British child migration] was interested in the welfare of children at St Vincent's Foundling Home.
Date: 1956 -
- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)
St Vincent's Foundling Home was mentioned in submission 279 to the Inquiry Committee as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.
- [Inquiry into past forced adoptive policies and practices, Western Australian government \(2023 - 2024\)](#)
The WA inquiry into past forced adoptive policies and practices found that institutions operated by the Sisters

of Mercy (now Institute of Sisters of Mercy Australia and Papua New Guinea) engaged in pressure and coercion practices which caused unmarried mothers to agree to the adoption of their children.

Related Organisations

- [Castledare \(1934 - 1983\)](#)
Boys often went to Castledare from St Vincent's Foundling Home when they were about six years old.
Date: 1934 - 1971
- [St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage \(1901 - 1971\)](#)
St Joseph's Orphanage and St Vincent's Foundling Home were close to each other at Subico. Younger children went to St Vincent's and older girls were housed at St Joseph's.
Date: 1914 - 1971
- [St Margaret's Hostel \(1918 - 1971\)](#)
St Margaret's Hostel was built as an extension of St Vincent's Foundling Home.
- [Catholic Child Welfare Council, United Kingdom \(1929 - 2003\)](#)
The Catholic Child Welfare Council was involved in sending unaccompanied child migrants to St Vincent's Foundling Home from Britain.
Date: 1947 - 1957
- [Father Hudson's Society, United Kingdom \(1902 - current\)](#)
Father Hudson's Society was one of the Homes in Britain that sent child migrants to St Vincent's Foundling Home.
Date: 1947 - 1957
- [Catholic Episcopal Migration and Welfare Association \(1947? - 1970\)](#)
The Catholic Episcopal Migration and Welfare Association [CEMWA] coordinated the placement of child migrants at St Vincent's Foundling Home.
Date: 1947? - 1966

Resources

- Community Affairs References Committee, [Lost Innocents: Righting the record - Report on child migration](#), 30 August 2001
- Stolen Generations' Testimonies Foundation, [Stolen Generations' Testimonies](#), 2009. *Relevance:* See testimony of Glenys Ward
- Immigration Museum, [Stolen childhoods](#), 2012
- Coldrey, Barry, [Good British stock: child and youth migration to Australia](#), 1999
- [On their own: Britain's child migrants](#), Australian National Maritime Museum website, 2010
- McLay, Anne, [Women Out of Their Sphere: A History of the Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia](#), 1992
- [Joy Milligan interviewed by Mary Hutchison for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 17 April 2012 - 20 April 2012
- [Dilys Budd interviewed by Ann-Mari Jordens in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 9 March 2010
- [Anthony Brennan interviewed by Christine Choo for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), February 2012
- [Robert Francis Allan Isaacs interviewed by John Bannister in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2000\)](#), 2 March 2000
- [Child Migration](#), National Archives of Australia, No date
- 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
- [Child Migrants Trust \[website\]](#), 2011
- [Happy and Carefree Natures Caught By the Cameraman In These Studies of Young Western Australians](#), Sunday Times, 5 February 1939
- Department for Community Development, State of Western Australia, [Submission No 55 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), July 2003
- Pushong, Lyn, [Heritage Trail: A journey through the history of MercyCare](#), 2008. *Relevance:* p.8
- Bradshaw, Paul, [Submission No 85 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 1 July 2003
- Peterson, Margaret, [Submission No 172 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 11 September 2003

- House of Commons Health Committee, [Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Health Committee on 11 June 1998 \(Health - Third Report\)](#), 11 June 1998
- Family Care Society, [Memorandum by the Family Care Society](#), Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Health Committee on 11 June 1998, 11 June 1998
- Thomas, Ivy, [Submission No 483 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 1 November 2004
- Heritage Council of Western Australia, [Catherine McAuley Centre](#), inHerit: our heritage places, 8 February 2015

Records

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

Records

- [Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea Perth Archives \(1847 - 1991\)](#)
- [Tuart Place Historical Photos Collection](#)
- [Father Hudson's Society, Records \(1902 - current\)](#)
- [Catholic Archdiocese of Perth CEMWA and CMC Files \[Former Child Migrants\], Catholic Archdiocese of Perth \(c. 1928 - 2008\)](#)
- [Commonwealth Child and Youth Migration Records \(1901 - 1983\)](#)
- [UK fact finding mission 1956 part 2, National Archives of Australia \(1955 - 1956\)](#)
- [St. Josephs Orphanage and St. Vincents Foundling Home, Leederville, Western Australia \(1948 - 1951\)](#)
- [PHIND Personal History Index \(1938 - 1965\)](#)
- [Correspondence files, multiple number series \(policy matters\) \(1922 - 1968\)](#)
- [Files - Community Welfare \("A" Series\), State Records Office of Western Australia \(25 August 1908 - 23 December 1990\)](#)
- [Files - Aborigines Departments \(1 January 1926 - 16 June 1972\)](#)
- [Files - Child Welfare, State Records Office of Western Australia \(1 January 1917 - 16 June 1972\)](#)
- [Files - Departmental \[Education Department\] \(1 January 1885 - 31 December 2000\)](#)
- [Former Child Migrants Referral Index \(1913 - 1968\)](#)
- [Former Child Migrants Blue Index Cards \(1947 - 1968\)](#)

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