

Service Children

Other Names: • Placed Out to Service

Details

Service children refers to those young people who were under the guardianship of the Western Australians departments responsible for the 'care' and protection of children. Service children had been placed in employment with employers who had entered into a service agreement. The service agreement was between the employer and the department or other authorised institution (such as a children's Home). In recent years, claims have emerged that monies earned and kept in Trust accounts for these young people were not returned to them when they reached the age of 21. The [Commonwealth](#) and [State](#) Governments have investigated these claims and the WA Government set up the [Stolen Wages Reparation Scheme](#) for Aboriginal claimants in 2012. There has been no such scheme for non-Aboriginal people who were placed at service.

The service agreement was a type of employment contract, outlining the wages and conditions of employment. From the outset in WA, "orphanage children" and Aboriginal children were placed out at service with an employer after they were deemed old enough (at 12 years of age in the nineteenth century). Young people could also be placed in service at the Children's Home where they were resident, or at a related institution. Up until about the mid-1950s, the numbers of children in service or placed at service were reported in institutional statistics.

In evidence to the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the *State Children Act Amendment Bill* in October 1918 (p.19), the Catholic Archbishop of Perth described the process for placing and checking up on young people from Catholic institutions who had been sent out to service or apprenticeship:

When the children reach the age of 14 suitable places are found for them by the heads of the institution and not only the material but the moral and spiritual side are taken into account. Then once every year the superior of the Clontarf Orphanage, Brother Bodkin, goes round and investigates closely the case of each boy...Brother Bodkin is an old man nearly 80 years of age. He is very fond of the boys and they are wonderfully attached to him. He has great influence over them and he sees that they are properly housed, and in some cases moves them about...As a rule...the boys are apprenticed to farmers.

The situation for young women was similar, but there was a greater concern about the moral elements of placements:

The superioress of the Girls' Orphanage sends the inmates to places around Perth...We found to our sorrow that it was risky to send the girls to remote farms, risky for moral reasons. Sometimes a farmer and his wife would go away to market and leave the girl behind. The results were unsatisfactory. Latterly the girls have been apprenticed around Perth, where we can have direct supervision over them.

The use of the word apprenticed in these examples does not necessarily mean an apprenticeship in the modern understanding of the term. Rather, it refers to a term of service.

The Archbishop stated that the institutions should not only be responsible for placing and inspecting young people, but that they should continue to hold their wages in trust:

When a child is sent out an account is opened at the Savings Bank in the child's name. Usually the head of the institution keeps the pass-book and pays in the moneys to the child's credit. One good result of that system is that it prevents borrowing from the children when they go out. It is marvellous the tendency there seems to be for borrowing, even from State children. [The Committee asked who borrowed from the children]. Their friends would induce them to take out this money from the bank if it was left in the hands of the children. Our system prevents that, and so the child, on reaching the age of 18, has all his or her money untouched.

The Archbishop went on to say that young people frequently asked the institution to hold onto their money even after it was due to be claimed at age 18 with some having 'as much as £100 or £150' by the time they were of a marriageable age. The Archbishop was advocating leaving the power to hold these monies with the heads of institutions and proposed that the bank accounts be audited by the State Children Department on an annual basis. The outcome in the State Children Act Amendment Act 1919 was that bank accounts were to be audited by the Auditor General.

The situation and arguments for holding the monies in trust by the Anglican orphanages was not dissimilar. In evidence to the Select Committee, Archdeacon Cuthbert Hudleston (pp.23-24) represented the view that the State could not 'exert the same moral and religious influence' over the children. He outlined the system of 'dealing with wages':

We have what is called an employers' and apprentices' fund, which is practically the same as a savings bank. A portion of the children's wages, as provided by the Act, is paid to our superintendents at the boys' or girls' orphanages. We put the money into our employers' and apprentices' fund, and there the depositors get the same interest as in the savings bank. At the age of 18 they can draw out the whole of the money. Before that time we allow them, if necessary, little advances. For instance, the other day I had to allow a girl to draw out some of her money in order to get a set of teeth...It keeps us in touch with the children. When they leave the orphanages at the age of 14, for instance – we try to keep the girls to a later age, to 16, but boys as a rule go out shortly after they are 14 years old – we feel that our having this sort of financial touch with them helps to keep the children in touch with us...We know that they often do not come from the best homes, and some of them are rather anxious to get out on their own, out of control...we feel that anything that is likely to loosen the close relationship, as it were the ties, between ourselves and the children, would be a misfortune for the children themselves.

The system of supervision of young people when they were placed in service with employers was also described by Archdeacon Hudleston (p.24): 'We let the clergyman know that a child is going to some home in his parish and Mr. Armstrong [Manager, Swan Boys and Redhill] or the matron visits the children once or twice a year.' There was no system to receive regular reports on children though they did 'get reports from the masters or mistresses about them'.

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More info

Resources

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- [Eliza Johns interviewed by Marnie Richardson in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2001\)](#), 25 January 2001
- [Heather Vicenti interviewed by Marnie Richardson in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2001\)](#), 6 September 2001 - 23 November 2001
- [Margaret Robinson interviewed by Marnie Richardson in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2001\)](#), 13 June 2001
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