

# Bradshaw House

1966 – 1976

- Other Names:**
- Receiving Home, Alice Springs
  - Bradshaw House Children's Receiving Home
  - Bradshaw House Receiving Home
  - Alice Springs Receiving House

## Details

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Bradshaw House was the new name given to the Receiving Home, Alice Springs in 1966. It was run by the government as a short term care facility for children placed in the care of the Director of Welfare. Many children, however, remained in the institution for long periods. The average number of children resident in the Home at one time was 12, but at times the number climbed as high as 17. The run-down nature of the building and its inadequate facilities led to the closure of Bradshaw House in 1976.

Bradshaw House began in 1966 after the Receiving Home, Alice Springs, which had operated in Warburton Street since 1959, was renamed. A series of letters on a departmental file about the Home show that in 1964 the government was seeking suggestions for a new name. The name Bradshaw House was chosen in October 1966 in memory of Thomas Bradshaw who had managed the Old Alice Springs Telegraph Station from 1899 to 1908. The Telegraph Station building had been used from 1932 to 1942 as the site of the Bungalow, a Home for Aboriginal children.

The name, Bradshaw House, may have been inspired by the publication in 1965 of *Alice On the Line* a book about the life of the Bradshaw family written by Thomas's daughter, Doris Blackwell (nee Bradshaw). In November 1966 Bradshaw House was formally recognised as an institution under the Child Welfare Ordinance 1959-1965.

Discussions on this same file about staffing matters show that in December 1966 four staff members were employed at the Home – a Matron, Assistant Matron, Child Care Assistant and a Domestic worker. All worked from Monday to Friday each week. However the Matron and her trained assistant only worked from 8am to 5pm. The night shift, which ran from 5pm to 8am was rotated between the Child Care Assistant and the Domestic, meaning for many nights no professionally trained child care worker was caring for the children.

The file shows that there were constant problems filling the weekend roster. The Deputy Matron and Child Care Assistant commonly worked 12 out of every 14 days. In May 1967 the Senior Social Worker recommended an increase in the number of staff 'to reduce overtime and meet needs for additional supervision, which cannot even be met by the present staff'.

Staffing problems continued through the whole of the 1960s. In December 1969 persistent shortages led to an advertisement for an assistant matron and a child care assistant being placed in the local paper. Correspondence from April 1970 refers to a 'staffing crisis' and the establishment of 'emergency relief arrangements'. A 'relief domestic' was hired to live-in and be on call during the night and three departmental clerical officers were appointed as weekend relief staff.

During much of its existence, Bradshaw House was described as 'quite unsuitable and inadequate'. As well as being understaffed, it was often overcrowded and the building itself was old and run-down. At times, due to demand for accommodation, children were sleeping on the verandah. In March 1967 the Director of Welfare proposed that a new receiving home for Alice Springs be designed and built as a matter of 'urgency'. He explained that:

*The existing Receiving Home at Alice Springs is a normal residential unit consisting of a lounge room, kitchen, two bedrooms and fly-wired verandah. It provides no residential accommodation for supervisory staff and its normal capacity would be for up to six children. Over the past few years the Home has been called on to accommodate on an average of nine to ten children, many of whom were infants. There are no facilities to accommodate older children.*

Further drafts of a proposal for a new Receiving Home pointed out that because qualified social workers had recently been appointed in Alice Springs, 'more energetic action' was going to be taken in relation to 'neglected children, particularly among the Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal populations'. The inadequacies of Bradshaw House meant that attention was 'restricted to the most urgent cases'.

On a further proposal addressed to the Commonwealth Department of Territories, the NT Administrator noted that the lack of an appropriate facility in Alice Springs had resulted in a 12 year old boy being sent to the gaol after action was taken against him by a Magistrate.

On 6 April 1967 the department asked the government to set aside Block 215 Kempe Street for the construction of a new, all purpose Receiving Home which would include dormitory accommodation for fourteen 0 to 10 year olds, a dormitory block for six older boys and another for six older girls and accommodation for a superintendent, matron and family to live on-site. However, it was not until a decade later that Giles House was opened on this site.

During 1968 and 1969 while plans were still being discussed for a new Home, welfare staff and social workers requested renovations be made at Bradshaw House because they expected 'to be using it for some few years'. They asked for the original bath to be replaced because it was 'totally unsuitable' and 'the continual lifting of infants in and out of the bath had given rise to regular complaints from staff of back troubles'. In August 1969 the District Welfare Officer asked that an oil heater be installed in place of the wood stove because it was difficult to get fire-wood. The house was only heated by an open fire place in the lounge room and a small number of ineffective strip heaters. The problems with obtaining enough wood meant that sometimes the Home was 'without any adequate heating' in winter. In response to requests, a fuel oil heating system was installed and the verandahs enclosed.

In November 1969 the Superintendent requested additional bathing and washing facilities be installed at the Home. He pointed out that it was difficult to maintain 'adequate standards of hygiene to enable handling of new-born infants when at the same time catering for other young children not clear of infectious illnesses.'

In July of the following year, the Senior Social Worker asked that, because of the numbers of children and staff at the Home, an additional toilet needed to be built as a matter of urgency. A subsequent health inspection on 28 September 1970 revealed 'overcrowding of sleeping areas and related contraventions [of] health regulations'. The inspector's report noted that there were 16 children living in the house despite it being 'really intended for a maximum of 10'. This had been the case for some time. Of the sixteen children, the youngest was 6 months old, the oldest was 9 and the majority were aged between 3 and 5 years. Six children were sleeping in cots in a 'sleepout', 5 children were sleeping in one bedroom, 3 in beds and 2 in cots. Another 4 young children slept in cots in a nursery bedroom, crowded in with a bench, a laundry trough and stand for bathing babies. The adult on night duty slept in the dining room which opened directly onto the verandah where another child slept.

The health inspector noted that many of these children needed assistance going to the toilet because of their age. He stated that one toilet for all children and three staff members was 'very inadequate' and recommended that two new toilets be installed as a matter of 'urgency', particularly 'in view of the frequent cases of hepatitis in

the Alice Springs area'. The inspector also suggested that the department acquire a separate house which could be used exclusively for children under toddler age.

David Carruth, who lived near Bradshaw House during this time remembers that the children in the Home were quite isolated from others in the community:

*I was a kid when Bradshaw House was running. I remember there was a big sign out the front. We didn't see much of those kids. Most of them were babies, a few were crippled, but even the kids my age never came out to play in the street with the rest of us. There was a big group of us, Aboriginal, European and Italian kids who played together in the street. I remember Mrs Ballagh used to visit the Home often. She organised the fostering*

Problems with Bradshaw House continued into 1971. In January, the Superintendent sent an eight page submission with a detailed list of complaints about the Home to the Director of Welfare in which he compared it unfavourably to Dundas House in Darwin. He argued that the entire Welfare Branch in Alice Springs was grossly understaffed and that because of this and many other inadequacies, the children placed at Bradshaw House received 'regressive passive care'. He believed that despite the best efforts of the staff to work against this situation, it was still 'actively damaging the children in care'.

Commenting on the complaints, the Assistant Director of Welfare agreed that accommodation at Bradshaw House was inadequate and that although the Home was not meant to provide long term care for children it very often did. A Health Department report instigated as a result of the complaints revealed that one child had lived in the home for more than three years and another for two and a half.

The Assistant Director also observed that home numbers which had risen as high as 17, had been kept down recently, but only by:

*resisting admission of children contrary to their need for placement and by undertaking a crash foster placement programme which we are not necessarily equipped to service. There is no doubt in my mind that even with the maximum number of resident children held at 12, the reasonable capacity of this building is exceeded.*

In September 1971 the Superintendent and Matron who had submitted the complaints resigned. Draft budget estimates for the Department of Welfare for the year 1976/77 show that the Receiving Home in Alice Springs had been 'closed down indefinitely'.

## Gallery

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**Exterior of house in Warburton Street, Alice Springs**

**Description:** This is an image from 2013 of the building that from 1966 to 1976 was known as Bradshaw House, and from 1959 to 1966 as the Receiving Home, Alice Springs.

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## More info

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# Chronology

- Receiving Home, Alice Springs (1959 - 1966)
  - **Bradshaw House (1966 – 1976)**

## Related Entries

### Run by

- [Welfare Branch, Northern Territory Administration, Australian Government \(1955 - 1970\)](#)  
Date: 1964 - 1970
- [Welfare Division, Northern Territory Administration, Australian Government \(1970 - 1972\)](#)  
Date: 1970 - 1972
- [Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Northern Territory Division, Australian Government \(1972 - 1990\)](#)  
Date: 1972 - 1974
- [Community Welfare Section, Department of the Northern Territory, Australian Government \(1974 - 1977\)](#)  
Date: 1974 - 1976

## Records

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

### Records

- [WB Receiving Home - Alice Springs - Bradshaw House \(1964 - 1971\)](#)
  - [Correspondence files, annual single number series, Northern Territory Administration \(1915 - 1978\)](#)
  - [Fostering files with 'F' prefix, Northern Territory Welfare Branch and successors \(1950 - 1999\)](#)
  - [Correspondence files, Welfare Branch, Northern Territory Administration \(1959 - 1978\)](#)
  - [Correspondence files relating to the alleviation of distress with "A" prefix, Northern Territory Welfare Branch and successors \(1939 - 1966\)](#)
  - [Correspondence files relating to children with "C" prefix, Northern Territory Welfare Branch and successors \(1958 - 1982\)](#)
  - [Correspondence files relating to State Children with "SC" prefix, Northern Territory Welfare Branch and successors \(1958 - 1980\)](#)
  - [Correspondence files relating to social development with "SD" prefix, Northern Territory Social Development Branch and successors \(1974 - 1980\)](#)
  - [Children's Registers \(1951 - 1999\)](#)
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