

Church of England Women's Shelter

1903 – 1978

Other Names: • Church of England Home for Girls

Details

The Church of England Women's Shelter in Brisbane opened in 1903. It was a shelter for single mothers as well as women needing "rescue". First located in William Street, it moved to a building in Mary Street in 1907 and remained there until 1928 when it moved to Spring Hill. The Shelter moved to its final location in Boundary Street, Spring Hill in 1952 and remained there until the institution closed in 1978.

The Shelter's first location in William Street, Brisbane was described as "makeshift" in contemporary newspaper articles: "it could not hold more than 18, and, when rain fell, it did not keep the rain out" (*The Telegraph*, 1907). In 1907, another building, brick rather than wooden, was secured in Mary Street, when Mr Horace Young of Bundaberg bought the property for the Church of England's use and gave them "the right of securing it from him on very favourable terms" (*The Courier*, 1907).

The Shelter in Mary Street opened officially in June 1907. Newspaper articles described the institution:

*The long dormitory on the ground floor was utilised for the occasion. The ladies used the beds as seats, and many persons who could not gain admittance to the room remained on the veranda. The service over, the visitors filed out of the room on to the veranda and lawn, where afternoon tea was served by a staff of waitresses from Rowe's Café ... After the shelter had been declared open, most of the visitors made a tour of inspection under the guidance of Mrs Downward and her lieutenants, Misses Haggard and Kellett (all of whom wore their pretty uniforms of blue zephyr, with white apron, collar, and cuffs). For the outdoor work, a brown bonnet and cloak will be added to the indoor uniform (*The Telegraph*, 1907).*

Another article in *The Courier* gave more details about the Church of England Women's Shelter in Mary Street, which had accommodation for 40 women:

Down stairs in the front of the building are the rooms for the use of the secretary Mr Downward and his family. Behind this is the formal dining room, now arranged as a dormitory, containing eight beds and behind this again is a second room, also containing eight beds. These rooms will be used for night rescue work. Upstairs in front of the building are two wards with four beds each, which will be reserved for women who will be willing to pay a small charge for their bed. Another room consisting of four beds is intended to receive women who are waiting for admission to the Lady Bowen Hospital and another room, with four cots, has been arranged for the reception of children (police court cases) pending their admission to an orphanage. At the rear of the building on the same floor are two bedrooms for the use of Mrs Downward's assistants Misses Kellett and Haggard. There is also a room for the cook of the establishment. There are two attic rooms above this each containing one bed. All the rooms are neatly furnished and are spotlessly clean

(The Courier, 1907).

Another article stated that “The building is plainly, but adequately furnished, although it would certainly be better if funds permitted the substitution of iron bedsteads for the wooden stretchers at present in use. The stray babies are better lodged, their little cots being all that could be desired” (*The Truth*, 1907).

In 1928, the Church acquired a new property, comprising a house and two cottages, on the corner of Hope and Boundary Streets in Spring Hill and the Shelter moved to this new location. In 1952, the Shelter moved to another location at 520 Boundary Street, Spring Hill and remained there until the institution closed in 1978.

A directory from 1968 described the Shelter’s purpose as “to provide a home for unmarried mothers of all denominations”. It could accommodate 13 women in six double rooms and one single. “Attendance at own church services is required. Each person helps with household duties” (Social Services Queensland, 1968).

A document from 1975 stated that the Shelter was staffed by one resident Matron and relieving Matrons. “Facilities include a piano, television, radio, stereo, sewing machine, typewriters and indoor games. Each girl is free to go to her own church. Sunday church attendance is not compulsory. A service is held at the Shelter once a fortnight” (information from c.1975, provided by Records and Archives Centre, Anglican Church Southern Queensland).

A woman who was at the Home in 1960 made a submission to the Senate inquiry into forced adoptions about her experience. As a single pregnant woman, she spent 7 months at the Home before having her baby at the Women’s General Hospital in Bowen Hills. She remembers that the Matron “had great contempt for unmarried pregnant girls. We were made to work long hours and treated badly most days”.

At the Home, I was never informed about my rights when my baby was born, even though I continually claimed that I intended to keep my baby ... [in the labour ward] I was treated with more contempt from the medical staff as my paperwork supposedly said ‘adoption planned’.

The birth was an event that has left life-long scars due to the treatment at the hospital and I was not allowed to see or hold my baby once it was born. In fact, i didn’t know what sex it was until two days later. I was placed in a ward with other mothers and their babies.

I fought to see my baby in the nursery but was banned from that area and eventually drugged to keep me quiet and asleep (Submission no 39, 2011)

When she returned to the Home from the hospital, she was “put back on scrubbing duties”.

The Church of England Women’s Shelter closed in 1978. The Records and Archives Centre, Anglican Church Southern Queensland advises that they have some administrative records related to the management of the Home.

The Church of England Women’s Shelter 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



Church of England Women's Shelter

Description: This is a copy of the Church of England Women's Shelter in Spring Hill, from around 1953.

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