

Disability Homes

Why are Disability Homes included on Find & Connect?

The Find & Connect web resource contains information about many children's Homes and institutions for people with intellectual and physical disabilities. These types of Homes are part of the history of the Forgotten Australians – in all states and territories, there were crossovers between children's institutions and disability institutions.

Children with disabilities were commonly placed in children's institutions (source: '[You can't forget things like that](#)', p.8.) A number of children with no disabilities found themselves placed in disability institutions. Sometimes a child's disability was the reason they were 'voluntarily' placed in 'care' by their parents, who felt unable to care for them (source: "[Forgotten Australians](#)" report, p.391). Forgotten Australians could be incorrectly diagnosed as being 'feeble-minded' or 'mentally defective' and be placed in a disability Home. The "dull" characteristics that led to these false classifications were often the result of abuse and neglect, sometimes from the very institutions supposed to be 'caring' for them.

The Senate's "Forgotten Australians" inquiry took in many forms of institutional "care":

The inquiry has examined care and experiences in residential and out-of-home care (foster and kinship care), juvenile detention centres and homes for people with disabilities. The committee also received a number of submissions relating to children in migrant detention centres and boarding schools, as well as adoption issues ("[Forgotten Australians](#)" report (2004), p.8).

The 2004 report pointed out that many children were inappropriately accommodated, not only in disability Homes, but also in mental health institutions (for adults and children) and adult prisons.

The Senate's second report from the inquiry into institutional 'care', ("[Protecting vulnerable children: A national challenge](#)", March 2005) contained information about disability Homes, and pointed out that large-scale, institutional accommodation of children with disabilities continued well into the 1980s and early 1990s, lagging behind the phasing out of orphanages and children's Homes.

Both Senate reports demonstrate another way that disability is connected with the stories of many Forgotten Australians – many Forgotten Australians ended up with disabilities as a result of their (often abusive) experiences in 'care'.

Stories

Many children in institutions lived with a diverse mix of residents, of different ages and abilities. This extract from a submission relates to a woman's experiences at [St Aidan's Orphanage \(Convent of the Good Shepherd, Bendigo\)](#):

The inmate population was made up of women of all ages. There were girls who had become too old to stay in institutions for young children. These girls tended to have an intellectual disability or physical disability. Some women were single mothers and others were old women with dementia. Also many young girls had been placed by the courts for protection or for criminal offences. I was so traumatized and shocked that I didn't menstruate for about 12 months. I cried and hardly spoke a word for the first few months (Submission 166, quoted in "Forgotten Australians" report, p.121).

Many wards of state experienced multiple placements, in government-run and non-government Homes, reformatories, training institutions and disability Homes.

I have been placed in a number of ward establishments due to being a neglected child and mental homes due to mental abuse and physical abuse. The first home was [Royleston](#), state ward home Glebe at the age of four years of age. 1962. In 1965 I spent time in Royleston. North Ryde Psychiatric Centre children's unit, in the year 1967. I was returned to Royleston, Glebe . November 1967. State ward home [Mittagong](#), Turner or Suttor Cottage, year 1968. Rydalmere Hospital, in adult ward 21/01/70. [Yasmar Boys' Shelter](#) 8/4/70. Toombong special central school, year 1970 . Mittagong training school Mackellar. Yasmar Ashfield NSW boys' shelter. Returned to Royleston. 8/9/71. [Berry Training Farm](#). 1971. Callan Park and Gladesville Psychiatric hospitals 15/1/73. [Metropolitan Boys' Shelter](#) 26/2/74. (Submission 318)

A lack of suitable facilities for children with intellectual and physical disabilities was a factor in the "inappropriate accommodation" of children. In Victoria in 1939, an investigation into the [Royal Park Depot](#) found that 30 per cent of the residents were "mentally retarded".

"It is almost a scandal the number of retarded children who enter some of the institutions of the Children's Welfare Department. There they are apt to stick" (Guy Springthorpe, 'The treatment of mental deficiency in Victoria', in Past Meetings, Medico Legal Society of Victoria, 1940).

Many of the records of Forgotten Australians contain false, insensitive, offensive and derogatory language about disability. Accessing these descriptions of their childhood selves that include terms like 'idiot' or 'high grade [mental defective](#)' can cause Forgotten Australians distress and trauma.

I found out a lot from that file ... more than I really wanted to know. That's how I found out that I was classified as being 'high grade mental defective' and sent to 'homes' for mentally retarded boys (Submission 94).

I was brought up in the [Neerkol Orphanage](#) outside Rockhampton from the age of 10 months to 12 years old. During this time I suffered mental, physical and sexual abuse from employees of Neerkol. I was treated as being mentally retarded from the age of two until the age of 10 when they discovered that all that was wrong with me was a simple tongue tie (Submission 218).

Finding out more about disability institutions on Find & Connect

You can find lists of institutions for children with disabilities on the [Search this Site](#) page for each state and territory. These institutions all have the categories “Disability Institution” – an umbrella term used to describe an institution (or other residential program) which provided services to children with special needs, specifically those considered to be living with intellectual, physical and mental disabilities.

The web resource also includes glossary terms that go into more detail about words and concepts relating to the history of disability institutions, such as “mental deficiency”, “training centre” and “feeble minded”. Please be aware that these sections of the website contain language that people may find offensive.

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/about-child-welfare/disability-homes/>