

# Winlaton

1956 – c. 1991

**Other Names:**

- Winlaton Youth Training Centre
- Winlaton Juvenile School
- Winlaton Reception Centre

## Details

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Winlaton, in Nunawading, was established in 1956 as Victoria's main state-run institution for adolescent girls. Previously (from 1951 to 1953) the building was a Home, also called Winlaton, run by the Mission of St James and St John. Winlaton Juvenile School received its first placements in 1956. Many female juvenile offenders were committed to Winlaton by the courts; however, throughout its history Winlaton housed many girls and young women who had not committed a crime. Winlaton had a training school, and by 1959 it also housed a reception centre (Winbirra) and a hostel (Leawarra). In 1991 it was renamed the Nunawading Youth Residential Service.

The Winlaton home run by the Mission of St James and St John from 1951 was taken over by the Children's Welfare Department in 1953. That year, the Department's annual report stated that:

*... during the year it was decided to erect at "Winlaton", Nunawading, a training and rehabilitation centre for delinquent girls. In three sections accommodating fifteen girls in each and with all the necessary facilities for training, education and treatment, this establishment will equip the Department with the means to cope with its teen-age problem girls.*

Following the completion of construction work, Winlaton Youth Training Centre received girls and young women from 1956 onwards, and became the main state-run institution for female adolescents.

Before the establishment of Winlaton, 'delinquent' girls who were Catholic were placed at the Abbotsford and Oakleigh convents of the Good Shepherd. Similar placements for Protestant girls were not available at the time, with the exception of the [Elizabeth Fry Retreat](#). Consequently, these young women were mostly accommodated at the Remand and Reformatory Section of the Department's Royal Park Depot (known as Turana from 1955). The opening of the "Winlaton Girls' Training School" in 1956, as a purpose built institution for 'delinquent girls', was prompted by the need to reduce overcrowding at Turana.

In 1956, the Department set out the objectives of Winlaton in its annual report:

*Winlaton's objectives are, broadly, to teach a girl:- (i) How to live as a well-adjusted, self-reliant member of the community; (ii) a craft or skill; (iii) how to use her leisure hours; (iv) to know and care for herself and, indeed, to care for others later on as a home-maker.*

In 1955, the Acting Premier, Arthur Rylah, described Winlaton as “a home of the future for Victoria’s girls, who need ‘straightening out’” (*The Argus*, 22 July 1955, p.6). Many former residents of the institution, in memoirs, oral histories and testimony, describe Winlaton as a prison.

One woman’s submission to the 2004 Senate inquiry described 3 weeks that she spent at Winlaton on remand, after having absconded from another Victorian institution:

*This had a deeply emotional effect on me as I was treated like a prisoner. I had to strip, then I was required to put on clothes they provided. I was confined to an exercise yard during the day then locked in a bedroom on my own at night. I was subjected to emotional torments and humiliation by the other inmates. Many of these girls were streetwise but I was very naive” (submission 166).*

Winlaton consisted of a main compound, with 3 residential sections, and a central Admitting Office. Girls were accommodated in three cottages, each housing up to 15 girls, in single rooms. The cottages were known as ‘Goonyah’, ‘Warrina’ and ‘Koorinal’. The Department described the system at Winlaton in 1956: ‘Promotion is made from one cottage to another. Conversely, of course, demotion occurs sometimes’.

There were separate programs at Winlaton for girls and young women admitted under child protection orders, and those committed to the centre under custodial orders. The latter group were referred to as ‘trainees’, a term that was introduced by the Social Welfare Act 1960.

In June 1957, the ‘Goonyah’ section of Winlaton was declared to be a reception centre for females aged 14 to 21 years. From 1959, the reception centre was in a building known as Winbirra.

The Leawarra Girls’ Hostel was added to the Winlaton complex in 1959. The Hostel helped with the overcrowding at Winlaton, and also functioned as a ‘privilege’ section. The Department described Leawarra in 1960:

*Leawarra ... has proved itself ideally suited to the accommodation of girls who have completed their training, and are worthy of a trial in private employment to enable them to adjust to proper social standards during a period of unsteadiness until they are capable of managing for themselves, or returning home.*

From the 1960s, the general process of de-institutionalisation, combined with a policy commitment to diversion in the field of juvenile justice, led to significant reductions in young people detained.

The Social Welfare Department annual report for 1968-69 stated that a Pre-Release Centre had been opened in the building formerly known as Leawarra House.

*All youth training must be a preparation for release but as the final days approach increased emphasis is necessary on deportment, physical appearance, letter writing, interview technique, money management, travelling to work and, in fact, all aspects of being socially in the community. This pre-release course attempts to give this and as experience grows in conducting such a course it is expected to provide an adequate reintroduction to real life problems (p.30).*

The Department also reported that Goonyah, ‘traditionally used as a disciplinary section is now the unit for the more psychiatrically disturbed girl or the one for whom limit setting in open situations is impossible’ (p.30)

Despite the lower number of girls being placed in Winlaton, the living conditions in this institution deteriorated markedly in the 1970s. In 1981 Deborah Forster reported in *The Age* newspaper that Winlaton was ‘run down’

and 'like the teenagers who live there, the institution looks tired.' Even Leawarra, the more homely open hostel section looked neglected.

Winlaton was overcrowded and understaffed. In an institution designed to hold 95, there were 104 in February 1981. The girls suffered from boredom and as the superintendent observed: 'when you put young women into an institution that is neglected they find even less reason to care about themselves'.

In the 1970s, Triad therapy was introduced at Winlaton. According to the Finding Records website:

*The purpose of triad therapy was to enable trainees to change destructive and negative aspects of their behaviour and/or attitudes. The therapy program was undertaken across all of the residential sections (Karringal, Warrina, Goonyah), the Winbirra Remand Centre and the Leawarra Hostel.*

*Each triad therapy group consisted of a mixture of trainees who had the same problem, people such as youth officers who had never had the problem and people who had once had the problem but had resolved it, such as ex-Winlaton trainees. A triad group usually consisted of the trainees from a particular section. Each trainee had to attend a triad group five times a week. The problems of a particular trainee were discussed during group sessions.*

*Mini-triad groups consisting of one trainee, one staff member and one ex-resident or more advanced trainee, were also held to accomplish a particular purpose, for example to help a trainee to control self-damaging behaviour. Advanced triad groups were held for trainees who had got to a stage where it was felt that they had a good understanding of their problems. People from the outside community were encouraged to attend triad sessions.*

At the hearings for Case Study 30 of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in 2016, there was testimony about triad therapy at Winlaton. The report concluded that triad therapy was "an inappropriate forum to receive and respond to" reports of sexual abuse of residents (p.13).

Former residents of Winlaton also gave testimony about absconding at the hearings in 2016. Some witnesses told the Royal Commission that they absconded from Winlaton because they had been sexually abused and to avoid further incidents of sexual abuse. The Royal Commission found that "there was an attitude to children of youth training and reception centres at the time which meant that police did not inquire into why residents abscond".

The Winlaton Youth Training Centre for girls (aged 14 – 21 years) had a population of about 100 in the mid-1970s, which reduced to about 70 in the mid-1980s and about 25 at the time of its closure in 1991.

It became known as the Nunawading Youth Residential Centre (or Nunawading Youth Residential Service) in 1991, a facility for both male and female young people.

Winlaton was investigated by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Case Study 30: Youth detention centres, Victoria.

## Gallery



**Off to school at "Winlaton"**

**Description:** This image appeared in the Department's annual report for 1958.



### Winbirra girls' remand centre at Nunawading

**Description:** This image appeared in the Department's annual report for 1959.

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### The commercial classroom at Winlaton Youth Training Centre

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1969-70

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### Girls' Dining Room, "Leawarra" Open Section at "Winlaton" Youth Training Centre

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1969-70

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### The art instructress prepares for a clay modelling session in the art room, "Winlaton" Youth Training Centre

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1969-70

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### Christmas concert at "Winlaton"

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in the annual report for the Children's Welfare Department for 1958.

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### Leawarra Hostel, Nunawading Youth Residential Centre. Photograph taken during the closure of Nunawading Youth Residential Centre, 1993

**Description:** This is a copy of a photograph published on the Finding Records website, on the page 'Nunawading Youth Residential Centre history in brief'.

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### Mural within the Winlaton Training Centre compound

**Description:** This is a copy of an image of a 'public images' mural in the Winlaton compound. According to the 'Finding Records' website, the mural was painted by staff and young women in 1983. The project was funded by the Victorian Ministry for the Arts.

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### Exterior of Winbirra Remand Office, Winlaton

**Description:** This is a photograph of the exterior of Winbirra Remand Office at Winlaton.

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### Exterior of Winbirra Remand Office, Winlaton

**Description:** This is a copy of a black and white photograph of the exterior of the Remand Office at Winbirra, showing the driveway and stairs leading up to the two entrances.

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### Bedroom, Winlaton

**Description:** This is a copy of a black and white photograph of an empty bedroom. There are two single beds. On one bed there is a doll, a card and a toy collie dog.

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### Dining room, Winlaton

**Description:** This is a copy of a black and white photograph of an empty dining room with three sets of tables and chairs. A kitchen area is visible through a serving window.

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## More info

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## Chronology

- **Winlaton (1956 – c. 1991)**
  - Nunawading Youth Residential Centre (1991 - 1993?)
  - Melbourne Youth Residential Centre (1993 - current)

## Related Entries

### Run by

- [Children's Welfare Department, State Government of Victoria \(1924 - 1960\)](#)  
Date: 1953 - 1960
- [Social Welfare Branch, State Government of Victoria \(1960 - 1970\)](#)  
Date: 1960 - 1970
- [Social Welfare Department, State Government of Victoria \(1970 - 1978\)](#)  
Date: 1970 - 1978
- [Department of Community Welfare Services, State Government of Victoria \(1978 - 1985\)](#)  
Date: 1978 - 1985
- [Community Services Victoria, State Government of Victoria \(1985 - 1992\)](#)  
Date: 1985 - 1992
- [Health and Community Services, State Government of Victoria \(1992 - 1995\)](#)  
Date: 1992 - 1993

### Related Events

- [Case Study 30: Youth detention centres, Victoria, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2015\)](#)
- [Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, Parliament of Australia \(2003 - 2005\)](#)



## Related Organisations

- [Fairhaven \(1927 - 1953\)](#)  
From 1951 to 1953, Fairhaven was situated in Nunawading, and known as Winlaton. In 1956, a government-run institution for adolescent girls, also called Winlaton, opened on the same site.
- [St Mary's Hostel \(1945 - current\)](#)  
Girls were sent from Winlaton to St Mary's Hostel in Geelong.
- [Lismore House \(c. 1982 - 1995\)](#)  
Some of the first residents of Lismore House came from Winlaton
- [Pirra Girls' Home \(1961 - c. 1980\)](#)  
Pirra Children's Home for Girls was opened by the Victorian Government in c.1960 to help ease overcrowding at Winlaton. Some girls were sent from Pirra to Winlaton, where they could be 'more easily controlled', according to the Department.  
Date: 1960 - 1980
- [Ivanhoe Girls' Hostel \(1965? - 1993?\)](#)  
Some young women from Winlaton went on to live at Ivanhoe Girls' Hostel
- [Foster Care Westernport \(1979 - 1991\)](#)  
Sometimes children from Winlaton spent holidays in foster homes provided by Foster Care Westernport.

## Related Concepts

- [Medical experiments \(1803 - 1970s\)](#)

## Resources

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- Spivey, Margaret, *Defying the gatekeeper: one girl's true story of resistance and rebellion*, 2010
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- Victoria. Children's Welfare Department, [Annual Report for the Year 1960](#), 1961
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- Anderson, Stephanie, [\*Children charged with needing protection call for apology\*](#), 15 November 2017
- [\*John Padfield interviewed by Sarah Rood in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\] \(2011\)\*](#), 2 November 2011 - 16 November 2011
- Borowski, Allan, [\*Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse\*](#), 2016

## Records

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

### Records

- [Victorian Government Wardship and/or Out of Home Care Records \(1864 - current\)](#)
  - [Trainee Information and Departmental Administration records \[Winlaton, Nunawading Youth Residential Centre, Melbourne Youth Justice Centre\] \(c. 1951 - c. 1999\)](#)
  - [Welfare Photographs and Publications \(c. 1956 - c. 1960\)](#)
  - [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/winlaton/>