

# Grassmere Youth Services

1973 – 1998

**Other Names:**

- Grassmere Cardinia Youth Service
- Grassmere Centre
- Grassmere Community Youth Guidance Centre

## Details

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The Grassmere Community Youth Guidance Centre was established in 1973, in the south eastern suburb of Doveton. The service provided locally based programs and sought to engage with young people before they came into 'care' or the juvenile justice system. Grassmere gained a reputation as a valuable alternative to institutional 'care' and benefited from strong support from the local community. The program grew to deliver a range of services to 'at risk' young people in the region. In 1993, Grassmere took up the auspice of the Uniting Church and in that year it relocated to new premises in Narre Warren. In 1998 Grassmere Youth Services merged with Copelen Child and Family Services to form the new organisation, Copelen.

Grassmere's founding director, Rev. John Smith, had previously worked at Tally Ho. There were a number of links between the two institutions. The service was largely the brainchild of Ian Cox, a former superintendent of Tally Ho, who went on to work in the government's Youth Welfare Division. In 1973, Tally Ho's superintendent Denis Oakley employed Grassmere's director, John Smith, to undertake research about young offenders.

John Smith later reflected on the philosophy underlying the programs at Grassmere:

*We were critical of the major theory that offending behaviour was entirely the responsibility of the offender. We firmly believed that the social, economic, educational and justice systems were also an important influence and often it was the interaction between the two that was an important starting point. To remove a child from their environment and place them in residential care did not solve the problem of learning to cope with law-violating behaviour, it merely delayed it.*

The 1976 Norgard Report into child care services in Victoria made reference to the innovative programs for young offenders at Grassmere, providing alternatives to wardship and keeping young people with their families:

*We are interested to observe the program operated by the Grassmere Centre, Doveton, where offending and misbehaving children attend for specified periods each week under the conditions of a Probation or Supervision Order. There are strong arguments for using such Orders to bring children into this type of group recreational program under skilled leadership.*

The decision to merge with Copelen Child and Family Services (another agency auspiced by the Uniting Church) was made following a strategic planning process in 1997. A Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies was signed in July 1998 and the merger was completed by May 1999. This established the new organisation using the name of 'Copelen'. From 1999, 'Grassmere Youth Services' was a division operating

within Copelen.

## More info

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### Chronology

- **Grassmere Youth Services (1973 – 1998)**
  - Copelen (1998 - 2000)
    - Connections UnitingCare (2000 - 2017)
    - Uniting - Connections (2017 - 2020)
    - Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited (2017 - current)

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Uniting Church in Australia \(1977 - current\)](#)  
From 1993, Grassmere was auspiced by the Uniting Church.  
Date: 1993 - 1998

#### Related Organisations

- [Tally Ho Boys' Training Farm \(1903 - 1986\)](#)  
Date: 1973 - 1986
- [Copelen Child and Family Services \(1991 - 1998\)](#)  
In 1998, Copelen Child and Family Services merged with Grassmere Youth Services to form the new organisation, 'Copelen'.

### Resources

- Grassmere Centre, *Grassmere Annual Report*, 1978 - 1999
- [Grassmere Youth Services \(1973-98\)](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance*: See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to Grassmere Youth Services

## Records

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### Records

- [Voluntary Children's Homes Files \(1921 - 1989\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/grassmere-youth-services/>