

Baltara Reception Centre

1968 – c. 1992

Other Names:

- Baltara
- Baltara Youth Training Centre

Details

Baltara Reception Centre was established by the Victorian Government in 1968. It was a separate entity from Turana, which was located on the same campus. Baltara was a specialised reception facility for boys aged 10 to 15 as well as a remand centre for boys in the same age group. Baltara comprised a number of different sections with different functions that changed over time. In the late 1970s, Baltara began to function as a long-term facility, mainly catering for boys who had experienced placement breakdowns or an unsuccessful return home. From 1985, Baltara was a youth training centre. In 1991, the Victorian government announced the impending closure of Baltara, and a new approach in the child and youth welfare system. For the first time, the law would ensure the separation of young people who had committed offences from young people on protection orders (The Age, 14 March 1991). In 1991, non-offenders at Baltara were moved into community-based facilities, in line with the policy of de-institutionalisation. When Baltara closed in 1992, its remaining residents were transferred to Nunawading Youth Residential Centre.

Baltara Reception Centre was established by the Victorian Government in 1968, as a separate entity from Turana which was on the same campus. Baltara was a specialised reception facility for boys aged 10 to 14, who were 'either awaiting a court appearance or were wards awaiting adoption or placement in foster care, family group homes, children's homes or mental health facilities ... The centre also acted as a remand centre for boys in the same age group' (Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

According to the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1969, Baltara Reception Centre remained under the overall control of the superintendent of Turana, but functioned to a large extent as an autonomous unit. Baltara had use of Turana's kitchen, store and laundry. In the early 1970s, Baltara got its own school and administration block.

Baltara in 1968

Initially, Baltara comprised 4 sections: Parkside (formerly the Turana classification centre, the security and remand section of Baltara for offenders as well as wards 'who are a community risk and wards with extreme behaviour or disciplinary problems'), Kinta (the top level of a two-storey building, a 'medium term section'), Mawarra (on the bottom storey, a short-term 'treatment section' – boys stayed at Mawarra for no longer than 3 months, and were selected on their potential for early home release or transfer) and Warrawong (a 'placement section', but constructed as a future security unit – it was for 'wards who are readily acceptable to other institutions ... mainly first offenders, care and protection boys with no extreme psychiatric or behavioural difficulties'). Each section had accommodation for 20 to 25 boys, aged between 10 and 15 ('Introduction to Baltara', 1968, p.11).

The functions of the different sections at Baltara changed over time. In around 1970, Kinta was described as an 'open' section for wards who could not be easily placed in available children's homes or were on the Mental Hygiene Authority waiting lists. The residents of Kinta included wards with intellectual disability or mental health difficulties, and those with educational issues which made placement difficult ('Introduction to Baltara', 2016,

p.11).

Baltara in the mid 1970s

In 1975, Kinta was said to be for remands and wards awaiting transfers to children's homes (DHHS, 2016).

Warrawong was described in the mid 1970s as a facility for 'open/semi-security placement, remand and internal classification of boys not needing a full security placement at Parkside (DHHS, 2016).

By 1975, new sections had been added to Baltara. Alkoomi was a new section within Parkside, described as a 'halfway house between Parkside and open section for older boys not needing long-term placement but needing group counselling and activities before home release' (DHHS, 2016). Akora was a 'short term "experiential treatment" section for wards who it is felt can make a quick positive adjustment back into the community after a period of intensive care and supervision' ("Akora" – (Short term "treatment" section, c.1969-1970).

Baltara from 1983

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse heard evidence of Kinta being used, from around 1983 onwards, to house 'older, tougher boys', including some convicted of sexual offences. At this time, Mawarra was intended as accommodation for boys who were not as 'rough and tough' as the boys in Kinta (Statement of G. Holland, 2015).

After 1983, Warrawong was the only high security section at Baltara, intended to house 'habitual absconders or serious offenders' (Royal Commission, 2016). An article in The Age in 1990 described Warrawong as 'the only locked section in Baltara', catering for 'the most unsettled boys – "runners" – who have a record of fleeing from the reception centre's other open sections and from Government-run units in the outside community' (The Age, 31 December 1990).

You have to hold your knife, fork and cup correctly during dinner at Baltara's maximum-security wing for boys. Otherwise your meal is whisked away by a youth officer, according to 'Sam', 10. His friends agreed. Everyone knew the cutlery rule at Warrawong, they said.

Later, a staff member said the boys' version was not quite right. 'We do get them to use proper table etiquette', she said. 'Some of them wouldn't know how to use a knife or fork' (The Age, 31 December 1990).

By 1983, there was also The Oaks – 'a house offsite that was designed to house up to five boys who had been convicted or were deemed to have a strong pattern of sex offending' (Holland, 2015).

In 1985, Baltara became a youth training centre.

In 1986, The Age reported on an upcoming fete and open day at Baltara, the first of its kind. The article quoted a 14 year old resident, Chad:

'People think there are just criminal people in here, but some kids come here because their parents can't get along. It's not their fault they're in here', he said.

'Most people won't come out to look at the place because they think it's all bad kids. I know, because I've been in homes most of my life and I'm saying that most homes are only visited by parents or people who were sent by their bosses. If more people came here to see us and more people took an interest, maybe we would get out a lot quicker', he said (The Age, 24 October 1986).

Overcrowding

Grant Holland, a former Youth and Child Care Officer (YACCO) at Baltara, gave evidence to the Royal Commission in 2015. He stated that from time to time, boys as young as 8 or 9 were admitted to Baltara, and sometimes young people over 15 were admitted. Holland provided detailed descriptions of the different sections at Baltara from 1983, but pointed out that the function of each section was 'theoretical', 'because it was common for Baltara to have issues with overcrowding and newly-admitted boys were placed wherever there was a spare bed available. There were times when boys had to sleep on mattresses on the floor because there were no beds available' (Holland, 2015). According to his statement:

Baltara was particularly overcrowded in the early to mid-1980s. There was also an influx of boys over the Christmas holiday periods. As a result, on a number of occasions, younger children were placed with older children who were either known sex offenders or who were known to have behavioural problems, and wards were mixed with boys who were on remand for criminal offences. For example, there were times when non-offending wards were placed in The Oaks with boys who had been convicted of sex offences.

Holland also stated that solitary confinement was used as punishment at Baltara, and that this was particularly prevalent in Kinta.

The Royal Commission accepted that overcrowding was a serious problem at Baltara and that this hindered the provision of adequate supervision, putting its residents at risk of abuse (Royal Commission, 2016). Overcrowding at Baltara sometimes led to industrial action. In 1975, teachers made an urgent request for more staff at Baltara, where the school sometimes had as many as 130 boys (The Age, 21 August 1975). In 1982, the Victorian Public Service Association advised its members to walk off the job when numbers at Baltara exceeded 80 (The Age, 3 August 1982).

Closure of Baltara

Following the passage of the Children and Young Persons Act 1989, the need to separate children and young people on protective orders from youth offenders in custody was legislated for the first time in Victoria. Newspapers reported on the radical changes taking place in Victoria's children's institutions, as models of 'congregate care' were phased out, and children were moved into units in the community. In February 1990, The Age reported on the changes at Baltara, which was said to be 'now down to what is described in welfare-speak as "a residual population"' (The Age, 15 February 1990).

Swept up by the Government's ideological spring cleaning, many Baltara boys will go to smaller group homes being set up under a scheme called the statewide services redevelopment plan. Some will go back to their families, and some to foster families.

Most feel that the separation of children who have committed offences from those who have been abused is long overdue. Boys who do not get ideas from their delinquent friends are often tarred by the association. Many become the labels they are given.

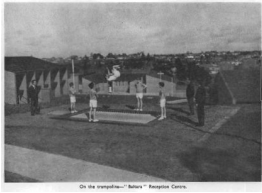
When the institution closed in 1992, residents at Baltara were transferred to the new Nunawading Youth Residential Centre in 1992 (which was formerly Winlaton, the institution for girls).

Baltara Reception Centre was investigated by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Case Study 30: Youth detention centres, Victoria. The Commission found that children in need of care and protection were often placed together with juvenile offenders at Baltara. Former residents and former staff members gave evidence of physical and sexual abuse at Baltara. One former staff member stated that Baltara was an 'old-school' system of brutal care (Royal Commission, Report of Case Study 30, 2016).

An article by Martin and Ricketson concludes that Baltara (and other institutions inquired into by the Royal Commission, including Turana and Winlaton in Victoria) exhibited most of the characteristics of a 'total institution',

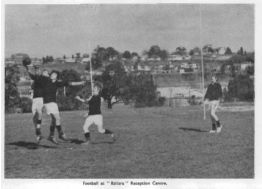
that is, institutions like prisons which exist to transform human beings by staff exercising total control, enforcing impersonal rules and procedures (Martin & Ricketson, 2017).

Gallery



On the trampoline - "Baltara" Reception Centre

Description: This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1970-1.



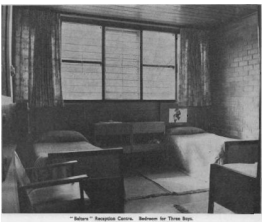
Football at "Baltara" Reception Centre

Description: This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1970-1.



New classroom at 'Baltara' Reception Centre

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



"Baltara" Reception Centre - bedroom for three boys

Description: This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1968-69.



"Baltara" Reception Centre - recreation room

Description: This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1968-69.



Entry to the Baltara Reception Centre

Description: This is a copy of a photograph on the Finding Records website, from around the 1970s.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Social Welfare Branch, State Government of Victoria \(1960 - 1970\)](#)
Date: 1968 - 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

Related Events

- [Case Study 30: Youth detention centres, Victoria, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2015\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Turana \(1955 - 1993\)](#)
Baltara was situated on the same site as Turana.

Resources

- Community Services Victoria, Statewide Services Redevelopment Team, *Discussion paper on the redevelopment of services for children and young people in Allambie, Baltara and Winlaton*, 1986
- Marshall, Paul, *Scarred for life: the true story of a self-harmer*, 2002
- Willich, Ray, *The troubled ones: sexually and emotionally abused children*, 1979
- Shingles, Stephen, [Submission no 188 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- Rowlands, Tom, [Submission no 342 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- Purcell, Fiona, [Peter Norris grew up on the run with his bank-robber dad. He refuses to be defined by his past](#), 4 May 2025

Records

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

Records

- [Child Information and Departmental Administration records, Turana, Baltara Reception Centre, Langi Kal Kal and Malmsbury Youth Training Centres, Melbourne Youth Justice Centre \(c. 1950 - c. 2005\)](#)
- [Victorian Government Wardship and/or Out of Home Care Records \(1864 - current\)](#)
- [Departmental Children's Homes Files \(1955 - 1987\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/baltara-reception-centre/>