

# Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society

1894 – 1920

## Details

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The Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society was established in December 1894 as a non-denominational child rescue organisation. It dealt with hundreds of cases every year. The Society ran a Receiving Home in La Trobe Street, Melbourne. In November 1901, the Society opened a children's Home in Parkville. In 1920, it changed its name, and became known as the Victorian Children's Aid Society.

The Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society was established in December, 1894. It came into being when prominent child rescuer Selina Sutherland withdrew from the Presbyterian Society for Destitute and Neglected Children (which had been founded in 1893).

In November 1894 Selina Sutherland withdrew from the Presbyterian Society for Destitute and Neglected Children as a result of a public disagreement with the Presbyterian Church. The Church's General Assembly had dictated that the Society would only receive children under legal guardianship. Sutherland objected to this practice, preferring a system where 'voluntary' placements were possible for families experiencing hardship. Parents whose circumstances improved found it extremely difficult to reclaim their children once they had come under the legal guardianship of an agency.

Sutherland also objected to the directive that the Society give preference to Presbyterian children and board them out only in Presbyterian foster homes.

On 16 November 1894, Sutherland (and the ladies' committee) resigned from the Presbyterian Society. At a public meeting on 7 December, it was resolved to form the Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society, as a non-denominational child rescue organisation.

The agency's work grew rapidly, mainly due to a high demand for charitable support during the years of the 1890s Depression. The Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society's number of cases peaked in 1897, with 299 children 'rescued' that year.

Selina Sutherland served as the Society's Agent and Superintendent for many years, until a very public disagreement with the committee forced her departure in 1908. Sutherland was joined in her work by Sister Ellen Sanderson, a former nurse at Melbourne Hospital.

Sister Sanderson was the matron at the Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society's Receiving Home in La Trobe Street, Melbourne. Sutherland was proud to describe Sanderson as a 'properly qualified nurse with great experience' (although Sutherland has been described as 'New Zealand's Florence Nightingale', she in fact had no formal medical training).

The Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society took in children, the majority of whom required temporary assistance and were the children of the 'deserving poor', as judged by Sutherland and the committee. The Society aimed to move children on from the Receiving Home into placements with families in the country, who

cared for them and educated them. These families received no payment from the Society.

In 1901, the Society established Ayr Cottage (also known as the Victorian Children's Aid Society Home and, until around 1908, Miss Sutherland's Home) in Leonard Street, Parkville, where Sister Sanderson was again the matron. This Home housed children on a longer term basis than the Receiving Home in the city.

The Society published a quarterly journal, *From dark to dawn*.

In 1908, after requests to resign voluntarily, the Committee of Management stood down Selina Sutherland as Agent and Superintendent of the Society. Sutherland had been suffering from increasingly debilitating health problems, including the effects of a shoulder injury she had suffered years earlier in New Zealand in a carriage accident.

When Selina Sutherland was stood down from the Committee of the Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society in May 1908, Sister Sanderson (along with Sister Mary Lockwood) immediately left the Parkville premises, according to Sutherland's biographer. Sister Sanderson was involved in the establishment of the new organisation, Sutherland Homes for Neglected Children. This new organisation was based at the premises at 68 La Trobe Street, which had previously been the Society's Receiving Home.

The Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society continued on in its work without Sutherland, based at the Home in Leonard Street, Parkville. Later in 1908, allegations of drunkenness and cruelty raised by the committee against Sutherland were the subject of an inquiry.

The newspapers reported on the testimony given at this inquiry. Former staff members and residents of the Home gave accounts of Sutherland punching children, and tramways employees described having seen Sutherland on the Sydney Road tram affected by alcohol (The Bendigo Independent, 30 September 1908; The Leader, 3 October 1908). Under cross-examination, Sutherland described a "wicked plot" against her, saying that "It is a pack of lies to say that I was in a regular state of drunkenness. It is absolutely untrue that I indiscriminately punched children" (The Argus, 28 October 1908). In November when the inquiry concluded, all charges against Sutherland were dismissed.

In the annual report for 1908, the Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society referred to the retirement of Selina Sutherland and the "large additional responsibility" it had thrown on the committee. It stated that Miss Sutherland had been receiving a salary of 100 pounds a year from the Society for many years, as well as a sum per child for expenses. These added up to an average of 700 pounds a year, according to the Annual Report. The annual report clarified that the former Receiving Home at 68 La Trobe Street was no longer connected with the Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society, and asked that all donations be sent to the Home in Leonard Street, Parkville.

In 1920 the organisation changed its name to the Victorian Children's Aid Society.

## Gallery



**23/11/1901 Miss Sutherland's Orphanage**

**Description:** Caption: opening of Miss Sutherland's new home for neglected children at Royal Park.

## More info

## Chronology

- **Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society (1894 – 1920)**

- Victorian Children's Aid Society (1920 - 1991)
  - Family Focus (1991 - 1993)
  - OzChild (1993 - current)

## Related Entries

### Ran

- [Victorian Children's Aid Society Home \(1901 - c. 1966\)](#)
- [Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society Receiving Home \(c. 1881 - 1908\)](#)

### Related Organisations

- [The Presbyterian Society for Neglected and Destitute Children \(1893 - 1895\)](#)

The Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society was formed as a result of Selina Sutherland's withdrawal from the Presbyterian Society for Destitute and Neglected Children in November 1894.

## Resources

- [Christmas Appeals: special need for help](#), The Argus, 14 December 1916
- Swain, Shurlee, *Traces in the archives: evidence of institutional abuse in surviving child welfare records*, Children Australia, 2007
- Swain, Shurlee, *Selina Sutherland, Licensed child rescuer*, Double Time: women in Victoria, 150 years, 1985
- [Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society \(1893 - \)](#), Finding Records, No date
- Golding, Frank, [Lost & Found: State Children in Victoria](#), Frank Golding: author, researcher, historian and consultant specialising in child welfare, 27 July 2017
- [Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society](#), The Age, 6 August 1895
- [Miss Sutherland](#), The Argus, 28 October 1908

## Records

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### Records

- [Victorian Children's Aid Society Records \(1893 - 1993\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/victorian-neglected-childrens-aid-society/>