

Mothercraft

c. 1920 –

Details

Mothercraft describes the knowledge and skills required to care for babies and young children. Mothercraft nurses were trained and specially qualified in maternal and infant care. Many of the institutions for children in Australia in the twentieth century were also mothercraft nursing training schools. Qualifying as a mothercraft nurse involved months of study and training in an approved mothercraft nursing school. Qualified mothercraft nurses could work in institutions, or in private homes. The Australian Mothercraft Society was formed in Sydney in 1923 based on the work of a New Zealand health reformer in the area of nutrition for babies, Frederick Truby King.

Mothercraft nursing was described in 1949 in *The Argus* newspaper as a career 'only for girls who are genuinely fond of children and interested in caring for them' ('A career for girls', 27 December 1949).

Many children's institutions (particularly babies' homes) were approved training schools for a mothercraft qualification.

It would seem that taking photos of the babies and children was a common pastime for women who trained and worked as mothercraft nurses in children's Homes. In recent years, many former mothercraft nurses have realised the value of these photographs in their custody – for some people who grew up in orphanages, these albums contain the only baby or toddler photos ever taken of them. There have been a number of projects undertaken by past providers to collect photographs taken by mothercraft nurses so that they can be made accessible to former residents applying for their records.

In 2016, Jenny Glare of MacKillop Family Services described one such project:

Mothercraft Nurses are a wonderful source of photographs. The St Joseph Babies' Home at Broadmeadows operated from 1901-1975 (the mothercraft nurse training school operated from 1931 to 1975). During this time, hundreds of women completed their training, some staying on to work at the Home and some becoming Sisters of St Joseph. Many of the nurses took photos of the babies and toddlers they cared for. In 2007, the Heritage and Information Service of MacKillop Family Services undertook a very special project with former mothercraft nurses where they were asked to add their photographs to our historical records collection. These photos have now been indexed and digitised and are made available to people. For many people who grew up in Homes or separated from their family, this will be the first time they see a baby or toddler photo of themselves. But more than this, in many instances the person has been able to meet or make contact with the nurse (where she is still living) who looked after them.

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More info

Resources

- [*RADGrant Mothercraft Nurses*](#), Find & Connect web resource blog, 28 February 2019
 - [*Interview with Beryl Grant, nurse, by Chris Jeffery*](#), 1977
 - [*Interview with Helen Jean Duncan, by Chris Jeffery*](#), 1977
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