

# Scarba Welfare House for Children

1920 – 1965

## Details

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Scarba Welfare House for Children at Bondi was run by the Benevolent Society. Previously it known as the Scarba Welfare House for Women and Children as it also provided accommodation for mothers together with their infants. From around the end of 1920 Scarba was a home for babies and small children, most of whom were short-term residents. In 1965, the name changed to Scarba House for Children.

In the years 1917 to 1986, between 30,000 and 40,000 children passed through Scarba. The purpose of the Home was for children to be accommodated for short periods of time, before they could be boarded out or adopted. According to the history of Scarba published in 2006 by the Benevolent Society, the majority of children only spent a few weeks at the institution. In May 1917, even before Scarba had opened, and before adoption was legal in New South Wales in 1923, the President of the Society had stated that “the preferred method for the long-term care of unaccompanied children was to arrange their adoption” (Squires & Slater, 2006, p.18).

The Senate inquiry into children in institutional care (2003-2005) received submissions from former residents of Scarba House. One woman who was admitted to Scarba in 1957 described it as a “hell hole”. She stated: “My brother was put into a separate area away from us. I could only watch him from behind a glass window lying in a cot. He was never held or picked up and I used to yell ‘Give me my brother’ constantly (submission 95). Former residents have remembered the use of corporal punishment and being isolated in dark rooms. One woman remembered: “There was a rocking horse on the verandah, but we were not allowed to play on it unless we had members of the family visiting” (Squires & Slater, p.22).

The 2006 history of Scarba House acknowledges that “prop” feeding (where babies were left in their cots with a propped up bottle, rather than being held while feeding) was carried out at the institution as a matter of policy until the end of the 1960s. “Prop feeding was seen as efficient, as it meant nurses were not occupied with individual infants and could instead feed a large number of babies simultaneously. As awareness of the needs of young infants grew, the practice was discredited, however it was used at Scarba for many years after that point. The legacy of a lack of human contact for babies over a sustained period is now known to severely disrupt development and can lead to issues with trust and attachment in later life” (Squires & Slater, p.22).

The Benevolent Society published a history of Scarba (Squires & Slater, 2006) as part of its response to the Senate Inquiry. The publication, *Living at Scarba House for Children*, intended to set out the good and the bad, and acknowledge mistakes made in the care of children. The publication acknowledges that it is difficult to find out what Scarba was like in the period before 1965 from the perspectives of the children who lived there, and that few individual records of that time survive. It states that “The few individuals who have shared their memories of Scarba during the 1940s and 1950s speak of a harsh regime in which there was little room for children’s social or emotional needs to be met or their individuality expressed (p.21).

Scarba Welfare House for Children was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* Report (2012) as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

In 1965, the institution changed its name to Scarba House for Children.

# Gallery

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## Life at Scarba House

**Description:** Scarba House and grounds, 1930 - 1940. Panoramic view of Main Block Observation and Isolation Block Grounds Playground and Children.

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## More info

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### Chronology

- Scarba Welfare House for Women and Children (1917 - 1920)
  - **Scarba Welfare House for Children (1920 – 1965)**
    - Scarba House for Children (1965 - 1986)

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Benevolent Society of New South Wales \(1813 - current\)](#)  
Date: 1920 - 1965

#### Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)  
Scarba Welfare House for Children was mentioned in submissions 72, 95 and 191 to the Senate inquiry.

#### Related Organisations

- [Post Adoption Resource Centre \(1991 - current\)](#)  
The staff of the Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC) is willing to discuss aspects of the history of Scarba Welfare House for Children with former clients and their relatives. PARC also handles complaints. People do not need to have been adopted to use this service.

## Resources

- Senate Community Affairs References Committee, [Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices](#), 29 February 2012
- Stolen Generations' Testimonies Foundation, [Stolen Generations' Testimonies](#), 2009. *Relevance:* See testimony of Lorraine Mcgee-Sippel
- Bluett, Ros, [Charity and Justice: The early days of the Benevolent Society in Sydney](#), 24 March 2013
- Benevolent Society, *Benevolent Society: 200 year celebration: Last 200*, 2013
- O'Neill, Cate, [Six years on from the national apology](#), Find & Connect web resource blog, 16 November 2015

## Records

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

### Records

- [Benevolent Society of New South Wales Collection, 1813-1996 \(1813 - 1996\)](#)

- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
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