

# Scarba House for Children

1965 – 1986

## Details

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Scarba House for Children at Bondi was the new name given in 1965 to what was previously called Scarba Welfare House for Children. It was run by the Benevolent Society of New South Wales and was a home for babies and small children. During the 1970s it developed a range of early childhood programs. Scarba stopped providing residential care for children in 1986.

Scarba House had the same matron from 1920 until 1963, Matron Chapman. On her retirement after 42 years, it was claimed that she had cared for 21,146 children at Scarba (Squires & Slater, p.23). Under its next Matron (Matron Ware, 1963-1967) there were changes in the administration of the Home in line with broader developments in child and family welfare. The institution got its first social worker in 1968. Recordkeeping about the children improved.

From 1968, there was a new policy of allowing children for stays longer than six weeks. Around this time, there was an increase in stays of over three months. In 1969, the Benevolent Society Adoption Agency was established, operating for the next four years.

According to the 2006 history, in 1969 Scarba House was in crisis. In January 1969 the Benevolent Society's Senior Social Worker wrote a "damning report on breakdowns in care practices and administration at the Home". It cited poor recordkeeping and staff supervision. The report described the conditions for children living at Scarba:

*The atmosphere of this Home is sterile and silent – like a prison. The playrooms that exist are naked of toys and add to the feeling of sterility. There is no, or little, stimulation available, either by voice or music, organised games, staff interest, etc. There are many toys in the Home but they are always kept tidy in their boxes and never dragged out by the staff for the enjoyment of the children. The only organised stimulation these children have is to watch television. This is only used for its [sic] soporific value. No use is made of home comforts to soften the severe and austere atmosphere of the Home – no mats, bright curtains. There is very little effort to make for warm intimate family living. Important intimacies in the life of a child, e.g. meal times, bath times, bedtimes and dressing, are quite depersonalised (Squires & Slater, pp.29-30).*

Matron Leach was dismissed after this report was presented to the Scarba Committee in April 1969. During 1969, another committee was convened to specifically examine the role and future of Scarba. The report put forward the view that, for children unable to remain with their parents, adoption was still the best alternative, followed by foster care, with institutional care a last resort (p.31).

In the 1970s Scarba opened a day care service and provided hospital care. Playgrounds and nursery toys were added. From 1980, "children were no longer housed together by age group, but were now looked after in four (later reduced to three) groups of up to eight children each, based around siblings and with consistent care givers". This vastly reduced the number of children who could be accommodated, from 48 at the beginning of 1980 to only 21 by the end of the year. (Squires & Slater, p.38). For the final year of its operation as a residential facility, Scarba accepted a maximum of only five children at a time, for stays of between three months and a year

(p.39).

In 1986 the Benevolent Society closed the home, to concentrate on offering day care and family support services. Scarba Family Centre then operated from the site.

Scarba 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. The Benevolent Society apologised in 2011 for its past adoption practices that included forcing some women to give up their children for adoption.

## Gallery

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**Scarba House today**

**Description:** Scarba House as it appeared between 1995-2005.

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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: 1965 - 1986

#### Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)  
Scarba 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.

#### 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 House for Children with former clients and their relatives. While there are significant gaps in the records, files from 1967 do survive. 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
- 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

# 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 \(1813 - 1996\)](#)
  - [Scarba House: Client records \(1967 - 1987\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/scarba-house-for-children/>