

# Kamballa

1974 – 1983

**Other Names:**

- Kamballa Training School
- Kamballa Special Unit

## Details

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Kamballa was an institution for girls aged 15 to 18 years. It was established on the site of the Parramatta Girls' Training School, as a response to public concern and protests about the running of the institution. The establishment of Kamballa was announced in July 1974, and the first girls started in November 1974. It was formally opened in March 1975.

Taldree Remand Centre for younger boys was established at the same time, in a separate building on the site. Kamballa and Taldree shared administrative staff and some facilities, including kitchens and a school building, although the boys and girls were kept separate and there was no mixing of the children from the two institutions.

Kamballa was proclaimed under the Child Welfare Act, 1939 as “a school for the reception, detention, maintenance, discipline, education and training of children and young persons committed to an institution to be known as ‘Kamballa’” (New South Wales *Government Gazette*, 7 March 1975, p. 807). According to press at the time it was announced, “Kamballa” was the “Aboriginal word” for “young woman”, although the language used and cultural group it was from were not identified (“Child detention centres to close”, *Sydney Morning Herald* 5 July 1974, p1).

Kamballa was often described as being designed to cater for the needs of girls found unsuitable for other training schools or institutions. Formed as a response to the poor conditions at Parramatta, Kamballa was “...an experiment to see if unmanageable girls could be rehabilitated if staff taught life skills and fostered relationships with us” (*Borderline*, p15). The emphasis was to provide extensive counselling and vocational and educational opportunities to facilitate individual development, and to build trust in the adult staff. To facilitate this, it housed around 10-20 girls at any time. Girls were sent to Kamballa from other institutions, including Minda and Reiby Training School.

Sandie Jessamine, one of the first girls admitted to Kamballa in November 1974, recalls the daily routine in her memoir *Borderline* (pp181-2):

*Up at 6.30, chores before breakfast, schoolwork before lunch on weekdays, sewing after lunch until three.*

*After classes we had rec – swimming, netball or reading – or sometimes a psychologist talked to us one-on-one, about our goals, behaviour and plans for release...during the evenings we watched TV or practised shooting hoops. The grounds had outside lights so we didn't trip over our feet...Saturday was big weekly cleanup. We'd spend the whole morning scrubbing, mopping and dusting all the rooms in Kamballa. The afternoon was leisure time.*

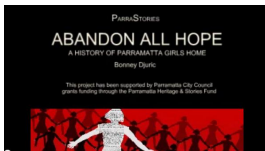
While Jessamine recalls a more relaxed environment at Kamballa than at other institutions, with access to vinyl records and magazines, a swimming pool and the opportunity to put on a performance for family members, she also makes it clear that it was still an institution. Jessamine escaped multiple times over the wall, and also recalled being put in isolation 8 times during her time at Kamballa.

In May 1980, Kamballa's premises were transferred to the Department of Corrective Services for conversion to the Norma Parker Detention Centre for Women. The Kamballa girls moved to adjacent buildings previously occupied by Taldree, although the general Kamballa program remained the same. Kamballa closed as a residential facility in 1983, and the girls were sent to the Minda Remand Centre. The buildings were then used for offices by the Department of Community Services until 2009.

The buildings used for Kamballa are part of the Parramatta Female Factories and Institutions Precinct. In November 2017, the Precinct was added to the National Heritage List. The inscription notes that "the Precinct is outstanding in its capacity to tell the stories of women and children in institutions over the course of Australian history". It has also been listed on the Register of the National Estate since 21 March 1978.

## Gallery

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### Abandon All Hope - a history of Parramatta Girls Home

**Description:** Caption taken from YouTube: Abandon All Hope is the first documented history of the Parramatta Girls Home - a project made possible through the Parrastories Heritage and Stories fund, Parramatta City Council. Until now the story of this State operated welfare institution has remained relatively unknown. The document examines the site's archaeological heritage together with an overview of the statutory and societal forces and the individual and collective experiences of the young people who once resided within its walls.



### Girls at Kamballa, 1975

**Description:** This is a digital copy of an image that appeared in the *Sunday Sun-Herald* on 4 November 2012. In the *Sunday Sun-Herald* article, this photograph is captioned "'Inmates' of the Parramatta Girls Home". However, information from former residents and the date of this photograph confirms that this was taken at Kamballa, in 1975, after Parramatta Girls Home had closed. This is established through the dress the girls are wearing and the presence of the dog. As a former resident of Parramatta Girls Home noted: "Parramatta Girls' Home did not allow short skirts. We were not allowed to sit around playing records and we definitely did not play with a dog! PGH was an inhumane, brutal, strict institution." It is likely that the dog belonged to the superintendent or deputy and was provided here to help stage the photograph. Sandy Jessamine, a former resident of Kamballa, recalls a photographer visiting in January 1975 where a number of photos were taken. This photo is part of that series.



### Girls Training School Precinct

**Description:** This is a picture of the front of what was formerly the Parramatta Girls Training School.

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### Kamballa - Parramatta - an institution for girls

**Description:** This is a video posted on YouTube by Sandie Jessamine, a former resident of Kamballa. It shows Sandie and her grand daughter walking around the former site of Kamballa and some photographs of Kamballa from the 1970s. This is the text accompanying the video: "Kamballa Special Unit was a girls home that existed between 1974 and 1983 in the buildings that had previously been Parramatta Girls Home. Kamballa held girls with emotional or behaviour problems who couldn't be managed in other juvenile prisons. I was sent there from Reiby Training School, located at Campbelltown, in 1974. I escaped from Kamballa three times. Forty years after my release I returned to finally heal the past. My return motivated me to write my memoir Borderline about my time in juvenile custody and lived experience of Borderline Personality Disorder, Complex PTSD and dissociation."

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### Front gates of Kamballa and Taldree

**Description:** This photograph was taken by former Kamballa resident Sandie Jessamine in 2015, showing the gates naming Kamballa and Taldree.

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### Dormitory, Kamballa

**Description:** This is a photograph of a dormitory at Kamballa, taken by former resident Sandie Jessamine in 2018.

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### Covered walkway, Kamballa

**Description:** This is a photograph of a covered walkway at Kamballa, taken by former resident Sandie Jessamine in 2020.

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## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Department of Youth and Community Services, State Government of New South Wales \(1973 - 1975\)](#)
- [Department of Youth and Community Services, State Government of New South Wales \(1976 - 1988\)](#)
- [Department of Youth, Ethnic and Community Affairs, State Government of New South Wales \(1975 - 1976\)](#)

#### Related Events

- [Case Study 07: Parramatta Training School for Girls, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2014\)](#)  
Kamballa was briefly mentioned in Case Study 07: Parramatta Training School for Girls, but was not the primary focus of the study.

#### Related Organisations

- [Parramatta Girls Training School \(1946 - 1974\)](#)
- [Minda \(1966 - 1991\)](#)  
Kamballa was closed in March 1983 and its functions, and residents, were transferred to the Minda Remand Centre.

- [Taldree \(1974 - 1980\)](#)

Taldree and Kamballa shared a school and administrative staff and were both located in the grounds of Parramatta Girls' Training School. Taldree had its own section. When Taldree closed in May 1983, Taldree's buildings were used by Kamballa.

- [Department of Family and Community Services, State Government of New South Wales \(1988 - 1991\)](#)

- [Myee \(1926 - 1977\)](#)

Girls from Kamballa who were pregnant were sent to Myee

- [Parragirls \(2006 - 2023\)](#)

Parragirls works to preserve the site of Kamballa.

## Resources

- Rapley, Judy, [Creating a Space: The Life of Bessie Guthrie](#), 28 October 2007
- Djuric, Bonney, *Abandon All Hope: a history of Parramatta Industrial School*, 2011
- State Records Authority of New South Wales, [Kamballa](#), No date
- *Dismay after Parramatta's historic Norma Parker Detention Centre orphanage damaged by fire*, Parramatta Advertiser, 10 January 2013
- State Records Authority of New South Wales, [Minda](#), No date
- [Girls Training School Precinct, 1 Fleet St, Parramatta, NSW, Australia \[Register of the National Estate\]](#), Australian Heritage Database, No date
- Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, [Report of Case Study No. 7: child sexual abuse at the Parramatta Training School for Girls and the Institution for Girls in Hay](#), October 2014.  
*Relevance:* Kamballa was briefly mentioned in Case Study 07: Parramatta Training School for Girls, but was not the primary focus of the study
- Hibberd, Lily, *Living Traces: a Parragirls Artist Book and Print Exhibition*, 2016
- Hibberd, Lily with Djuric, Bonney (editors), *Parragirls: Reimagining Parramatta Girls Home through art and memory*, 2019

## Records

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

### Records

- [Records of Girls' Industrial and Training Schools, State Archives NSW \(1867 - 1983\)](#)
  - [Departmental Records relating to State Wards, New South Wales \(1918 - current\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/kamballa/>