

Redfern Aboriginal Children's Service

1975 – c.2022

Details

Redfern Aboriginal Children's Service was established in 1975, after the Aboriginal Legal Service identified a high number of Aboriginal children escaping from custody or from fostering situations and coming to Redfern to search for their families. Many Aboriginal children were either placed into the care of non-Aboriginal families, or were wards of the state. The ACS continues to support Aboriginal children's wellbeing, connecting with family and alternate care.

Redfern was a key location for Aboriginal self-determination, with Aboriginal-run organisations including the Aboriginal Legal Service and Aboriginal Medical Service being established in 1970 and 1971. In 1972, Black Theatre, an Aboriginal-run theatre company was started, and in 1973 the Aboriginal Housing Company was incorporated. Also in 1972, Murawaina, a childcare centre run by and for Aboriginal people, was established.

While the ACS had paid staff, there were also many who worked without pay over the years to ensure the ACS could continue to provide services. These included Shirley Smith (MumShirl), Isobel Coe, Bev Coe, Pauline Coe and Ann Weldon. Initial staff at the ACS included Jenny Munro, Vilma Ryan and Sylvia Scott. Funding was initially provided by Australian Catholic Relief, before funding being provided by the NSW Department of Community Services. Intermittent grants were also provided by the Commonwealth Government.

The Redfern ACS worked with individual children, finding foster placements within the Aboriginal community, providing legal representation, referrals to other Aboriginal services, and searching for their families. The ACS also provided services to families to help ensure children were not removed. It also advocated on a broader level for Aboriginal children to be cared for by Aboriginal families, and to end the large numbers of Aboriginal children who were wards of the state, or placed with non-Aboriginal families. This later became known as the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.

According to the NSW Heritage Register, the Redfern ACS was located in a number of different buildings before moving to 18 George Street, Redfern. This building is now listed on the Heritage Register due to its significance as the location of the Aboriginal Children's Service.

In 2008, the NSW Department of Community Services withdrew funding for the ACS. The reasons given were that the Service was not adhering to contemporary training, accommodation and governance requirements.

The Redfern ACS continued with sponsorship from a not for profit organisation, and in 2018-19 a community restoration appeal was undertaken to restore the ACS building. This restoration enabled the establishment of a new playgroup in the building, in addition to other programs currently being run out of 18 George Street. Redfern Aboriginal Children's Service appears to have ceased operating some time around late 2022.

Gallery



The Lost Children of Sydney [Aboriginal Children's Services]

Description: This is a photograph taken from an *Australian Women's Weekly* article.

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