

# Kumanka Boys' Hostel

1946 – 1980

## Details

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Kumanka Boys Hostel (sometimes spelled Kamanka) was opened by the Children's Welfare and Public Relief Board at Childers Street, Adelaide, in January 1946. It was intended as a hostel for teenage boys who were transitioning out of state-run institutions and were working in the community or attending high-school. The aim of the Hostel was to help boys develop the skills needed to live independently in the wider community. Kumanka Boys' Hostel was one of the institutions that came under scrutiny for allegations of abuse during the *Children in State Care Inquiry 2004-2008* (also known as the Mullighan Report). The majority of the reported incidents at Kumanka Boys' Hostel were from the 1960s and 1970s. Kumanka Boys Hostel closed in 1980.

When the hostel opened it was reported in *The Advertiser* ('Judge's Mansion Now Houses State Wards', 3 July 1946) that Kumanka was an Aboriginal word meaning "comrades". The name comes from the Kaurna word Kumangka, which translates to "together" (Dr Lewis Yarlupurka O'Brien in *Kaurna Voices: Cultural Mapping of the Adelaide Park Lands*). Aboriginal children who were removed from family and community and made state wards were sometimes sent to Kumanka Boys Hostel.

Kumanka Boys Hostel had capacity for up to 28 boys between the ages of 12 and 18. The average number of boys at the hostel in the mid 1960s was 18. Many of the boys at Kumanka had previously come from state institutions such as the [Magill Reformatory](#), [Edwardstown Industrial School](#), [McNally Training Centre](#), [Brookway Park](#), [Glandore Children's Home](#), and [Windana Remand Home](#), as well as from foster placements. The Hostel also provided short-term accommodation for state wards from country areas who were temporarily in Adelaide for appointments. At least initially, placement at the Hostel was seen by the Department as a reward for select boys for good conduct. ('State's Largest Family is a Human Problem', *The Advertiser*, 6 March 1947). Boys at the home paid board while they were there (the amount paid depended on how much they were earning), and were required to hand a portion of their wages over to the superintendent to be placed in a savings account.

In the 1950s some girls from [Vaughan House](#) carried out occasional domestic work at Kumanka Boys' Hostel.

Boys living at Kumanka were expected to attend church each week, and outings to places such as the theatre were organised. According to the 1948 annual report of the Children's Welfare and Public Relief Board, activities for boys at the hostel included sports, crafts, and music. The boys were allowed a certain amount of freedom to come and go as they pleased, subject to the approval of the superintendent of the Hostel. This resulted in the death of a boy in 1951, who drowned in the Torrens River when a group of boys were permitted to go swimming without supervision. This lack of oversight of the boys was also noted in the *Mullighan Report* as putting the boys at high risk of abuse, and survivors reported abuse occurring off hostel premises while the boys were on arranged outings e.g. to movie theatres or in the local community.

The experiences of boys at Kumanka Boys Hostel vary widely, ranging from generally positive and constructive, to extremely harmful experiences of abuse and systemic neglect.

Kaurna elder Dr Lewis Yarlupurka O'Brien attended Kumanka in the 1940s, and has reflected positively about his time there. He writes:

*I went there for three years. It was a marvellous place because they set out to entertain you and to do things with you. I learnt boxing there, I learnt weightlifting.*

*It was very progressive, I think, for the department to do what they did – they did all these things for the different students there. There were, I don't know, about twenty-eight of us. Mainly, it was set up for working-class lads. I was an oddity, again, because they asked me "What do you want to do?" I said, "I want to go to school."*

*(Dr Lewis Yarlupurka O'Brien in Kurna Voices: Cultural Mapping of the Adelaide Park Lands)*

Dr Lewis Yarlupurka O'Brien's reflections about the early days of Kumanka Boys Hostel contrast significantly with statements made by people who lived at Kumanka through the 1960s and 1970s. This later period of Kumanka's history is characterised by emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, and systemic failures to protect the boys by both Hostel and Departmental staff. Seven people provided statements to the *Children in State Care Inquiry* Commission about abuse that was committed against them during their time at the hostel by staff, other residents, and outsiders. These statements describe the hostel as a hostile environment which included bullying, frequent violence, and emotional and sexual abuse occurring both at the hostel and during outside activities. Several statements described that boys at the hostel were specifically targeted by outsiders. They also describe boys being given drugs and alcohol before abuse occurred, and sometimes being paid afterwards. Those who reported abuse to hostel and departmental staff and police state that they were ignored or accused of lying, and nothing was done to prevent abuse continuing or to protect the boys.

The Kumanka Boys Hostel closed in 1980.

## Gallery



### Kumanka Boys' Hostel

**Description:** This is a copy of a photo from the archival series 'Photographs of Departmental Institutions', Volume 1, the original caption states: 'Kumanka Boys' Hostel, North Adelaide. Opened in 1945 for working wards of the State who, generally speaking, have no suitable homes.'



### Kumanka Boys' Hostel

**Description:** This is a copy of a photo from the archival series 'Photographs of Departmental Institutions', Volume 1, the original caption states: A closer view of the front of the main building.



### Kumanka Boys' Hostel, Dining room

**Description:** This is a copy of a photo from the archival series 'Photographs of Departmental Institutions', Volume 1, the original caption states: 'The dining room, showing tasteful table amenities, coloured table cloths and serviettes, etc.'



## Kumanka Boys' Hostel, Recreation room

**Description:** This is a copy of a photo from the archival series 'Photographs of Departmental Institutions', Volume 1, the original caption states: The recreation room indicating sports and leisure-hour-activities equipment.

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## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Children's Welfare and Public Relief Board \(1927 - 1966\)](#)  
Kumanka Boys' Hostel was run by the Children's Welfare and Public Relief Board and its successors.  
Date: 1946 - 1966
- [Department of Social Welfare, South Australian Government \(1966 - 1970\)](#)  
Date: 1966 - 1970
- [Department of Social Welfare and Aboriginal Affairs, South Australian Government \(1970 - 1972\)](#)  
Date: 1970 - 1972
- [Department for Community Welfare, South Australian Government \(1972 - 1990\)](#)  
Date: 1972 - 1990

#### Related Events

- [Children in State Care Commission of Inquiry, South Australia \(2004 - 2008\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Boys Reformatory, Magill \(1891 - 1967\)](#)  
Most boys came to Kumanka Boys' Hostel from the Boys' Reformatory at Magill.  
Date: 1946 - 1967
- [Glandore Boys' Home \(1966 - 1973\)](#)  
Some boys came to Kumanka Boys' Hostel from Glandore Boys' Home
- [Brookway Park \(1965 - 1978\)](#)  
Some boys came to Kumanka Boys' Hostel from Brookway Park
- [McNally Training Centre \(1967 - 1979\)](#)  
Some boys came to Kumanka Boys' Hostel from McNally Training Centre
- [Edwardstown Industrial School \(1898 - 1949\)](#)  
Some boys came to Kumanka Boys' Hostel from Edwardstown Industrial School
- [Windana Remand Home \(1965 - 1975\)](#)  
Some boys came to Kumanka Boys' Hostel from the Windana Remand Home
- [Vaughan House \(1947 - 1979\)](#)  
Some girls from Vaughan House carried out domestic work at Kumanka Boys Hostel

#### Is amended by

- [Glandore Children's Home \(1958 - 1966\)](#)  
Some boys came to Kumanka Boys' Hostel from Glandore Children's Home

#### Related Concepts

- [Stolen Generations](#)

## Records

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

## Records held by other organisations

- [Child Welfare Records of the Social Welfare Department and predecessors, South Australia \(1862 - 2000\)](#)
- [Records of the Department for Community Welfare and Successor Agencies \(1972 - current\)](#)
- [Records of the Aborigines' Office and Successor Agencies \(1866 - 2003\)](#)
- [Government Child and Social Welfare Client Files, State Records of South Australia \(1900 - 2014\)](#)
- [Photographs of Departmental institutions, Social Welfare Department and Predecessors \(1945 - 1970\)](#)
- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)

Item B365 of the Child Endowment correspondence files relates to Kumanka Boys' Hostel

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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/kumanka-boys-hostel-3/>