

St Joseph's Orphanage

1879 – 1970

Other Names: • Aikenhead House

Details

St Joseph's Orphanage, run by the Sisters of Charity, opened in central Hobart in 1879. It was for Catholic girls who could be placed there by relatives for a fee, or by the Government. In 1958, the Sisters renamed it Aikenhead House. It began accepting young boys in 1963. The Listen to the Children inquiry received 17 claims of physical, sexual and emotional abuse against St Joseph's Orphanage. St Joseph's Orphanage closed in 1970.

In 1877, the Sisters of Charity bought an office building opposite St Joseph's Presbytery. Despite initial plans to convert it into an orphanage, all but a small section was demolished, and a new building constructed. Due to the construction costing more than planned, a wing of the orphanage was not built. Bishop Murphy opened the St Joseph's Orphanage on 23 March 1879 with accommodation for 60 girls. Eighteen of the first girls to enter St Joseph's Orphanage came from the Queen's Orphan Asylum.

In 1883, the Sisters were donated money to build the additional wing, which was completed in 1885 and included a school room, refectory, chapel, dormitory and lavatory. Catholic girls could be admitted by the Government, or by relatives who paid fees. Girls generally left the orphanage by being apprenticed out as domestic servants or returning to parents or relatives. St Joseph's Orphanage was a certified children's Home under the Youthful Offenders, Destitute and Neglected Children's Act 1896.

The 26th annual meeting of the St Joseph's Orphanage was reported in the *Tasmanian News* on 17 May 1905 where it stated that the girls were undertaking domestic training, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and history and singing as part of their education. The Report also acknowledged "Formerly there had been about 50 inmates, now there were only 43." The reduction was not due to less applicants, but instead due to reduced funds to support children.

The Mercury visited St Joseph's Orphanage in May 1907 and described the schedule of girls aged three to eleven as participating in lessons in the morning, but then "play is liberally interspersed with work, an hour in the afternoon being devoted to the needle, and the rest of the day to amusements of various kinds". The elder girls had a different schedule with "work in the laundry from 9.30 a.m. till 12, and for an hour in the afternoon, attending school from 3.45 p.m. till 5.20 p.m., and then again for an hour in the evening." The work in the laundry included washing, ironing, sewing, mending socks, making socks, and making footwear.

In 1949, St Joseph's Orphanage applied to take 10 Catholic girl migrants, aged six to 12, from Britain. As a result, immigration officials visited St Joseph's and in their report from 29 November 1949 described the six dormitories as "large well ventilated rooms [that] vary in size from five to fourteen beds per room. They are very bright rooms and are kept spotlessly clean". The report also noted that the Orphanage had "accommodation for seventy (70) female children, and at the date of the application there was fifty six (56) children in residence. Of this number thirty six are Wards of the State and the balance are neglected children."

An Annual Inspection from October 1950 noted recently purchased items included a "piano, radio, typewriter, electric sewing machine, percussion band instruments and three maps." The Report also comments on the

addition of new weekly drama classes and the establishment of gym club. A day's routine included devotional exercises, and a vegetable garden was being grown.

Girls had limited contact with life outside the Orphanage. In a letter from the Mother Superior on 17th December 1950 supporting the application she stated, "experience has taught us that it is not advisable to allow children to spend holidays in other homes. It has been proved that the evils far outweigh any good that can come from this practice". Instead, "frequent outings are arranged for all the children, and, each year, all are taken for a month's holiday to a delightful seaside spot". Other opportunities for engagement included the Annual Music Festival of Combined Schools, religious celebrations, swimming lessons and sports events with other schools were detailed. She also shared that girls were sent on shopping errands, to hospital for treatment, and that they could entertain other children at the Orphanage. While most children were educated at the orphanage, it was noted that older girls with extra ability might undertake further education at the St Joseph's College.

In January 1951, a follow up report from immigration officials detailed how there were two classrooms, one for grades one to three and the other for grades four to seven with room for 30 girls in each. It also stated how the staff consisted of "six Sisters and two full time domestics" noting five of the Sisters were registered teachers who were also in charge of the girls recreation and dormitory time in after school hours. Six senior girls were undertaking Domestic Science courses and assisted with domestic duties.

Girls left the Orphanage when they reached 16 years of age. In letters the Sisters reported that they worked with the Catholic Welfare Organisation to find a position with accommodation, and no girl would be placed unless suitable accommodation could be found. St Joseph's also kept a reception room and a bedroom for girls who had left to stay in if they wished to have their holidays in Hobart.

On 11 December 1951, the Mother Superior was informed that the "United Kingdom authorities cannot recognise St Joseph's Orphanage as an "Approved Institution", owing to the fact that migrant girls maintained at St Joseph's would have insufficient opportunities to mix with Australian families". While it appears to have been an approved institution for a short period in the mid-1950s, there is no evidence that St Joseph's ever received any children from the United Kingdom.

From 1957, and possibly as early as 1955, holiday placements were arranged for the children.

In 1958, new accommodation was completed, and St Joseph's Orphanage became known as Aikenhead House. From 1963, the Home began to house boys as well as girls, after the completion of a new wing for 14 boys aged 2 to 9 years.

This Home was an approved children's home under the terms of the *Child Welfare Act* 1960.

The Sisters of Charity planned to gradually replace institutional accommodation with family group homes, with the first Family Group Home opened by the Sisters – Villa Maria – in 1964. Followed by Loreto in 1966, and Carinya in 1969. All were managed by the Orphanage.

The Sisters sold the Harrington Street property to the Commonwealth government in 1969 and bought a four acre site and house in Tarooma where they established the St Joseph's Child Care Centre. In early 1970, the children living at Aikenhead House moved to the Centre. At this time, a senior nun told a child welfare officer how relieved she was to get the children into new surroundings.

The Commonwealth government demolished the old Orphanage and replaced it with an office block.

One thousand girls went through the Harrington Street site during the 91 years it existed. In the *Report of the Stolen Generations Assessor*, Aikenhead House was identified as a children's home where members of the Stolen Generations were placed.

Gallery



St Joseph's Orphanage (Hobart)



Aikenhead House

Description: The new wing at St Joseph's Orphanage known as Aikenhead House, circa 1960.



St Joseph's Orphanage

Description: The original building of St Joseph's Orphanage, built in 1879. This photograph appeared in *The Leader* on 8 July 1979, p. 5



Boys brushing their teeth at St Joseph's Orphanage, Hobart

Description: Photographer unknown



St Joseph's Orphanage

Description: This photograph is by the Beattie Studio, Hobart. It appears on a post card.

More info

Chronology

- **St Joseph's Orphanage (1879 – 1970)**
 - St Joseph's Child Care Centre (1970 - 1978)
 - St Joseph's Crisis Accommodation Centre (1978 - 1999)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Sisters of Charity of Australia \(1838 - current\)](#)
Date: 1879 - 1978

Related Events

- [Listen to the children: review of claims of abuse from adults in state care as children, Ombudsman Tasmania \(2003 - 2006\)](#)

The Listen to the Children inquiry received 17 claims of physical, sexual and emotional abuse against St Joseph's Orphanage.

Related Organisations

- [Queen's Orphan Asylum \(1833 - 1879\)](#)
Some of the first girls to enter St Joseph's Orphanage came from the Queen's Orphan Asylum.
- [Carinya Family Group Home \(1969 - 1978\)](#)
- [Catholic Welfare Organisation \(1940 - 1948?\)](#)
The Catholic Welfare Organisation provided support to girls when they left St Joseph's Orphanage.
- [Villa Maria Family Group Home \(1964 - c. 1981\)](#)
- [Loreto Family Group Home \(1966 - 1982\)](#)
- [Catholic Family Welfare Bureau \(Tasmania\) \(1959 - 1977\)](#)

Related Concepts

- [Stolen Generations](#)

Resources

- Community Affairs References Committee, [Lost Innocents: Righting the record - Report on child migration](#), 30 August 2001
- Immigration Museum, [Stolen childhoods](#), 2012
- Rimon, Wendy, [Children's homes](#), The companion to Tasmanian history, 2005
- Cannell, Josephine, [To the beckoning shores: urged on by the love of Christ](#), 2007
- [Wants families to aid child migrants](#), The Mercury, 26 September 1951
- Paul, Carleen, [From Darkness to Light](#), 2000
- [Children given outing: showgrounds picnic](#), Mercury, 28 March 1938
- [Girl killed by electricity](#), Argus, 27 November 1939
- [Untitled photograph](#), Mercury, 27 July 1944
- [Enjoying last day of camp holiday](#), Mercury, 16 February 1951
- [No heading](#), Mercury, 5 June 1946
- [Treat to children of the charitable institutions](#), 22 May 1900
- [Demonstration at Hobart; the children entertained](#), Examiner, 22 May 1900
- Howell, PA, [Catholicism](#), The companion to Tasmanian history, 2005

Records

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

Records

- [Sisters of Charity Archives \(1879 - 1973\)](#)
- [Records held by CatholicCare Tasmania \(1959 - 1979\)](#)
- [EX 955 Aikenhead House, St Joseph's Orphanage \(1969 - 1970\)](#)
- [M2181 St Joseph's Orphanage \(1949 - 1954\)](#)
- [Building Applications, Hobart City Council \(1919 - 1990\)](#)
- [Register of children at Boys Home Lansdowne Crescent; Girls Industrial School, Hobart Training School for Females, St Josephs Orphanage for whom a Government Allowance is Payable \(1869 - 1898\)](#)
- [Correspondence Files \(1919 - 1998\)](#)

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