

Overseas League

1910 –

Other Names: • Royal Overseas League

Details

The Overseas League was founded in London in 1910 by Sir Evelyn Wrench with the aim of strengthening relationships and fostering good will within the British Empire. It was based in England, and had branches across Australia. The Overseas League was involved in the migration of children from Britain to Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, and believed this would help strengthen ties between Britain and the Commonwealths. In total the Overseas League was involved in the migration of 222 children to Australia between the end of World War Two and 1955. Most of these children lived with foster families, although 18 were sent to Dhurringile Rural Training Farm in Victoria. From the 1930s to the 1970s the League also provided assistance to the Fairbridge Society in bringing child migrants to Australia, through the parent-following scheme. In 2020, the League is known as the Royal Overseas League. It has some branches still in Australia.

The Overseas League sought to bring British child migrants aged between 5 and 17 years old to Australia. The League did not source child migrants from institutions. Instead, children would be nominated for the scheme by their parents or guardians. Most came from single parent families that could not cope financially, and who hoped that their children would have better opportunities in Australia.

The migration scheme was similar to the scheme that the League ran in New Zealand. Children were placed with foster parents and the Minister for Immigration had legal guardianship of them. Foster parents would apply to the League, who would select them and then inform the Department for Immigration. Checks on foster families were then carried out by the State Child Welfare Departments prior to the child's emigration. Adoption of a child by the foster family was a possibility, however the League specified that this was not a goal of the scheme.

The Overseas League first proposed their child migration scheme to the Australian government in 1947. However, the Federal government was hesitant to approve the scheme, as they wanted an approved institution for the children to be run by the League in case foster placements did not work out. State welfare departments were concerned that, without an institution run by the League, they would have to support these children. The League said that, with careful selection of children, this would not be a problem, as it had not been an issue of the scheme in New Zealand. After several years of negotiation the scheme was approved in 1953, when the Overseas League became an "approved recruiter" for the Dhurringile Rural Training Farm in Victoria.

It is not clear exactly which states the Overseas League sent children to in Australia, although they are known to have sent children to Western Australia, Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales. The League made significant efforts to establish homes for children in Queensland in conjunction with an English organisation called Shaftesbury Homes, however this does not seem to have eventuated. The League also attempted to conduct its scheme in Tasmania, however it does not appear that this was successful.

Although the Overseas League was not an approved organisation for the purposes of child migration until 1953, they had been involved in the migration of children to Australia prior to this point. From the 1930s the League sponsored a small number of children from the U.K. who were sent to schools run by The Fairbridge Society.

From 1947 they were enlisted by the Chief Migration Officer to escort and care for former war evacuees who were on a return voyage to Australia (The Age, 16 May 1947). The Victorian State Immigration Authorities also requested that the Overseas League supervise unaccompanied children en-route to Australia. The League also assisted in the migration of children who had been nominated by friends or family in Australia.

From the mid-1950s the Overseas League were also involved with The Fairbridge Society's Parent Following child migration scheme. In this scheme the children of a single-parent family would emigrate ahead of the parent and stay at one of The Fairbridge Society's schools until the parent had established themselves in Australia. The Overseas League's role in this scheme was to assist the parent with finding accommodation and employment in Australia.

In 2018 the U.K. Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse published a report titled *Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report*, which stated that the League had virtually no surviving records of its activities in child migration, and were unable to state when or why these records were destroyed, or if they were ever created. In response to this report the League issued a short statement on its website apologising for its involvement in child migration:

*"The Royal Over-Seas League (ROSL) deeply regrets and apologises for its support of government initiatives from the 1920's onwards relating to child migration and condemns unreservedly the abuse and ill treatment of children.
ROSL welcomes the report and will continue to cooperate with the Inquiry's work in any way we can."*

More info

Related Entries

Related Glossary Terms

- [Child Evacuee \(1940 - c. 1945\)](#)

From 1947 the Overseas League was involved in the migration of former child evacuees from Britain who wished to return to live in Australia

Related Organisations

- [Dhurringile Rural Training Farm \(1951 - 1964\)](#)

The Overseas League was an 'approved recruiter' for Dhurringile Rural Training Farm

- [Fairbridge Society Inc. \(1909 - 1987\)](#)

The Overseas League worked with the Fairbridge Society in bringing child migrants from Britain to Australia

Related Concepts

- [Child Migration \(1800s - 1970s\)](#)

Resources

- Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse, [Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report](#), March 2018
- [Child migration proposal](#), Advocate, 14 February 1950
- [Child migrants as aid to Empire unity](#), The Mercury, 2 June 1948

Records

Records

- [M365 British Evacuee Children Nominated to Australia-Overseas League \(1950 - 1952\)](#)
 - [M3846 Fairbridge Society of Tasmania \(1956 - 1971\)](#)
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