

# Ngala-a Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Inc

1956 – 1989

- Other Names:**
- Alexandra Home for Mothers and Babies
  - Ngala Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Inc.
  - Ngala
  - Ngala-a
  - N-gala

## Details

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The Ngala-a Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Inc (Ngala) was the new name given in 1956 to The Alexandra Home for Mothers and Babies (Inc) and Mothercraft Training School, in Highgate. In 1959 Ngala moved to Kensington. Ngala had three functions: a maternity home for mothers and babies; from 1959, the 'reception centre' for all infants admitted to State 'care'; and a training school for mothercraft and infant health nurses. Many babies were adopted from Ngala until 1980 when adoptions ceased. In 1989, Ngala became a family support service called Ngala-a Family Resource Centre and no longer provided institutionalised out of home care. However, it continued as a subsidised facility under child welfare legislation.

When Ngala-a Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Inc (Ngala) began in 1956, it was both a maternity home and a training facility for mothercraft nurses. It was located in Lincoln Street, Highgate, in the premises that had originally been acquired for the House of Mercy in 1901, and which had continued from 1916 as the Alexandra Home for Women and from 1950 as The Alexandra Home for Mothers and Babies (Inc) and Mothercraft Training School.

'Ngala-a' is a Bibbulmun word meaning 'we two' or 'mother and child'.

In August 1959, Ngala moved from Lincoln Street, Highgate, to purpose-built premises on the corner of George Street and Jarrah Road in Kensington.

From September 1959, all infants who were admitted into State 'care' were sent to Ngala instead of being admitted to the Child Welfare Reception Home. These 'infants' were children aged from birth to 5 years and in some government reports were known as 'lone' or 'sole' infants, to distinguish them from babies who were admitted with their mothers. Writing its history in *The Open Door* (1980), Jean Lang reported (p.68) that not all sole children were admitted to Ngala because of child protection issues. Often, the mother was physically ill, or one or both of the child's parents were in a mental health institution. By the mid-1970s, according to Lang (p.85), there were an increasing number of 'multi-social problems', including a 'larger number of Aboriginal children...now being admitted from various tent villages'.

Young children with intellectual, and sometimes physical, disabilities could also be admitted to Ngala from 1959. There was a special wing for children with intellectual disabilities.

Single, pregnant women could be admitted privately to Ngala, or be referred by government agencies prior to the birth of their child. Until 1959, babies whose mothers were resident at Ngala were born at [King Edward Memorial](#)

[Hospital](#). After Ngala moved to Kensington in 1959, the mothers could have their babies at either King Edward or the [South Perth Community Centre Hospital](#). In some circumstances, women had their babies at [St Anne's hospital](#) (for example, one woman in Ngala had her baby at St Anne's because her mother had arranged a private obstetrician, submission no 150). Mothers and babies returned to Ngala after the birth. They were accommodated in the 'Alexandra Wing' at Ngala.

From 2 November 1959, Ngala also trained Infant Health Nurses.

In the first four months after its relocation to Kensington, Ngala admitted 230 pregnant women, mothers, babies and young children. In the year ending June 1961, 46 children were adopted from Ngala. Ngala also accepted babies who were awaiting adoption and whose mothers had not been admitted to Ngala before their confinement.

Lang (1980) writes that Ngala was involved in three aspects of the birth of children to single mothers: accommodation and support for young women who were determined to keep their child; accommodation and/or foster placement of babies while an adoption placement was sought for them; and the preparation of adopting mothers.

While the consent of both parents was legally required before a baby could be adopted from Ngala, State and Commonwealth inquiries have found that many young parents did not make an informed choice to allow their baby to be adopted. Following the Parliamentary apology to people involved in adoption in Western Australia in 2010, Ngala issued a statement of support and expressed regret for the trauma that past maternity and adoption practices caused to mothers 'and their children'. Submissions to the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices in 2012 showed that the impact of this trauma was long-lasting.

One woman's submission to the Senate inquiry describes Ngala as "cold, clinical and isolating":

*It was deliberately set up that way ... When my mother and I went for the interview, an officious matron greeted us....Immediately my morality was in question, and the circumstances of my daughter's conception. The sordid little story.... My mother left and I was ushered to my dormitory, I sat on my bed, looked out of the window that had cement brick guards bordering it, and then I saw the high fence with barbed wire encircling the entire back area, I was told under no circumstances was I to go to the entrance of the building again, and I was only entitled to 1 visitor every 2 weeks This did not happen. I WENT INTO SHOCK, I WAS INCARCERATED, I WAS IN GAOL (submission no 150).*

During the 1960s, children and young people referred to Ngala by child welfare authorities were recorded in the annual reports of the Child Welfare Department (*Signposts*, 2004 pp.372-373). A year-end census of children who were wards of the state and those who were classed as 'private children' under 6 years of age at year end was also reported. In 1961, there were 137 admissions (representing 51 individual children), with 20 children who were 'wards' and 6 under-sixes who were 'private children' at year end. In 1965, there were 95 admissions (representing 56 individual children), with 25 children who were 'wards' and 31 under-sixes who were 'private children' at year end. In 1968, the last year that statistics were presented in this way, there were 94 admissions (representing 57 individual children), with 2 children who were 'wards' and 16 under-sixes who were 'private children' at year end. From 1966 to 1968, the number of children who were classed as 'native wards' were also identified in admission statistics. There were six children admitted as 'native wards' in 1966, 9 in 1967 and 14 in 1968.

In 1975 (*Signposts*, 2004 p.373) Ngala was described by the Department for Community Welfare as providing short term care for up to 89 infants and boys and girls aged 0-5 years, with the average length of stay being 'around 1 year'. Sibling groups were admitted together and 'foster placements were actively sought for the children'. School-age and pre-school children walked to the local school. There was a range of play equipment including: 'garden, play area, 2 swimming pools, swings and slides, tennis court, cubby house, bikes, 2 sandpits, a boat, 2 adventure playgrounds and educational toys that could be used outdoors...TV, piano, radio or radiogram, library, toys and a fish tank'. Visits outside Ngala were said to be 'many and varied and included going to town, the zoo, on the ferry'. Ngala's approach to accommodating 'unmarried mothers' was also described: it

provided for 'confinement' and assisted in 'rehabilitation'. This section of Ngala was known as the Alexandra Wing. At this time, according to Lang (p.83), all but one of the pregnant women in the Alexandra Wing were 'schoolgirls' who were provided with a tutor while at Ngala.

In 1989, Ngala became a family support service called Ngal-a Family Resource Centre and no longer provided institutionalised out of home care. However, it continued as a subsidised facility under child welfare legislation.

Ngal-a Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Inc was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices Report* (2012) as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

## Gallery

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### Alexandra Home for Mothers and Babies 1950s

**Description:** 'Alexandra Home for Mothers and Babies 1950s' is a digital image published on the Ngala website, however it is no longer available there. The caption read, 'The Alexandra Home for Women as it was in Highgate in the 1950s'.

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### Sister Janet Chin, from Malaya [Ngala]

**Description:** This is a digital version of an image held by the 'PhotoSearch' site of the National Archives of Australia. The full title is 'Sister Janet Chin, from Malaya [Malaysia], a triple certificated nurse has spent 18 months in Australia as a private student, specialising in maternal and infant care and obtaining a diploma in child care at Ngala, a mothercraft and infant welfare centre in South Perth - Sister Chin with five month old baby Diane [photographic image] / photographer, W Hartley. 1 photographic negative: b&w, acetate'.

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### The entrance of Ngala, 1961

**Description:** This digitised image is part of the Picture South Perth Photograph Collection. Matron Beryl Grant is pictured with some children at the front entrance of the Ngal-a Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Inc.

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### Ngala Mothercraft Centre, 1988

**Description:** This is a photograph of the Ngal-a Mothercraft Centre in 1988. It shows a series of two-storey buildings set amongst tall trees, with various pieces of children's play equipment located around the grounds. The boundary of the site is marked by a tall chain link fence.

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## More info

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### Chronology

- House of Mercy (1891 - 1916)
  - Alexandra Home for Women (1916 - 1950)
    - The Alexandra Home for Mothers and Babies (Inc) and Mothercraft Training School (1950 - 1956)
- **Ngal-a Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Inc (1956 – 1989)**

## Related Entries

### Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)  
Ngal-a Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Inc was mentioned in submissions 48 and 150 to the Inquiry Committee as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.
- [Inquiry into past forced adoptive policies and practices, Western Australian government \(2023 - 2024\)](#)  
The WA inquiry into past forced adoptive policies and practices found that the Ngal-a Mothercraft Home and Training Centre played a significant role in past forced adoptions.

### Related Organisations

- [Child Welfare Department, State of Western Australia \(22 December 1927 - 15 June 1972\)](#)  
The Child Welfare Department placed all children under the age of six years at Ngal-a Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Inc (Ngala) from 1 September 1959 (and possibly earlier) instead of the Child Welfare Reception Home.  
Date: 1956? - 1972
- [King Edward Memorial Hospital \(1916 - current\)](#)  
Ngal-a Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Inc. (Ngala) sent all resident expectant mothers to King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH) for the birth of their babies in the years between 1956 and 1959. From 1959 to 1980 some women still had their babies at KEMH. Mothers and babies generally returned to Ngala after the birth, but from September 1959, babies could be sent from KEMH to Ngala without their mothers.  
Date: 1956 - 1989
- [South Perth Community Centre Hospital Inc, South Perth Community Hospital \(1956 - 2003\)](#)  
Ngal-a Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Inc sent some expectant mothers to the South Perth Community Centre Hospital Inc for the birth of their babies.  
Date: 1959 - 1980
- [Department for Community Welfare, State of Western Australia \(1972 - 1985\)](#)  
The Department for Community Welfare placed young children under the age of six years at Ngal-a Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Inc (Ngala) and, until 1980 when Ngala ceased its involvement in adoption, may also have placed young expectant mothers there.
- [Department for Community Services, State of Western Australia \(1 January 1985 - 1 October 1992\)](#)  
The Department for Community Services placed young children under the age of six years at Ngal-a Mothercraft Home and Training Centre Inc.  
Date: 1985 - 1989

## Resources

- Senate Community Affairs References Committee, [Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices](#), 29 February 2012
- [Beryl Grant interviewed by Christine Choo in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 20 October 2011
- [Interview with Beryl Grant, nurse, by Chris Jeffery](#), 1977
- [Interview with Beryl Grant, Matron of Ngala 1959-1980, by Helene Charlesworth](#), May 1997
- [Interview with Beryl Grant, nurse, by David M. Byrne](#), 1989
- [Interview with Helen Jean Duncan, by Chris Jeffery](#), 1977
- Department for Community Development, State of Western Australia, [Submission No 55 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), July 2003
- Welsh, Anita, [Submission No 48 to the Senate Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices](#), 2012
- South Perth Hospital, [South Perth Hospital - Our History](#), 1989

## Records

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

# Records

- [Picture South Perth Photograph Collection \(1870s - 2000s\)](#)
  - [South Perth Hospital Maternity Records \(1959 - current\)](#)
  - [Interview with Beryl Grant, Matron of Ngala, 1959-1980](#)
  - [Files - Community Welfare \("A" Series\), State Records Office of Western Australia \(25 August 1908 - 23 December 1990\)](#)
  - [Files - Aborigines Departments \(1 January 1926 - 16 June 1972\)](#)
  - [Files - Child Welfare, State Records Office of Western Australia \(1 January 1917 - 16 June 1972\)](#)
  - [Ngala Adoption Records \(1958 - 1980\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/ngal-a-mothercraft-home-and-training-centre-inc/>