

# Catherine McAuley Centre

1971 – 1991

**Other Names:** • Catherine McAuley

## Details

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The Catherine McAuley Centre was run by the Sisters of Mercy from 1971. It replaced the [St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage](#) and [St Vincent's Foundling Home](#) which closed in 1974, and were on the same site in Subiaco.

Children who were wards and also those who were 'privately placed' lived there, or in one of the suburban cottages that were part of the Centre. In 1969 and 1970, eight girls also resided there. By 1975, possibly earlier, boys and girls (both sexes up to 18 years) lived at the centre. The Centre offered short, medium and long-term placements and by 1990 had developed a fostercare program. The Centre was named after the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, and was replaced in 1991 by Mercy Community Services.

Child Welfare Department reports state that Children's Homes run in Wembley by Sisters of Mercy became known as the Catherine McAuley Centre in 1969. The official history commissioned by the Sisters of Mercy, however (Pushong 2008, p.9) gives the starting date as 1971. This latter date is used in the Find & Connect web resource because it seems to introduce not only a new name, but a new way of providing the out of home 'care' that had previously been undertaken on the Wembley site at St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage and St Vincent's Foundling Home.

The Catherine McAuley Centre accommodated children aged 16 years and under. Existing histories conflict about when changes in the style of accommodation happened. Sometime between 1971 and 1977, what Pushong (p.9) described as 'family-type units' in the old orphanage buildings were constructed, refurbishing the existing St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage. An undated history of the centre written by Shreeve and Westaway (p.11) reports that these early family units could accommodate 13 children and young people and that by 1974 nearly all the staff were social workers or cottage parents rather than Sisters of Mercy. Around this time, too, the on-site school was closed and children went out to local schools.

In 1977, new cottages were built on the Barrett Street premises. These were staffed by cottage parents and enabled siblings to be housed together (including boys). These houses have been described in internal and government reports as 'clustered group homes'.

The number of children living at the Catherine McAuley Centre from 1971 to 1984 was around 70 to 80 each year. Some children stayed for short periods, but others were there for many years.

By 1985, some teenagers were being accommodated in nearby suburban houses. The Consultative Committee on Residential Child Care (CCRCC) reported that two of these 'satellite' houses were operating, with room for eight teenagers in each and another 9 suburban houses. Over the years, it seems from government reports that particular houses were opened and closed, possibly in relation to demand for places but also for funding reasons.

By the late 1980s according to the CCRCC, 30% of the adolescent group were "seen as requiring a different model of care, one which can cope with violence, use of drugs etc. and the needs of more damaged, sexually abused children," which the Centre was "hoping to develop services for".

By 1990, the Catherine McAuley Centre was also placing children and young people in [foster care](#).

In 1991, the Catherine McAuley Centre was replaced by Mercy Community Services.

The 2024 report of the Western Australian government's Inquiry into past forced adoptive policies and practices contained a finding that "Women at institutions operated by the Sisters of Mercy including St Margaret's Hostel, the Catherine McAuley Centre, and St Anne's Maternity Home were made to perform unpaid labour, which included caring for children who were not their own (p.258).

## Gallery

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### St Vincent's Foundling Home

**Description:** 'St Vincent's Foundling Home' is a digital copy of an undated photograph from the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea Archives and Heritage Centre. As it is a colour photograph, it is likely that the image dates from the 1940s or later.

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### St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage

**Description:** This is a digital copy of a photograph of the front entrance of St Joseph's Girl's Orphanage in 1953. It is from the State Library of Western Australia's collection of online images that were made available by the Historical Records Rescue Consortium Project supported by Lotterywest.

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## More info

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### Chronology

- St Vincent's Foundling Home (1914 - 1971)
- St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage (1901 - 1971)
  - **Catherine McAuley Centre (1971 – 1991)**
    - Mercy Community Services (Inc) (1997 - 2002)
    - MercyCare (2002 - current)

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Sisters of Mercy, Perth Congregation \(1846 - 2011\)](#)

#### Related Events

- [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 institutions operated by the Sisters of Mercy (now Institute of Sisters of Mercy Australia and Papua New Guinea) engaged in pressure and coercion practices which caused unmarried mothers to agree to the adoption of their children.

#### Related Organisations

- [Youth Care \(1983 - 1990\)](#)

Date: 1990 -
- [St Gerard's Hospital \(1944 - c. 1972\)](#)

The building that had housed St Gerard's Hospital was refurbished and was renamed 'Davis House'. It was

used as a Group Home by the Catherine McAuley Centre.

Date: 1972 - ?

## Resources

- McLay, Anne, [Women Out of Their Sphere: A History of the Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia](#), 1992
- Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, *A piece of the story : national directory of records of Catholic organisations caring for children separated from families*, November 1999
- [The Catholic Encyclopedia](#), New Advent, 2009
- [Child Migrants Trust \[website\]](#), 2011
- [Western Australian Government Gazette No. 112](#), Western Australian Government Gazette Online Archive, 5 August 1994. *Relevance:* The WA Government Gazette 112 identifies the Catherine McAuley Centre as a Mandatory Counsellor appointed under section 26AA(6) of the Adoption of Children Act 1896
- Heritage Council of Western Australia, [Catherine McAuley Centre](#), inHerit: our heritage places, 8 February 2015
- [Education: Aborigines Living away from home](#), Hansard Archive 1870 to 1995, 6 November 1973

## Records

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

### Records

- [Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea Perth Archives \(1847 - 1991\)](#)
  - [Files - Community Welfare \("A" Series\), State Records Office of Western Australia \(25 August 1908 - 23 December 1990\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/catherine-mcauley-centre/>