

Dulhi Gunyah

25 February 1909 – 1918

Other Names: • Dulhi Gunyah Orphanage

Details

Dulhi Gunyah Orphanage was run by the Western Australian State Council of the Australian Aborigines Mission from 1909 to 1918. It was a children's Home rather than an Orphanage and was set up to admit Aboriginal girls under the age of 14 years and boys under eight even if they weren't orphans. The children came mostly from Nyungar lands and language groups and often did not speak English. The purpose was to educate the children and train them for domestic service or agricultural labour. Dulhi Gunyah closed in the winter of 1918, possibly because of financial reasons. The children were sent to Carrolup in Katanning.

The Dulhi Gunyah homestead was acquired by the Methodist Church in 1921 and later became the first cottage of the Methodist Children's Home.

The day after their marriage, Australian Aborigines Missionaries, Mr Ernest and Mrs Florence Telfer started Dulhi Gunyah in a house at 34 Bulwer Street, East Perth. Its name came from the northern New South Wales language group Djangattie: 'Dulhi' for 'child' and 'Gunya' for 'shelter'. Dulhi Gunyah took some children whom the Government had removed under the provisions of the 'Aborigines Act 1905' and received a maintenance payment from the Department of Aborigines and Fisheries for those children. The first children were sent from Geraldton in May 1909, later children came from Busselton. Some were sent by family to Dulhi Gunyah.

The 1914 annual report of Dulhi Gunyah gives some insight into the backgrounds of the children admitted to the home, and how their time was spent in the home. The report shows there were 12 girls and four boys in the home, aged from one month to fifteen years. The children came from different parts of the State: Katanning (6 children, who had returned to Carrolup during the year), Busselton, Albany; one child from Fremantle and another from Onslow; and an infant who had been found "abandoned" in King's Park. The report said that children were mostly from Nyungar lands and some spoke only their local languages when they arrived at Dulhi Gunyah. It was also reported that 24 children were enrolled in school at Dulhi Gunyah, with a teacher whose salary was paid by the Education Department. Children were not able to access the local state school. The emphasis of the curriculum was on "skills that would lead to laboring and domestic work".

Dulhi Gunyah was run on 'faith lines'. That is, 'no appeals for contributions in money or in kind is sanctioned by the central authority, but when need arises definite prayer is made to God for necessary sustenance'. Financial and other support was accepted when offered and government funding for those children admitted under the 'Aborigines Act' was seen as the answer to prayer. Dulhi Gunyah had moved to temporary premises in Victoria Park by 1910. In early 1912, they moved to a site of 12 acres in Argyle Street, Victoria Park. On that site was a large gum tree, known to the local Nyungar people as the 'Lookout Tree'.

A number of AAM missionaries worked at Dulhi Gunyah. Miss Annie Lock was appointed Matron in June 1909 and in March 1911 Catherine Mantell arrived from NSW to help with the growing number of children. In March 1912, Lock resigned to go and work in rural camps and Bertha Telfer was appointed to run Dulhi Gunyah from June 1912-1913. In 1913, a teacher was appointed to the schoolroom on site. Constance and Eustace Radford resigned in December 1913, and Lock and Telfer were brought back to fill the gap. Ethel and William Fryer (from

NSW) were appointed by the AAM to work at Dulhi Gunyah in early 1914 and left there in 1915 to work at Carrolup. The only Western Australian missionary at Dulhi Gunyah was Miss Taylor, who came as a probationary missionary in November 1914.

Bertha Telfer's item for the AAM's 'Missionary Record' in October 1912 gave insight into the children's background and her own desire to convert them to Christianity :

I feel quite settled down to the work in the Children's Home now, it is not so trying as station work. One does not come into contact with the awful sin that is so heart breaking to the missionary among the adults. We have 27 children to care for, feed, clothe and educate, and we are kept very busy; for many of these little ones do not know a word of English when they come to us, and others know so little that is good and so much that is evil...Some of the older girls have lately taken Christ as their Saviour and it is a joy to witness the change in their lives. Longworth, p.143

A letter of appreciation for the donation from *The Daily News* Orphans' Christmas Cheer Fund in 1915 gives shows how unusual it was for the children to have 'extras':

*We are greatly indebted to you and your subscribers for the glorious outing your gift provided for the children in our charge. We had a delightful picnic; the children were in their element, and enjoyed their visit to the seaside immensely. It is just the one day in the year for them, as we are otherwise not able to provide such an outing for them, and we thank you most heartily on their behalf. Letter, 16 January 1916 published in *The Daily News* 2 December 1916*

Children and missionaries all wore uniforms when they went to church at the Victoria Park Methodist Church and Christian Endeavour Society. The female missionaries wore a cape over a long dress, a horseshoe-shaped bonnet, gloves and black lace-up shoes. Girls wore a winter uniform of 'dark grey with a red collar, cuffs and belt...and a summer uniform of a light coloured dress and straw hat' with black shoes and stockings. People who were children at Dulhi Gunyah have recalled racist taunts from local children when they walked to church.

Milk was provided by Manning's Dairy in South Perth: 'two girls would walk there and be given milk to carry back to Dulhi Gunyah'. Visits by AAM members and supporters would bring children the opportunity for races and other games, picnic teas and cake. Children made 'craft items' that were sold to try to raise enough money to build the additional dormitory space that was needed by 1914. The dormitory was built in 1915 and was connected to the main house by a corridor. The new arrangements were described by Ethel Fryer at that time:

We have 35 children in the Home...to be fed, clothed and taught...There are two dormitories, one for girls, the other for boys with beds arranged one above the other, in ship fashion. These are only temporary as they are not large enough, nor yet waterproof and we have long been praying for a new dormitory. To comply with the regulations of the Board of Health, some kind friends have taken the matter in hand, and building operations have commenced. We believe God will honour our faith, and the cost of about £250, will be supplied...Our children have been doing their part, praying and working to assist the fund. Longworth, p.185

When the new 'cottage dormitory' was officially opened on 5 April 1915, two hundred people came. The dormitory was intended to be the first of many cottages, run along the lines of the Parkerville Children's Home, but funds ran out and this did not happen.

Children went to Sunday School, and were taught gospel songs and stories from the Bible at night meetings during the week.

Gallery



Dulhi-Gunyah Aborigine Girls' Orphanage, Victoria Park

Description: This digital copy of a photograph from the *Western Mail* supplemental pages, to accompany an article on p.25 of the same paper titled 'Dulhi Gunyah Orphanage, Victoria Park'. The caption says the Dulhi Gunyah orphanage was for Aborigine girls. In fact, both boys and girls were sent to live there.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Australian Aborigines' Mission \(c. 1894 - 1929\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Methodist Children's Home \(1922 - 1959\)](#)
Methodist Children's Home was located on the site of Dulhi Gunyah.
- [Chief Protector of Aborigines \(1898 - 1936\)](#)
The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of children at Dulhi Gunyah. Maintenance payments for some children at Dulhi Gunyah were received from the government.
- [Carrolup \(1915 - 1922\)](#)
Children from Dulhi Gunyah were transferred to Carrolup.

Resources

- Telfer, EJ, [Amongst Australian Aborigines: forty years of missionary work](#), 1939
- [Interview with Isobel Bropho \[interviewed by R. Jamieson\]](#), 1989
- [Aboriginal orphans](#), The West Australian, 10 April 1909
- [News and notes \[Australian Aborigines' Mission\]](#), Western Mail, 25 June 1910
- Aborigines Department, Western Australia, [Collection of typed copies of annual and other reports by and to the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia dated 1910 and 1911](#), 1910 - 1911

Records

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

Records

- [Files - Aborigines Departments \(1 January 1926 - 16 June 1972\)](#)
 - [Files - Department of Aborigines and Fisheries \(1909 - 1920\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/dulhi-gunyah/>