

Essington House

1963 – 1974

Other Names:

- Adolescent Boys Home
- Essington House Remand and Classification Centre
- Assessment and Training Centre, Darwin
- Remand and Training Centre, Darwin

Details

Essington House was opened by the government in 1963 as a Receiving Home for adolescent boys due to appear before the Children's Court, and boys awaiting placement in other institutions or in foster care. From 1964 Essington House was also used for sittings of the Children's Court and later became a Remand, Assessment and Training Centre for boys and girls. Essington House was closed in December 1974 after being badly damaged by Cyclone Tracy.

Essington House was opened in 1963 as a Receiving Home for adolescent boys. During its first year it provided accommodation for five boys. As a Receiving Home it took in boys who were regarded as neglected or destitute, or who had committed an offence before they appeared in the Children's Court. Many stayed at Essington House while they awaited placement in another institution or in foster care. During the mid to late sixties between 80 and 150 boys were placed in the Home each year.

In 1969 Essington House became a Remand, Assessment and Training Centre which took in both boys and girls. In later years the Home had both secure and open sections. A 1973 report on 'juvenile delinquency' in the Top End of the Northern Territory however noted that except for parts of the designated security section of Essington House, it was not in fact a secure institution. The report was also critical of staffing stating that:

Apart from one Group Worker who stayed about 4 months, there has been anyone in the last 19 months with recognised professional qualifications working in the Home.

There was also concern at the high number of Aboriginal children from Eastern Arnhem Land and Groote Eyelandt in the institution and the lack of attention to their needs:

Essington House is a Home which seems to lack a programme for the particular needs of the children. Although over half of the children are entirely of Aboriginal descent, there are only two employees who are of partial Aboriginal descent out of 24 Group Workers.

In the Welfare Branch Annual report for 1963-64 plans were being made to hold sittings of the Children's Court at Essington House with the suggestion that the 'large residence' would allow the court to be 'conducted in an atmosphere more appropriate to its purpose' than the Court building used for adult cases. From 1964 the Children's Court operated from Essington House. In 1971, two years after the Home became a Remand Centre,

a stipendiary magistrate refused to sit at this Court because he regarded it as being 'on the par with holding Court in a gaol.'

As part of the research for the 1975 Weir report into Correctional Services in the Northern Territory, the investigating committee visited Essington House, describing their impressions as follows:

The treatment of juvenile offenders in the Northern Territory has been notorious. The Committee inspected Essington House while it was operating normally at the beginning of December 1974, and concluded that although the complex had some commendable features the purposes to which the building was put were too diverse; to the detriment of both welfare and correctional needs. The accommodation at that time in the secure area of Essington House was considered unsatisfactory having regard to the age of the inmates, the climatic conditions and the generally accepted standard of material needs in child care. Overcrowding, programme deficiencies and staff inadequacies in terms of number, qualifications and experience and appropriate experience were evident. Because of the attractive parts of the complex it was unlikely that anything less than a cyclone on the scale of 'Tracy' would have caused the Essington House project to be abandoned for a long while.

The attitude of the committee to the standards of care at Essington House was clear in the following comments about its future after Cyclone Tracy:

In June 1975 the Committee heard with grave concern suggestions that Essington House might be reconstructed – and used again for its former purposes. Its emotion at that prospect is only equalled by the Committee's grave concern at the present necessity to hold juvenile offenders, deemed to require secure custody, in Darwin Police Cells.

As the majority of the Essington House site was badly damaged by Cyclone Tracy, the decision was made to close the institution and open a new facility, Essington House ceased operating in late December 1974 and it appears that prior to the opening of a new centre, children previously accommodated there, were placed in other locations, including the Darwin Police Cells and the Berrimah Gaol. In 1977 young people on remand were moved to the Government Remand home in Chapman Street. By that time, the Essington House building was being used as a live music venue for young people.

Gallery



Essington House, McMillan's Rd. Darwin, 1960s

Description: This is an image of the Essington House complex on McMillan's Road in Darwin, taken in the 1960s.

More info

Chronology

- **Essington House (1963 – 1974)**
 - Chapman Road Remand Home (1976? - 1979)
 - Malak House Juvenile Detention Centre (1987 - 1991)
 - Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre (1991 - current)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Welfare Branch, Northern Territory Administration, Australian Government \(1955 - 1970\)](#)
Date: 1963 - 1970
- [Welfare Division, Northern Territory Administration, Australian Government \(1970 - 1972\)](#)
Date: 1970 - 1972

Related Organisations

- [Her Majesty's Gaol and Labour Prison, Alice Springs \(1938 - 1996\)](#)
Young offenders were often held in cells at Her Majesty's Gaol and Labour Prison, Alice Springs prior to being placed at Essington House.

Resources

- [Patrick McAndrew interviewed by Karen George in the Bringing them home oral history project \[sound recording\] \(2001\)](#), 27 June 2001

Records

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

Records

- [Correspondence files, annual single number series, Northern Territory Administration \(1915 - 1978\)](#)
 - [Essington House, reports on juveniles \(1969 - 1974\)](#)
 - [Fostering files with 'F' prefix, Northern Territory Welfare Branch and successors \(1950 - 1999\)](#)
 - [Correspondence files, Welfare Branch, Northern Territory Administration \(1959 - 1978\)](#)
 - [Correspondence files relating to the alleviation of distress with "A" prefix, Northern Territory Welfare Branch and successors \(1939 - 1966\)](#)
 - [Correspondence files relating to children with "C" prefix, Northern Territory Welfare Branch and successors \(1958 - 1982\)](#)
 - [Correspondence files relating to State Children with "SC" prefix, Northern Territory Welfare Branch and successors \(1958 - 1980\)](#)
 - [Correspondence files relating to social development with "SD" prefix, Northern Territory Social Development Branch and successors \(1974 - 1980\)](#)
 - [Essington House Correspondence Files \(1969 - 1974\)](#)
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