

Welfare House

c. 1946 – c. 1953

Details

Welfare House was a convalescent Home for mothers and children, on the corner of Alma Road and Chapel Street in East St Kilda. The Red Cross leased the property from around 1946 and until around 1953. Initially Welfare House provided accommodation for children of ex-servicemen whose mothers were in hospital. From around 1948, Welfare House primarily provided accommodation and treatment for children with paralysis (following polio) or cerebral palsy. After Welfare House closed around 1953, children were accommodated at the Lady Dugan Home in Malvern.

The Red Cross took over the Welfare house property, on the corner of Alma Road and Chapel Street in East St Kilda, from the Air Force Auxiliaries Committee around 1946. For 3 years before the Red Cross signed the lease for Welfare House, the property had been 'conducted for the benefit of wives and children of Air Force personnel' (*The Argus*, 9 June 1945). 'It is on the corner of Alma Rd. and Chapel Street, the large white, double-storey house with the red door and huge red flower boxes in front' (*The Argus*, 14 March 1950).

From 1948, Welfare House primarily accommodated paralysis patients. 'These patients, the majority of whom are women and girls from the country, are in the city on medical advice to receive treatment not available in their own areas' (Red Cross annual report, 1948).

In 1949, Welfare House was described in the Red Cross Annual Report:

Welfare House gives an opportunity to patients (young women, children and babies) from the country, and sometimes from other states, to come to Melbourne for special treatment following on poliomyelitis or cerebral palsy. Care is given by skilled staff. Amenities such as transport to and from clinics, are regularly arranged. Playrooms, garden and craft centre are provided. The average number of patients and escorts is 26 (Red Cross annual report 1949).

An article from 1950 described The Red Cross Welfare House: 'For hundreds of mothers from country towns and lonely farms in the remotest corners of our State it is one of the greatest places in the world ... Welfare House has accommodation for 25 mothers and children. The mothers bring their children there every three months or so for period of from three to six weeks.'

Children living at Welfare House studied by correspondence and received regular visits by a representative of the Education Department.

An article published in the *Australian Red Cross Junior* in 1950 described 'Picture Night' at Welfare house. There were 25 young people, cerebral palsy and polio patients, living there, 'lying in their tidy beds, with smoothly-brushed hair and shining eyes'. The children were treated to a screening of the Red Cross Blood Transfusion film, 'The River of Life'. 'The films are shown in a long, airy ward at the back of Welfare House. The children lie on either side, many with their arms stretched out in splints, others fully dressed and sitting on chairs, with only the crutches at their side revealing the distance they have yet to go'. The children with cerebral palsy were aged

between 4 and 8. One resident is described as having come to Welfare House all the way from Queensland.

It appears that the Red Cross ceased leasing Welfare House around October 1953. The annual report states that the building 'was inconvenient and needed a great deal of maintenance'. Following the closure of Welfare House, services for children with polio and cerebral palsy continued at the Lady Dugan Red Cross Home in Malvern.

Gallery



Welfare House

Description: Melbourne, Vic. 1943-03-23. The new Welfare house for Dependants of RAAF personnel situated at the corner of Alma Road and Chapel Street, East St Kilda. The latest project of the Air Force Auxiliaries Committee. Shown: Mrs WA McDonald (holding a briefcase) and other members of the committee



Many Neighbours

Description: Many Neighbours is a video from the Red Cross Red Crescent historic film collection. It is a short promotional film about the Australian Red Cross Society released in 1949. It was made for the Victorian Division of the Red Cross and depicts various services in repatriation hospitals, convalescent homes, civilian hospitals and in homes of outpatients ([The Sun News-Pictorial, 1949](#)). It includes footage of Welfare House in St Kilda, Victoria, a convalescent home for mothers and children.

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