Melbourne Jewish Orphan and Neglected Children's Aid Society

1882 –

Other Names:
- Melbourne Jewish Orphan Society
- Melbourne Jewish Children's Aid Society
- Jewish Children's Aid Society

URL: https://www.jcas.org.au/our-history

Details

The Melbourne Jewish Orphan and Neglected Children's Aid Society was established in 1882. Its objects were to provide for destitute orphan or neglected Jewish children until they turned 16 and to find employment or promote the future welfare of children in its care.

In the annual report for 1883, the secretary of the Department of Industrial and Reformatory Schools stated that there were 3 children under the superintendence of the department who were being boarded out in Jewish foster homes. The 1884 annual report stated that there were 5 Jewish children being boarded out, and that the Melbourne Jewish Orphan and Neglected Children's Aid Society was contemplating at a future time relieving the State of their cost.

In 1922 the Society had 17 children in its care. In 1932, the Society's annual general meeting was told that it was caring for 20 wards of state – 5 were in employment and contributing towards their support, 11 were attending school and 4 were below school age. Some of these children were living with their parents and others had been placed in "comfortable homes". The Society also provided maintenance for a number of other children whose parents were temporarily unable to make a living for them (*The Australian Jewish Herald,* 4 August 1932).

Newspaper articles from the 1930s referred to "the Jewish Orphanage" and the "Melbourne Jewish Orphanage". To date, it has not been possible to identify further details about this orphanage, including its location. In 1937, the Society reported that it was caring for 35 children, and that around a dozen of these children were living with their guardian in a property bought by the society that year. The article stated that previously the Society had rented a house for this purpose. In 1940, the Society received a 500 pound bequest which was to be put towards making structural alterations to the property where the orphans resided (*The Australian Jewish Herald,* 11 January 1940).

During the years of World War Two, there was some controversy within Melbourne's Jewish community about the fact that the city had 2 separate institutions for needy Jewish children. In the late 1930s, the Australian Jewish Welfare Society (AJWS) had leased a mansion in Balwyn, known as Larino, to house Jewish children who had fled to Australia from Germany and Austria. The anticipated flow of more Jewish migrant children from Europe did not eventuate because of the War, and the original group of 17 child refugees stayed on at Larino during the war years. In 1941, the Jewish press in Melbourne published a number of articles and letters from members of the community, suggesting that the home where the Melbourne Jewish Orphan and Children's Aid Society accommodated local needy children compared unfavourably with conditions at Larino. The *Australian Jewish Herald's* regular column by "Hamabit" discussed this situation a number of times in 1941, stating in June:

> *I could not help feeling after a visit to Larino that some thought might be given to placing our local Jewish orphans in the Balwyn home … To me, it just doesn't seem right. I cannot see why Larino can't take our local Jewish orphans as well. Mixing those German children with Australia youngsters would help the Australianisation of the new arrivals no end (The Australian Jewish Herald, 12 June 1941).*

In the same column Hamabit claimed that the Society had decided against establishing a Jewish orphanage, because it was preferable that local children be boarded out in private homes. However, the situation in 1941 had the Society paying for around several Jewish orphans to all live in the one home in the suburb of Balaclava, under the care of a Mrs Meerman. This property where the wards were boarded out was said to be in a state of disrepair (*The Australian Jewish Herald,* 24 July 1941).

The newspaper published a series of articles alluding to disagreements between and within the two Jewish welfare organisations in Melbourne. Finally, it was reported that the committees of both organisations had met in September 1941, and that there was agreement that one organisation was enough to be able to meet the needs of Jewish children (*The Australian Jewish Herald,* 4 September 1941). However, nothing eventuated and the situation remained unchanged, despite the matter re-emerging in the news periodically in 1942 and 1943.

In 1958, the Jewish Orphan and Children's Aid Society (as the organisation was called at that time) reported that its approach was now to avoid institutional care of Jewish orphans, by supporting children to remain with their parent/s by supplementing the income of the family breadwinner (*The Australian Jewish Herald,* 2 May 1958).

In 2024, the organisation continues to provide services to the community. In 2014 the organisation changed its name to the Melbourne Jewish Children's Aid Society. In October 2018 its name changed to the Jewish Children's Aid Society (JCAS).

More info

Related Entries

Related Organisations

- Frances Barkman Homes (c. 1939 - c. 1992)
  In the 1940s, there was disagreement within Melbourne's Jewish community about the different living conditions for children housed at the Australian Jewish Welfare Society's "Larino" Home, and the children boarded out by the Melbourne Jewish Orphan and Children's Aid Society.

Resources

- Victoria. Children's Welfare Department and Reformatory Schools, *Report of the Secretary / Department for Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools*, 1887 - 1895