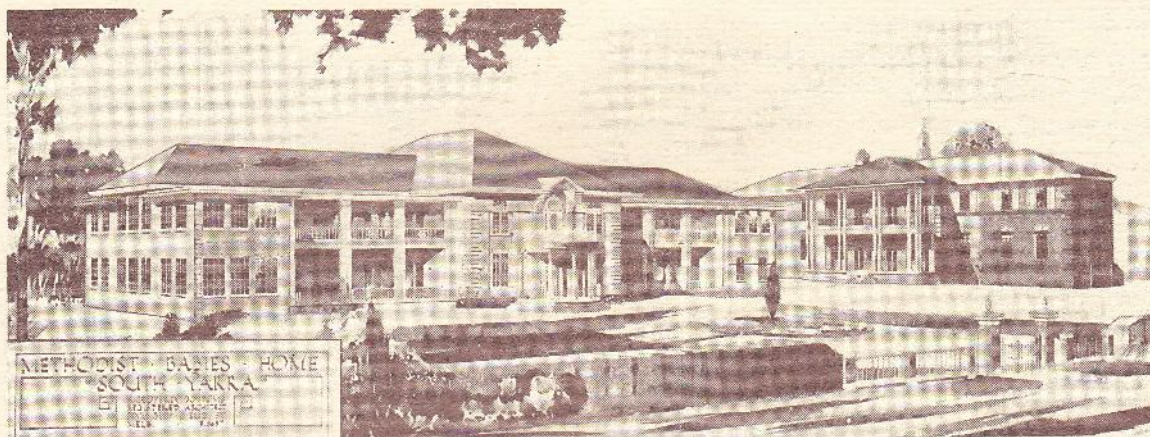




# Copelen Street Family Centre

Formerly The Methodist Babies' Home, South Yarra



## Fiftieth Birthday 1929 ~ 1979



In the grounds  
on Saturday 1st and Sunday 2nd December  
11 a.m. — 5 p.m.



# Copelen Street today

Copelen Street Family Centre offers a range of non-residential services designed to promote family life and prevent family breakdown. These services are available for families of pre-school children, particularly those families where children are at risk because of the family circumstances. Child care workers, a community health nurse, kindergarten teachers and social workers are all involved in the Centre's programme.

Services offered are:

## Family Support

This service includes income assistance, housing assistance, health and well-being assistance, medical assistance, transportation, child care, transporting and waiting for clients at court or at hospital, home-making and emergency funds.

## Adult Support

This is achieved through individual counselling, parent aides to assist home-making, parent education on child management and crisis intervention.

## Treatment Services for Children

Therapeutic day care for children involves individualized treatment in small groups, and kindergarten day care. Short term emergency fostering or weekend fostering with a Centre staff member provides parent relief plus a warm, reinforcing environment for the child. Individual therapy involving behaviour modification, speech therapy or remedial teaching is carried out with the help and supervision of outside consultants.



*Mothers also have fun in the sandpit*



### Client Participation

This is provided for at all levels of the programme including Council membership. Though not fully developed yet, participation by families is increasing as they make known to the Centre staff their needs and opinions.

Copelen Street tries to provide a high standard of child care aimed at developing every child's potential. This is done through the child's interaction with truly caring adults who respect him, who uphold standards for his development and stimulate self-respect and aspirations in the child as well as in his parents. In the five years of the Family Centre's operation, only three children have been admitted to residential care.

### Adoption and Foster Care

Since 1929, over 3000 children have been placed for adoption through the agency. Recent changes in policy have promoted the concept of the adoption of older children and children with special needs. Children available for adoption are now cared for in foster care while awaiting final placement. The Adoption and Foster Care service is also involved with Westernport Foster Care of the Uniting Church and is developing a new foster care service for the inner city of Melbourne. During the past 12 months, 45 children have been placed for adoption.



*How are we going to work it? (opportunities for group discussion)*



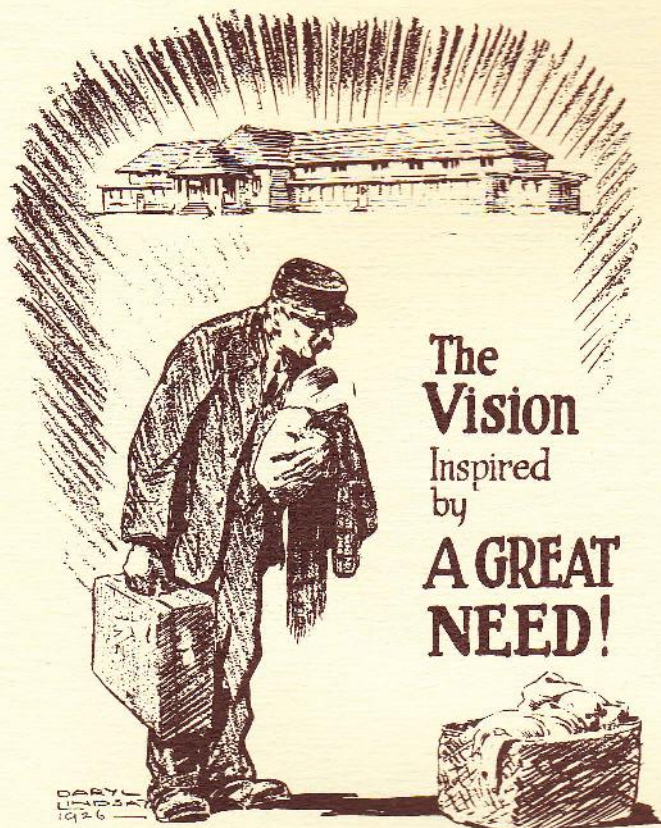


# Fifty Years of Caring at Copelen

The opening of the Methodist Babies' Home marks the beginning of a new epoch. It is the first time in the history of the Commonwealth, probably in the history of the world, that a definite attempt has been made to solve the slum problem, by taking the tiny babies out of their vicious environment.

— Opening of M.B.H., 7th December, 1929

On the 7th December, 1929, the Methodist Babies' Home in Copelen Street, South Yarra, was officially opened. This event was the start of fifty years of caring for very young children, but it was also the culmination of four years' planning and fervent activity by the Young Men's Movement of the Methodist Church.



*Our illustration is based on actual fact — a Baby found abandoned on the Flinders Street Railway Station.*

In 1925, the newly-formed Y.M.M., a junior branch of the Laymen's Missionary Movement, took as one of its particular tasks the establishment of a babies' home to care for neglected slum babies and to provide for their adoption into Christian families. Members of the Y.M.M. worked very enthusiastically to publicize the need for a babies' home and to raise the necessary finance by conducting Church services and speaking to Bible Classes and to other youth groups. As a result, land was purchased for £3,854 in a new subdivision in South Yarra and, after an architectural competition, Mr Geoffrey Bottoms became architect for the project. Rousing ceremonies were held for the opening of the gates and the turning of the first sod on February 25th, 1928, and for the laying of the foundation stones of the Babies' Home and the Nurses' Home on December 1st, 1928. The buildings were erected at the net cost of £28,000 by Mr. George Gay and gifts at the official opening brought the total raised by the Y.M.M. to an amount which allowed the new Babies' Home to be opened free of debt.

The concept of the Babies' Home arose from the slum conditions of housing and living in Melbourne's inner suburbs in the 1920's. In many instances, children were removed from parents and committed to institutional care by the courts because they were 'neglected' or 'ill-treated'. It was felt, however, by the young men of Methodism that this action was too late and that if these children could be saved as babies and adopted into Christian homes, the effect of their original environment would be negated and they would have the opportunities which were denied to them at present. Given the lack of action by the Victorian Government in tackling Melbourne's housing crisis in the inner city areas, the approach of the Y.M.M. to the problem seemed to be the only available option for improving the quality of life for future generations of children born into such surroundings. If it were not possible to improve the environment immediately, then the severing of all links between the neglected baby and that environment was necessary if the child was to break the vicious circle of 'slum-mindedness'.

Adoption provided a satisfactory way of making such a break permanent while at the same time enriching both the baby's and the adoptive parents' lives. To overcome community distrust of adoption and to allay fears that an adopted baby would be tainted because of its biological parentage, much prominence was given to the argument that the environment was more important than heredity in determining the sort of person a child would become. Besides, all babies made available for adoption would be carefully screened while in the Babies' Home so that their health and mental condition would be normal at the time of adoption.

For such a programme to succeed it was necessary to obtain children as young as possible, hence the emphasis was on babies rather than older children who were equally neglected and ill-treated. The present generation of slum children had to be left to their fate; there was little that could be done to change their way of life or future. It was the next generation, the babies, who could be helped by removal to the Babies' Home and subsequent adoption. They would be too young to remember or to have developed any undesirable traits associated with their original environment. While in the 1970's the emphasis is on keeping families together as long as possible, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the forcible taking of babies from their mothers and families by the courts in the 1930's may not have been as bad as it sounds. When one considers the size of the families (often 8+ children), the economic depression which began in 1929, the number of babies who were illegitimate (in a follow-up study of 100 adopted babies, 86 were illegitimate and of those 86, 72 had unknown fathers) and the accommodation crisis (often families of 10-13 lived in three to four rooms in shanty-type homes built over rights-of-way with water available only from external taps), it seems quite possible that many of the babies may have been unwanted anyway. In fact, to avoid any charge of manipulation on the part of the Babies' Home, the Confidential Officer and the Admissions Committee increasingly relied on the Court of Petty Sessions and the Children's Court to commit babies to the Home after declaring them neglected, rather than using the practice of obtaining the mother's written consent to transfer guardianship of the child to the Home.

It was with this background and in this context that the Babies' Home opened in 1929. Amid the general euphoria



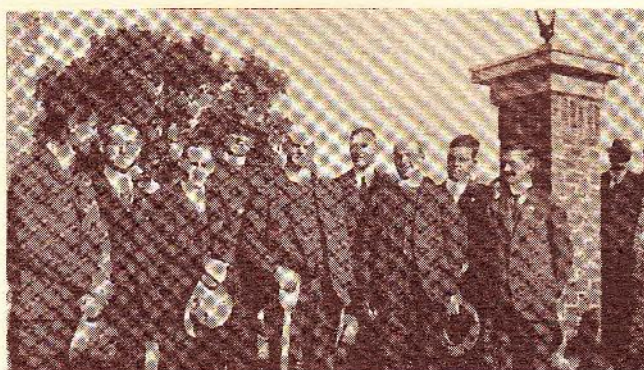
# Street

which produced the final £3,000 in 3 minutes to fulfil the pledge to open the Home 'free of debt', a sense of history was present in the comments of the speakers. Recording the occasion in *Excalibur*, the official organ of the Y.M.M., the reporter noted:

Thus passed into history a red-letter day in Methodism, a day never to be forgotten.

The strongest impression one gets of those early years of planning and establishment is the overpowering enthusiasm and ceaseless activity with which these young Methodist men attacked the problem of the neglected slum babies. For the Babies' Home was a project of considerable proportions. At one stage the plan for the Home envisaged five buildings each housing 100 babies, only the first of which was to be opened in 1929. And it was wholly a Methodist project. Finance for the Home's construction and maintenance came largely from Methodist Churches throughout Victoria. Specially trained teams of Y.M.M. members visited and spoke regularly to congregations everywhere. In one year, 800 services were taken, 120 at the Labour Day weekend. Within local Churches there were representatives appointed to make weekly collections via the Blue Book system. The five architects, including Mr G. Bottoms, who submitted plans in the competition for the design of the Home were all Methodists as was Mr George Gay, the honorary builder. The honorary medical staff at the Home also were Methodists. But the Y.M.M. were the motivating force behind it all. They organised and ran a building appeal to raise the capital required. They involved young and old in the fund-raising, although they were very keen that it should be the young men and women of the Church who should do the most, to make the establishment of the Babies' Home a young people's project. They even published a magazine, *Excalibur*, to publicize further the plight of the slum baby and to keep people informed of the progress being made at South Yarra in the construction of the Home. The Methodist Babies' Home, then, was not the product of professional social workers or child care experts; rather it was a practical expression of the Christianity of a group of concerned and committed young men.

After the foundation of the Home, the Y.M.M. provided members of the Board of Management and gave dedicated voluntary service to the Home. Persons prominent in those early years were Dr Douglas Thomas (President) and Messrs A. G. Wilson, F. Oswald Barnett, A. E. Parker, B. A. Barber, E. M. Harris, G. Padgham and C. H. Lord. Branches of the Y.M.M. in provincial cities were co-ordinated by R. G. Ebbott in Geelong, F. Jones in Bendigo and R. Bartrop and R. Young in Ballarat. One of the most significant side-effects of the Y.M.M.'s involvement with slum babies was the campaign led by F. O. Barnett for the abolition of the slums which, with



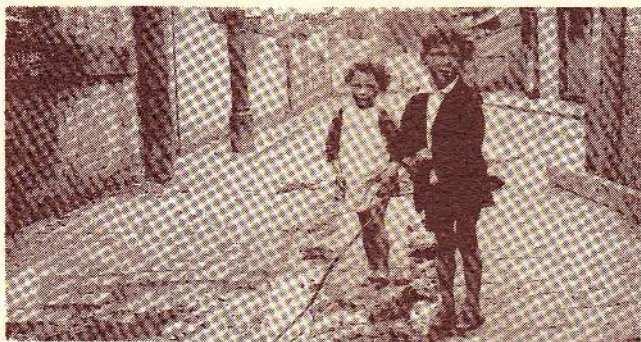
l to r: F. O. Barnett, G. Padgham, G. Bottoms, Rev. T. C. Rentoul, Rev. A. T. Holden, A. G. Wilson, Rev. A. W. Amos, Dr. D. Thomas, A. E. Parker

other concerned community groups, resulted eventually in the establishment of the Victorian Housing Commission in 1938, of which Mr Barnett was appointed deputy Chairman.

For many years the Babies' Home operated according to the ideals of the founders, acting as a haven for neglected babies and preparing them for adoption. Adoptions were arranged largely on the recommendations of the Confidential Officer to the Adoptions Committee. These recommendations were based on references and interviews with adoptive parents and the matching of suitable babies and parents. According to the available evidence, the success rate of such adoptions was high, with some families adopting a second baby later on.

The original plan of the Home provided large nurseries caring for up to 52 babies at any one time in four wards. As part of this function, the Home became a training school for mothercraft nurses who were supervised by the Matron and the honorary medical staff. In 45 years, there were only 6 Matrons, of whom the longest-serving was Miss Isobel Grant who retired in 1962 after serving the Home from its inception in 1929. Altogether, over 700 mothercraft nurses qualified after taking a fifteen month course. In 1966, however, in line with current thinking, the large nurseries of 13 babies were divided into groups of 4, each group being cared for by a group of nurses. For the older babies, a toddlers' cottage was built to provide a family-like environment with cottage parents.

Over the years during which the Babies' Home operated in its original form, the type of babies it accepted gradually changed. In the beginning, the majority of babies were neglected or ill-treated slum babies committed to the Home by the courts. In fact, in the early days when those in charge of the Home saw the rescue of slum babies as the Home's prime task, these babies were admitted in preference to other babies from less unfortunate backgrounds. By the 1950's, however, physical neglect was less common with more prosperous times and although spiritual and moral neglect continued, it was harder to prove, so that fewer babies were committed by the courts to the Home as neglected children. Instead, increasing numbers of babies of single mothers came to the Home on a 'Consent to Adoption' basis. In addition, growing numbers of babies were admitted to the Home on a temporary basis in times of family emergency or crisis and were returned to their own homes when the crisis had passed.





## Fifty Years of Caring at Copelen Street *continued*

The 1970's saw the use of foster care as an alternative to residential care for babies awaiting adoption. This led to the Babies' Home gradually being phased out of residential care and developing a non-residential role as a family centre. In 1974 the Home's programme was substantially restructured and the buildings at Copelen Street ceased to be used for their original purpose of a babies' home. Babies awaiting adoption are cared for by 'foster mothers' or at the Babies' Home, Canterbury. The Copelen Street complex is now used for day care programmes involving local children, together with support programmes for their families. The emphasis is firmly on keeping the child with his family and providing help to keep the family unit functioning as well as possible. A change in name from Methodist Babies' Home to Copelen Street Family Centre indicates the change in approach, though the essential work of caring for babies and children in families is continuing.

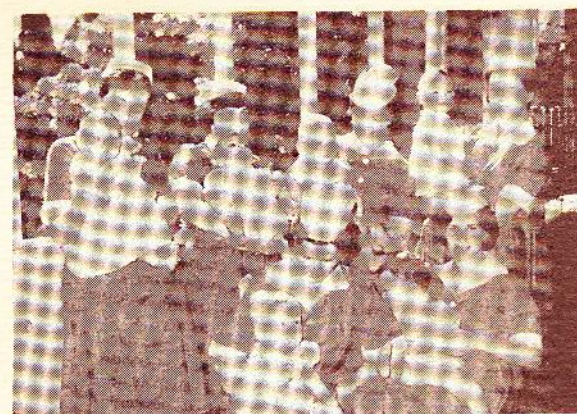
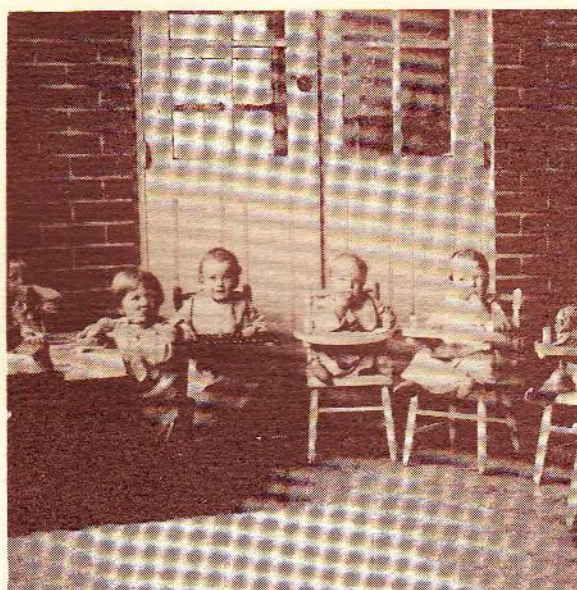
Administrative changes have occurred with time, too. Originally, the Board of Management which administered the Home was placed within the Home Missions Department of the Methodist Church. In 1959, the Boards of Management of the Methodist Homes for Children (Orana) and the Methodist Babies' Home were brought together by Conference into a Department of Child Care under the Rev. Dr. Keith Mathieson as Director. In 1964, the Rev. Graeme Gregory was appointed Associate Director with special responsibility as Principal Adoptions Officer for the Babies' Home. In 1971, the Methodist Department of Child Care and the Presbyterian Department of Social Services formed a joint organisation to undertake all work associated with the admission and placement of babies and children on behalf of the two Churches. With the inauguration of the Uniting Church in 1977, the Copelen Street Family Centre Council, which is the former Board of Management of the Methodist Babies' Home, became responsible for the Adoption and Foster Care service carried out at the Centre on behalf of the Uniting Church, the Family Centre project and the new foster care service for the inner city. The current Chairman of the Council is Mr G. L. Jones and the present Director is Mr Ray Cleary.

Fifty years have passed since that dedicated band of young men opened a refuge for neglected babies. Ideas and methods have evolved, understandably, over the half-century, but the guiding philosophy still holds true. As Mr F. Oswald Barnett expressed it in 1953:

I suppose the real purpose of it all [Babies' Home work] is that we believe every child should have the full opportunity to develop to its utmost potentiality.

In that respect nothing has changed. The future will see a continued effort by those involved with Copelen Street to fulfil that aim. As we look to the years ahead in the same way as the founders did in 1929, the words of U Thant, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, are appropriate in this International Year of the Child:

Let us resolve that fifty years hence — when today's children look back on these years — they will be convinced that we did our best for their welfare.





## Members of Council of Copelen Street Family Centre 1979

Chairman — Mr G. L. Jones

Treasurer — Mr W. B. Cook

- Mr L. Mill
- Mr F. C. Armstrong
- Mr A. Horne (resigned September 1979)
- Mrs S. Horne (resigned April 1979)
- Ms F. Johns
- Mrs M. Wilson
- Ms J. Vanstaveren
- Rev. W. Gillard
- Rev. M. John
- Rev. C. Jones
- Miss B. Potter
- Mrs A. Williams (since October 1979)

### Staff

Director and Secretary  
— Mr R. L. Cleary

Administrative Secretary  
— Mr W. B. Cook

Principal Officer - Adoption  
— Mrs S. Mercer

Principal Officer - Foster Care  
— Ms K. Lancaster

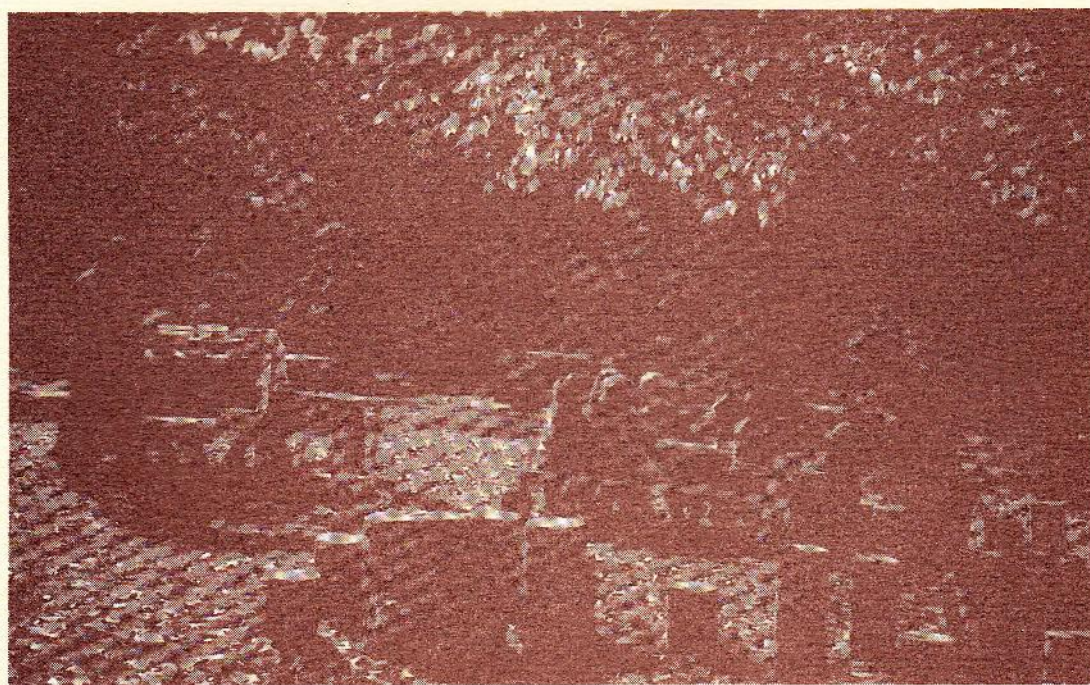
Program Director Family Centre  
— Miss B. Potter

### Some Figures

Number of babies placed for adoption  
since 1929 — over 3000

Number of mothercraft nurses trained  
since 1929 — 712

Number of families involved in the Family Centre  
since 1974 — 150





## An Invitation to Support the Work of The Copelen Street Family Centre

The Copelen Street Family Centre has great traditions of personal financial support.

There was Mr George Gay, who built the Babies' Home buildings "free of fee or reward" and those who responded on opening day in 1929 and contributed £3,000 in three minutes, so that the Home could open free of debt.

There were hundreds of "Blue Book" agents who collected from thousands of Parish members on a regular basis, many personal donors who responded to appeals from letters and deputationists, the auxiliaries and other groups, and many generous people who chose to remember our work when making their Wills.

Throughout the 50 years of service to children and families, it hasn't mattered whether we were \$500, \$5,000 or \$50,000 short of ready cash, a cheque would arrive at the critical time. As recently as September this year, we were \$45,000 in Overdraft, when two cheques totalling \$48,000 arrived unexpectedly, avoiding the need to sell investments on which we depend for regular income.

In 1929, we were able to pioneer a service which responded to the needs of the day, and since then, have continued to pioneer new services, confident that our loyal supporters would provide the resources not available from Government subsidies.

We want to be able to continue to meet emerging needs with high standard services, and invite you to consider any, or all of the following opportunities to support our work:

1. Make a Special 50th Birthday Donation of any amount.  
You may wish to donate \$1 for every year you have been associated with the Centre.

A form for this purpose is enclosed.

2. Become a subscriber to the Friends of Copelen Street Birthday Guild and celebrate the Centre's birthday in December each year, or your own birthday, or that of a loved one or friend.

A form for this purpose is enclosed.

3. Consider the work of the Centre when making or reviewing your Will. Terms of such bequest should be:

"The Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (Victoria)  
for the general purposes of The Copelen Street Family  
Centre of The Uniting Church."