

Livingstone House

1888 – 1891

Other Names: • Temporary Home for Destitute Children

Details

Livingstone House was established in Carlton in 1888, and was first known as the Temporary Home for Destitute Children. It was run by the Central Dorcas Society, and led by its Senior Biblewoman, Mrs Varcoe. Many children in Livingstone were placed in foster care. In 1891, it relocated to a new property in Cheltenham and later became the Methodist Homes for Children.

The Temporary Home for Destitute Children opened in August 1888, and soon became known as Livingstone House, named after the African explorer and missionary. Livingstone House was originally located at the corner of Drummond and Richardson Streets, in the inner-Melbourne suburb of Carlton. According to Howe and Swain, the early years of Livingstone House marked the high point of child rescue philosophy.

Livingstone House was run by an executive committee, whose members were initially drawn from the Central Dorcas Society, and led by its Senior Biblewoman, Mrs Varcoe.

The Central Dorcas Society was a women's organisation established in 1888 to help the poor and 'waifs' (it later changed its name to the Central Dorcas Association Help and Rescue Society).

The 'ladies' running Livingstone House were under the ultimate control of the Home Mission Society. Subsequent committee members were mainly the wives of Melbourne Methodist clergy and laymen.

The passage of the Neglected Children's Act 1887 gave new legal status to the child rescue activities of Livingstone House. In March 1889, the Rev James Walter Crisp (Chairman of the Home Mission Committee) and Mrs Emma Jane Varcoe (the matron of Livingstone House) were authorised to apprehend children living in brothels (under s.21 of the Neglected Children's Act 1887). Under s.62 of the Act, Mrs Varcoe was also approved as 'a person desirous of taking charge of neglected children gratuitously'. To get children apprehended by Mrs Varcoe and Rev. Crisp returned to their parents, it was now necessary to obtain a court order. Indeed, as Swain and Howe have asserted, cutting off 'neglected' children from their parents was 'crucial to the philosophy of child rescue'.

Mrs Varcoe's daughter, Ada, helped care for the children at Livingstone House. Ada, in her late teens, died in 1889, possibly from an infection caught at the Home.

From Livingstone House, many children were placed in foster care. Its foster parents received no payments, leading the Secretary of the Home Mission Society, Rev. Bickford, to argue that they 'were more likely to be motivated by love'.

From the outset, the Executive Committee had concerned about the limited outdoor space at Livingstone House, making it unsuitable for a children's home. A new site at Cheltenham was found, a two-storey, double-fronted brick building, facing Nepean Highway. The new building, which could accommodate 25 children, was to be named Livingstone Home.

In 1891, the home relocated to the new property in Cheltenham, known initially as Livingstone Home, and later as Methodist Homes for Children. The move from the 'back slums' to Cheltenham was in part a philosophical move away from ideas of inner city child rescue. With the move to Cheltenham, the name of the Central Dorcas Association Help and Rescue Society changed again, to the Wesleyan Church Neglected Children's Aid Society.

Mrs Varcoe was not matron at the new home, but continued her work with the Home Mission Committee.

In 1989, Orana Family Services became the custodian of records of Livingstone House.

Gallery



First Home, Carlton.

First home, Carlton

Description: This is an image of Livingstone House, published in the pamphlet, *Furnishings of love* (1938).

More info

Chronology

- **Livingstone House (1888 – 1891)**
 - Methodist Homes for Children (1891 - c. 1953)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Home Mission Society of Victoria \(c. 1871 - current\)](#)

A committee of ladies from the Central Dorcas Society ran Livingstone House, under the auspices of the Home Mission Society.

Date: 1888 - 1891?

Related Legislation

- [The Neglected Children's Act 1887, Victoria \(1888 - 1890\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Central Dorcas Society \(1888 - 1891\)](#)

A committee of ladies from the Central Dorcas Society ran Livingstone House, in Carlton.

Resources

- UnitingCare Victoria and Tasmania, *Uniting Church in Australia: agencies in Victoria delivering substitute care services*, April 2008
- Cleverdon, Irene V., [Furnishings of love: a record of fifty years in the services of children](#), 1938

Records

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

Records

- [Orana UnitingCare Records \(1888 - 2011\)](#)
-

You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/livingstone-house/>