Frances Barkman Homes

c. 1939 – c. 1992

Other Names:
- Larino Children's Home
- Frances Barkman House
- Larino

Details

The Frances Barkman Homes were run by the Australian Jewish Welfare Society (AJWS). From the late 1930s, the Society used a Balwyn mansion, Larino, to accommodate Jewish children migrating from Germany and Austria, including survivors of the Holocaust. In the 1960s, the Society shifted its model of care towards family group homes in the Caulfield area. Frances Barkman Homes closed around 1992.

In the late 1930s, the Australian Jewish Welfare Society (AJWS) leased a mansion known as 'Larino', to be used as a home for Jewish children migrating from Germany and Austria.

The mansion was located at 23 Maleela Avenue, Balwyn, on the corner of Whitehorse Road.

Frances Barkman had been the first to propose the immigration of Jewish children to the Executive of the AJWS in late 1938. In February 1939, the AJWS formally requested the Australian government to grant visas to 750 Jewish children over the next three years.

In March, the Australian government responded, however begrudgingly, agreeing to accept 250 children a year. The department stressed that these children were to be included in the total of 15,000 Jewish immigrants over 3 years that the Government had agreed to accept in December 1938.

The historian Rodney Benjamin writes:

> Conscious that allowing children into the country without their parents would lead to a later demand for family reunion, the Commonwealth terms were for orphans in the true meaning of the term; that both parents were dead.

The Home had capacity for 40 children, and Barkman's original plan was for children to stay at Larino for 3 months and then be boarded out, to be replaced by the next group of 40 children.

In July 1939, 17 German children arrived in Melbourne, on the *Orama*. They had travelled in the care of Dr Erna Falk, described in the press as a 'children's specialist' from Berlin. Dr Falk was the first matron at Larino. On the day after their arrival, the children were enrolled at the local Balwyn State School.

The *Argus* reported that most of the children had parents still in Germany. Frances Barkman, secretary of the AJWS in 1939, helped the children to settle in at Larino, and then departed, carrying in her bag 'dozens of letters to parents to tell of safe and happy arrivals'.

This group of German children included George Dreyfus, who became a famous composer. His piece 'Larino, safe haven' was written about his experiences as a child, and to celebrate 'plain, naked survival'. Over 50 years after his arrival in Melbourne, Dreyfus reflected on Larino:

> There isn't much left of the Larino Children's Home at the corner of Whitehorse Road and Maleela Avenue in Balwyn. The dark red brick fence is still there, always looking as if it's about to fall down. When passing I sometimes get out of the car and give it a bit of a pat, a mixture of reassuring 'hold in there, old fellow' and 'thank you for saving my life'.
>
> The stately old mansion – it was the same colour as the brick fence – is long gone, replaced by an obviously upmarket retirement home. Larino was to have been pulled down before the war, but at the last moment Samuel Meyers bought it on behalf of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society. The space was needed for the 17 German-Jewish children, including my brother Richard and myself, already on the high seas on board His Majesty's Ship Orama. We children were fleeing Nazi Germany, alone, no relatives – in fact most of the children were never to see their parents again.

With the outbreak of the War disrupting the AJWS's migration activities, these 17 children were the only group of war refugees to be cared for at Larino. As no more were able to follow them, the children stayed on at Larino.

Miss Ursula Kaye became matron in 1941. She remained at the Home until 1946.

The Society purchased the property after the War to accommodate orphaned child survivors of the War and the Holocaust, as well as immigrant children in need of care.

In 1948, the Home was named in the memory of Frances Barkman, who had died in 1946. In January 1948, there were 15 children at the Home, and the Society was expecting the arrival of survivor children from Belsen. At the end of 1949, there were 23 children at the Home.

A new building was constructed at the site in the early 1960s. In 1964, in line with contemporary thinking, the Society began a shift towards family group homes. Three family group homes were opened in the Caulfield area, known as Frances Barkman Homes.

The houses were situated in Aroona Road, Howitt Street and Glen Eira Road in Caulfield.

The building at Balwyn was sold to the Victorian government in 1964, where the state-run Illoura Children's Home was established.

In the late 1970s, the home in Glen Eira Road was converted for use as a hostel for the intellectually disabled. In 1984, the Aroona Road property became a community and residential unit for Jewish children, aged up to 18 years, with intellectual and physical disabilities. In the same year an emergency/respite care home at Bundeera Road, Caulfield, was approved.

Frances Barkman Homes closed around 1992.

Gallery

Children in the Frances Barkman House

Description: Caption reads, 'Jewish children eat together in the dining room of the Frances Barkman House, one of Australia's many hostels that took in Jewish war refugees.'

Australian Jewish Welfare Society, Group Outside Children's Home, Balwyn, Victoria

Description: This is a copy of an image from the Laurie Richards Collection, held by Museums Victoria. The collection includes a number of promotional photographs of the Larino Children's Home (also known as Frances Barkman House) in Balwyn.

More info

Related Entries

Run by
- Australian Jewish Welfare Society (1936 - 2001)

Related Organisations
- Illoura Children's Home (1964 - 1984)
  Illoura Children's Home was established on the former site of Frances Barkman House in Balwyn.
  Date: 1964 -

Resources

- Arnstein, Lenke, *Recurring Dreams*, 2002
- Connolly, Sharon, *Overcame childhood trauma to make his mark with a caring, creative life*, Brisbane Times, 14 July 2008
- Bartrop, Paul R., *Barkman, Frances (1885-1946)*, Australian Dictionary of Biography Online Edition, 1993
- *Frances Barkman House, Group Homes (1939-c.1985)*, Finding Records, No date. *Relevance:* See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to Frances Barkman Homes
- Kohn, P., *Jewish Care Victoria probes claims of historic child abuse*, The Australian Jewish News, 14 November 2013

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- Jewish Care (Victoria) Inc. records
- Voluntary Children's Homes Files (1921 - 1989)
- Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' [Child Endowment] prefix (1904 - 1974)
  Item B303 of the Child Endowment correspondence files relates to Frances Barkman Homes

You can view this page online by visiting https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/frances-barkman-homes/