

State Children's Relief Board

1881 – 1923

Other Names:

- State Children's Relief Department
- SCRB
- SCRD
- State Children Relief Board

Details

The State Children's Relief Board was a government agency established by the *State Children's Relief Act 1881* to introduce the boarding out system. By 1915, more than 24,000 children had been boarded out in New South Wales. Please note that the titles 'State Children's Relief Board' and 'State Children's Relief Department' are used in various ways in the records. Generally, the Department means the staff (the public servants), while the Board refers to the people who made the decisions about the running of this agency. The head of the State Children's Relief Board led the State Children's Relief Department, and the Boarding Out Officer was the most senior public servant. In Find & Connect, we use the term 'State Children's Relief Board' to cover all the functions of this agency.

The State Children's Relief Board was created with the aim of removing children from large institutions, such as orphanages and asylums, and boarding them out, or fostering them. Foster parents were paid a small fee. Older children could be apprenticed, as domestic servants, for a tiny wage. Boarded out children were supposed to be considered a member of the family and attend school, but they also worked, often quite hard, in the foster family's home. As apprentices, they earned their keep.

The State Children's Relief Board was a committee of well-to-do women, drawn from Sydney's charitable networks, presided over by Dr Arthur Renwick, who was also president of the Benevolent Society and a member of Parliament. Its second president was Dr Charles Mackellar, also an MP.

At first the State Children's Relief Board only had the power to collect children who had already been placed in an orphanage, but it was so successful at doing this that, by 1890, all government-funded orphanages had closed down and the only surviving large institution was the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children (although some religious orphanages later became very large). The Board did not control reformatories and industrial schools, like Parramatta or the training vessels – these were part of the prison system and were later controlled by the Department of Public Instruction.

Although boarding out was the main goal of the State Children's Relief Board, not all state children were fostered. From 1885 the Board created a series of cottage homes, or small institutions, beginning at Pennant Hills and later moving to Mittagong, to care for children who had special needs, such as illness, mental and physical disabilities, eye conditions or behavioural problems. It seems many Aboriginal children in care were institutionalised, as white families would not foster them.

The Board could also arrange 'adoptions', which had no legal status, but which meant children could be placed permanently and the government did not have to pay for their care. Such adoptions were, however, rare, affecting fewer than five per cent of all state children.

During the life of the State Children's Relief Board, around 60 per cent of children were boarded out, 20 per cent were apprenticed, 15 per cent lived in cottage homes and the rest were 'adopted'. The State Children's Relief Board did not look after reformatories and industrial schools.

In 1896 the *State Children's Relief Act* was amended so the Board could collect children directly from the police, who had, until then, had to deposit neglected or destitute children with an institution or take them to an adult court. The 1896 amendments also allowed the State Children's Relief Board to pay a half-rate of the boarding out allowance to mothers who were in distress. This meant women, and relatives, could keep their children, if they could satisfy the Board and the Boarding Out Officer that they were respectable.

In 1904 Renwick retired and was replaced by Dr Charles Mackellar, a specialist in infant medicine and care. In 1905 he introduced the *Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders' Act*, which replaced the *State Children's Relief Acts*. The most important part of the new act was the creation of Children's Courts, a probation system, and a system of supervising all homes where infants were kept, including maternity hospitals, nursing homes, orphanages and institutions. Under the new legislation the State Children's Relief Board ran all government depots, and the shelters attached to the Children's Courts, although it was not responsible for reformatories and training schools.

Mackellar was also considered to be an 'expert' on feeble-mindedness and mental deficiency. He believed people with those conditions should be separated from the mainstream community and offered special education. He was an advocate for the Montessori method, and used Montessori-trained teachers to run the first school programmes offered to 'mentally deficient' and 'feeble-minded' children in State Children's Relief Department institutions. This method was gradually introduced to all institutions for intellectually disabled children run by the State Children's Relief Board, and later the Child Welfare Department.

The State Children's Relief Board, which had its own staff, was under the supervision of the Colonial Secretary/Premier until 1906, when it came under the direction of the Minister for Public Instruction.

The Child Welfare Act 1923 amended and consolidated the principal laws relating to the welfare of children in New South Wales. The State Children's Relief Board was dissolved by this Act and its powers were transferred to the Minister for Public Instruction, later known as the Minister for Education. The new Child Welfare Department, which took on all the functions of the State Children's Relief Board and the reformatories and training schools, was the forerunner of the New South Wales Department of Community Services.

Gallery



TYPES OF HOMES FROM WHICH THE BOARD RECEIVES WARDS

Types of homes from which the Board receives wards

Description: This is a digital copy of a photograph used in a State Children Relief Department Report to depict the sort of home children were 'rescued' from. This image was used to illustrate the benefits of boarding out, at a time when the system was the subject of two government inquiries.



BOARDING OUT HOMES ON THE HAWKESBURY RIVER.

Boarding out homes on the Hawkesbury River

Description: This is a copy of an image used by the State Children Relief Department Report for the year ended 5 April 1914 to illustrate the benefits of boarding out, at a time when the system was the subject of two government inquiries.



State Children's Board, Head Office, Sydney

Description: This is a digital copy of an image published in the State Children Relief Board Report for the year ending 5 April, 1908.

More info

Chronology

- **State Children's Relief Board (1881 – 1923)**
 - Child Welfare Department, State Government of New South Wales (1923 - 1970)

Related Entries

Ran

- [The Cottage Home \(1879 - c. 1889\)](#)
Date: 1884 - 1889
- [Shaftesbury Reformatory School \(1880 - 1904\)](#)
Date: 1901 - 1904
- [Ormond House \(1884 - 1923\)](#)
- [Mittagong Cottage Homes \(1885 - 1976\)](#)
- [Probationary Farm Home, Branxton \(1890s - 1915?\)](#)
- [Probationary Farm Home, Rydalmere \(1891 - 1894\)](#)
- [Carpentarian Reformatory for Boys \(1894 - c. 1908\)](#)
Date: 1897 - 1908
- [Probationary Farm Home, Dora Creek \(1900 - 1913\)](#)
- [Mittagong Farm Home for Boys \(1906 - 1947\)](#)
Date: 1906 - 1923
- [Newcastle Shelter \(1906 - 1966\)](#)
- [Thirlmere Babies' Home \(1907 - 1913\)](#)
- [Home for Sick Infants, Paddington \(1907 - 1913\)](#)
- [Cottage Home for Feeble-Minded Children, Parramatta \(1907 - 1923?\)](#)
- [Cottage Home for Invalid Children, Parramatta \(c. 1907 - c. 1940\)](#)
- [Brush Farm Reformatory \(1908 - 1912\)](#)
- [Home for Mothers with Infants, Croydon \(1909 - 1911?\)](#)
- [Probationary Farm Home, Toronto \(November 1909 - 1912?\)](#)
- [Metropolitan Boys' Shelter \(1911 - 1983\)](#)
- [Cicada Home \(1911 - 1930s\)](#)
- [Raymond Terrace Home \(1913 - 1930?\)](#)
- [Hillside Home for Mothers and Babies \(1913 - 1920\)](#)
- [Shaftesbury Home for Babies and Mothers \(c. 1913 - 1915\)](#)
- [Eastwood Home for Mothers and Babies \(1915 - 1922\)](#)
- [Yarra Bay House \(1917 - 1923\)](#)
- [May Villa \(1919 - 1983?\)](#)
- [Corelli Hospital for Women \(1919 - c. 1945\)](#)
- [Santa Marina \(1919 - 1930?\)](#)
Date: 1919 - 1923

- [Bidura \(1920 - 1977\)](#)
Date: 1920 - 1923
- [Montrose Maternity Hospital \(c. 1920 - c. 1935\)](#)
Date: 1920 - 1923
- [Hillside Training Home for Girls \(1920 - 1923?\)](#)
- [Royleston \(1922 - 1983\)](#)
- [Brush Farm Home \(1922 - 1988\)](#)

Related Glossary Terms

- [Apprenticeship \(1860s - 1960s\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Benevolent Asylum, Sydney \(1821 - 1901\)](#)
The State Children's Relief Board removed children from the Benevolent Asylum and placed them in the boarding out system.
- [Colonial Secretary \(1 Jan 1821 - 1 April 1959\)](#)
Date: 1881 - 1888
- [Protestant Orphan School \(1850 - 1886\)](#)
The State Children's Relief Board was given the power to withdraw children from the Protestant Orphan School and place them in the boarding out system.
- [Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children \(1858 - 1915\)](#)
The State Children's Relief Board was created to remove children from large institutions like Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children and place them into the boarding out system.
- [New South Wales Institution for the Deaf, Dumb and Blind \(1869 - 1957\)](#)
State wards were sent to the New South Wales Institution for the Deaf, Dumb and Blind and the State Children's Relief Board cared for children from the Institution during vacations and other periods
- [Sydney Female Refuge \(c. 1870 - 1926\)](#)
The annual reports of the State Children's Relief Board record that it sent some girls to the Sydney Female Refuge.
- [Department of Public Instruction \(1880 - 1915\)](#)
The State Children's Relief Board became part of the Department of Public Instruction in 1906.
Date: 1906 -
- [State Children's Relief Department \(1881 - 1923\)](#)
The terms State Children's Relief Department and State Children's Relief Board are interchangeable and both may appear in the records. Generally, the term Department refers to the staff (the public servants), while the term Board refers to the decision-makers, the ladies and gentlemen who ran the State Children's Relief Board.
- [Children's Court of New South Wales \(October 1905 - current\)](#)
- [Sydney Norland Nurseries \(1908 - 1945\)](#)
Sydney Norland Nurseries was licensed by the State Children's Relief Board.

Related Legislation

- [State Children Relief Act 1881, New South Wales \(1881 - 1901\)](#)
- [Children's Protection Act 1892, New South Wales \(1892 - 1902\)](#)
- [State Children Relief Act 1896, New South Wales \(1896 - 1901\)](#)
- [Infants' Custody and Settlements Act, New South Wales \(1899 - current\)](#)
- [Infant Convicts Adoption Act 1901, New South Wales \(1901 - 1939\)](#)
- [State Children Relief Act 1901, New South Wales \(1901 - 1923\)](#)
- [Children's Protection Act 1902, New South Wales \(1902 - 1923\)](#)
- [Infant Protection Act 1904, New South Wales \(1904 - 1923\)](#)
- [Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act 1905, New South Wales \(1905 - 1923\)](#)

Related Places

- [Brush Farm \(1803 - current\)](#)
The State Children's Relief Department used Brush Farm as a home.
Date: 1881 - 1923
- [Ormond House \(1824 - current\)](#)
The State Children's Relief Board used Ormond House as a depot, shelter, children's court, training home and

mothers' home.
Date: 1884 - 1923

Related Concepts

- [Adoption in New South Wales \(c. 1923 - current\)](#)

Resources

- Ramsland, John, *Children of the back lanes: destitute and neglected children in colonial New South Wales*, 1986
- [New Parents for "Nobody's Child"](#), The Sydney Morning Herald, 7 August 1939
- State Children's Relief Department, *Report of the State Children's Relief Department, 1881 - 1893*
- Lark, Susan, *Index to children in the care of the State Children's Relief Department as of 05 April, 1883*, 2002
- [The Mittagong Children's Farm](#), Sydney Morning Herald, 5 November 1914
- [The Children's Friend: Sir Charles Mackellar: Mittagong Homes. A great work. Those who never had a chance.](#), The Sydney Morning Herald, 28 November 1914
- Department of Justice, [History](#), Children's Court of New South Wales, 2012
- ["The Death Roll": The Babies' Home: Condemnatory Reports: Mother's Complaint](#), The Sydney Morning Herald, 8 November 1911
- State Records Authority of New South Wales, [Dept of Community Services](#), No date
- [Publications - Department of Community Services](#), OpenGov NSW, 2014

Records

Records

- [Departmental Records relating to State Wards, New South Wales \(1918 - current\)](#)
 - [Inspectors' Diaries \(1916 - 1922\)](#)
 - [Dependent Children Registers \(1883 - 1923\)](#)
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