

# Mount Penang Detention Centre

1988 – 1991

**Other Names:**

- Gosford Boys' Home
- Mt Penang
- Gosford Detention Centre
- Mount Penang

## Details

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Mount Penang Detention Centre in Kariong was the new name given in 1988 to what had been the Mount Penang Training School for Boys, also known as Gosford Training Home. It was run by the Department of Family and Community Services. Mount Penang Detention Centre was transferred to the Department of Juvenile Justice and renamed Mt Penang Juvenile Justice Centre in 1991.

The discipline and violence between detainees that previous inquiries had identified at Gosford emerged at Mount Penang. In 1991 the New South Wales Ombudsman, then David Landa, conducted an inquiry into the administration of Mount Penang. He found that the Department of Family and Community Services had failed to ensure that staff acted within the law (the *Children (Detention Centres) Act* when dealing with minor and serious misbehaviour in the centre. According to the Ombudsman, staff had neglected their duties and there were systematic problems in the administration of the centre.

The Ombudsman's inquiry was triggered by a 16 year old boy, 'Detainee A', who was put into the Centre in 1989 and was serially harassed and assaulted by other detainees. The boy wrote to the Ombudsman for help:

*I have nothing against this place. Actually, it's a good place with many helpful useful facilities. Apart from the kids it's alright ... I have not asked for all this trouble ... They like to scare and play tricks on the new kid ... I have considered taking several desperate measures one of which is running away and handing myself in to a better detention centre, such as Reiby or Keelong ... I believe I done the crime I should do the time. These incidents are way out of hand and are unable to be fixed up ...*

The incidents included being offered 'drugs' (actually bleach), threatened with pack rape, hit in the head with a steel bar, bitten, cut, shoulder-charged, assaulted in his own bed in front of a worker, burned with a cigarette, taunted homophobically, nearly drowned at a group swimming event and being bashed so seriously that he was hospitalised twice. Another boy, 'Detainee C', was hospitalised after a 'discharge bashing', which the Ombudsman described as a ritual of bastardisation, common in the centre.

The Ombudsman found that 'Detainee A' was credible and, as he was young and a minor, non-violent offender, should not have been placed in Mount Penang to start with. He was highly critical of the superintendent, who ignored Detainee A's complaints, and found the staff allowed the boys to bash the detainee, rather than manage him properly:

*... administrative staff were prepared to condone the violence of the detainees on Detainee A to fashion his behaviour rather than to set proper standards of conduct and maintain control of the establishment.*

This was against the regulations of the Department of Family and Community Services, and the law, and the Ombudsman said would have recommended disciplinary action against the Superintendent had the man not taken voluntary redundancy.

The Ombudsman's report describes the state of the institution in October 1990. It was overcrowded – there were 184 boys, when capacity was 160, and each dormitory had 40 beds, just six feet apart. The Ombudsman described the units as follows:

- Walpole, for 'sophisticated delinquents the most secure unit'
- Vernon, 'for youths with interpersonal relationship problems, drug problems'
- Sobraon, for 'previous committals'
- Carinya, for 'first committals'
- Stayner, 'drug and alcohol unit'
- Wood, 'previous committals but not habitual offenders'.

Kariong Secure Unit existed alongside the home at this time. The Ombudsman found that, overall, 42% of detainees were aged 18-21 and were being held on serious and violent charges. He was sceptical about the classification of the boys, and whether young, non-violent offenders could be cared for in such an environment.

The report was handed down after 'Detainee A' was transferred to another centre and after Mount Penang was removed from the Department of Family and Community Services. The administration of juvenile justice was transferred to the Department of Corrective Services in July 1991 and the Juvenile Justice Unit of the Department of Corrective Services became a separate administrative office in November 1991, named the Office of Juvenile Justice. This became the Department of Juvenile Justice.

The site of Mount Penang Training School for Boys is, in 2021, part of the Mount Penang Parklands precinct, 'a Central Coast destination for tourism, events, business and education'. Two juvenile justice facilities are located in the precinct.

## More info

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### Chronology

- Mount Penang Training School for Boys (1946 - 1987)
  - **Mount Penang Detention Centre (1988 – 1991)**
    - Mt Penang Juvenile Justice Centre (1991 - 1999)

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Department of Family and Community Services, State Government of New South Wales \(1988 - 1991\)](#)  
Date: 1988 - 1991
- [Department of Juvenile Justice, State Government of New South Wales \(1990 - current\)](#)  
Date: 1991 -

#### Related Organisations

- [Keelong Remand Centre \(1978 - 1990\)](#)  
Mount Penang Detention Centre and Keelong Remand Centre were both used for boys who were considered

to be delinquent, but Keelong was usually for first offenders. Both were transferred from the Department of Family and Community Services to the Department of Juvenile Justice in 1991.

Date: 1988 - 1991

## Resources

- [\*Ken Buttrum interviewed by Gail Winkworth in the National Library of Australia's Children and the State oral history project \[sound recording\]\*](#), 15 October 2009
- [\*Mount Penang Parklands\*](#), Hunter & Central Coast Development Corporation, 2021

## Records

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

### Records held by other organisations

- [Departmental Records relating to State Wards, New South Wales \(1918 - current\)](#)

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You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/mount-penang-detention-centre/>