

# Westbrook Training Centre

26 May 1966 – 1987

## Details

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The Westbrook Training Centre, run by the government, was situated at Westbrook, 15 kilometres south west of Toowoomba. It operated as a reformatory for boys under the age of 18 who were confined by a court order. It was previously known as the Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook and in 1966 the name was changed to the Westbrook Training Centre. In 1987 the name was again changed to Westbrook Youth Centre.

Boys under the age of 18 years were sentenced by various courts to a term of confinement at the Westbrook Training Centre. The Home was overseen by a Supervisor who reported to the heads of the relevant Department.

The boys received training in farm skills while learning to work the Home's farmland. They learned how to farm, garden and keep stock. Stock was often exhibited at the annual Toowoomba Show. Produce from the farm was sold, and the boys were allowed to keep the profits from their individual gardens.

Regular maintenance work of the buildings at the Home was also undertaken by the boys.

Boys could also learn various trades while at the Centre, including metalworking, woodworking, mechanics and building maintenance and construction.

Departmental records quoted in the report of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions (1999) reveal that overcrowding and absconding were major challenges at Westbrook Training Centre in the early 1970s. Witnesses to the Inquiry in 1998-1999 spoke of harsh physical discipline at Westbrook during this period.

In 1971, the government launched the second magisterial inquiry into Westbrook (the first having been held in 1961). The 1971 inquiry was a response to articles published in the *Truth* newspaper in May, alleging excessive punishments, inadequate food, cases of mental illness and widespread homosexuality among the inmates, as well as details of a foiled plan for a mass breakout.

The month-long inquiry in 1971 became known as the Peel Inquiry. The report found that most of the claims in the press were either incorrect or exaggerated. The Peel report was discussed in the 1999 report of the Forde Inquiry:

*[Peel] did, however, condemn the practice of punishing troublesome inmates with an open-handed slap, and identified a few isolated incidents of staff using excessive force to control individual boys. Peel also conceded that there was a certain amount of homosexual activity among the inmates, but that it was infrequent, especially since the Inquiry had been ordered. There was also evidence to support the allegation that 'unreasonable or excessive drill' had been imposed by some of the training officers. In spite of Peel's benign findings, there remained a great deal of suspicion about the happenings at Westbrook (p.133).*

In 1977, Westbrook's superintendent Kevin Sullivan (a former prison warder) retired due to ill-health. The department replaced him with Alec Lobban, who had been a senior child care officer. According to the Forde report (1999), the appointment of Lobban 'suggests that the authorities intended to institute fundamental changes to the philosophy informing the policies and procedures at Westbrook'. Lobban had written in a departmental report in 1974, that Westbrook was 'torn between three competing aims: punishment, instruction, and rehabilitation'. One significant change that followed Lobban's appointment was the introduction of in-service training for Westbrook staff. A program of community work was expanded during Lobban's time.

Lobban prepared another report about Westbrook in 1978, which stated that the institution had 4 functions: a remand centre, an assessment and treatment centre, a training centre, and a detention centre. His report drew attention to the poor educational arrangements at Westbrook.

In 1981 the dormitory system at Westbrook was abolished, and residents had separate rooms (albeit with ventilation problems in summer, according to the Forde report, p.137).

In 1982 Lobban was seconded to work at head office, and Trevor Carlyon was formally appointed Superintendent the following year (the position was renamed 'Manager' in 1985).

Westbrook Training Centre was mentioned in the Bringing Them Home Report (1997) as an institution that housed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families.

## Gallery



### Westbrook Training Centre

**Description:** This is a photograph of Westbrook Training Centre taken in 1979. It shows what appears to be a central quadrangle with gardens and benches surrounded by three wings of the centre buildings. Silhouettes of boys can be seen in some of the windows of the training centre.



### Superintendent's House, Westbrook, 1960s

**Description:** This image shows the Superintendent's House at Farm House for Boys, Westbrook and later, Westbrook Training Centre.



### Westbrook Training Centre - a State-run institution for boys

**Description:** This image is from page 124 of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Child Abuse in Queensland institutions. The image was sourced for the Inquiry from Queensland Newspapers. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



### Westbrook dormitory

**Description:** This image is from page 143 of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Child Abuse in Queensland institutions. The image was sourced for the Inquiry from Queensland Newspapers. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



### Westbrook drill - Courtesy Queensland Newspapers

**Description:** This image is from page 133 of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Child Abuse in Queensland institutions. The image was sourced for the Inquiry from Queensland Newspapers. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.

# More info

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## Chronology

- Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook (30 October 1919 - 26 May 1966)
  - **Westbrook Training Centre (26 May 1966 – 1987)**
    - Westbrook Youth Centre (1987 - 1993)

## Related Entries

### Run by

- [Children's Services Department, State Government of Queensland \(1 August 1966 - 6 June 1987\)](#)  
Date: 1966 - 1987
- [Family and Youth Services Department, State Government of Queensland \(9 June 1987 - 14 December 1987\)](#)  
Date: 1987 -

### Related Organisations

- [Department of Justice and Attorney General \(2012 - current\)](#)  
The Department of Justice and Attorney General controls access to the records of the Westbrook Training Centre.

## Resources

- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, [Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families](#), 1997. *Relevance:* Westbrook Training Centre was mentioned in the Bringing Them Home Report (1997) as an institution that housed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families
- *Westbrook/ History of the centre*, Chronicle, 6 July 1994

# Records

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

## Records held by other organisations

- [Institution Files, Queensland Government-run Institutions \(c. 1871 - c. 2001\)](#)
- [Administrative Records, Queensland Government-run Institutions \(c. 1865 - 2001\)](#)
- [Matron's Daily Report Books, Westbrook \(10 December 1968 - 2 October 1990\)](#)
- [Record of Tetanus Injections Administered, Westbrook Training Centre and Westbrook Youth Centre \(1 November 1977 - 26 February 1990\)](#)
- [Visiting Medical Officer's Record of Hospital Treatment, Westbrook Training Centre \(28 March 1979 - 23 September 1985\)](#)
- [Investigation Files \(Westbrook Training Centre\) \(23 May 1971 - 28 April 1994\)](#)
- [Visiting Medical Officers' Journals - Westbrook \(18 February 1873 - 19 April 1990\)](#)
- [Heritage photographs of Queensland children's homes, buildings and people \(1848 - 1979\)](#)
- [General Correspondence Batches - Agent A223 Labour and Industry Department 1 \(1921 - 1974\)](#)
- [Visitors' Books - Westbrook \(18 February 1873 - 9 July 1984\)](#)
- [History Papers - Westbrook \(22 February 1892 - 31 December 1992\)](#)
- [Case History Cards \(Westbrook Reformatory\) \(5 May 1900 - 30 June 1994\)](#)
- [Superintendent's Punishment Registers - Westbrook \(14 January 1924 - 17 June 1988\)](#)
- [Administration Files, Westbrook \(1 January 1959 - 31 October 1994\)](#)
- [Visiting Psychiatrist's Journals - Westbrook \(3 July 1962 - 25 August 1966\)](#)

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