

Children of the State Department, State of Tasmania

1918 – 1934

Other Names: • CSD

Details

The Children of the State Department replaced the Neglected Children's Department. The Department oversaw the care of wards of state. In 1934, the new Social Services Department took over the role of the Children of the State Department, although the name persisted in annual reports well into the 1940s.

The *Children of the State Act*, also known as the *Children's Charter*, established the Children of the State Department.

The name, 'Children of the State Department', was an attempt to remove the stigma of neglect from wards of state. It also reinforced the idea that the State was responsible for neglected children.

The Secretary of the Department was the guardian of all wards of state. He decided whether to place them in a receiving home, the boarding out system, in a training school, a voluntarily run children's home, or with an employer as an apprentice. The work of the Department included correspondence with children, especially older ones, their parents, foster parents, and employers. The Department also carried out inspections of the homes where wards of state lived. Its officials maintained a separate file for each child that contained correspondence, inspectors' reports, and other information about his or her life. In 2013, the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office holds these files.

The *Children of the State Act* broadened the definition of neglect, enabling the Department to deal with more children. Unlike the Neglected Children's Department, its officers were able to remove children who were destitute, found to be uncontrollable by a children's court, did not attend school or lived in a home where they suffered abuse. The Department also took over the babies of single mothers living in foster homes supervised by the Police Department (known as Nursing Homes), although they did not become wards of state. According to Naomi Parry, widening the definition of neglect immediately led to more committals.

In 1914 there were 387 children in the Department's custody, of whom 48 per cent were boarded out. The introduction of the Children's Charter resulted in an immediate surge in committals, from 77 in 1914 to 134 in 1918. In 1919-1920 the Department committed 173 children, a record number that boosted the children in its care to 517, excluding the 100 infant life cases now supervised by the Department. Boarding-out rates also rose. In 1920, 55 per cent of state children were boarded out, 31 per cent were institutionalised and just 14 per cent were apprenticed – proportions that remained static until 1928, by which time there were 669 children in care. Boys continued to outnumber girls, with 1.2 boys for every girl in institutions and 1.15 to one in foster homes.

The increased workload, better funding, and the employment of an extra inspecting nurse to supervise the foster homes of the illegitimate babies gave an immediate boost to the Department's status. In 1923-4, the Charitable Grants Department, which had also been located within the Chief Secretary's Department, became a Department in its own right, taking with it the Children of the State Department. This further improved its importance.

John Daley, formerly a Chief Clerk, became the new Secretary. In 1922, he was forced to resign apparently for grossly mismanaging Departmental funds. Charles Seager, the son of Frederick Seager, the second Secretary of the Neglected Children's Department, succeeded him. In 1923-4, he became the Administrator of Charitable Grants and the Secretary of the Children of the State Departments. Seager later became Director of the Social Services Department, retiring in 1941.

The *Children of the State Act* included a clause enabling the State to take over children who had been deserted. The Department used this clause against parents who had left children in institutions voluntarily but been unable to pay their maintenance. It also used it to speed up the removal of children whose parents had not been able to attend their hearing in the children's court.

In 1920, the *Mental Deficiency Act* passed. It provided for children (and adults) diagnosed with an intellectual disability to be supervised by a Mental Deficiency Board which had powers to place them with a guardian or in an institution. The framers of the Act intended it to supplement the Children of the State Act. State wards were tested for intellectual disability and this became another way to justify the Department's control over them. Even so, its officials often disagreed with and ignored the Board's advice about individual children. Caroline Evans and Naomi Parry wrote:

To a pragmatic department, experienced in the management of its wards, the new ideas were often a nuisance and at times foolishly idealistic. In addition, officers had doubts about the board's usefulness to state wards.

In 1935, the Social Services Department, which replaced the Charitable Grants Department, absorbed the Children of the State Department.

More info

Chronology

- Neglected Children's Department, State of Tasmania (1901 - 1918)
 - **Children of the State Department, State of Tasmania (1918 – 1934)**
 - Social Services Department, State of Tasmania (1934 - 1961)

Related Entries

Ran

- [Boys' Training School \(1884 - 1926\)](#)
- [Hobart Receiving Home \(1898 - 1958\)](#)
- [Omaru Receiving Home \(1910? - 1968\)](#)
- [Ashley Home for Boys \(1926 - 1999\)](#)

Date: 1922 - 1936

Related Events

- [Committee of Inquiry into the State Farm and School for Boys, Deloraine, Tasmania \(1925\)](#)
The Secretary of the Children of the State Department was a member of the Committee of Inquiry.

Related Places

- [Cape Barren Island Reserve \(1881 - 1951\)](#)

Some children from Cape Barren Island Reserve became wards of the Children of the State Department.

Related Organisations

- [Magdalen Home \(1893 - 1974\)](#)

Officials at the Children of the State Department used the Magdalen Home as a place of last resort for state wards.

- [Police Department, State of Tasmania \(1898 - 2004\)](#)

The Police Department assisted the Children of the State Department.

- [Charitable Grants Department, State of Tasmania \(1901 - 1934\)](#)

- [Chief Secretary's Department and Premier's Office, State of Tasmania \(1914 - 1955\)](#)

- [Mental Deficiency Board \(1922 - 1964\)](#)

A significant number of the children in the care of the Children of the State Department were also under the guardianship of the Mental Deficiency Board.

Related Legislation

- [The Children of the State Act 1918, Tasmania \(1918 - 1936\)](#)

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
- Parry, Naomi, ['Such a longing': black and white children in welfare in New South Wales and Tasmania, 1880-1940](#), 2007
- Evans, Caroline, [Idealists, Pragmatists and 'Simple-Minded' Scamps: The Tasmanian Mental Deficiency Board and State 'Care' in the 1920s](#), Australian Historical Studies, 2017

Records

Records held by other organisations

- [Correspondence Relating to the Custody and Welfare of Children under Various Acts \(1887 - 1954\)](#)

This archival series contains the files kept on each ward of state by the officials of the Children of the State Department.

- [General Welfare Case Files \(1915 - 1994\)](#)

- [Register of Wards of State \(1897 - 1989\)](#)

- [Case Files of the Child Welfare Division \(Northern Office\) \(1932 - 2003\)](#)

- [Master Index to Case Files \(1920 - 1989\)](#)

- [Correspondence Files \(1919 - 1998\)](#)

- [Case Files of the Child Welfare Division \(1939 - 1972\)](#)

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