

# Social Welfare Department, State of Tasmania

1961 – 1983

**Other Names:** • Department of Social Welfare

## Details

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The Social Welfare Department replaced the Social Services Department in 1961. It provided financial and other assistance to people with inadequate incomes and managed children's services, including the supervision of state wards. In 1983, it became the Department for Community Welfare.

The name, Social Welfare Department, was an attempt to avoid confusion with the Commonwealth Social Services Department.

The Social Welfare Department's Relief Division provided outdoor relief, that is, financial and other assistance, to people without enough income to meet their day to day expenses. It managed the Domestic Assistance and Juvenile Probation Services. In 1961, the Department took over the administration of the *Adoption of Children Act* from the Registrar-General's Department.

The Department's Child Welfare Division oversaw state wards in foster or receiving Homes and managed West Wind Boys' Home, Weeroona Girls' Training Centre, Wybra Hall, and Ashley Home for Boys. The Division regulated child care and carried-out preventative work with families. It also supervised wards of state in approved children's Homes. It paid the Homes a bed allowance and board rate for each ward as well as contributing to the costs of the other children living in the Home.

In 1961, the Social Welfare Department took over responsibility for adoptions from the Registrar-General's Department. Women child welfare officers approved potential adoptive parents, talked to relinquishing mothers, and found placements for their babies. By the 1970s, many more mothers were able to keep their babies. This meant that the welfare officer's role changed to helping the mother to make the decision and, if she kept the baby, putting her on the single mother's allowance, and maintaining regular contact in order to offer support.

The Department's child welfare officers also had responsibility for investigating the plans made by divorcing parents to look after their children, under the Matrimonial Causes Act 1959.

Honorary child welfare officers supplemented the work of the child welfare officers employed by the Social Welfare Department. (In 1974, the Social Policy Planning Unit began investigating ways of increasing their numbers in order to involve the community more widely in the supervision of children who were wards of state. This did not happen.)

Providing adequate training for child welfare officers had a slow start in Tasmania. In 1963, the Annual Report of the Social Welfare Department said that the absence of a university course in social science made it difficult for the Department to recruit specifically qualified child welfare officers. Instead it employed people qualified as teachers or nurses. There were social welfare courses at the Technical Colleges but they lacked a thoroughgoing education in practical and theoretical social work. Tasmania was the only state in Australia without a degree

course in social science.

In 1970, the Department began granting post-graduate scholarships in social administration to be studied at Flinders University. This appears to have provided child welfare officers with much needed training and to have made the workforce more professional. In 1974, the College of Advanced Education in Hobart began offering post-graduate courses in social work so the Department discontinued the arrangement with Flinders University. The Department also offered in-service and on the job training to child welfare officers.

Following a Public Service Commissioner's Inquiry into Weeroona Girls' Training Centre in 1965 which upheld a number of allegations against its Principal, the Department appointed Official Visitors to visit Departmental children's Homes and make suggestions for their improvement.

These official visitors visited Ashley Home, Wybra Hall, and Weeroona monthly, or more often if they wished, in order to get to know the children. They could go to all parts of the home and talk to any of the children. Official visitors could make suggestions to the Superintendent and notify the Director of the Social Welfare Department or the Minister of any problems that they found.

From the mid to late 1970s, the Department adopted policies designed to keep children out of the care of the state. This approach is best summed up by the 'Policy and Objectives' statement published in its 1982 Annual Report which stated:

*In providing residential care for children and young people, the Department's view is that, wherever reasonably possible, this should be supplementary to the care provided by the natural parents, rather than substituting for it.*

This is in contrast to policy at the beginning of the 1970s when the Director of the Department, GC Smith, called for a new Remand and Assessment Centre to accommodate the increasing numbers of children that the 1971 Annual Report described as 'delinquent and disturbed'. Weeroona Girls' Training Centre, Wybra Hall, and Ashley Boys' Home could not cope with the extra numbers or the short term stays that many of these children needed. The 1975 Annual Report reported that progress had been made with the Centre but by 1976 the idea appears to have been dropped.

In 1975, a report by a Sub-Committee of the Tasmanian Branch of the Australian Institute of Welfare Officers recommended that teenage girls described as 'maladjusted' should only be placed in institutions as a last resort, that it was better to support the young woman, her family, and the community to keep the family together.

This too had become the Department's view which explains why it had dropped plans for the Remand and Assessment Centre. According to Dennis Daniels, who became the Director in 1977, placing children in institutions led to 'labelling, segregation and reinforcement of deviant behaviour'. In February 1976, following research by the Social Policy Planning Unit, the Department began a pilot program that supported children in the community rather than sending them to institutions. Daniels' first Annual Report stated that:

*Similar to trends elsewhere in Australia, the numbers of children in institutional care for delinquent and disturbed behaviour has fallen. This can, in part, be attributed to an expansion of community based services, and the philosophy of the Department shared by other responsible authorities, including the Children's Court, that children belong in the community. The community has become generally more tolerant and accepting of this concept and there is a reluctance to remove children permanently from their homes. All other available resources and techniques are called into effect before admitting children to institutional care.*

This also became the approach to working with children who, in the past, would have come into care because of family problems. From the late 1970s onwards, the Department introduced measures which the 1982 Annual Report described as designed 'to increase the general well-being of those in need rather, than simply responding to crisis situations'. The measures included interim orders, which delayed making a child a ward of state and establishing the Homemaker Service, which supported families in crisis. The Department began using the Domestic Service Assistance Scheme to give parents who had problems with their children a respite. The Relief Division, which gave assistance to people in poverty, supported attempts to keep children out of care.

A 1981 Departmental Report entitled 'Caring for residential children and young offenders in the 80s' said that residential institutions should be closed so that Regional Centres could be established. These centres supported families and their children so that they did not have to become wards of state. In 1979, Weeroona was closed and the girls transferred to Wybra Hall so that Lucinda Resource Centre could be set up on its site. Similarly, West Winds Boys' Home closed in 1983 so that a centre could be established in Southern Tasmania. It opened in 1985.

One part of the Department's policies designed to prevent children from becoming state wards was emergency care. Emergency care could avoid children being committed solely because of a short term family crisis. By 1977, the Department had 52 homes that could look after children on an overnight or short term basis.

The Department's new preventive approach led to a decline in the number of state wards from 937 in 1972 to 549 in 1982.

The feminist workers at Annie Kenney Young Women's Refuge, established in 1978, did not agree with the Department's emphasis on preserving families. Unlike the Department, the workers did not see troubled teenage girls as 'maladjusted' or in need of rehabilitation. Instead they considered them to be powerless in their dealings with government authorities and their families, who were often the source of their difficulties. The girls needed support to develop their independence. This meant that the workers often opposed attempts to keep the girls and their families together. The attitude of the workers led to disputes with child welfare officers over decisions about particular teenage girls.

Even so, the Department was more broad-minded than in the past. In 1983, in order to reflect this, the government changed its name to the Department of Community Welfare.

## Gallery

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### A Home For Danny

**Description:** The film "A Home For Danny" was produced for the Tasmanian Department of Social Welfare in 1966. The aim of the film was to encourage people to become foster parents. The film shows the story of a young boy, "Danny", who is a ward of the state living at Malmesbury Receiving Home in Hobart. It speculates on Danny's possible futures as a state ward, and emphasises the importance of the role of foster parents in the out of home care system. It also features Wybra Hall, showing boys working on the farm there. A copy of this film has been digitised and made available by Tasmanian Archives. The film runs for 10minutes 22seconds.

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## More info

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### Chronology

- Social Services Department, State of Tasmania (1934 - 1961)
  - **Social Welfare Department, State of Tasmania (1961 – 1983)**
    - Department for Community Welfare, State Government of Tasmania (1983 - 1989)

# Related Entries

## Ran

- [Ashley Home for Boys \(1926 - 1999\)](#)  
Date: 1961 - 1983
- [Domestic Service Assistance Scheme - Tasmania \(1947 - c. 1989\)](#)
- [Wybra Hall \(1956 - 1988\)](#)  
Date: 1961 - 1983
- [West Winds Boys' Home \(1967 - 1983\)](#)  
The Social Welfare Department ran West Winds Boys' Home.
- [Kanaganra Hostel \(1975 - c. 1985\)](#)
- [Omaru Community Youth Centre \(1977 - c. 1995\)](#)
- [Lucinda Family Group Home \(1980 - 1986\)](#)
- [Miranda Family Group Home \(1980? - 2005?\)](#)
- [Lucinda Resource Centre \(1980 - 1986\)](#)  
The Social Welfare Department ran the Lucinda Resource Centre.
- [Mosley Family Group Home \(c. 1981 - 1991\)](#)
- [Casablanca Family Group Home \(c. 1981 - c. 2011\)](#)
- [Malmesbury Family Group Home \(c. 1981 - 2009\)](#)
- [Binnowee Family Group Home \(c. 1981 - c. 2001\)](#)
- [Mardon Family Group Home \(c. 1981 - 2000?\)](#)
- [Bevis Marks Family Group Home \(c. 1981 - 1986\)](#)
- [Connellen Family Group Home \(c. 1981 - 2005?\)](#)
- [Cornwall Family Group Home \(c. 1981 - 2005?\)](#)
- [Danbury Family Group Home \(c. 1981 - c. 1987\)](#)
- [Eastville Family Group Home \(1981 - c. 1987\)](#)
- [Monomeeth Family Group Home \(c. 1981 - c. 2011\)](#)
- [Rochebank Family Group Home \(c. 1981 - 2009\)](#)
- [Abermere Family Group Home \(c. 1981 - c. 2000\)](#)
- [Gilburn Family Group Home \(c. 1981 - 1985?\)](#)
- [Garthfield Family Group Home \(c. 1983 - 1990?\)](#)
- [Naramarrindi Family Group Home \(c. 1983 - c. 2005\)](#)
- [Northern Regional Resource Centre \(1983 - 1990?\)](#)  
The Social Welfare Department ran the Northern Regional Resource Centre.

## Related Events

- [Select Committee Inquiry into Ashley Home for Boys, Tasmania \(1962 - 1963\)](#)
- [Investigation of the care and treatment of "socially maladjusted teenage girls", Sub-Committee of the Tasmanian Branch of the Australian Institute of Welfare Officers \(c. 1975\)](#)
- [Committee of Review into the Child Welfare Act 1960, Tasmania \(1977 - 1978\)](#)

## Related Legislation

- [Adoption of Children Act 1920, Tasmania \(1920 - 1968\)](#)
- [Child Welfare Act 1960, Tasmania \(1960 - 2003\)](#)

## Related Organisations

- [Magdalen Home \(1893 - 1974\)](#)  
Officials at the Social Welfare Department used the Magdalen Home as a place of last resort for state wards.
- [Child Welfare Division \(c. 1953 - 1980\)](#)  
The Child Welfare Division was a part of the Social Welfare Department.
- [Relief Division \(c. 1953 - 1980?\)](#)  
The Relief Division was part of the Social Welfare Department.
- [Registrar-General's Department, State of Tasmania \(1959 - 1972\)](#)  
The Child Welfare Division of the Social Welfare Department took over the administration of the *Adoption of Children Act* in 1961.

- [Child Welfare Advisory Council \(1960 - c. 1998\)](#)  
The Secretary of the Child Welfare Advisory Council had to be an employee of the Social Welfare Department.
- [Social Policy Planning Unit \(1975 - 1990?\)](#)  
The Social Policy Planning Unit was a part of the Social Welfare Department.
- [Wardship Review Committee \(1977 - 1997?\)](#)  
The Guardianship Review Committee was a part of the Social Welfare Department.
- [Annie Kenney Young Women's Refuge \(1978 - 2009\)](#)  
Workers at Annie Kenney opposed policies at the Social Welfare Department that saw teenage girls as 'maladjusted' and in need of rehabilitation. They disagreed with the Department's emphasis on the family as the main focus of the rehabilitation.
- [Aspect House \(1981\)](#)
- [Southern Regional Resource Centre \(1985 - 1995?\)](#)  
The Social Welfare Department planned to open the Southern Resource Centre. This did not happen until 1985 when the Department had become the Department for Community Welfare.

### Related Concepts

- [Adoption in Tasmania \(c. 1920 - current\)](#)

## 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
- [Jane Monaghan interviewed by Caroline Evans for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 30 August 2012
- [Dennis Daniels interviewed by Lyn McLeavy in the Bringing them home oral history project \[sound recording\] \(2000\)](#), 12 May 2000 - 25 June 2000
- [Government neglect: how foster care ruined a young boy's life](#), Stateline Tasmania, 2003
- Joint Select Committee, Parliament of Tasmania, [Adoption and Related Services 1950-1988](#), 1999
- Department of Social Welfare: report for the year ended 30 June 1979, 1979
- Department of Social Welfare: report for the year ended 30 June 1970, 1970
- Department of Social Welfare: report for the year ended 30th June 1965, 1965
- Department of Social Welfare: report for the year ended 1981, 1981
- Report of the Department of Social Welfare; for the year ended 30th June 1962, 1962
- Report of the Department of Social Welfare for the year 1965-66, 1966
- Department of Social Welfare: report for the year ended 30 June 1974, 1974
- Department of Social Welfare: report for the year ended 30 June 1980, 1980
- Department of Social Welfare: report for the year ended 30 June 1969, 1969
- Department of Social Welfare: report for the year ended 30 June 1971, 1971
- Department of Social Welfare: report for the year ended 1973, 1973

## Records

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### Records held by other organisations

- [M903 \[3\] Big Brother Movement of Tasmania \(1955 - 1969\)](#)
- [Case Files of the Child Welfare Division \(North West Office\) \(1943 - 2002\)](#)
- [Register of Wards of State \(1897 - 1989\)](#)
- [Applications and Associated Correspondence for Compassionate Allowances \(1913 - 1971\)](#)  
The Social Welfare Department created the Applications and Associated Correspondence for Compassionate Allowances.
- [General Welfare Case Files \(1915 - 1994\)](#)
- [Case Files of the Child Welfare Division \(Northern Office\) \(1932 - 2003\)](#)
- [Case Files of the Child Welfare Division \(1939 - 1972\)](#)
- [Hobart Area Office - Register/Index of Appearances by Juveniles in the Children's Court in Tasmania \(1941 - 1981\)](#)

- [Hobart Area Office-Register/Index of Wards and Supervision Cases \(1941 - 1983\)](#)
  - [Record Cards of "Non-Citizen" Children Including Children Arriving Under the Child Migration Scheme \(1950 - 1989\)](#)
  - [Correspondence, Applications & Associated Records Relating to the Custody & Welfare of Children \(Southern Regional Offices\) \(1950 - 1996\)](#)
  - [Record Cards of Wards of the State \(1955 - 1990\)](#)
  - [Record Cards of Children with Residential Domestic Status \(1955 - 1972\)](#)
  - [Record Cards of Children Organised by the Type of Order They Received \(1955 - 1990\)](#)
  - [Records Cards of Children who Received Remands and Warrants \(1956 - 1978\)](#)
  - [Hobart Area Office - Case Records of the Childrens Court in Southern Tasmania \(1962 - 1980\)](#)
  - [Master Index to Case Files \(1920 - 1989\)](#)
  - [Unidentified Group of Record Cards of Children \(1971 - 1977\)](#)
  - [Correspondence Files \(1919 - 1998\)](#)
  - [Record Cards of Children Who Have Come Under the Notice of the State But Who Are Not Declared Wards of the State \(1982 - 1990\)](#)
  - [Case Files of the Child Welfare Division \(North West Office\) \(1943 - 2002\)](#)
  - [Record Cards of Children Under Legal Supervision \(1955 - 1978\)](#)
  - [Correspondence files relating to social development with "SD" prefix, Northern Territory Social Development Branch and successors \(1974 - 1980\)](#)
  - [Films and Videos Produced and Acquired by the Agency \(1950 - 1985\)](#)
  - [Ministerial Files and Associated Papers - Unregistered \(1977 - 1982\)](#)
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