

Hobart Benevolent Society

1859 –

Details

The Hobart Benevolent Society was originally formed in 1832 but has run continuously since 1859. It was, and remains, a Protestant organisation that assisted people in poverty. Between 1880 and 1881, it managed the boarding out system. In 2014, it is managed by Uniting Care.

The Hobart Benevolent Society based its approach to charity on the Charity Organisation Society of London which also had followers in Melbourne and various cities in the United States. It had developed a so called 'scientific' approach to welfare which involved refusing to assist people its officers considered to be lazy or alcoholic, the supposedly 'undeserving' poor. The officers of the Hobart Benevolent Society questioned applicants closely to ensure that they were 'genuine'. In addition, the officers believed that if a man was willing to work in the Society's wood yard, it indicated that his poverty was not caused by laziness. Recipients received rations rather than money in case they spent it on alcohol. To avoid encouraging dependency and to protect the Society's limited funds, rations were small, no more than the minimum needed to survive. The Society discouraged giving to beggars, known as 'indiscriminate almsgiving', because it encouraged recipients to beg rather than work. Its officers favoured removing poor children from 'undeserving' parents because they did not like to penalise the children but at the same time did not want to give assistance to the parents.

In March 1880, the Benevolent Society took over outdoor relief and the boarding out system from the Administrator of Charitable Grants. He had been concerned that his department could not carry out enough inspections of the homes of boarded out children. Over the next year, the Society reduced the number of children requiring boarding out by finding work for boys of 12 and over. It made sure that foster parents only received their pay if the children attended school.

The Administrator of Charitable Grants appears to have been unhappy with the Society's management of the system because, in 1881, his Department established the Central Boarding Out Committee to take over from it. A *Mercury* editorial strongly condemned the decision, questioning whether the work could be done any better. In particular, it suggested that the volunteer Committee would not be as good at overseeing the children as the paid officers of the Benevolent Society. The editorial concluded that:

While meaning nothing disrespectful to the Administrator of Charitable Grants and the Central Committee, we cannot help thinking that the interference with the recently established boarding-out system is a retrograde step.

During the early twentieth century, the Benevolent Society maintained a role in the boarding out system mostly through the individual cases that it dealt with. Its officers often assisted those of the Neglected Children's Department to persuade parents to surrender their children. Sometimes they did so by withdrawing relief so that the parents had no option.

In 2014, the Hobart Benevolent Society continues to assist those in need but no longer on a judgmental basis.

Gallery



Hobart Benevolent Society Building



Hobart Benevolent Society Building



Hobart Benevolent Society Building with the wood yard to the right

More info

Chronology

- **Hobart Benevolent Society (1859 –)**
 - Central Committee for Boarding Out Destitute Children (1881 - 1896)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Uniting Care Tasmania \(2008 - current\)](#)

Resources

- Brown, Joan C., *'Poverty is not a crime': the development of social services in Tasmania, 1803-1900*, 1972
 - The Wapping History Group, *Down Wapping : Hobart's vanished Wapping and Old Wharf districts*, 1988
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