

Aspect House

1981 – 1981

Other Names: • Aspect House for Handicapped Children

Details

Aspect House, run by Colony 47, opened in New Town in January 1981. It provided respite accommodation for children with physical and intellectual disabilities. Aspect House closed in November 1981.

A group of parents of children with disabilities and their supporters established Aspect House. It opened on 14 January 1981 in Warragul Avenue, New Town. The Aspect House Management Committee, also made up of parents and their supporters, ran Aspect House under the auspices of Colony 47. It had a licence as an approved children's Home under the *Child Welfare Act* 1960.

The letters of the name Aspect House stood for Assistance and Support to Parents of Exceptional Children in Tasmania.

The Management Committee sought to avoid the stigma of disability by refusing to label the children who stayed there with specific conditions. They believed that labelling disabilities was a product of the mental health care model, which was too medical in its approach. They would not work with Rosebank Cottage because it accommodated children with a specific form of disability.

In 1979, according to records held by Tascare, the goals of Aspect House were:

- *Support for families with exceptional children*
- *Prevention of family crisis and family breakdown*
- *Prevention and/or delay of institutionalisation*
- *Implementation of the normalisation principle*

The Mental Health Services Commission and service club funds paid for the premises in Warragul Avenue. The rest of the funding came from a Commonwealth grant of \$60,000. This was supposed to be enough to fund the running costs of the Home as a pilot project for five months.

On 3 June 1981, on behalf of the Management Committee, Colony 47 used nearly all of their funds and some of the Crippled Children's Association, to buy another house in New Town Road. The Committee planned to run holiday programs and an assessment clinic for children from all over the state. Colony 47 provided the funds believing that the state government would reimburse them.

By the middle of 1981, the Federal funding had run out. The Aspect House Management Committee asked for a bridging loan from the Tasmanian government to pay for three months salaries and the purchase of the house in New Town Road. The government was unsure about what to do mostly because it feared that the house purchase with plans to expand services showed that the Committee would not stick to a well-defined service with predictable funding requirements. They also feared a public backlash if Aspect House was not funded. The

solution was to establish a review. The terms of reference were to:

- Examine the structure of the service to see what changes could be made.
- Consider ways of reducing the running costs.
- Look at alternative ways of providing respite care.

The review team reported on the 28 September. It recommended that the Mental Health Services Commission take over Aspect House.

Colony 47 and the Aspect House Management Committee opposed the review on several grounds. They did not have a representative on it. They thought that its approach was too medical and therefore stigmatised disability. They disputed the terms of reference because of their emphasis on change, believing that this meant services would be withdrawn. Parents feared they would be forced to use Social Welfare Department receiving homes for respite care and lose custody of their children. This was despite the Department's insistence that the children would be placed in the Homes under the *Domestic Assistance Service Act* (1947) so that the parents would not lose custody.

By now the issue was public. Senator Shirley Walters asked a question in the Senate on 15 October 1981 of Senator Fred Chaney, the Minister for Social Security, about the funding of Aspect House. In addition, the MHA for Dennison, Michael Hodgman, presented a petition to the House of Representatives to keep Aspect House open. The petition stated that:

The petition of the undersigned citizens of Australia respectfully sheweth:

- 1. All children in Tasmania are not treated equally.*
 - 2. Persons with intellectual, physical and multiple handicaps in particular will be denied access to Aspect House, 6 Warragul Avenue, New Town in Tasmania if the house is closed.*
 - 3. Aspect House is faced with imminent closure because of lack of Government policy and on-going funding.*
 - 4. Aspect House is the only community-based facility in an ordinary house in an ordinary suburban setting which provides relief to parents and families engaged in the onerous and demanding task of rearing their handicapped children in the community.*
 - 5. That the rights of all children to live with their families should be respected.*
 - 6. That we seek Government to take immediate action to prevent the closure of this unique facility.*
- And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.*

Following a report written within the Social Welfare Department, the government decided to follow the recommendation of the review and place Aspect House in the control of the Mental Health Services Commission. Aspect House would provide respite care for up to six children attending special schools who were not eligible to receive it at Rosebank Cottage or Yallambee Hostel. The government feared that if it left control in the hands of the Aspect House Management Committee, it would always seek to expand which meant an open ended demand for funds. This would encourage the rest of the disability sector to do the same. Another issue was that the Mental Health Services Commission would use trained staff, which was currently not so. A Ministerial statement read:

In this time of financial stringency government is not able to open its purse merely in response to public demand. In all other welfare and welfare-related services provision is related to a definition of need. And while government is extremely sympathetic to the needs of the parents of handicapped children it has a responsibility to ensure that public money is going to areas of greatest need.

The Aspect Committee see any definition of need according to the medical assessment of the child as stigmatizing. This need not be the case, in fact saying something is stigmatizing is a sure way to make it

so. I certainly would not agree with the Aspect Management Committee that the services provided by Rosebank Cottage and the Tasmanian Spastics Society were stigmatizing. Removing stigma does not so much consist in removing labels as in appreciating and responding with kindness and understanding to differences between people.

On 28 October, the state and Federal governments announced they would both contribute \$50,000 so that the Mental Health Services Commission could run Aspect House until the end of the financial year. Then they would review it.

A few days later, in a surprise move, the Aspect House Management Committee closed Aspect House before the Commission could take it over. At least part of their motivation was that the Commissioner of Mental Health Services rejected a 13 point plan for parental involvement put forward by the Tasmanian Minister for Public and Mental Health. The Chairman of the Committee, Mr G Williams, claimed that the Commission's total financial and administrative control would leave no room for parental involvement. One member of the Committee described the takeover as 'the destruction of something beautiful for political expediency'. According to Williams, the strain of the last few weeks had been so great that it had 'caused family splits and even personal friendships to break down'.

In November 1981, Quindalup Respite Care Centre, run by the Mental Health Services Commission, opened in the former premises of Aspect House.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Colony 47 \(1973 - current\)](#)

Related Glossary Terms

- [Domestic Service Assistance Scheme - Tasmania \(1947 - c. 1989\)](#)
Aspect House provided respite 'care' under the Domestic Service Assistance Scheme.

Related Organisations

- [Social Welfare Department, State of Tasmania \(1961 - 1983\)](#)
- [The Mental Health Services Commission \(1968 - 1989\)](#)
- [Rosebank Cottage for Disabled Children \(1979 - c. 1994\)](#)
The Aspect House Management Committee did not approve of the policy at Rosebank Cottage of accommodating children with a specific disability.

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- [Records of Tascare Society for Children/ Tasmanian Society for the Care of Crippled Children \(1935 - 2014\)](#)
The records held by Tascare contain a file about Aspect House.
- [Ministerial Files and Associated Papers - Unregistered \(1977 - 1982\)](#)

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