

Caretakers Cottage

1977 –

URL: <https://www.caretakers.org.au/>

Details

Caretakers Cottage was established by the Paddington Woollahra Youth Service (PWYS) in 1977. It was first located in a cottage on Gordon Street, Paddington provided by the Uniting Church, and later moved into the Manse on Regent Street. In 1990, the refuge – still called Caretakers Cottage – moved to Albion St, Surry Hills. In 1996, it moved to Bondi Junction where the organisation continues to exist in 2021, providing services including a youth refuge, out-of-home care, transitional housing and early intervention programs for young people at risk of homelessness.

Caretakers Cottage was one of the first youth refuges in New South Wales. It was established by the Paddington Woollahra Youth Service (PWYS) in 1977. It had close links with the Matthews family: Rex Matthews, minister at the Uniting Church in Paddington, was the first chair of the PWYS. The Uniting Church provided two houses for the Matthews family, the family home on Newcombe Street and a caretakers cottage in Gordon Street, Paddington. The family was already providing accommodation in their home to people who needed it, and this led to the establishment of a refuge in the caretakers cottage. Rex's son Laurie Matthews and his wife Sara worked at the refuge.

According to the Caretakers Cottage Inc website:

It was a time when large institutional care was being closed down everywhere, there were the remnants of traditional old orphanages but there was nothing coming along to replace them. It became clear that the old institutional sort of accommodation was inappropriate and needed to be replaced with a formalized approach. And so began the Caretakers Cottage Youth Refuge (formed under the Paddington Woollahra Youth Service), a groundbreaking response to the emergence of youth homelessness.

The roots of Caretakers Cottage were in a teen drop-in centre, The Club, established in 1972 in Jersey Road, Woollahra.

This address became the headquarters of Paddington Woollahra Youth Service (PWYS), established in 1977 and chaired by Rex Matthews.

In 1981 Caretakers Cottage refuge began to receive regular funding from the NSW Department of Youth and Community Services. Around this time, the PWYS ran a Shared Housing Letting Service called Phone-A-Home, which relied on a computer database, new technology at this time. The Matthews family also played a role in establishing the Youth Refuge Action Group, which became Yfoundations, a peak body in NSW representing children and young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

In 1988, the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran an article about Caretakers Cottage, which at that time was facing the threat of eviction from Paddington. It described life at the refuge:

The two males and six females at the Cottage must adhere to a strict set of rules. Drugs, violence, weapons, and sex are forbidden on the premises. Those under 16 years have to be home by 9pm on weeknights and 10pm on weekends. For residents over 16, the curfew times are 10.30pm on weeknights and midnight on weekends. If they break these curfews, they are grounded.

Domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking and washing are done on a roster basis. There is no TV until after dinner on weekdays, and visitors are welcome only at weekends. The refuge is closed between 9am and 1pm during the week, and those residents who are not at school are expected to look for work and accommodation during this time.

"The rules suck," according to Kim, 14, who has been at the Cottage for a month. She moved there when the Kingsford refuge she was staying in closed down temporarily. Kim says the curfew times "stink", but that the sharing of the chores is fair (Sydney Morning Herald 10 November 1988).

In 1990 Caretakers Cottage moved into new premises in Albion Street, Surry Hills. In 1996, it relocated again to Bondi Junction, where the refuge continues to operate in 2022.

Gallery



Caretakers Cottage, Paddington

Description: This is a copy of a photograph of Caretakers Cottage which was published in an article in the Sydney Morning Herald on 10 November 1988 ('Paddington youth refuge faces the threat of eviction').



The former Caretakers Cottage building in Paddington NSW

Description: This is a copy of an image of the former building of Caretakers Cottage, Paddington.



The youth refuge's Surry Hills location

Description: This is an image of Caretakers Cottage Surry Hills location. It shows a group of three-storey terrace houses, with white render, red roofs, and second-floor balconies (one enclosed). At the top of the right-most terrace is an inscription which reads "1869 Carlingford Terrace".



Caretakers Cottage, Bondi

Description: This is a photograph of Caretakers Cottage in Bondi. It shows the front of a grey, two-storey terraced building, with the Torres Strait Islands, Aboriginal, Australian, and Pride flags displayed on the 2nd floor verandah. This photograph was published in the Caretakers Cottage 2018 Annual Report.

More info

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- [Caretakers Cottage records \(c. 1977 - current\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/caretakers-cottage/>