

Searching in Your State

Understanding the background of state and territory welfare systems can make it easier to find records. For example, in South Australia there was a centralised government department that was usually involved in organising a child's placement in 'care' so it makes sense to start with government records; in Victoria, until the 1950s many placements were likely to be arranged more informally by churches or charities (known as "voluntary" or "[private placements](#)"). Records may not be held by government archives, but with the past provider, or organisation that holds their records.

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Australian Capital Territory

[See all ACT records](#)

Until 1938 Canberra practices and laws of child welfare and the care of children followed New South Wales. 'Boarding-out', or foster care, was preferred, with small institutions and homes also existing.

In 1938, the first [Adoption of Children Ordinance](#)—a special Commonwealth law made for Canberra—regulated the adoption of children in the ACT. Until 1957, young people in Canberra were institutionalised under NSW laws. The ACT did not have its own entirely separate system of child welfare until self-government, in 1989.

Children from the ACT were sometimes placed in institutional and [foster care](#) in NSW. Commonwealth Government agencies contracted agencies of the NSW Government to provide services, and to keep the records that went along with them.

Finding records from the ACT

If the person whose records you are searching for was in a non-government [Home](#) in the ACT, contact the organisation that now holds records from that Home. After that, or if you don't know the name of the Home, follow the instructions for finding New South Wales records.

New South Wales

[See all NSW records](#)

Homes, orphanages and institutions in New South Wales were often run by religious or community organisations, and took children on a "voluntary" basis – the child was committed by a relative or family member.

Children were also made wards of the state, usually at a hearing of the [Children's Court](#). Wards were most commonly placed in foster homes, known as '[boarding out](#)'. [Boarding out](#) was introduced in NSW in the late 1870s, after widespread criticism of the treatment of children in large institutions like the [Protestant Orphan School](#) and the [Randwick Asylum](#) for Destitute Children. The Boarding Out Society, and later, the [State Children's Relief Board](#) (established in 1881) removed children from institutions and placed them in foster homes.

Within a short period, 70% of children in state care were boarded out, while others were 'apprenticed' (into domestic service) and a few were informally adopted.

The New South Wales government ran more than 100 different Homes and institutions for children and young people from the 1880s until the 1990s. Nearly all children who were made state wards spent at least some time in these homes, and some were placed in homes run by religious or community organisations.

The [Child Welfare Department](#) was created in 1923, with broad powers to inspect private institutions and manage all government institutions, as well as foster care. With the introduction of the [Child Welfare Act 1939](#), more tailored programs were introduced, particularly around concepts of juvenile delinquency, truancy, child guidance and education. [Juvenile justice](#) became more repressive, with the creation of [Hay](#) and [Tamworth](#) as annexes to [Parramatta](#) and [Mount Penang](#).

In the 1970s, the Department became known as the [Department of Youth and Community Services](#), reflecting the diversity of approaches taken by its staff to children, families and other vulnerable groups. Foster care remained the primary method of caring for children who could not live with their families, and like other Australian jurisdictions, the remaining large institutions for children began to close during a period of deinstitutionalisation.

Finding records from NSW

If the person whose records you are searching for was a state ward in New South Wales (or was from the ACT and was placed in a NSW institution), you can apply to [Community Services](#) for access to their records. Only minimal records exist pre-1940.

If the person was in care before 1940, search for their name in the [State Records NSW Guide to Child Care and Protection](#). You can view microfilm copies of the records in the State Records NSW reading room or request photocopies online.

If you do not find the information you were searching for, apply to Community Services under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA Act). Use their application form or write a letter stating that your request is a formal application under the GIPA Act.

Postal address:
Right to Information Unit
Community Services
Locked Bag 4028
ASHFIELD NSW 2131

[Applicants are required to provide information and a fee](#), such as proof of identity and proof of your relationship to the person who was in care (for example, a birth certificate).

Northern Territory

[See all Northern Territory records](#)

The lack of care facilities in the Northern Territory during the first half of the twentieth century affected all children in the care of the government. Many children were [moved away from the Territory or placed in inappropriate facilities](#). During World War II many were evacuated south for the duration of the war. Children with disabilities were sent to southern institutions and children who had committed offences could be placed in adult prisons in the Northern Territory.

When first established, the NT welfare system focussed on placing Aboriginal people into missions, government compounds and institutions; and removing children of Aboriginal descent from their families, often to the larger centres of Alice Springs or Darwin. Child removal practices and the policy of assimilation led to these children becoming known as the [Stolen Generations](#).

The Northern Territory was under Commonwealth control from 1911 to 1978, but also had a local [Northern Territory Administration](#) with branches responsible for Aboriginal Affairs, Welfare and Health. Records relating to children in State Care in the Northern Territory were created by Commonwealth and local agencies.

From the mid-1950s and after the passing of the [Child Welfare Ordinance](#) in 1958, the [Welfare Branch](#) of the NT Administration began to establish Receiving Homes for children. In the 1960s and 1970s, government-run secure care facilities and [family group homes](#) were opened. Non-government church based organisations established [cottage homes](#), however children were still sent interstate. During the late 1970s-1980s homes for children with disabilities and youth hostels/refuges were established by non-government organisations with government assistance.

Finding records from the NT

Files related to children under the care of the government are primarily held by the [Northern Territory Archives Service](#) and the Department for Children and Families. Records about children in secure care are held by the Department for Correctional Services. There are also numerous records related to Children's Homes and institutions held by the [National Archives of Australia](#).

To get access to Northern Territory government records about a family member, you may need to make a [Freedom of Information](#) application.

Queensland

[See all Queensland records](#)

In Queensland a system of orphanages and homes for destitute and neglected children was established from the mid nineteenth century. Most children were not orphans, but admitted to State care due to family breakdown or poverty. Indigenous children were removed from their families.

Up until 1900, the majority of children in State care were in institutions. As well as government-run orphanages and reformatories, religious organisations ran their own institutions, often with assistance from the government.

Around the turn of the century, the government moved towards the boarding out of children (foster care). The [Orphanages Act 1879](#) allowed for the boarding out of children to 'any trustworthy or respectable person'. Since the early twentieth century, foster care has been the primary option for children requiring out-of-home care in Queensland.

The [State Children Department](#) was established in 1911, to 'provide care, management and control of orphaned, abandoned and convicted children and their property'.

By the 1960s [family group homes](#) began to replace the dormitory style accommodation. Clustered family group homes were often located on or nearby the former site of an orphanage or a mission. There were also 'scattered' family group homes located in suburbs and towns.

Finding records from QLD

Records created by private institutions are held by their successor organisation. Each organisation has its own access rules and restrictions.

If the person was ever admitted to an institution run by the State, or if their care was organised by the State, there is likely to be some evidence of their placement in government records, held at the [Queensland State Archives](#).

Contact:

Right to Information, Information Privacy and Screening
Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women
Locked Bag 3405, Brisbane QLD 4001
Phone: 1800 809 078 or (07) 3224 2242
Email: rti@csyw.qld.gov.au

Applicants are required to provide information and a fee, such as proof of identity and proof of your relationship to the person who was in care (for example, a birth certificate).

More information about the Queensland government's [Support for Forgotten Australians](#).

South Australia

[See all South Australia records](#)

In South Australia the earliest form of 'care' for children was the government-run [Destitute Asylum](#) which also took in adults. From the 1860s children began to be accommodated separately in a number of government-run and/or church run institutions. From as early as the 1860s-1870s, boarding out (an early term for [foster care](#)) was favoured. South Australia was the first state to introduce boarding out as an alternative to [institutional care](#).

Children committed to the care of the state by a magistrate were referred to as State Children or Wards of the State, and the [State Children's Council](#) was established in 1886 to take responsibility for all matters relating to them. Following committal, State Children would be sent to the [Industrial School](#) at [Magill](#), and later [Edwardstown](#). While some stayed there long term, the majority of children were boarded out. Others were transferred to other government institutions, such as [Reformatories](#), or into the care of religious bodies.

By the early twentieth century religious organisations ran their own institutions, often with assistance from the government. Some organisations recognised the value of smaller group care as opposed to large institutions, and established cottage homes as early as the 1920s.

After the passing of the [Community Welfare Act 1972](#), the government began to close large institutions and established cottage homes, hostels and family group homes. (During the 1970s-1980s cottages were renamed [Admission](#) or [Assessment Units](#) depending on their purpose.) The outsourcing of care to non-government organisations became increasingly common.

Finding records from SA

When a child was committed to [State Care](#), government files and other government records were created about them, including files, admission register records and State Ward Index Cards (from 1900-1992), that are held by [State Records of South Australia](#). Records of State Care are restricted for 100 years, only very early records are available.

In order to see any records less than 100 years old, apply for access through the Department for Child Protection. Care leavers (and their family members) are entitled to access, free of charge, to original and copy documents

relating to them, under Section 153 of the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017. The “[Provision of Information Request Form](#)” application can be downloaded here. You can submit that form by email, postal mail or in person.

Records of children placed by carers in religious-run institutions are held by the organisations that succeeded them, that has its own access rules and restrictions. Where records are available, you will find access information on the relevant home’s page.

Tasmania

[See all Tasmania records](#)

Until the mid 1850s, children’s welfare was dominated by the convict system. The major institutions were the [Female Factory at Cascades](#), the [Queen’s Orphan Asylum](#) and [Point Puer](#).

In the post-convict era, a number of training and industrial schools opened in Tasmania, including the [Hobart Girls’ Industrial School](#), the [Boys’ Reformatory](#) and [St Joseph’s Orphanage](#). In 1873, the [Charitable Grants Department](#) was established, which included a [boarding out](#) system as an alternative to large institutions.

Most wards of state in Tasmania were placed in foster care, some were placed in homes run by the government or by voluntary organisations. Children could also be admitted as private placements.

In the late nineteenth century, a number of institutions with an emphasis on the moral ‘rescue’ of girls and young women were established, including the [Home of Mercy](#) in New Town, the [Magdalen Home](#), and the Salvation Army’s [Rock Lynn House](#) and [Elim Maternity Hospital](#).

The [Children’s Charter](#) of 1918 established the Children of the State Department. The government in Tasmania continued to favour the boarding out system, or placing children in homes run by the charitable or religious sector.

The immediate post war period marked a trend towards greater institutionalisation by the government, and the establishment of some state-run institutions. This was partly in response to inquiries that had recommended the segregation of older from younger boys at Ashley Home.

Around this period, in line with national and international trends, new types of care began to emerge in Tasmania – [receiving homes](#) and [hostels](#) based on a cottage care model. From the 1970s, the government began closing down large institutions, and opened more receiving homes, which were later known as family group homes. Many privately run institutions either closed or were converted to cottages.

Finding records from TAS

The Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office (TAHO) holds many of the case files of state wards. Those case files over 75 years old are open to the public. If the person whose records you’re searching for left care more than 75 years ago, it’s best to start by searching the [TAHO website](#).

If the person was a state ward and they were in care less than 75 years ago, apply to the Department of Health and Human Services for permission to access their case files.

Contact:
After Care Support Program
Department of Health and Human Services
GPO Box 538 HOBART TAS 7001

Phone: 1300 654 583(free call) or (03) 6166 0422

Web: [Adoption/support for care leavers](#)

If the person was placed in an institution rather than foster care, there may be less information on their case file. You may find the institution also kept records. Check the records tab on the page for that home, or ask the archivist at TAHO for further suggestions.

Victoria

[See all Victoria records](#)

Victoria's child welfare system relied heavily on care [provided by churches and charitable organisations](#). Where foster care or ['boarding out'](#) was not available, children were placed in homes, reformatories and other institutions. From the 1920s, the number of foster homes available fell, and more children were placed in institutions.

Many of the homes were established by charitable organisations with religious affiliations, and children often admitted as ['voluntary placements'](#). For state wards, the [Royal Park Depot](#) (later Turana) is a site of enormous significance as the only reception centre for children entering state care from approximately 1880 until 1961.

The [1954 Children's Welfare Act](#) widened the scope under which children could be committed to state care, resulting in an increase in children admitted to the care of the department. Until the passage of this Act, children's homes and orphanages were run by charitable and/or religious organisations. The only institutions in Victoria for children run by the state had been reception centres, [reformatories](#) (and in an earlier era, industrial schools) for juvenile offenders and disability institutions. The 1954 legislation contained new requirements for all non-government homes to be registered with the Children's Welfare Department as 'approved' children's homes, juvenile schools or hostels, and provided for more inspection of these homes and the children who lived there. After this Act was passed, the Victorian government began to establish state-run children's homes. From the mid-1950s, the Department established state-run [family group homes](#) and [hostels](#) for young people.

In 1972, the [Social Welfare Department](#) commenced a regionalisation program, to develop a statewide network of children's and family welfare services in Victoria. The new system aimed to shift face-to-face activities and decision-making from the centralised Department to new regional centres: Mallee, Wimmera, Loddon-Campaspe, Goulburn, Upper Murray, East Gippsland, Central Gippsland, Barwon, Glenelg, Central Highlands.

Many homes continued to provide large-scale, [congregate care](#) into the 1970s when they moved towards smaller arrangements, such as foster care, group homes and residential units, under the broader movement of deinstitutionalisation. Institutional and [congregate care](#) was replaced by home-based care (such as foster or kinship care) or residential care, with the Out of Home Care system being delivered by Community Service Organisations funded by the Victorian government.

Finding records from VIC

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) manages records relating to [wardship](#) and adoption in Victoria. Some of these records are held at DHHS, and some are held at the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV). Generally, records less than 99 years old are not open to the general public. If the records are about you, or members of your family, you have a right to access these records.

If you believe the person whose records you are looking for was a Victorian ward of the state, contact the Care Leaver Records Service (CLRS) team at DHHS:

Freedom of Information Unit, Care Leaver Records Service

Phone: (03) 9096 8449

Email: clrs@dhhs.vic.gov.au

If they were placed in the home privately, contact the organisation that holds records from the home directly.

Western Australia

[See all WA records](#)

For any person admitted to a facility run by the Child Welfare Department, or whose care was organised by the department, there is likely to be some evidence of their placement in WA government records. The amount and quality of these records will vary. Sometimes, it will be only a name in a register.

The [State Children Act 1907](#) established the requirement to keep records of children. At the very least, the department responsible for child welfare, the institutions that housed children, and licensed foster-mothers were required to keep a register of the child's name, age, sex, nationality, religion, dates of admission and departure, and the names of parents and near relatives. The [Children and Community Services Act 2004](#) (s.128) requires all records created under s.11 of the [Child Welfare Act 1947](#) and still in existence in 2005 to be kept forever, along with all records created 'in respect of wards and children placed under the control' of the department after 2005 when the Act came into effect.

The care and protection of children in Western Australia has been regulated by various Acts of Parliament, dating back to the [Industrial Schools Act 1874](#) and the [Aborigines Protection Act 1886](#). Until the 1970s, there were separate child welfare systems for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in WA.

[State child](#) was a term used in WA from 1907 to describe 'a destitute child or neglected child received into a Government institution or a subsidised institution or apprenticed or placed out' under the authority of the [State Children Act 1907](#). An amendment in 1919 extended the definition to include 'an incorrigible or uncontrollable child'. The term state child was replaced by ward in 1927. At this time the name of the Department was changed, to bring it line with the practice in other states, to the [Child Welfare Department](#).

During the [1920s](#), all children committed under the State Children Act 1907 were sent to the [Government Receiving Depot](#) at Mt Lawley, before being boarded out (placed in foster care), or placed in an 'orphanage' or industrial school (reformatory).

From 1927 until 1972, the Child Welfare Department ran its own children's Homes, 'placed' children in foster care, or in Homes run by charitable or religious organisations, and it organised adoptions.

In 1972, the CWD was replaced by the new [Department for Community Welfare](#). The Department took over responsibilities to Aboriginal children that were previously held by the authorities for 'native welfare'.

Finding records from WA

Government records are held at the [State Records Office](#), but permission to access them must be obtained from Freedom of Information at Child Protection and Family Support, Department of Communities.

Contact:

Freedom of Information, Child Protection and Family Support, Department of Communities:

PO Box 6334, East Perth WA 6892

Telephone: (08) 9222 2555

Free call in WA: 1800 000 277

Email: [foi@cpfs.wa.gov.au/](mailto:foi@cpfs.wa.gov.au)

Web: [Searching for your family history](#)

If the child's placement was arranged by family, or with the informal assistance of a Departmental officer (for example, in the country or one of the suburban regions), it is possible that no Departmental record was made. In that case, you should contact the organisation where they were placed, or the organisation that now holds the record from that place.

You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/child-welfare-records/understanding-records/>