Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0574

Victorian Children’s Aid Society

(1893 - 1991)

Born	18930101, Melbourne Victoria Australia
Died	19911231
Occupation	Welfare organisation

Summary

The Victorian Children’s Aid Society, originally named the Presbyterian Society for Neglected and Destitute Children, was established with the aim of rescuing ‘neglected and destitute children’. Its officers comprised a president, two vice presidents, a secretary and a committee. Although an initiative of the Presbyterian Church, by October 1894, it became interdenominational and independent, with its name changed to the Victorian Neglected Children’s Aid Society. The Society took in children, the majority of whom required temporary assistance and were the children of the ‘deserving poor’, and placed them with families in the country, who cared for them and educated them. Older children were taught household or farm work. It decided upon another name change in 1920, to the Victorian Children’s Aid Society. In 1991 it became Family Focus and in 1992 it merged with other children’s organisations to form Oz Child-Children Australia.

Details

As a result of a bequest Mrs Maria Amour left to Selina Sutherland, the Presbyterian Society for Neglected and Destitute Children was formed to continue the work that she and Selina Sutherland had begun in Melbourne. The founding president was the Reverend A Stewart. The Reverend J Thomson was the other man involved in the early committee. The founding committee comprised Mesdames Armstrong, Young, Sinclair, McCallum, Picken, Stewart, Hughes, Gunn, Munro, Roberts, Lambie and Misses Lorimer, Sutherland, Houston, Catt, Thomson, Sinclair, Gunn. Miss Selina Sutherland, as Agent of the Society, assumed responsibility for the care and placement of the destitute children. She was a Scottish nurse who had come to Melbourne via New Zealand, where she had been visiting her married sister. She met Mrs Maria Amour in Melbourne who had been involved in caring for homeless children. Selina Sutherland understood the importance of such work and decided to stay and assist with the children.

As the Victorian Neglected Children’s Aid Society, it comprised five Honorary medical officers, and two Honorary Auditors. Mrs Bevan became president, with the Reverend Stewart as chairman. Miss Laws and Mrs McCallum were secretary and treasurer. The Council included Alfred Deakin, who was to become a prime minister of Australia, and Alexander Peacock who was premier of Victoria at the time of Federation. The Society worked from premises in La Trobe St from 1895 until 1901 when it moved to Swinburne House in Parkville.

In 1908 Miss Sutherland left the Society and died shortly after in 1909.

Courts committed children to the care of the Society or alternatively, parents or guardians signed the children over to it if they were unable to look after them. The Society accommodated these children in its home, but endeavoured to send them to approved foster homes in the country. Fostered children remained under the legal control of the Society and were visited by its Agents and social workers.

As well as completely caring for children in this way, the Society also accepted children for short periods while their parents were in hospital or convalescing.

In 1966 the Society removed its home and headquarters from Parkville to a new building at Black Rock.

Published resources

Book
Selina's legacy: from VCAS to Oz Child, Hilton, Della, 1931-, 1993

Thesis
The Victorian Charity Network in the 1890s, Swain, Shurlee, 1977

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

State Library of Victoria
Records, 1893-1993 [manuscript].

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