

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Organisation

Entry ID: AWE0961

Sydney Female Refuge Society

(1848 - 1919)

Born 1 January, 1848, Sydney New South Wales Australia

Died 31 December, 1919, Sydney New South Wales Australia

Occupation Welfare organisation, Women's refuge

Summary

The Sydney Female Refuge Society was established in 1848 and had premises in Pitt St and at Glebe. It aimed to assist prostitutes abandon their work by cutting them off from the world and by requiring them to conform to the aims and practices of the institution. The middle-class Ladies' Committee enforced strict moral codes coupled with religious instruction to rehabilitate the Refuge inmates. By providing them with laundering and needlework skills they were enabling them to find alternative work once they left, but at the same time required them to work at those tasks while at the Refuge. The minimum period of stay was eighteen months, although the actual time inmates stayed varied.

Details

Although nominally under the control of men, in practice the Society was administered by women. Constitutionally the Ladies' Committee was an 'advisory body', but became increasingly powerful and by 1870 the women were firmly entrenched and resisted encroachment on to their sphere. In accordance with Protestant evangelical ideas all members of the Ladies' Committee were required to be married as a way of presenting to the inmates of the refuge the ideal of the respectable marriage.

The tasks of the Ladies' Committee were numerous. For example two women visited the refuge twice a week; four met as a subcommittee each week and all met once a month. The Ladies' Committee employed and determined the salaries of all the employees, for example a matron, teacher, bible woman and laundress, supervised their work and made all the decisions affecting the domestic economy of the refuge. They decided upon the admission and discharge of each inmate, found work for those who required it on discharge and supervised the progress of each inmate. The Men's Committee produced the annual reports, ran the annual meetings and the subscriptions were generally made in the husbands' names only.

Published resources

Journal Article

Sectarianism and purity within the woman's sphere: Sydney refuges during the late nineteenth century, Godden, Judith, 1987

Report

The annual report of the Sydney Female Refuge Society, Sydney Female Refuge Society, 1849-

Thesis

Philanthropy and the woman's sphere, Sydney, 1870-circa 1900, Godden, Judith, 1983

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection

Sydney Female Refuge Society records, 1863-1911

Author Details

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