

Fifty years ago Betty was a blessing for busy mums [AU] ^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

When Betty Heaney opened what is believed to be Australia's first childcare centre in Hobart more than 50 years ago, conditions were very different from today.

Mrs Heaney, now 81, of Penna, started the Scots Church Child Care Centre in Bathurst St in 1954 after seeing similar centres in Canada -- and worked in the industry until she was in her 70s.

"I originally set up in the old Manse behind the church," she said.

"It was a very old building and rather primitive conditions. We did have a nice playground with very high fences, but it was nothing like the childcare centres of today."

The centre began with five children and quickly grew as working mothers and shoppers came from as far as Huonville and New Norfolk.

Mrs Heaney -- who had previously been an art teacher -- said there were no government-set rules for child care, so she made things up as she went along.

She offered half and full day care but some children stayed overnight when parents went away or had to work.

"We worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year, even Christmas," she said.

"One woman went to Japan and couldn't take her two children with her so they stayed with me for over a month.

"Times have certainly changed -- you wouldn't be allowed to run the hours I ran and you wouldn't be able to have the kids overnight now.

"But back then there was nowhere for me to go to find all these things out."

After about four years, Mrs Heaney left the centre and set up Windermere Nursery Playschool at Lindisfarne, which later moved to Seven Mile Beach before closing in 1995.

As a pioneer in the industry in Tasmania, Mrs Heaney is saddened by the state's current childcare crisis.

She said child care should be recognised as an important profession and good training and good pay for carers was essential.

"As carers we played a big part in children's upbringing," she said.

- reprinted from the Mercury

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[2]

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