

"A Warm and Home-like Welcome"

A History of the Travellers Aid Society of Victoria



"Aunty Didn't Meet Me".
 Creator unknown.
 Photograph reproduced
 from the Travellers Aid
 Annual Report, 1926.

From the Travellers Aid's manifesto, as outlined at its first annual meeting on July 7 1916:

The Policy of the Travellers Aid Society was laid before them in the following terms:

- 1) **Protection from evil**
- 2) **Prevention from evil**

"Fence at the top of the precipice, not an ambulance at the bottom."

3) **Detection of Evil.**

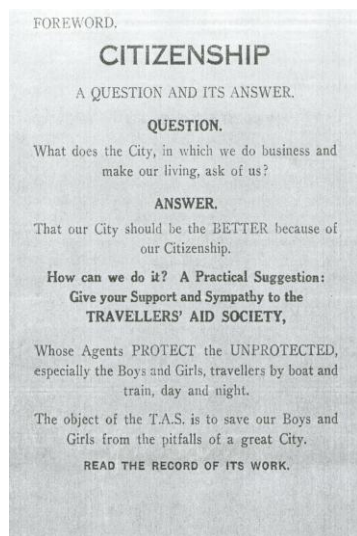
Through the eyes of its agents, trained social workers aware of the dangers and difficulties which beset the path of our young girls and boys while travelling to and fro to 60% of our girl workers in offices (sic) are without the protection of a home.

The Travellers Aid Society of Victoria was formed in July 1916 to offer support and protection for women and girls arriving in Melbourne from overseas, interstate, and rural Victoria. From 1916 Travellers Aid staff met boats arriving at Station Pier and trains at Spencer Street Station and Flinders Street Station. From 'domestic girls' and migrant brides in the 1920s and 1930s, to evacuees during

World War Two and immigrants in the post-war era, Travellers Aid has been there for the lonely, the unemployed, and those who have lost everything. Their services included finding housing and employment, homes for orphans, referrals to maternity homes, organising weddings and christenings, interpreting, counselling and chaperonage. Until the 1970s, the Travellers Aid Society provided temporary accommodation at their Lodge and Hostel.

With the post-war immigration boom behind them, Travellers Aid today reunites homeless and stranded travellers with their families, provides personal care services to disabled clients and offers affordable meals and a welcoming environment at its café on Swanston Street. They make an ongoing contribution to the safety and cultural diversity of Melbourne and Victoria.

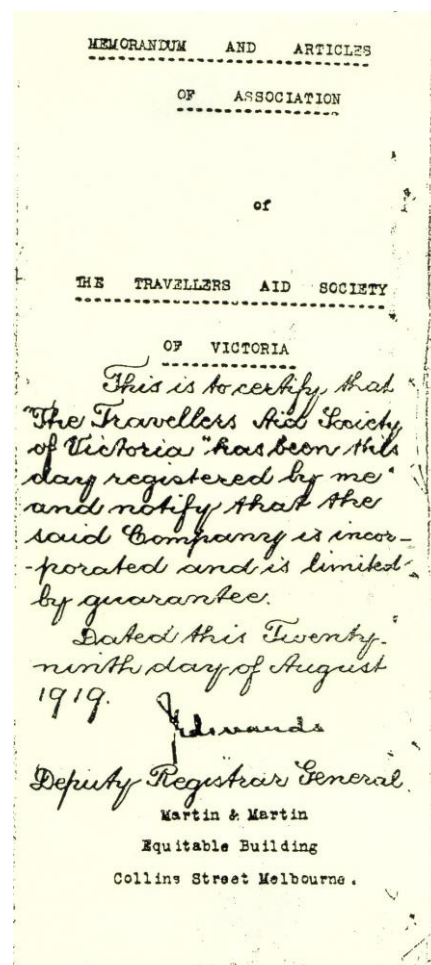
Travellers Aid's annual reports and personal letters illuminate the importance of the organisation's work and its ongoing relationship with the community. They bring inner city Melbourne and the back-blocks of rural Victoria to vivid life, as staff wrote of their experiences with various clients. The reports also document Travellers Aid's adaptability as they confronted global events such as the World Wars, the Depression and mass migration.



"Citizenship: a Question & its Answer" Early Travellers Aid flyer, c.a. 1920, reproduced from the Travellers Aid Society Archives.



Travellers Aid office at Spencer Street Station 1916. Image reproduced from the Travellers Aid Society Archives/



Memorandum and Articles of Association, 1919. Image reproduced from the Travellers Aid Society Archives.

Gatekeepers of the City, 1916-1919

Travellers' Aid took up its new position as the vanguard of Melbourne's citizenry with vigour as it assisted many young women in search of employment both during and after the war. Soldiers' wives and British migrants formed the bulk of Travellers Aid's clientele during this period. Women from rural Victoria were also assisted as they arrived in Melbourne to find employment during the First World War. To meet the needs of its diverse clientele, Travellers Aid opened its Lodge in 1919 in King Street where road weary travellers were given temporary accommodation.



"Soldiers marching down Collins Street during WWI", Kerr Brothers. Image reproduced courtesy of the State Library of Victoria



Owing to the rapid demobilisation of so many troops, the TAS found itself faced with a large increase of work, owing to the fact that thousands of our soldiers had married while abroad. Many of these war brides came out to the land of their adoption before their husbands could come with them, and the workers of the Society have been veritable friends in need to many of them, and have helped them very materially to tide over the difficult time of arrival in a new land, and have given them a welcome, when perhaps they had not expected it, (Excerpt from the 1919 Travellers Aid Report.)

Caption

A young girl who had left her home in another State and was going to a country district of Victoria was met by our worker, who won the confidence of the girl and found that she had run away from a drunken mother. Full enquiries were made about her new surroundings and being favourable, we saw her safely off to her destination. She has written to us, thanking us for our interest and help. (Excerpt from the 1919 Travellers Aid Report.)

A fine little chap, aged 1 year and 9 months, whose mother, a Welsh girl, died on the eve of sailing for Australia to rejoin her husband, arrived on the "Bremen", was handed over to our care and conveyed to his father's home. (Excerpt from the 1919 Travellers Aid Report.)

In dealing with emotional cases of neglect and abuse, Travellers Aid Helpers drew their inspiration from the heroism shown by Australian soldiers during World War One:

The Society was born and cradled during the awful anxieties of the Great War {and} we would desire to express ... our admiration and gratitude to our fellow citizens who went out in their thousands to fight for and uphold the cause of Right and Freedom, to succour the weak and helpless, and to make the world safe for true democracy ... To some small extent, our society may modestly claim to stand for the same ideals, and (of course in a more pacific and less strenuous way) to help those who need protection and care. True citizenship implies and demands that we do, indeed, recognise that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. (Excerpt from the 1918 Travellers Aid Report.)



"Group of Women Typists at the Defence Department Base Records Office", Melbourne, Vic. c.a. 1919. Image reproduced courtesy of the Australian War Memorial.



"Carlton: entrance to a slum", F Oswald Barnett Collection, c.a. 1930's. Image reproduced courtesy of the State Library of Victoria

No Girl Need be Friendless, 1920-1939

With the end of the Great War, young women from rural Victoria, interstate and overseas were arriving to take advantage of employment opportunities in Melbourne. Females were also coming into the city looking for romance and adventure which were influenced by the increasing popularity of cinema and the glamour industry, while others wanted to escape into the anonymity of the city as they struggled with coming to terms with their out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Regardless of their different circumstances, these women were touched by the hospitality and moral crusading of the Travellers Aid Helpers. Temporary accommodation, wedding and christening ceremonies, referrals to hospitals, adoptions and employment advice were just some of the services rendered to clients.



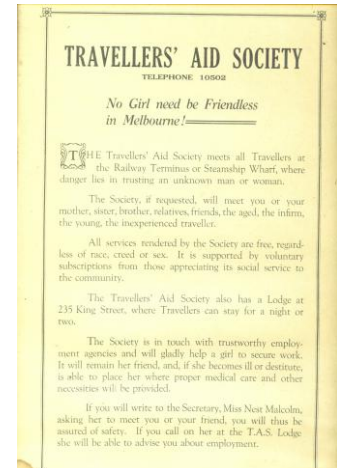
The Police know the Value of the Travellers Aid Society

A young girl who, with the simplicity of the country bred, regarded everyone as her friend, accepted the offer of a motor ride on a Saturday afternoon and was not traced until the following Tuesday night, when her desperate plight made suicide seem the only solution to her distressed mind. A policeman restrained her from jumping from the wharf and brought her to the Lodge. She had been so drugged that it was difficult to arouse her for meals. (Excerpt from the 1925 Travellers Aid Report.)

"The police know the value of the Travellers Aid Society", Helper with police officer, Creator unknown, 1927. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society

A bride-to-be writes: 'It is very kind of you to go to so much trouble for what to you are strangers, but I'm beginning to see how much we have to depend on others, and how lost we would be without the TAS. We are going to get a married couple's place for a year or two. This isn't quite what we had intended to do, but it's so frightfully lonely, and the folks at

home are worried, too, so it's the best way. I'm quite game to risk the odds. Church of England we belong to, and will leave all the rest to you.' Excerpt from the 1926 Travellers Aid Report.)



"No Girl Need Be Friendless in Melbourne", Early Travellers Aid flyer c.a. 1920, reproduced from the Travellers Aid Society Archives.



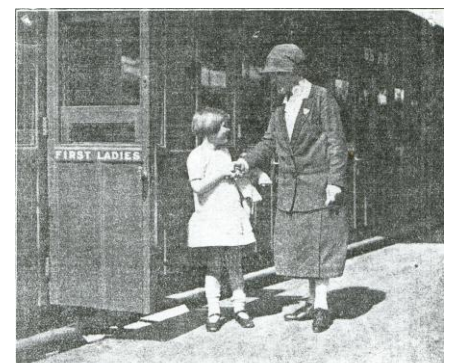
Wedding photo of Isabella Warden and William Allen at the Lodge, ca February 1929. Creator unknown. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society Archives.

With the collapse of the "roaring '20s" came the Great Depression. Travellers Aid was confronted by the disheartening sight of abandoned children, women fleeing domestic violence, the disintegration of families and disillusioned migrants. Helpers distributed clothing to remote rural regions, temporarily housed families and children whose parents could not care for them.

Three little children from a seaside holiday, not met, wept long and bitterly. Pacified and hurried to their home, it did not improve the situation when the neighbour shouted to them, 'Your mother has cleared out and left you.' (Excerpt from the 1933 Travellers Aid Report.)



'Will you give me a ticket to Geelong?' The Travellers Aid Helper looked into the enquiring eyes of a small boy. 'I am employed by the police in secret service and am following the track of a criminal'. With a pang of regret, he was restored to the Orphans Home from which he had been reported missing. (Excerpt from the 1936 Travellers Aid Report.)



"The Helper Meeting a Child", Creator unknown, date 1930. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society Archives.

Travellers Aid Hostel, Argus, November 1 1922, p.9. Image reproduced courtesy of the State Library of Victoria.

A national necessity: World War Two and immigration boom, 1940-1959.

With the outbreak of another war, Travellers Aid assisted women coming into the city looking for employment, war evacuees from Britain and Asia and the wives of American soldiers stationed in Melbourne. Such clients were often housed at the Travellers Aid Lodge and Hostel. As well as accommodating travelling women, Travellers Aid served as a protective force for young girls looking for romance with soldiers positioned in Melbourne.

The unseemly attitude of affection between soldiers and girls, usually intoxicated, on the Station concourse is difficult to cope with. It is not possible to reason with a girl under the influence of strong drink. Immediately abusive when approached, she creates a scene. (Excerpt from the 1940 Travellers Aid Report)

Wives of American soldiers told that passages were easier to obtain in Melbourne began to pour in from Adelaide and the West and besiege the Consulate. They all wished to travel on a ship whereby only five pounds subsistence was required. As money could not be taken from Australia, there followed an orgy of shopping to disburse saved money. With taxis coming and going the Lodge was in a state of turmoil. (Excerpt from the 1944 Travellers Aid Report)



"American Servicemen marching in Melbourne—the influx of American soldiers and their effect on the women of Melbourne caused much anxiety for Travellers Aid Helpers.", Argus Photographic Collection, c.a. 1942-1944. Image reproduced courtesy of the State Library of Victoria.



Javanese women and children refugees in Melbourne, c.a. 1942. Argus Newspaper Collection of Photographs, State Library of Victoria. Image reproduced courtesy of the State Library of Victoria

It was with a tightening of the throat that the 450 women and children in two boats from Malaya were greeted. So touching was it to witness their high courage and the self-control displayed, not only by the wives of the English military and civil authorities, but by the least important evacuee on board. This morale was greatly to be admired in the light of uncertainty regarding the fate of loved ones and the total loss of treasures of a life time... On the other boat came many Chinese women with their children. The husbands- professional men (Doctors, Lawyers and Bankers) remained at their posts. There were four generations of one family. Two young wives had no food for their babies, and were grief stricken at their tragic death. (Excerpt from the 1942 Travellers Aid Report)

With the cessation of battles, Travellers Aid once again positioned its Helpers along Station Pier as thousands of migrants arrived in Melbourne. Helpers provided migrants with temporary accommodation at its Lodge, rest at its Station Pier rest rooms and an interpretation and employment service. Travellers Aid staff dealt with migrants who were disappointed with their new homeland and those were who only learning to adjust.

An English settler suffering war neurosis, disappointment in their nominator and that he was receiving a lower wage than expected ... ineffectually tried to commit suicide. To be within hospital call until out of danger, his wife, after the shock of finding him, was cared for at the Lodge. (Excerpt from the 1946 Travellers Aid Report)

During one week, babies from Germany, Finland, Poland, Holland, Latvia, Ukraine and twin boys from Belgium, all travel-stained, emerged from the Station Restroom bath all radiating bonniness and health- a very good augury for future citizenship. (Excerpt from the 1952 Travellers Aid Report)

Other countries, other ways: A foreign woman, her husband and 2 year-old had been disembarked through illness. Making them comfortable in the rest room, the Helper left for luncheon. On her return, the child was running about clad only in an abbreviated vest, the desk chair had become a drying horse for his overalls and the mother was hanging personal clothing, heavily washed, around the room. (Excerpt from the 1949 Travellers Aid Report)

In the midst of constant activity, Travellers Aid also managed to establish information stalls across the city to cater to the needs of visitors during the Olympics in 1956.

A time not for the faint-hearted: Social and economic change, 1960-1979.

Due to a recession which occurred in the early 1960s, the rising costs of employment and reduced government funding, Travellers Aid's financial status was crippling the organisation's work. As a result, the society's much loved Lodge was closed in 1972, while small-scale projects such as Travellers Aid information booths at Golden Fleece petrol stations also folded.



The Lodge c.a. 1960's.
Creator unknown. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society Archives

This forced Travellers Aid to take a fresh approach to its services. In 1972 men were allowed to receive financial aid and other referral services from Travellers Aid. Additionally, the Travellers Aid Amenities Centre at "My Ladies Lounge" on Collins Street was established to accommodate the varying needs of its clientele. The Centre include among other things, baby-feeding facilities, a café and equipment for the disabled.

As the arrival of migrants via Station Pier slowed down in the 1960s, Travellers Aid began to assist Asian students who were arriving to study in Australia.

The Students Hostel has been full most of the year: there is a normal decline in numbers during the summer vacation months. Girls from Bangkok, Canada, Colombo, England, Hong Kong, Ireland, Malaya, Manila, New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand have been in residence and live happily with girls from at least four Australian states. (Excerpt from the 1969 Travellers Aid Report)

Although Travellers Aid embraced a new approach to its community work, it still encountered the same cases of abuse and colourful clientele which have characterised the organisation's history.

During one week-end a slightly unsteady man walked into the Lodge and asked for some money (2/-) would be enough. We told him we did not give people money. He said 'This is Travellers' Aid isn't it? Well, I'm travelling'. We asked him where and he replied, 'I'm travelling from Pub to Pub'. (Excerpt from the 1969 Travellers Aid Report)

She was an attractive blonde who had remained in our rooms all day ... She had come from North Queensland, telling us she had to leave her husband. They had been married for some time, and one night when he was away the police called, asking for him. The wife was mystified but it was not long before the police had convinced her her husband was a well-known criminal. She had stayed with him, worked for him and looked after him, but when in a heated moment he attacked her with a knife, she knew she must leave. She managed to get away without her husband knowing ... Before leaving she'd had her red hair dyed blonde so that if she should be followed anywhere, she would not be so easily recognised. Travellers' Aid had helped her all through. (Excerpt from the 1969 Travellers Aid Report)



My Lady's Lounge, 1981.
Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society Archives



Wheelchair visitor being assisted at My Lady's Lounge, c.a. 1970's.
Creator unknown. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society Archives.



Travellers Aid information booth, c.a. 1973. Creator unknown. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society Archives



Mrs Evelyn Lark meeting a potential client at Spencer Street Station, 1979. Creator unknown. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society Archives

Neighbourhood House for the Inner-city? 1980-present.

Probably the most significant change for Travellers Aid over the past twenty years has been the gradual professionalisation of the organisation – the recognition that good intentions alone were not enough to sustain them into the 21st century. New Executive Officers saw the need for professionally qualified staff – especially in welfare and disability services. New services have been implemented, while older ones have been expanded.

Travellers Aid's Spencer Street Station staff continue to meet elderly and disabled travellers in need of orientation around Melbourne. In recent years, welfare assistance has been provided to travellers needing to return home.

Since its inception in the 1970s, the amenities centre and café continues to be a popular meeting place for rural and suburban travellers. Situated in 169 Swanston Street, the Travellers Aid Family Centre offers information, showers, affordable meals and internet access to visitors.



Charles Briffa, Travellers Aid worker, at the Spencer Street Station office assisting a client, c.a 1980s. Creator unknown. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society Archives



Phillip Robertson and Annette Sassano bowling with TADAS, 1998. Creator unknown. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Disability Access Service Archives

The Travellers Aid Disability Access Centre (TADAS) was established in 1989 to assist those with physical or mental impairments. Personal care is provided to clients as well as a variety of social activities.



Carlos Montes, TADAS worker carrying out minor wheelchair repairs. 2003. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Disability Access Service Archives.

In addition, the newly established "Homeward Bound Program" reunites stranded or homeless people with their family and loved ones. Meal vouchers

and free breakfasts are also provided to homeless clients.

As it celebrates its 90th birthday next year, the Travellers Aid Society of Victoria is planning for a range of new programs dealing with, among other things, domestic violence, disadvantaged school children and ex-prisoners.

A neighbourhood house? We don't have one in the inner city – the nearest we've got is Travellers Aid. (Conversation overheard at Spencer Street Station)

Travellers Aid in the 21st century fulfils many of the same needs as a 'neighbourhood house' – offering social networks, chances to learn new skills, welfare and support services.

Throughout its history, the Travellers Aid staff were aware of the disruption caused from entering a new environment and developed services which would integrate clients into the wider community. Today, through the café which provides a meeting point for many, and the intensive one-on-one disability and welfare services, the Travellers Aid Society still strives to create a welcoming environment and opportunities for friendship, and participation in the wider community.

IMAGES

1) Charles Briffa, Travellers Aid worker, at the Spencer Street Station office assisting a client, c.a 1980s. Creator unknown. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society Archives.¹

2) Phillip Robertson and Annette Sassano bowling with TADAS, 1998. Creator unknown. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society Disability Access Service Archives.²

3) DARE protest, 1995. Creator unknown. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society Disability Access Service Archives.³

4) John Awad, Travellers Aid Welfare Officer, at the Travellers Aid City Centre with a client, c.a 1990s. Creator unknown. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society Archives.⁴

5) Travellers Aid Helpers at the Amenities Centre, 1980. Creator unknown. Image reproduced from Travellers Aid Society Archives.⁵

¹ Spencer St Charlie.jpg (Found on CD1)

² Bowling.jpg (Found on CD1)

³ DARE.jpg (Found on CD1)

⁴ welfare.jpg (Found on CD1)

⁵ TAS Helpers.jpg (Found on CD1)

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