Retta Dixon Home

Darwin, the Bagot Reserve, and a story of removal, truth-telling and healing

A note before you read. This read refers to events and policies that may be distressing, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers. Please take care as you read, and stop or take a break whenever you need to. If you would like to yarn with someone, support is available through 13YARN on 13 92 76, Lifeline on 13 11 14, and your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service.

Overview

The Retta Dixon Home was an institution for Aboriginal children in Darwin, on the Bagot Aboriginal Reserve, on Larrakia Country. It operated from 1946 until 1982 and was run by the Aborigines Inland Mission, later renamed Australian Indigenous Ministries. The Home was named after Retta Dixon, the missionary who founded the Mission in 1905.

The Home cared for Aboriginal children, and some mothers, alongside a hostel for young Aboriginal women. Many of the children had been removed from their families under assimilation-era policy. Retta Dixon is named in the Bringing Them Home report and is part of the history of the Stolen Generations in the Northern Territory.

Purpose

This information sheet gives a clear, culturally safe introduction to the Retta Dixon Home for staff, partners and community members. Because the Home stood in Darwin, this is local history, and understanding it is an important part of cultural awareness and respectful engagement in the Top End.

The purpose is to support truth-telling: to acknowledge honestly what happened, to honour the children and families affected, and to strengthen the understanding that supports healing and reconciliation today.

Objective

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe what the Retta Dixon Home was, where it stood, and when it operated
- Explain its place within assimilation policy and the Stolen Generations
- Recognise the local significance of this history for Darwin and Larrakia Country
- Understand the findings of the Royal Commission and the path toward redress and healing
- Engage with this history in a culturally safe and respectful way

Key dates

A timeline of the Home, from its establishment to truth-telling and redress.

1905	Retta Dixon founds the Aborigines Inland Mission in New South Wales.
1946	The Aborigines Inland Mission establishes the Retta Dixon Home on the Bagot Reserve in Darwin.
1961 to 1962	The Home is rebuilt into cottage-style accommodation at the northern end of the reserve.
1974	Cyclone Tracy devastates Darwin and the Home.
1980 to 1982	The Home closes, with an official date of 30 June 1980 and private operation continuing until 1982.
1997	The Home is named in the Bringing Them Home report.
2015	The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse examines the Home in its Darwin hearings.
2017	An out of court settlement provides compensation to 71 former residents.

Times

Standalone read
About 10 minutes

Facilitated module
About 45 to 60 minutes

Workshop
About 2 hours

Actual outcomes

Participants and readers gain:

- A stronger understanding of local Stolen Generations history in the Top End
- Greater cultural awareness and the confidence to engage respectfully
- A foundation for truth-telling, commemoration and remembrance
- Practical grounding for Reconciliation Action Plans and cultural protocols

SUMMARY

The Retta Dixon Home is a difficult but important part of Darwin's history. Understanding it honestly, and with respect for survivors and their families, is a meaningful step toward healing, reconciliation and a stronger shared future.

Reference material

- **Find and Connect, Retta Dixon Home**
  findandconnect.gov.au
- **The Healing Foundation**
  healingfoundation.org.au
- **Bringing Them Home report, Australian Human Rights Commission**
  humanrights.gov.au
- **National Redress Scheme**
  nationalredress.gov.au
- **AIATSIS, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies**
  aiatsis.gov.au

How Emus Talking can help

Emus Talking is a proudly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned business. We help organisations build culturally safe workplaces and strong partnerships, delivered remotely and virtually right across Australia, or in person by arrangement.

Mitch Amidy · mitch@emustalking.com.au · 0404 232 621 · sales@emustalking.com.au

Emus Talking Pty Ltd does not provide financial advice. This information is general in nature and should not be relied upon as a substitute for professional advice tailored to your circumstances.