

CONDINGUP HOSTEL FOR WORKING YOUNG MEN, ESPERANCE

From January 1975 to February 1976, the Condingup Hostel in the farming area out from Esperance, was operated by ACCIM on a property which was leased by the AAEM mission organisation in Sydney.

ACCIM was keen to operate this hostel, as a number of young men who had previously been cared for at Norseman Mission were wanting to work on farms – and there were work opportunities on the farms in the local area. The hostel was a good solution to this opportunity waiting for these young men in the Condingup area.

Records cannot be accessed by the writer, but discussion with one of the Managers would indicate that there was probably Government funding involved in the operating of this hostel, maybe from the same source as the Esperance Smash Repair and Training Workshop that ACCIM operated in Esperance for a similar group of young men. This operated successfully for more than 10 years before funding was withdrawn.

An experienced ACCIM missionary couple were the first Hostel Managers at Condingup. Previously they had cared for a home of boys from small children to teenagers at Norseman Mission for some years, and then working with the adult aboriginal people out from the Christian Centre in Norseman town,. Most of these young men knew them, and some would have been cared for by this couple at Norseman Mission. This missionary couple had three Primary School aged children and there were up to 8 young men living at the hostel and working in the district. They were the Managers for over a year before they were seconded to manage the Pugung Village in Norseman town. This had been purchased from a mining company for the residential use of Aboriginal families and adults in Norseman town.

The second ACCIM missionary couple were asked to transfer from Carnarvon Mission where they were caring for a home of children, to the Manager's position at Condingup. They had two small children, and took on this role with the young men until the hostel closed after one year.

It was in February 1976 when ACCIM withdrew from the Condingup Hostel agreement. The reason given was the lack of work for the young men on the farms at that time and increasing cost of operating the hostel because of this and including the need for essential maintenance by AAEM.

The Hostel was designed with three areas in a U shape, one as a living/meals/kitchen area, one for the missionary couple (both of whom had at least 2 small children) and a large bedroom that the working boys shared. Their bedroom room also served as a 'music room' with guitars, drums and other instruments which they enjoyed with good success! All meals were prepared by the Hostel Manager couple.

There were between 6 and 8 boys at the hostel and in 1976 their ages ranged from 16 to 21 years, with most of these young men having been cared for at Norseman Mission.

The days in the working week saw the Hostel Manager take each of the boys to the farm where they were working, and pick them up after work. On some the days when there was no work for some of the boys, the hostel manager arranged with some of the farmers to pick mallee roots from their farms to sell in Esperance. At other times they would all go to the coast for the day with the Hostel Manager, with a barbecue and swimming gear for a day of fun.

The second Hostel Manager also investigated the possibility of a Carrier Business which would employ the young men at the hostel. The farmers were interested, but before it could be implemented, the lease ran out and the hostel closed – someone from Esperance took the idea and created a Carrier business for himself.

The Managers and the young men spent the weekends in Esperance. The first Managers had worked together at Norseman Mission with the Managers of the Fairhaven Hostel and the Esperance Smash Repair Training Workshop and the young men and the Manager's family stayed at the home of the Manager of Fairhaven in Emily street close to Fairhaven, for the weekends from Friday night to Sunday night after church at Fairhaven Hostel.

The verandah was closed in to accommodate 10 boys, and there was a bedroom for the Manager, his wife and their three children. Every Saturday night, the Emily Street "mob" had a barbecue of kangaroo, supplied by the Condingup Manager and the 'Boys'.

With the arrival of the second Manager, other arrangements needed to be made for the weekends, and the young men stayed at the hostel in town where the rest of the working young Aboriginal men lived at the 'Working Boys Hostel' operated by another Aboriginal Christian organisation. Along with the social and music activities that these young men enjoyed together, they were also able to interact with the teenaged Aboriginal girls living at the ACCIM Fairhaven Hostel in Esperance in organised social activity and the church service at Fairhaven on the Sunday, before returning to Condingup in the afternoon ready for the working week.

When the Condingup Hostel closed, it was a sad end to successful ACCIM venture that closed, and with it the excellent training for farmwork and accommodation opportunities for these young Aboriginal men, and those who could have benefitted in future years.