

CHURCHES OF CHRIST 'FAIRHAVEN' HOSTEL, ESPERANCE

The Australian Churches of Christ Indigenous Ministries extended its residential childcare facility at Norseman Mission in response to a need for a live-in facility specifically for teenaged Aboriginal girls to be able to attend High School in Esperance. The official opening of the Fairhaven Hostel at 141 Dempster Street was in February, 1965. This also marked the commencement of the Esperance Church of Christ based at the Hostel until it closed in 1986.

Fairhaven Hostel, situated close to the centre of town in a residential area, is a beautiful old stone two storey home on a very large block of land, built with ballast from a sailing ship for Captain Douglas at the turn of the 20th century. This home known as 'Bayview' was completed in 1904. It featured a foyer area, big rooms downstairs and upstairs with very high ceilings, a polished wooden staircase which was rescued from one of the old sailing ships and a wide verandah around the top floor. Stained glass windows and front door were features at the front entrance and remain so to this day. The building now has some form of heritage listing.

For some time prior to the opening of Fairhaven, three missionaries from the Churches of Christ Norseman Mission, together with Christian Tribal Elders from the Norseman Church of Christ had been visiting communities and towns in the Northern Goldfields, the Western Desert as far as Warburton Ranges, Wingelina and Blackstone and out to Cundeelee on the transline, travelling long distances over dirt roads. Teenagers from these communities had been coming to Norseman Mission to do their High Schooling for a number of years, and this was one way that Norseman Mission was able to keep close contact with the parents and families of these young people. Many parents in these places were keen to give their teenagers the opportunity of High Schooling that was not available in their areas, while being cared for in a Christian environment. When Fairhaven Hostel was opened, the parents were confident that the same care would be given to their girls who went to Fairhaven.

Fairhaven Hostel was established for three main reasons

1. The first was a concern for the future of the teenage girls who had been cared for at Norseman Mission whose prospects for further education or training and employment were very limited in Norseman. Fairhaven Hostel provided a home and a safe environment from where they could gain employment, traineeships or further their education.
2. The second reason was to provide the opportunity of High School education for teenage girls from the Northern Goldfields and Western Desert areas and surrounding communities and along the transline including Cundeelee. High School girls from these areas came to Fairhaven from when it was opened.
3. A third reason eventuated when any of the girls Fairhaven girls who chose to do so were able to gain employment in Esperance town or on farms in the surrounding district after they completed their schooling in Esperance. Some girls did further employment training in the town. These girls continued to live at Fairhaven as Boarders, giving them a safe and supportive environment to enable them to take employment opportunities that may not have been available to them otherwise.

A spiritual / social opportunity was provided for the girls with the establishment of a Church of Christ at Fairhaven Hostel from the beginning which also embraced indigenous teenagers and young men from Wongutha and the AAEM Working Boys' Hostel in Esperance as well as others from the town. There was an active weekly programme for the young people with much participation and regular social occasions. The Superintendents of Fairhaven were responsible for the church until an Aboriginal Church of Christ Pastor who had been the Superintendent at Norseman Mission, was appointed the Pastor of the Esperance Church at Fairhaven in 1981.

The missionaries

The first Superintendent and his wife were an older couple from NSW who with two single young women, established Fairhaven and welcomed girls for the first time in 1965. This couple were followed by another older couple from NSW. Along with the single missionaries, everyone lived in a family setting at Fairhaven. This was the pattern until Fairhaven closed.

In 1971 one of the Norseman missionaries who had been visiting the people in the outback, together with his wife, moved from Norseman Mission where they had been caring for boys for a number of years, more

recently teenaged boys who had come from the Western Desert and Cundeelee areas for high schooling to take on the role of Superintendent at Fairhaven Hostel.

The parents of girls coming to Fairhaven knew that their girls would continue to receive the care at Fairhaven similar to that which their teenaged boys had experienced while in the care of this couple. They remained overall Superintendent at Fairhaven from 1971 to 1982.

During the latter part of this period the husband also established the Esperance Smash Repairs, a training workshop for Aboriginal young men during the weekdays. He was well qualified to operate this with the financial assistance of the Adult Aboriginal Education Department, while his wife continued her role at Fairhaven.

From 1976, an experienced couple from Norseman Mission who had an adult family in NSW managed Fairhaven Hostel under the leadership of the Superintendent until 1981. Three other missionary couples transferred from other Churches of Christ Mission centres managed it for shorter periods of time until it was closed in 1987. One couple (in 1985-6) were indigenous Christian leaders from Bunbury who had a unique connection with the girls, including having had 7 teenage and adult daughters of their own.

Single missionaries were always part of the Fairhaven staff, and indigenous missionaries were appointed whenever they were available. All Superintendents visited the parents of the girls from the remote areas regularly and were well respected and known for the excellence of care and opportunity they provided for the girls.

Since the closing of childcare in 1984 at Norseman and 1987 at Fairhaven, four long serving missionary couples from Norseman and Esperance have continued to live in Esperance and have remained in contact with many of those they cared for either at Fairhaven or Norseman Mission. For many years, the Manager of the Esperance Smash Repairs Training Workshop as well as one of his sons and his wife have also had an active role in the training of the boys in various areas in the workshop at Wongutha CAPS, 20 kms out of Esperance as part of the education for Aboriginal high school students and those doing further training from across WA.

The parents

Many of the parents from the communities where the girls came from were Christians, and they requested and expected that Christian standards would be maintained in the care of their girls at Fairhaven, with attention to appropriate behaviour, as well as the opportunity for them to gain further education that was unavailable in their communities. They specifically requested that their girls receive training in 'domestic skills and mother craft as part of their schooling. There were limited places for girls at Fairhaven and the parents were keen to take up this opportunity for their daughters. There were periods when there was a waiting list for a place at Fairhaven.

From the beginning in 1965, the maintaining of a strong connection with the parents and families of these young people while they were away from home was a priority for the Fairhaven Superintendent and staff. As well, they provided a spiritual ministry of encouragement to the indigenous people they met, and also to other missionaries in these isolated areas. This continued until Fairhaven was closed in 1987.

The Fairhaven missionaries always looked for opportunities to have contact with parents of the girls in their care and other indigenous people in the Esperance area. Because of the easy movement of people between Norseman and Esperance, many of the adults had strong connections with Churches of Christ over the years. Parents of girls from the communities were also welcome at Fairhaven.

The Building

With increasing numbers of girls, the need to extend Fairhaven resulted in the upstairs verandah being enclosed for bedrooms for the girls. In 1967, a large extension was built at the back which included bedrooms, a large laundry, bathrooms and a meeting hall / school room. The expanded building was able to cater for 30 girls as well as the missionaries.

A large breezeway with a wood fire between the old and the new parts of Fairhaven provided an area of casual socializing for the girls, and a basketball (netball) court was added at the back of the hostel on the property that stretched from one street to the next.

High Schooling for the Girls

All of the girls came to Fairhaven initially as students.

With the addition of up to 30 girls, mostly from communities in the Western Desert and Cundeelee areas, the Esperance High School had to expand their educational programme to provide appropriate and excellent educational opportunities for the girls. It needs to be noted that for the girls from communities, careful consideration needed to be given to the fact that English was a 2nd (or 3rd) language for them.

The Esperance High School provided the girls with an opportunity for an education that was relevant. These girls went back to their communities for each school holiday, and returned to their families in the communities when they finished their schooling.

From the beginning, the Esperance High School established a curriculum whereby the girls did their formal subjects at the High School each day, and then returned to Fairhaven where the missionaries taught them their practical subjects.

The curriculum and times were adjusted from time to time, but in general terms the girls spent two and half days at the Esperance High School, and two and half days at Fairhaven. The following details were related by the wife of the long serving Manager who indicated that they followed the process that was already in place when they came to Fairhaven in 1971

“The Fairhaven missionaries were responsible to the Esperance High School for the practical subjects and the training of the girls. They worked closely with the school though the curriculum was set by the Fairhaven staff.

The curriculum was designed to give the girls skills and structure that they would be able to use in their family life in the tribal communities or in their family life in the general community, and also as a stepping stone to possible openings for training or employment. All students were taught all subjects.

The application of the practical parts of their curriculum assisted with the running of Fairhaven during the two and half days a week of their schooling at Fairhaven. This gave them experience in the practical application of these subjects.

The curriculum required that the girls were given points for the way that did their practical work each day and at the end of each year the top three girls received an Award for this achievement

The girls were rostered at different jobs each week. Any money they earned was given to them personally.

Cooking The students were taught by the cook and other missionaries on the staff, how to plan, prepare, cook and serve healthy meals for the Fairhaven family, including cakes etc. The setting of the tables for a meal and the overall tidiness of the dining room was included.

Washing and Ironing
then The students were taught how to wash and iron their own clothes correctly. They could advance in their ironing skills to be able do ironing for customers in the town who paid to have their ironing done at Fairhaven. The students were given the full amount for their ironing for customers.

Care and cleaning
 The students were taught good practice in this area, working with the missionaries.

Sewing The students were taught basic sewing using sewing machines, and made clothes for themselves

Home Management, Childcare and First Aid
 The students were taught many areas in these three very practical subjects.

Art The students were involved in different types of art. Paperbark from the bush and the girls used this to do their artwork, making pictures and cards which were sold to visitors and others. The individual girls received the money from the sale of their artwork

Music This was a natural gift that the missionaries encouraged. Most years, the Fairhaven Girls gained prizes in many sections of the annual Esperance Music Eisteddfod and became well known in the community for their singing.”

The girls’ training was very practical, particularly for the girls from the tribal areas. They were taught not to overcome their tribal traditions but to improve conditions in the tribal framework. They went back with well equipped minds and teaching that had upgraded their eating habits and taught them to care for their people. The community expected the girls to go back and do a better job but still live in the tribal ways. First Aid was taught in the later years at the insistence of the local communities so that the girls would be capable of operating their First Aid Posts and provide this skill to their community.

During the last few years before Fairhaven closed in 1987, the students did all of their schooling at the High School.

Boarders

If girls gained employment or training after completing their schooling, they were able to board at Fairhaven. Most of the boarders were teenagers from the Esperance/Norseman area. Some stayed as long as 3 or 4 years and were well known and appreciated in the Esperance community for their work

One of the missionaries took each of them to their work or training place each day and picked them up afterwards. Girls who worked on farms and came back to Fairhaven for the weekends were taken to the farms and picked up.

They paid minimum board from their pay. They had to do their own washing on set days, and their own ironing and they were rostered to do the washing up, as were the students.

Boarders held jobs at the local kindergarten, the dry cleaners, Woolworths and other businesses in the town as well as at the hospital and motels. Others were employed by individuals to clean, wash, mind children and everything needed in a normal household and some worked the weekdays on surrounding farms and all were involved in Fairhaven sporting teams and all social activities unless they were working.

The Schedule for a typical day at Fairhaven around early 1980’s

8.30 am	Girls taken to school and work
9.15 am	Collect some of the girls from school for child health
10.00 am	Annette taken to work at Child Minding Centre
11.00 am	Maria taken to TAFE
11.45 am	Collect girls from child health and return them to school
12.00 noon	collect girls from work for lunch at Fairhaven
12.55 pm	Take girls back to work
1.00 pm	Bring Maria back to Fairhaven for lunch
2.30 pm	Collect bread
3.00 pm	Get Pearl from work
3.30 pm	Collect girls from school
4.30 pm	Get Cynthia from work
5.00 pm	Get the rest of the girls from work

Then there were netball and volleyball games on Saturdays with several teams involved, and team practice times during the week.

Students’ Travel

Until an airfare was paid by the Government for the students to come from, or return to their communities, the Fairhaven missionaries took the girls to Kalgoorlie and they completed the journey by truck.

Medical, Social and every day activities

Medical care of the girls was a priority with doctors and hospital available in Esperance. Some inappropriate suggestions were made to the Fairhaven missionaries by some inviting their active involvement in contraception for the girls

The girls loved to sing after tea, sitting around on the couch and the floor in the entrance hall of Fairhaven. With English as a second language for most of them, they usually sang songs in their own languages, including Christian songs. Table tennis in the breezeway and other games and activities were always available for the girls, and they enjoyed trips to the beach, into the bush and visiting in and around Esperance and further afield. Fishing was a favourite!

On Saturday mornings all the girls walked down town unsupervised. They loved shopping and meeting up with their friends. They were not permitted to go alone, and there was a standard of dress – they couldn't go out looking untidy. This was helpful on occasions when there was an accusation of one of them stealing from a shop. Their standard of dress distinguished them from others.

When the 'bush' girls went home they loved to take home clothes they had bought for themselves and their families from the secondhand shop as well as from Woolworths. The students from the communities came to Fairhaven with little personal clothing and suitable clothing was provided by the Churches of Christ Women's Groups around Australia with a parcel of clothing and other essentials for each individual girl as well as a Government Clothing Grant for each of the students.

Boarders bought their own clothes and they knew what they needed to leave at Fairhaven for their return when they went on holidays.

Friday nights was Movies Night at Fairhaven and the boys from the "Working Boys' Hostel" for working young men in Esperance came to Fairhaven for this social event. Saturday nights was movies at the Working Boys' Hostel and the Fairhaven girls joined in with the boys there. These times were closely supervised and there was a healthy interaction between the two groups of young people. The Working Boys' Hostel was operated by a well known missionary couple from another church and there was a close friendship and working relationship between the adults from both hostels. The young men from the Working Boys' Hostel visited Fairhaven every Saturday and Sunday afternoon, with the adults keeping careful track of everyone.

21st birthdays, engagements and weddings

Some friendships that developed between the young people resulted in them marrying and there were a number of weddings at Fairhaven, along with Engagement parties. The 21st birthdays of the boarders were celebrated in style, and birthdays for all of the girls were celebrated in some way, as were the birthdays of the missionary's children who lived at Fairhaven.

Unwelcome visitors

With Esperance being a port with seamen coming and going, the missionaries needed to be constantly alert in protecting the girls in their care. After having caught someone trespassing with no good intention, the long serving Superintendent visited the Captain of a particular ship to complain and demand action. He also spoke to the CEO at the Port Authority and this unwelcomed activity was stopped. The word 'Student' was added to the sign at the front of the hostel to assist in this area.

Eisteddfods and Sport

The Esperance Eisteddfod

An annual, well run and prestigious Esperance Eisteddfod which was a branch of the WA Music Festival was held in the town, and the Fairhaven girls entered a number of sections most years, gaining much acclaim from the Accredited Adjudicators from the WA Music Festival for the excellence of their entries, including many 1st prizes. With the natural harmony of voices, the girls from the communities were exceptional, and over the years the various missionaries helped the girls to form singing groups and choirs that did exceptionally well.

Sport

Many Fairhaven Netball and Volleyball teams entered into the competitions in the town each year. Both students and boarders participated in these two sports, and the Fairhaven teams were very successful, excelled in the sporting competitions they entered and were well known for their participation. The missionaries made the sports uniforms for all of the girls.

Only the Boarders at Fairhaven played in the basketball (netball) competition as it was played at night

The Esperance YMCA Volleyball Association, the YMCA Vice President's Trophy donated by R Gentle for the Women's Competition was won by the Fairhaven Olympians the first time it was presented in Summer 1974. Another team won it in summer 1975 and Fairhaven Olympians then won it 12 consecutive seasons – The Inscription on trophy - "Presented to Fairhaven Olympians for winning this shield 12 consecutive seasons"

Over the years the Fairhaven girls were always involved in many community events and activities. The girls were very well respected, and well known in the town because of sport, their standard of work in the town, their regular participation in community events, and their general appearance and attitude

Life after Fairhaven

The students and Boarders

When the young people left Fairhaven, a number of them continued on in their chosen career and most of them had families of their own. Many stayed in the Esperance / Norseman area and Churches of Christ missionaries who 'retired' and stayed in Esperance have continued to be a support and encouragement to many of these girls over the years (and the boys cared for at Norseman Mission as well).

When the girls who were students from the communities left Fairhaven, they went back home to their families and community. Most of these girls would have married.

A Govt survey in the Western Desert areas some years ago easily identified the girls who had been at Fairhaven as caring well for themselves, their families and their community. Some of the girls from Fairhaven helped to translate the Bible into their own language in later years.

Many years later, the long serving Superintendent and his wife visited some of the communities again and met up with a number of the Fairhaven 'girls' and the teenagers who did their schooling at Norseman Mission as well as those from the 'Working Boys Hostel'. Many have put their schooling and practical teaching and training into practice as well as their work experience in Esperance and are working in the local hospitals and schools, running their communities and caring for their families.

Casual contact over the years by a number of Church of Christ missionaries living in other places, and stories heard through others would indicate that many of the 'Fairhaven' girls from the communities have held responsible and active positions in their communities as well as taking a leading role in their extended families even when they were older.

The closing of Fairhaven Hostel in 1987

The closing of the Fairhaven Hostel came from the change of Govt policy as a result of the 'Children in Limbo' Report which indicated that children in substitute care were being denied interaction with, and the opportunity to return to their parents and families for holidays and in the long term.

It was unfortunate that this Report was a blanket cover for all childcare agencies, for this did not apply to so many of the children cared for in the five residential childcare centres by the Churches of Christ Federal Aborigines Board Inc. (later known as the Australian Churches of Christ Indigenous Ministries Inc. – ACCIM)

At that same time, the WA Education Department completed the provision of High Schooling in outback towns and communities. The result was that **indigenous parents were denied the opportunity and the choice to send their children away for High Schooling.**

The Fairhaven hostel was sold after the last of the girls had left in 1987.