

Australian Churches of Christ Indigenous Ministries Inc.

CARNARVON MISSION / INGADA VILLAGE

In 1944/5, having been informed of the situation for the Aboriginal people in Carnarvon by the Commissioner of Native Affairs in WA through the Inspector's Report, the Churches of Christ ACCIM Board commenced an investigation as to what possibilities there were to help the Aboriginal people in Carnarvon area and undertook to contact the Minister for Native Affairs in respect to land in the northern area.

Mr and Mrs Hammer from South Australia, who had previously been missionaries in the New Hebrides, were appointed to commence a ministry amongst the adults and families in Carnarvon and a three roomed neglected house in the town was purchased for them. They had four young children including a small baby.

After having visited Mount Margaret Mission and Norseman Mission on the way to Carnarvon to observe their operations, they stayed in Perth for several weeks to prepare and gather goods necessary for this new venture and to meet with the Commissioner of Native Affairs and other Government authorities. Because it was during World War 11, goods were scarce and permits were required to purchase a small truck released by the Transport Department, tyres for the truck, petrol ration tickets allocated for the 1000 km trip from Perth over rough roads and tracks. A permit was necessary to take the truck to Carnarvon and the Hammer family arrived in the town on 27th August 1945 after 3 days of travel over unsealed roads and tracks.

There was a growing number of Aboriginal people living at the Reserve and along the riverbed, and the white people in the town did not make the Hammers welcome as they did not want more Aboriginal people to come into the area. This did not deter the Hammers and they commenced contact with the Aboriginal people by starting a Sunday School in the riverbed and this led to personal contact with the families and practical help for them in many ways. At this time Carnarvon was closed to Aboriginal people except for the set times on specific days. Mr Hammer was asked by the Aboriginal people to advocate on their behalf in areas such as more hours for shopping, on one occasion he insisted that an Aboriginal man be given proper respect at his funeral, he gained permission to move a shed at the Reserve for an older blind man who had just come out of hospital and represented Aboriginal people in Court amongst many other things. There was not even a water tap at the Reserve

To gain an overview of the situation, Mr Hammer asked the older Aboriginal men to recommend one of the young men to accompany him as he travelled to surrounding stations speaking with the Aboriginal people and the station owners, visiting eleven stations in five days travelling over tracks.

Having formed a friendship with the aboriginal people at the Reserve, the Hammers were asked to care for children who were very sick, or whose parent was in hospital or in some other way unable to care for them for a short period of time. The Hammers took these children into their small home, sharing their food and clothing with them and Mrs Hammer started to give them some basic school lessons. Aboriginal people were not allowed to live in the area where the Hammers lived, and the authorities had ignored this ruling, having asked the Hammers to care for some of these children.

Reason why the Mission property was purchased

When the number of children being cared for by the Hammers rose to twelve including their own children in their small house which they had extended with verandahs, the Hammers commenced looking for suitable land to provide facilities to meet an obvious need for the Aboriginal people.

Finally a suitable place of about 70 acres over the river on Miaboolya Beach Road was purchased by Churches of Christ (ACCIM). The property had a small tumbledown shack on it and the shack was used for a kitchen / diningroom / school room / store room. Ex army tents were purchased as a temporary measure for bedroom accommodation for everyone. They all moved out to the property on 15th May 1946 and on that same day the Hammers were asked to take four children from one family who were very sick.

It was not long before parents working on stations started to request that their children stay at the Mission to receive schooling, knowing that that their children would not have to be sent a long way from home and out of their area to receive an education. In September 1947, the Welfare brought two sick children from Roebourne to the Mission for them to be cared for, the first of a growing number over the years, and the Police also requested that children be cared for at the Mission. Over the years a number of pregnant women from the stations stayed at the Mission awaiting the birth of their babies.

Buildings established

Material sourced locally became available at a time when such material was scarce, and two temporary buildings were completed in March 1946 and used as sleeping accommodation for the boys and the girls. A Work Party of people in the WA Churches of Christ came to Carnarvon to relocate the house in town out to the Mission and to construct the first of many buildings on the property using material salvaged from the aerodrome built to protect aircraft during the War. Good water proved to be difficult to find and water for drinking and cooking needed to be carted to the Mission for a long time until a well in the riverbed and a pipe line to the Mission were put in place. Prior to this salt water from the wells at the Mission was used for other purposes.

Initially large homes were built to care for the children, with a missionary couple or a single missionary caring for them. A large diningroom / kitchen was also built to provide the meals for the children and the single missionaries each day.

Lighting was provided by kerosene lamps in the shack and the tents. A small Lister lighting plant was installed some time before 1950 and this operated for a few hours in the morning. A larger generating plant was installed for electricity in 1960 allowing the power to be on until 9 o'clock each night.

In 1961 the Teens Hostel at the Mission was specifically built to cater for teenagers, both girls and boys who were studying at High School and were cared for by a missionary couple. This gave them the opportunity of sharing a home having their meals there instead of going to the dining room, in an environment that was conducive to study.

A Youth Hostel next to the Christian Centre in the town was built in 1968 to cater for young people completing their High School studies or working in the town. They were cared for by a missionary couple.

There was then a gradual change from large homes at the Mission with the children having their meals in the diningroom, to the children living in smaller family type homes with their siblings where they had their meals and did everything together as a 'family'. This was known as the 'cottage system' and it is thought that Churches of Christ were the first to introduce this concept into a large childcare centre.

To further extend the 'Cottage system', in 1973 the first 'cottage home' located in the town of Carnarvon opened with children from the Mission moving in with a missionary couple and their children. Subsequently a another three hostels were established in the town of Carnarvon. This gave these children the opportunity of living in the community.

The change to the 'cottage system was complete by 1975, and the big Mission diningroom closed down.

The Care of the Children

From the early years until the change to the Cottage System in 1975 when children had their meals in the home, the children at Carnarvon Mission had all their meals in the Mission Diningroom. The first diningroom was the original 'Shack' then the main diningroom was built in 1947 and provided all the meals for the children and the single missionaries. When the Kindergarten building was being used for the very small children, they had all of their meals at home and the missionaries caring for the little children were assisted by the 'Home Girls'. Specific missionaries were given the task of cooking at the Mission dininroom / kitchen and this was constantly busy with three meals a day, seven days a week for up to 140 children and adults.

Breakfast and the evening meal saw all the children having their meals in the diningroom, along with the single missionaries who watched over the children, mostly one to a table of about 10 children. Those who were old enough, both boys and girls, were rostered to help in the kitchen and diningroom, setting the tables and helping with preparation of the meals, and doing the dishes afterwards. School lunches were also made in the Diningroom. The 'Working Girls' took their share of responsibility when it was their turn to work alongside the cook in the Mission diningroom, and this helped the younger ones as well. There were also tasks that needed to be done in the home before the children went to school so the mornings were busy.

The care of the large homes, and washing and care of clothing was a constant task, particularly in the years before 1975 when larger numbers of children were being cared for in each home. Washing was endless, and this was before the easy care materials were available and when power plant did not operate all the time so time management was important. The gardens outside their home were the responsibility of the houseparents

In 1975 the renovations were completed to the Mission Homes to cater for the children receiving all of their care, including their meals, from their house parent/s, known as the Cottage System. Most were cared for by a married couple with both husband and wife working at the Mission, in a similar way to the children cared for Churches of Christ Norseman Mission, Roelands Village and Fairhaven and Bamburra Hostels. Most of the married houseparents had children of their own. There were a number of single missionaries, some who had been at Carnarvon Mission caring for children for many years and by 1975, most of them cared for a small group of children once the Cottage System was operating. There were six large Homes and a several smaller homes as well as four hostels in the town.

Meals were prepared in the home and mealtimes shared together. As in any home with a large number of children, the children were expected to look after their bedrooms and help with some of these tasks, usually with a rotating roster eg. hanging out some of the washing and doing the dishes after a meal and sometimes helping with the gardening on the weekend. Supervision of homework was the responsibility of the houseparents, as was the general health and well being of everyone in their home.

A central Food Store operated, with non perishable food ordered from Government Stores and a weekly Food Order from each home was filled, ensuring that good meals were provided for everyone, supplemented with fresh fruit and vegetables from the Mission or surrounding plantations and eggs from the Mission.

From the very early years, a personal Clothing Parcel every year was provided for every child in the five residential childcare centres in WA (up to 300 children at any one time) including Carnarvon Mission from one of the Churches of Christ Ladies groups around Australia. This variety of clothing gave each child the opportunity to be an individual, knowing that they were given to them personally. The Church Ladies groups also supplied bed linen, blankets, bedspreads and towels for the children in care and tablecloths for the diningrooms and curtains for the Homes.

A central Clothing Store with new and secondhand clothing was available to the houseparents to ensure that all of the children were well dressed in appropriate clothing. A Secondary Grant Clothing Allowance provided school uniforms, shoes and other things necessary for the students at High School in later years.

All of the houseparents cared for their children for 24 hours every day, apart from one weekday each week when they had time off between when the children went to school on the school bus in the morning until they returned home on the bus in the afternoons. Included in 'work' each week were times of fun and relaxing or spending time with the other missionaries, sharing a picnic with the children from another Home etc. as well as keeping up with the demands of a large family. School holidays sometimes gave them more time to catch up on things left undone, or maybe to relax. Each year missionaries took the 4 weeks of holidays that they were entitled to, when some of them who came from the Eastern States returned home, usually by car, to visit family.

From the 1940's the Churches of Christ churches around Australia were practical and financially supportive of their childcare centres in WA and the children at Carnarvon Mission benefitted through their interest and involvement.

Schooling

The number of missionaries increased, and the children continued to receive basic schooling for the rest of 1946 and a variety of activities by the missionaries as well as their general care. Churches of Christ churches around Australia commenced to send clothing for the children and furnishing for the new buildings and this financial and practical giving continued until 1986 when the childcare closed.

At the beginning of 1947 the Carnarvon School Principal agreed that the standard of education was acceptable for the children at the Mission to attend the school in town. This met with opposition from the white community and Mr Hammer strongly advocated on behalf of the children. At the meeting of the P & C Association in March 1947 he answered their many questions, the attitude of some changed and the children remained at school.

Early in 1948, there was a change of School Principal, and the children at the Mission were excluded from attending the school in town. The Education Department said that they would provide a school at the Mission and trained teachers and a work party from the WA Churches added a new school to the list of buildings they were working on at the time and the school was ready to use in March 1948. This was situated about 300 metres from the Mission Homes on land set aside for this purpose.

By May 1948, there were 48 children receiving care and schooling at the Mission. It was a two teacher school and in 1952 two male teachers were appointed and one of their wives taught the girls sewing. They taught a primary school curriculum which needed to be adapted for older children who had no basic reading skills as their parents were illiterate. The children of missionaries caught the school bus into Carnarvon for their schooling. The Mission received an invitation for the children to participate in the Combined Schools Sports Day and two of the boys were Champions.

In 1956, with the opening of the new wing of the Junior High School, sixteen of the older children in Grades 5, 6 and 7 were able to go into town for schooling and all of the other children continued their education at the school at the Mission. This necessitated the purchase of a school bus which was also used by the Mission for local activities and holidays for the children to Perth at Christmas. In 1959 three of the good students were accepted into the High School. By 1956 there were 110 children cared for at the Mission and by 1959 there were 140 children and teenagers with more requests from parents to take children than there was room for them. At the beginning of 1962 all of the children received their education in the town schools

“Home boys and girls”

Young people were classified as children until they were 16 and were not allowed to be employed until then. The ones who had achieved a higher level of education went to Perth for High School, or to the High School in the town. For them to be able to continue their education and become work ready, the other young people became "Home" boys and girls where they were taught manual skills which would help them gain employment in these areas or when they went back to work on the stations.

The girls particularly spent a lot of time in the kindergarten section both with the babies and pre schoolers where they were taught mothercraft and also in the Mission kitchen to learn cooking and nutrition, all of which they gained experience for their future lives. They were taught personal grooming and had sewing lessons where they made their own clothes.

The boys helped in the garden, with the water pump and well in the riverbed, maintenance of the buildings and motors as well as the sawing of the firewood. The Mission had a horse and cart which the boys used and cared for. They looked after the horse and the goats at the Mission and learnt milking, and they were taught how to slaughter and butcher sheep for the mission family. The boys learnt to shear the sheep using hand shears and later the Mission had a two stand shearing plant.

These young people continued to receive the same care and all of their needs were provided for. The missionaries took a lot of care in the teaching and training of these young people while they worked together on the tasks that needed to be done at the Mission. The missionaries worked with the young people towards each of them gaining employment when they were old enough and most stayed until they went to work, often returning for their holidays.

Parents and families

From the move to the Mission, the Hammers (and other missionaries later on) took every opportunity to retain a strong link between the children in care and their parents. This included taking the children into the Reserve when their parents were in town from station when Mr Hammer went in to take Sunday School.

From the beginning, the parents and relatives of the children being cared for were welcome to visit their children at the Mission and whenever possible children spent school holidays with parents or families.

Some of the parents and relatives lived at the Reserve, and there was a lot of regular interaction between the Mission and the Reserve. The church and Sunday School at the Reserve gave opportunity for the teenagers living at the Mission to be involved and spend time with the families there, and the people at the Reserve came to the Mission for Church Services as well. There was also ongoing contact between the missionaries and the adults at the Reserve through church services, Bible studies and prayer meetings as well as sewing classes for the women.

From the 1960's regular visits to the parents at the surrounding stations and towns were made as well as to the younger people who had been cared for at the Mission in previous years. Tribal Elder from Carnarvon, Bob Williams and other aboriginal leaders shared these trips with some of the missionaries. The parents and families who lived out on the stations were also welcomed to visit when they came into town. Where there was room, they were able to stay at the Mission for a short time, and later a specific place was built so they could spend a few days with their children.

Older family and relatives

From the very beginning, Mr and Mrs Hammer identified the need for a place for older Aboriginal people to receive any necessary care. In August 1947, the Native Affairs Inspector for the area asked if an old blind man named Punch who had worked on stations could be cared for. They had two days to build a small place for him down by the creek and they provided meals, medical care and billy tea throughout the day, with the older boys taking his meals to him from the diningroom and he stayed there until he died six weeks later. Over the years, adults came to stay at the Mission for a medical reason when there was room to accommodate them.

In the mid 1960's, older Aboriginal people living at the Reserve and in the riverbed asked if they could live at the Mission. Many of these people were Christians and they wanted to live a quiet life away from the alcohol at the Reserve. By this time the school at the Mission was no longer operating and this area was re-designated for Aged Care to allow for simple buildings to cater for these people. Within a short time there were up to 25 people living in this area with a missionary couple appointed to assist them in many ways, particularly because these people were mostly illiterate and all had lived and worked on stations all of their lives. Apart from when they were sick, they cooked their own meals, and a community lounge/activity room was built in the middle where they spent lots of time together as these older adults were related or knew each other from working on stations.

They had their own community structure and Management Committee. In later years, the accommodation was upgraded, and in addition in 1972, purpose built flats were built by the missionaries for some of these residents. In 1984 a 15 bed Aged Care Hostel was built to give further care for older residents.

Until the childcare closed at the Mission in 1986, these older adults were related to many if not most of the children in care at the Mission and this additional connection with family was a very important link for the children and the adults alike as well as the parents of the children living and working on stations. One of the first adults to move to the Mission was the tribal leader of this whole area, Bob Williams, and he was active in visiting the families of the children in care who worked on surrounding stations.

Change of name to Ingada Village

The name 'Carnarvon Mission' was changed to 'Ingada Village' on 1st July 1975 at the suggestion of Bob Williams, the well respected tribal elder and Christian leader of his people in the area.

Medical and Sport

Apart from the very early days, a qualified Nurse who was also a missionary caring for children was on the staff at the Mission and careful attention was given to the medical wellbeing of children and missionaries and their families. An extensive range of medical supplies was kept at the Mission and an excellent working relationship was established with the local doctors and the hospital. Children who needed additional care were sent to Perth for treatment and a number of "special needs" children were cared for at the Mission.

Over the years the children in care were encouraged to participate in regular sporting activities in the town and many achieved excellent results from schools sports Carnivals and team sports in the community. Some were chosen to participate in sporting teams representing their school or team in statewide competitions.

There were periods of time when both boys and girls who wanted to joined the Brownies and Boys Scouts in the town and some joined the Naval Cadets unit.

Holidays for the children

Where at all possible, the parents who brought their children to the Mission for schooling, took them home for school holidays, sometimes the missionaries took them home and at times the station people arranged for their travel. The children who were not able to go home to family had a more relaxed lifestyle with picnics, swimming at the beaches around Carnarvon as well as organised activities at the Mission. From the late 1950's the older girls went to Perth for several weeks of holidays with one of the missionaries and in the early 1960's all of the children who could not go out with family spent 4 weeks in Perth with missionaries and they visited many places of interest as well as enjoying beach activities. They travelled to Perth in the Mission School bus. Some children had a holiday with Churches of Christ families in Perth.

Church

Church services and Sunday School were part of every week at the Mission which was held in the Mission diningroom – requiring the tables and chairs to be moved and then moved back for the next meal. Aboriginal Christian people came out to the Mission for these services until a 'bough shelter' church at the Carnarvon Reserve saw many gather together on Sundays and during the week from the early 1960's under the leadership of tribal Elder, Bob Williams.

In 1967, the missionaries built a Christian Centre / church where the Mission and Reserve churches and a Church of Christ in the town for white people combined together to form one church with shared leadership. It is significant that this building was on the edge of town at that time, and was a place where Aboriginal people gathered together in earlier times. The Christian Centre is across the main street from the Cultural Centre that was established for the local people.

A missionary couple was appointed to live at the Christian Centre to be available to help Aboriginal adults and families with daily living issues that were difficult for them and as a resource to them.

Following a change of WA Government Policy, the childcare at the Mission was closed at the end of 1984, apart from a few children from Onslow who needed to stay until schooling was ready for them in Onslow at the end of 1986.