

Darwin Youth Refuge

1978 – 1980s

Other Names:

- Murkwood House
- Harvey's House

Details

The Darwin Youth Refuge, also known as Murkwood House, opened at Myilly Point in 1978. It was managed by the Young Women's Christian Association, YWCA, with funding from the Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments. It provided short term emergency accommodation for up to 14 teenagers who were homeless or affected by family crises. The Refuge moved to Parap in 1983. The closing date of the Refuge is not yet known.

The Darwin Youth Refuge opened at 2 Kahlin Avenue, Myilly Point in December 1978, taking over the building which had been the Tambling House Family Home. The Refuge provided short term emergency accommodation and support for young people who were homeless or affected by family crises.

During 1978, the Community Welfare Division became aware of the need for a youth refuge and approached the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) to oversee the institution. The Refuge was initially run by a voluntary committee known as the Darwin Youth Refuge Management Committee, and was funded by the government. The Northern Territory administration approved a grant of \$51,500 for three years to assist with the operation and staffing of the Home. In January 1980 the Commonwealth Government agreed to provide \$12,000 on a dollar for dollar basis to the NT government for the running of the Refuge. This was part of a broader Commonwealth funding program called the Youth Services Scheme. To foster independence and self-reliance, young people were expected to pay board to the Refuge. The government paid rental assistance, under a number of specific circumstances, for residents who could not afford to pay board.

The Darwin Youth Refuge took in teenagers, mainly aged between 14 and 18 years who were homeless, escaping family conflict, recently released from an institution or who were in the midst of other situations which meant that they required temporary shelter. A 1980 report noted that many young people were referred to the refuge by friends or were returning for a subsequent stay. Over half of the residents remained for less than two weeks but a significant number stayed for more than a month, which was regarded as an extended stay. During 1979, 102 young people passed through the refuge, while in 1980 the number had increased to 130. Between 11 and 14 young people stayed at the refuge at one time. During 1980, there were times when the Home was overfull and up to 11 young people were turned away each month.

Later records show that some young people were referred to the refuge by welfare officers or by school teachers; others came because of parents' refusal to provide a home for them. Some were transferred from other institutions, including government Homes or from gaol. Many were described as itinerant and/or homeless.

The Refuge was staffed 24 hours a day by four youth workers. Residents were expected to contribute to the running of the Home by cooking, doing housework and gardening. A flier provided to residents in 1980 outlined a set of rules, developed in discussion with residents:

*These rules exist to help the house run smoothly...and here they are..
Da daa...the doors are locked at 12pm on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday. On Friday and Saturday they are locked at 1am. Anyone not home at these times can sleep on the verandah...don't break in or you'll be asked to leave
da daa...no sex, no drugs, but you can rock and roll. That means no unprescribed drugs of any sort on the premises (this includes alcohol)
da daa...no alcohol except on special occasions. This means that if everyone decides on a special event, then we all pool our money and buy a small amount of grog. If you come home drunk and are abusive and obnoxious, then you'll be told to sleep outside for the night
da daa...no violence: that is, if you cause injury to other people in the house or to the house, you'll be asked to leave for a period of time.
This is your home while you're here, so look after it and yourselves and others.*

Residents of the Refuge were also encouraged to get up early and do something during the day. A significant number of residents attended the nearby Community Skills Centre to take courses. A report on the Refuge from late 1980 noted that the residents had started to informally refer to the Refuge as Murkwood House:

This has come about because the young people expressed discontent, to put it mildly, at being called refugees, and we all felt that another name would be more appealing. Everyone agreed on Murkwood House, Mirkwood being the name of a wood in "The Lord Of The Rings" where everything is a little crazy, and we substituted a 'u' for an 'I' as things are often a little murky in the house!

An end of year assessment report for 1980 also stated that from the beginning of the Refuge, management had decided that 'no records would be kept that the young people could not have access to'. This generally meant that the only information taken by staff was for statistical reports.

In 1981 the NT News featured an article about the Refuge which emphasised that it should not be regarded as an institution but rather as 'a place to break destructive lifestyle patterns and to re-assess problems'.

In January 1982 the YWCA took over full administrative responsibility for the Refuge and in late 1982 discussion began about relocating the Refuge because the building at 2 Kahlin Crescent was to be either demolished or redeveloped. A series of alternative sites were discussed including the former site of Dundas House in Parap. As a temporary measure a dwelling at 151 Stuart Highway, Parap (Lot 3378) purchased by the government in preparation for a redevelopment of the Parap area, was offered to the YWCA in May 1983. The property was described as not 'ideal' but 'quite large' and immediately available. The Refuge re-opened in the new premises on 22 August 1983.

The closing date for the Darwin Youth Refuge is yet to be determined.

Gallery



Old style house used as youth refuge

Description: This image is held within the Northern Territory Dept of the Community Development Collection. The image is of Darwin Youth Refuge.



Youth refuge

Description: This image shows two people in the main room of the Darwin Youth Refuge. This image is held within the Northern Territory Dept of the Community Development Collection.



Youth refuge

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Teenagers learning the guitar

Description: This image shows three people with guitars in a room at the Darwin Youth Refuge. This image is held within the Northern Territory Dept of the Community Development Collection.



Library resources

Description: This image shows the library resources available at the Darwin Youth Refuge. This image is held within the Northern Territory Dept of the Community Development Collection.



Darwin Youth Refuge Heritage Building

Description: Darwin Youth Refuge as a heritage building.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Young Women's Christian Association, Darwin \(1969 - current\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Tambling House Family Home \(1976 - 1978\)](#)

The Darwin Youth Refuge was located in the building that was the Tambling House Family Home.

Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

Records held by other organisations

- [General Administration Files, Annual Single number series with "N" prefix, Department of Community Development](#)
- [General Administration Files, Annual Single Number with "N" prefix \(1982 - 1984\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/darwin-youth-refuge/>