

Community Department with many jobs

One of the most diversified Government departments in the NT which has really proven itself since Self-Government is the Department of Community Development.

This department controls most of the social aspects of the community and the necessary services catering to social and welfare needs.

Since the establishment of the department there have been several important moves made to develop the cultural and artistic side of the NT.

One of the most important moves has been the establishment of a Heritage Commission.

Another has been the setting up of the Arts Advisory Council and an arts trust.

The council was established to advise the Minister on the needs of arts and artists in the NT. One of the biggest moves afoot at the moment is the planning of a performing arts centre in Darwin capable of catering with a large audience at any time and making the presentation of talent and exhibitions professional, acceptable and available.

The department's different branches perform many tasks.

One of the most active parts of the department has been the Consumer Affairs Branch.

COMPLAINTS

This branch handles complaints by members of the public dealing with retail outlets and professional services in the NT and since its establishment the branch has handled and resolved many cases in favor of both the consumer and sales outlet.

Another major role is that in the field of Youth, Sport and Recreation. The department's officers have the task of monitoring and promoting awareness and participation in sports, community use of schools, and establishing projects like the Rapid Creek Recreational area, soon to be completed.

The Youth dealings of the department are not always concerned with recreation and sports needs. The officers of the Department have carried Australia's first youth needs survey and have also compiled information relevant to the needs of youth in our community, like legal requirements information on housing and employment and other youth initiatives.

ACTIVITY

Life Be In It has also become a major activity in the NT during the past 18 months.

The Department also administers the Grants-In-Aid scheme which last year passed on more than \$1.5 million to community recreation and service needs.

There are many other services available through the department for the community in the welfare and social services fields.

The schemes include adoption requirements and control of children who have been before the courts.

The Department also exercises controls over children being minded by the state and child-

ren who are actually under the guardianship of the state.

Since self-government the provision of public libraries to the Northern Territory community has improved dramatically. In February 1980 the new Casuarina Library was opened at a cost of \$1.5 million. The impact of the library on the northern suburbs was immediate and dramatic. On average since opening more than 1,000 books a day have been borrowed by the public.

New libraries are planned to be opened this calendar year in Alice Springs and the Centrepoin building on the corner of Smith Street Mall. This is all part of the work to improve the quality of public library service right throughout the Territory.

Many people are unaware of some of the extra services that the Northern Territory Library Service provides. There is a country borrowers' service which is designed to help those people living in isolation who do not have access to any of the existing public libraries. Any one who wants to participate can simply write either to the Country Borrowers' Librarian, Central Services, Northern Territory Library Service, P.O. Box 39971, Winnellie 5789 or to the Country Borrowers' Librarian, Alice Springs Public Library, P.O. Box 8, Alice Springs, 5750. A catalogue of books will be provided and country borrowers can then select the material that they require.

LIBRARY

The Northern Territory Library Service also provides a film library. This is a collection of 16mm films not feature films but documentary and general interest films, which are available on loan to community groups. The service is being expanded and a large number of new films have recently been purchased and will soon be available to the borrowers.

Public libraries are more than just places that provide recreational reading. They are centres from which people can obtain information about any topic. If your librarian does not know the answer to your enquiry he or she can refer you to the appropriate agency which can help.

The Community Welfare Division under the Directorship of Mr Bruce Alcorn is responsible for the "welfare" function of the Department. The responsibilities of the Division ranges from matters pertaining to immigration and ethnic affairs to a complete range of welfare services consistent with other Australian States.

The welfare services function of the Division has been organised into three operational units throughout the Territory. The development of a series of programs provides a wide range of assistance.

The major function of the Youth Services Programme is to fulfill the responsibilities of the Director of Child Welfare in relation to juvenile offenders as outlined in the Child Welfare Act. Through this programme young people and their families are assisted to overcome their conflict with the law at Malak House.

ADOPTION

In the Adoption of Children Act the Director is responsible for the placement of a child with a view to adoption of those children who come into his care by virtue of the signing by parents/(s) of a General Consent of Adoption. Thorough assessments have been introduced to ensure the best available placement of children and the policy adopted wherever possible of placing Aboriginal children with parents of similar racial origin.

In the Territory a Task Force on Family Policy has been formed with representation from government and non-government agencies.

The Neighbourhood Centres established at Marrara in Darwin and in Tennant Creek provide an important resource for use by non-profit community groups for a variety of activities.

In addition there are 24 registered child care centres operating in the Territory, 10 which receive government funding and are sponsored and operated by community based organisations and the remainder which are privately owned and operated.

The Northern Territory has the doubtful distinction of having the highest rate of imprisonment of any of the Australian states or territories.

Figures published by the Australian Institute of Criminology for June 1980 show the Territory's imprisonment rate as 222 persons in custody for every 100,000 of population. The rate for Australia as a whole was 67.3 per 100,000 — only a third of the Territory rate.

CRIME

Reasons for the remarkably high NT rate cannot be pinpointed with certainty, beyond them being linked to the factors making the Northern Territory such a rapidly expanding society.

This has led to a noted criminologist recently referring to the Northern Territory as the "Wild West of Australia" and drawing a parallel with the middle and western states of America during the early 1800's.

Similarities include both being vast areas of sparsely populated land, occupied by Aborigines with totally different

Caters for all social aspects

cultural and value systems. Clashes between these systems and those of the dominant European culture often produce offences against the law.

Like the Wild West at the time, the Territory has a young population.

Statistics have demonstrated that youth itself is a factor in criminal behaviour — most criminal offences being committed by people between the ages of 16 and 24.

In both regions too there is the isolation of families from their extended kin — grandparents, uncles, aunts — often causing family instability leading to

juvenile delinquency and crime.

The rising trend in the imprisonment rate demonstrated over the last 18 months can be expected to continue. Rising population figures alone are a contributing factor.

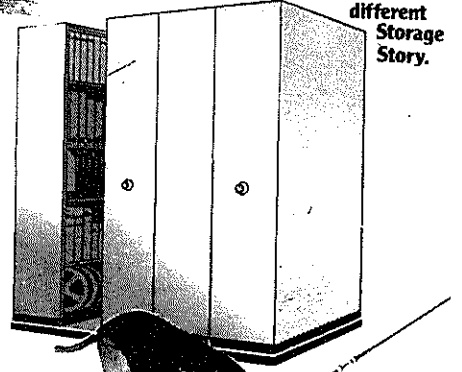
Other factors are related to the greater use of probation and parole for minor offenders who would otherwise have been sent to prison, and imposition of longer sentences on people sent to prison, with a consequent accumulation of prisoners occurring.

It is against this background that the

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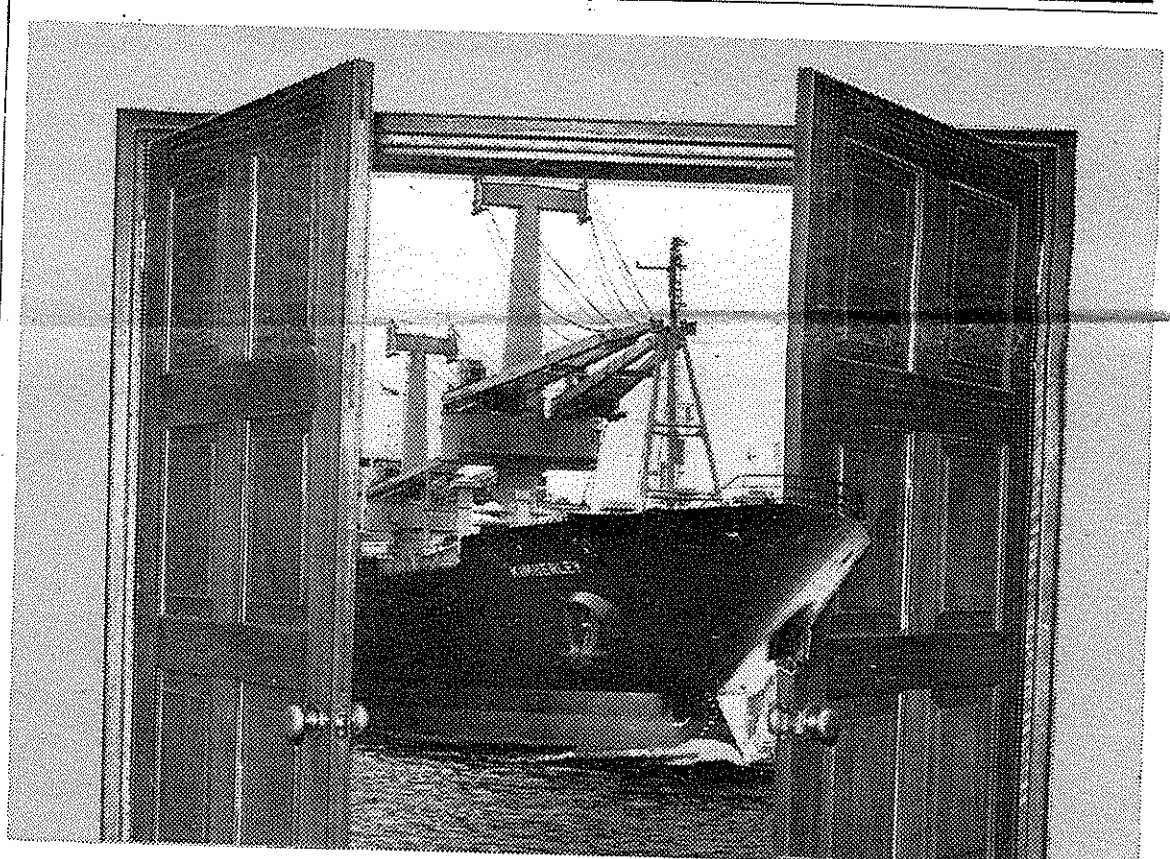
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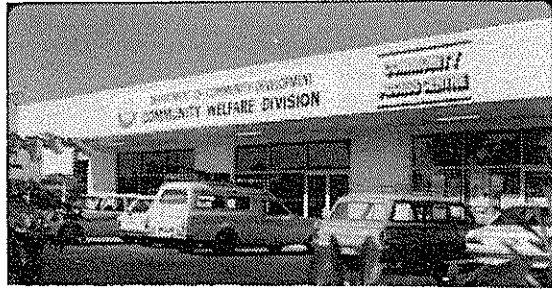
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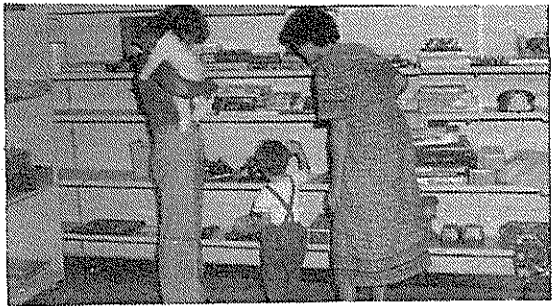
Community services in pictures



A DIVERSITY of jobs done by the Department of Community Development is reflected in this photographic look at some of the work done by the department. One of the better recognised Community Development offices (above) is the Community Access Centre and Headquarters of the Welfare Services Division of the department.



CHILDREN AT PLAY in a playground (above) of a local child minding facility. It is the department's job to make sure facilities for child minding are properly established and maintained. Child minding in the Territory is an important consideration as the working population is younger than the norm for the rest of the country, meaning there are more working parents with children below school age.



TOY LIBRARY (above) facilities in Darwin. The toy library has become an important draw-card for children throughout Darwin's urban area. A recently set up Fun Bus is also a big draw for young children. The department's officers are often able to help establish these projects through provision of Government aid.



MEAL TIME for children in a child care centre in Darwin. There are more than 20 centres in the city catering for young children from all urban areas. The children spend a great deal of time at the centres and their operation is one of the major concerns of the department. About half of Darwin's centres are privately owned and run under licence.



EDUCATING parents to the needs of their children is one of the more difficult tasks facing the Department of Community Development. Discussion groups (above) are held regularly to make people more aware of the needs of the community's youth and exactly what the adult population can do to meet those needs.

Conserving Territory important task

The Conservation Commission plays an important role in NT life, reflecting the increased concern over managing our own affairs since Self-Government.

The Commission projects what makes the Territory unique — its flora and fauna, wildlife, habitat, forests, soil and historical, archaeological and geological features of the land.

The Commission, formed in March this year, has come a long way since the formation of its founder organisation, the Northern Territory Reserves Board.

Although the first Territory land set aside for conservation was in 1924 when Cobourg Peninsula and Palm Valley were declared reserve areas, there was no provision for management or control.

This authority did not come until 1955 with the introduction of the National Parks and Gardens Bill under which the Board was established.

The first reserve, John Flynn's Grave, was formally gazetted in May 1957.

The Flynn memorial monument soon followed and in the same year Howard Springs and Simpsons Gap also came under the Board's control.

Ayers Rock — Mt. Olga National Park was gazetted in 1958 with the approval of 126,132ha to be set aside for conservation and management.

During its 21 years of operations, the Reserves Board obtained control of 43 reserves covering 251,449ha.

The Board was frustrated by delays in establishing national parks and complained of inadequate financing and staffing.

In the Board's final report, retiring chairman Colonel Lionel Rose said finance was available for day to day operations

Community department

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Department of Community Development, through its Correctional Services Division, has the responsibility for the balanced development within the Northern Territory of an integrated correctional system.

Achieving this objective requires not only continually reviewing the need for new and expanded facilities, but also pursuing the implementation of community based programs offering alternatives to imprisonment.

The Field Services Branch provides the specialist facilities required for an adult probation and parole service throughout the Northern Territory. (Juvenile probation and parole is a Community Welfare Division responsibility).

As well, the Branch administers the programs associated with community based correctional systems, such as community service orders.

Probation provides for supervision of an offender while he or she remains in the community and may be subject to certain conditions ordered by the court — usually concerning reporting arrangements, employment, accommodation, obeying reasonable instructions etc.

Parole refers to the conditional release of an offender after having served a minimum term of imprisonment set by the court. Parole is subject to the discretion of the Parole Board and the offender receives regular supervision by Field Services Branch.

Community service order facilities allow courts to order offenders to carry out unpaid work for the benefit of the community — an

opportunity to contribute a service to the community against which they have offended.

Since inception of the C.S.O. program, 26 offenders have been placed on service orders by the courts in Darwin (18) and Alice Springs eight, including six offenders from Papunya and Yuendumu.

This is especially relevant in the complex situation of inordinately high numbers of Aboriginal offenders — demanding intensive field activity for consulting with Aboriginal communities and for exploring means of defining, assessing and approaching the problem.

At the same time, another concern of the Field Services Branch relates to the delivery of criminal justice in Aboriginal communities — an issue where the branch has contributed significantly to development of court procedures which respond to the needs of local communities.

Currently the prison system in the NT can accommodate 247 inmates. This is a theoretical capacity however, in view of the need to retain some flexibility at each institution for segregating prisoners on remand, women, juveniles, and higher security risk prisoners.

For the 12 months to June 30 this year, the daily average number of persons held in custody was 258.

In spite of the opening of a new multi-million dollar prison complex in Darwin in September 1979 recognised as the most modern in the southern hemisphere, overcrowded conditions now prevail at each institution constantly.

THE FIRST TWO YEARS
— OF SELF GOVERNMENT —

Save environment

only and capital works had virtually ceased.

"With the move towards Self-Government, it is hoped that there will be a better understanding and support for conservation issues," he said.

The Board was replaced by the Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission in 1977.

With the inclusion of Forestry, Environment and Land Conservation

Units, Parks and Wildlife was given the more appropriate title of Conservation Commission.

The Commission's role has expanded greatly. Its functions now include:

- Conserving and protecting the human and natural environment.

- Establishing policies, plans and programs for conservation and

management of natural resources.

- Assessing the impact of the environment by development and assisting other departments and authorities in reducing harmful, environmental impact.

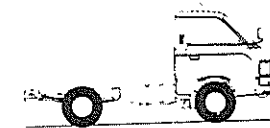
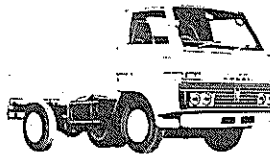
- Assisting the pastoral and agricultural industries and the NT Government in urban development, soil conservation and land use.

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