Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) was founded in Britain in 1855. Some meetings were held in Perth as early as the 1870s, but continuing work probably began in Northam in 1902 under Miss Eva Edmeades. The YWCA officially opened in Perth in 1920 with the support of the National Association in Sydney (with which the Perth YWCA affiliated in 1922), the Women's Service Guild and members of the Congregational Church. The governor's wife was traditionally a patron. A non-profit Christian social movement dedicated to the service of women, the Perth YWCA's earliest social role was providing safe, supervised long-term accommodation at its hostel Gledwyn, 16 St Georges Terrace (opened in 1920 and in service until 1962), for young single women working and studying in the city. Northam founded and opportunities to establish other regional YWCAs were not pursued vigorously in the early years; however, the city YWCA's 900 members participated in literary, cultural, sporting, citizenship and social activities, some co-ed. The YWCA was also ahead of its time in offering its members lectures on sex education in 1926.

The Depression led to a fall in the donations that largely financed the organisation, but the YWCA nonetheless expanded its branches to Midland and Osborne Park in the 1930s and also ran sewing classes for young unemployed women. In 1935 it purchased a permanent booth (still owned today) at the Royal Perth Show, to continue the major fundraising work begun in 1924 of serving teas and refreshment. During the war, the YWCA provided accommodation, services and amenities to servicewomen on leave and, with the YMCA, entertainment for soldiers.

Growth continued, and in the postwar years, branches extended through the north-ern suburbs and as far as Roleystone. Other activities included meeting British and (from 1953) Japanese war brides and European...
Young Women's Christian Association

migrants in transit through Fremantle, and
providing accommodation for migrant women
coming to work in the city from the Northam
migrant camp. In 1952 the YWCA opened
the newly purchased Lady Gowrie Hostel at
15 Ord Street, West Perth. Meeting the needs
of migrant women remained an important role
for the YWCA; in the 1970s, for example,
hostel facilities were made available to newly
arriving young Yugoslav women. However,
in 1974, in line with changing community
needs, the YWCA largely ceased the hostel
work that had been the mainstay of its activi-
ties since the 1920s and leased the former
Lady Gowrie Hostel to the state government
for drug rehabilitation work.

In its more recent work the YWCA has
been involved in pioneering a number of
activities that have subsequently been taken
on by other agencies. Examples include: Big
Brother and Big Sister programs; step family
support; and the House for Lone Women
(an early refuge for single women in Perth).
In these activities the YWCA has worked
closely with both government bodies and
NGOs. Other community services include
provision of a clothes lending library for the
unemployed, outreach work with Aboriginal
communities and young Aboriginal women in
Perth, and swimming and water therapy for
women recovering from breast surgery. The
YWCA continues to offer its members social,
physical and cultural activities through club
and fellowship activities; however, member-
ship has dropped over the years as young
working women turn to community centres
and TAFE. In 2007 the YWCA had eighty
members and just one branch, in Perth. Jan
Gothard

See also: Guides Western Australia; Migrant
reception; Young Men's Christian Association
(YMCA); Youth movements
Further reading: M. M. Thomas, *Women
of Perth: a history of the Young Women's
Christian Association in Perth, Western
Australia from 1920–1984* (1985)