

Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was founded in the UK in 1844 with the aim of improving the spiritual condition of young working men. Meetings were first held in Perth in 1869, but ongoing YMCA activities were not fully implemented until 1907 when, encouraged by associations in other states, the YMCA was once more revived in Perth.

From 1909, headquarters (opened 1910) with a gymnasium and indoor swimming pool were established at a donated site in Murray Street, extended in the 1920s to the adjacent Hotel Westralia (used as a hostel) and Cremorne Theatre and Gardens facilities. Activities ranging across the spiritual, educational and physical included a brass band, public speaking and annual camps. A Katanning branch was established in 1913. From 1914, the YMCA set up social facilities, including letter-writing tents and concerts for soldiers at military camps such as Greenmount and Blackboy Hill. By 1929 membership had reached one thousand.

During the Second World War, the YMCA again played an active role in supporting troops in army camps, and many of its own members joined up. The YMCA also worked in prisoner of war camps. After the war, the YMCA hostel housed a stream of European migrants as well as South-East Asian students, YMCA members in their own countries.

Fremantle YMCA activities began in 1946 (officially opened 1947), and the centre soon commanded nearly one-fifth of the YMCA's membership of 1,300. Eastern Goldfields YMCA was established in 1948. Activities—all alcohol-free—focused on Bible study and fellowship, basketball, volleyball, hockey, athletics, gymnastics, public

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speaking and debating, photography and leadership. In addition to the 1,700 members on the books in 1954, many thousands more made use of YMCA facilities and activities. From 1956 young women were accepted as associate members. The YMCA's Camp Pickering (named for Ernest Pickering, the association's general secretary from 1927 to 1952) opened at Stoneville in 1958 on a site owned and developed by the YMCA for over thirty years. YMCA centres opened across the suburbs (Victoria Park, Melville, Scarborough, Claremont, Bentley, South Perth, Armadale) and by 1963 membership totalled almost six thousand across the state.

The hostel's facilities and the annual Rottnest camp, a regular event since 1921, remained institutions. But the 1980s was a decade of change: Fremantle folded in 1981 due to financial strain; the YMCA lost its Rottnest site in 1983; and the YMCA generally faced monetary problems. The YMCA began to cater more directly for inner-city youth in need with their Murray Street night shelter, and drop-in centres were established at Coolbellup, Bentley, Armadale and Fremantle. The YMCA also became involved in Aboriginal outreach. A further new direction was the opening of childcare facilities for working parents. The YMCA became involved with youth rehabilitation and from the early 1990s, in concert with the state government, worked in mediation services for youth. In 1991 the YMCA ceased its eighty-year relationship with its premises in Murray Street and moved to new headquarters in Short Street. In 2007 facilities included ten recreational centres (metropolitan, Port Hedland and Kojonup), twenty-eight childcare centres, three youth centres (one mobile), mobile support centres in the Great Southern and the Wheatbelt, and a hostel in Goderich Street. Jan Gothard

See also: Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA); Youth movements

Further reading: T. Austen, *Something worthwhile: a history of the Perth YMCA* (1992)