

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 foundered 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 northern suburbs and as far as Roleystone. Other activities included meeting British and (from 1953) Japanese war brides and European

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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 activities 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, membership 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, *Y women of Perth: a history of the Young Women's Christian Association in Perth, Western Australia from 1920-1984* (1985)