

Bethel Inc.

1964 – 1986

Other Names:

- Bethel Homes
- Bethel

Details

Bethel Inc. was an independent missionary society initiated by Don and Meg Shedley to provide residential accommodation based on Christian principles for Aboriginal students, male and female. The first Home began in 1962, and Bethel Inc was formed in 1964. Bethel operated until 1982, with three hostels in Applecross for high school students, and two in Kununurra for primary school students, with up to 12 children in each Home, from all over the State.

Bethel Inc. was a non-denominational Protestant service that was initiated by Don and Meg Shedley. In their book, *Black and white best together: the Bethel story* (pp.55-57), the Shedleys relate how Bethel began. In 1960, the Shedleys were asked by Rod Schenck, who was associated with the Australian Aborigines Evangelical Mission, to accommodate two non-Aboriginal students from Esperance in their home in Applecross. These two girls were the daughters of missionaries and knew many young Aboriginal people who had lived on missions and later came to Perth for work. Thus, the Shedleys came to know and be known among Aboriginal people. The Shedleys' church connections had also introduced them to many people who were working in Protestant missions around the State.

In early 1962, the superintendent of the Churches of Christ's Carnarvon Mission asked the Shedleys if they could accommodate an Aboriginal girl who needed to come to Perth for schooling. In the same year, the Department of Native Welfare asked the Shedleys to accommodate an Aboriginal student from Tambellup. Over the next few years, the Shedley home at 2 Millington Street, Ardross became what was to be the first of the Bethel Homes in Perth.

When Don Shedley, a government entomologist, was transferred to Kununurra, a missionary couple ran the Millington Street house. Demand for places for Aboriginal students to board in Perth continued to grow and the Shedleys and others within a Christian network decided (p.57), around Christmas 1965, to establish an 'independent mission society' named 'Bethel' which means 'house of God'. Bethel Inc used the Shedley's home at 2 Millington Street, Ardross (from 1962); and purchased houses at 843 Canning Highway, Applecross (1966); 8 Ventnor Avenue, Mount Pleasant (1970); 56 McCallum Crescent, Ardross (1971, next door to Millington Street) for high school students; and Lot 32 Cajuput Street, Kununurra (1967) and Lot 109 Nutwood Crescent, Kununurra (1970), for primary school students.

The Shedleys (p.57) report that Bethel had a policy of 'a maximum of twelve to a household, including house parents and their own children'. If there was a single housemother, a total of six to the household was allowed. The Bethel Homes did not receive any per-capita allowance from the Department of Native Welfare and thus, as the Shedleys say (p.58), they were 'never subject to outside control or interference'. The students' living away from home allowance and child endowment helped to subsidise the students' living costs. Parents were asked (p.69) to pay a single fare per year for children to return home (Bethel Inc subsidised one additional journey and the government paid one return airfare) and the child's parents signed the child endowment over to Bethel Inc to support the children in their Homes. Children were able to return home each school holidays. Children were able

to keep the pocket money they received from the government, but the Shedley's report (pp.69-70) that the students had to 'keep a tally of how they used it' and were fined if they spent too much on sweets. The students were expected to help with household chores and keep their own bedrooms tidy. They attended church locally and some also went to the Aboriginal Church in Beaufort Street, Perth. Boys and girls occupied the same premises.

The Shedleys said (p.71) that they aimed to provide a home-like atmosphere to distinguish the Bethel Homes from other mission and hostel environments that Aboriginal people experienced. By 1970, when the Ventnor Avenue property was purchased, there were 23 students in Bethel Homes in Perth, 'all less than two kilometers from each other'. In 1972 there were 31 students, and in 1973 there were 33 students. From 1974, enrolments decreased rapidly, as country high schools began to be developed.

In Kununurra, the Bethel Homes at Catjuput Street for primary school children reportedly (Shedley, p.103) started so that children whose parents worked on stations or with Main Roads could stay in town and continue their schooling. Many of the children in the Homes in Kununurra had come in from camps or Reserves and had never lived in houses before (p.106).

The Bethel Homes in Perth had all closed by 1982. The Kununurra Homes remained open until 1986.

More info

Related Entries

Ran

- [Canning Highway Bethel Home \(1966 - 1982?\)](#)
- [Millington Street Bethel Home \(1962? - 1982?\)](#)
- [Ventnor Avenue Bethel Home \(1970 - 1982?\)](#)
- [Bethel Home Cajuput Street \(1967 - 1986\)](#)
- [Bethel Home Nutwood Crescent \(1970 - 1986\)](#)
- [Bethel Home McCallum Crescent \(1971 - 1982\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Pallottine Mission Centre \(1955 - 1991\)](#)
Bethel Inc. sometimes accommodated young people if there were no places available at the Pallottine Centre.

Resources

- Wilson, Katrin and Michael V. Robinson., *Aboriginal Hostels in Perth : A Comparative Survey*, 1971
- State Records Taskforce, Government of Western Australia, [Looking West: A Guide to Aboriginal Sources in Western Australia](#), 2004

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