

Our History

Late in 1969 the Auckland Ladies Auxiliary approached Wellington's Jeanne Hunter about starting an auxiliary in the capital, similar to the Auckland group.

The Aucklanders invited Mrs. Hunter to the opening of Greenlane Home in February 1970. While there, she held a long discussion about the need for a Wellington hostel with Sir William Stevenson, the chairman of the National Trust Board.

On March 18 1970, her Excellency Lady Porritt hosted a meeting at Government House of prominent Wellington ladies with the aim of setting up a Ladies Auxiliary. The women attending were told that a Wellington Hospital Board survey had established the need for residential accommodation similar to the one recently set up for disabled people in Auckland. The majority were keen on the project and the gathering became the inaugural meeting of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Wellington Branch of the Laura Fergusson Trust.

Things moved quickly from there. In May, officers were elected and Mrs Jeanne Hunter became the first president, a position she held for the next seven years.

On July 6, Government House was the venue for another meeting open to anyone with an interest in assisting the Trust. Sir Richard and Lady Wild hosted the gathering.

The guest speaker, Dr. Lopdell, spoke of the residential problems of young people with disabilities and the need for suitable housing for them to lead a normal life and to contribute to society. This contributed greatly to the vision of the project and helped to harness the goodwill needed for the challenges ahead.

Over the next several years, the Wellington branch worked hard to turn the dream of a local home into reality. The Ladies Auxiliary sold the vision of the Trust to the people of Wellington so conscientiously that in their first year they raised over \$15,000. In the second year they raised another \$7,000. By the end of the first five years, their coffers were bulging with more than \$70,000.

In August 1972 approval was given to the incorporation of the Wellington branch under the Charitable Trusts Act, to be called The Laura Fergusson Trust for Disabled Persons/Wellington Branch. After extensive but fruitless searching, in November 1972 land was finally found in Naenae, Lower Hutt. Through the kind offices of Cardinal McKeefry and the Sisters of Mercy, it was gifted to the trust.

In April 1977, Sue Byers was appointed the first manager of the 'Homes' as it was known. Sue Thompson took over later that year and is the CEO still today.

The Homes were officially opened on June 11, 1977 by the Governor-General, Sir Denis Blundell. A large number of people who, over the years had given much of their time and money to bring the project to fruition, turned out to celebrate.

In 1982, the Trustees were delighted to receive a grant of \$20,000 towards the cost of a much needed recreation centre which is used to increase the scope of the rehabilitation

programme in which the staff and residents were involved and which includes many non-resident disabled people.

Another progressive move was the allocation to the trust of a nearby State Housing Corporation house to give opportunity for the residents to experience independent living conditions.

As an investment and to allow for future expansion, another section near the rear of the hostel was purchased. It was also decided that some recently purchased land adjoining the hostel be used for five self-contained units for either staff or residents. This was made possible because the Ladies Auxiliary had raised \$30,000 specifically for the encouragement of independent living. Also a housing corp. grant of \$25,000 and a loan of \$175,000 for 25 years at 3% interest, added to the funds available.

The new units were opened by the Governor-General the most Reverent Sir Paul Reeves on May 3, 1989.

A new independent living complex complemented the existing facilities and increased client's ability to fulfil their full potential by providing a graduated opportunity for those aspiring to move into the community. It allowed a range of skills for living to be developed.

In 1995, the old Kilbirnie Post Office was moved on to the site where it has been used as a small gymnasium.

In its first 10 years the Laura Fergusson Trust was home to nearly 200 clients. About 80 of these were people on short-term or intermittent care programmes, eight passed away or were hospitalised and 86 moved into independent living.

Today the Wellington hostel caters for up to 26 residents. They are selected on the basis of their clinical and social needs and, while demand fluctuates considerable, it always outstrips accommodation capacity.

The Trust has a Board of Trustees which meets quarterly or as required and a Hostel Management Committee which meets monthly and controls the day to day running. The Ladies Auxiliary remains the major fundraising vehicle.

The Trust's Wellington home is based on a partnership model and residents buy-in to all decisions via a number of quality circles.