

Our Beginnings

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 Laura Fergusson 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.

Their many fundraising events were well patronised. They held a series of progressive luncheons, a black and white ball, cocktail parties, sought after bequests and gifts of money and many other activities. More importantly the vision of what could be achieved was expanding, and fairs, balls, film previews and charity races were held. Many people and businesses in the Wellington region became benefactors as they were gathered up in the enthusiasm of the Ladies Auxiliary.

It was a distinct help for the Wellington Branch in its infancy to follow the organisational pattern of the well-established Auckland branch, which provided a great deal of help and encouragement. Jack Hutchinson, the National Trust Board's director paid frequent visits to Wellington to assist wherever possible.

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 Disable 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.

Credit for all that's been achieved goes to the dedication and hard work of the Ladies Auxiliary, the hostel operating committee, the splendid work of Sue Thompson and her staff and the tremendous amount of time , financial acumen and devotion of the trustees.

The Ladies Auxiliary remains the major fundraising vehicle.