



Australian Government



ABORIGINAL
HOSTELS LIMITED



Proudly supporting
First Nations people

Home away from Home

Aboriginal Hostels Limited
50th anniversary
1973 – 2023



Leaders and Legacies

As the Chair of the Board and as a Gamilaraay-Yuwaalaraay man, it brings me great pride to reflect on AHL's 50 years of successfully providing accommodation for First Nations people across the country.

This anniversary provides an opportunity to acknowledge the legacy left by the leaders who came before, recognise achievements and celebrate the role we've played in the lives of many First Nations people and families. AHL has been a useful stepping stone for many in the community – whether staying at a hostel, or having the opportunity to work and learn skills with AHL, many people would not be where they are today were it not for AHL. Importantly, the standard of services has not lowered in 50 years.

Our task now is to continue to build on the successes of the past 50 years to ensure we can provide a safe and culturally appropriate home away from home for First Nations people for future generations of leaders to come.

Anthony Ashby

Anthony Ashby, Chairperson, AHL



For 50 years AHL staff have had the honour and privilege of providing accommodation for First Nations people and families. This has not changed.

Professor Valerie Cooms, Deputy Chair, AHL



Welcome! Daphne Allia and residents at Daisy Yarmirr Hostel, Darwin.

Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be aware that this document may contain sensitive information, images or names of people who have since passed away.



Here we are – 50 years on! Let's celebrate and remember.

From the beginning ...



Directors and staff at Yumba Hostel, our first hostel.

... and still flourishing.

The 1970s saw increasing numbers of our mob moving to cities and towns, for employment, for study, for health and for a whole range of reasons.

Where to stay? Where was a First Nations place for First Nations people?

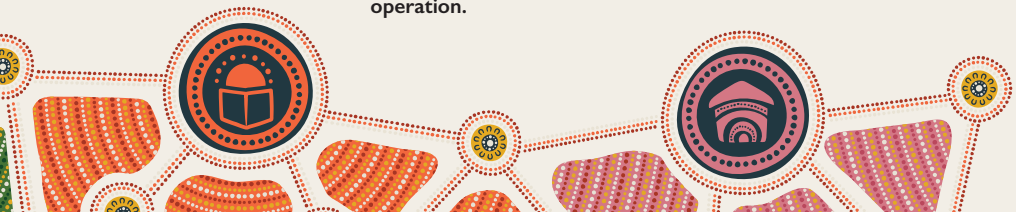
The answer came in 1973 when Uncle Charlie Perkins and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs created Aboriginal Hostels Limited. Uncle's magic touch was to imagine Hostels as more than a culturally safe place to stay for us – but as an economic opportunity. The Hostels would be majority-staffed by us, creating employment and training in skills such as hospitality and office management. This wider focus has been the vision of Hostels from the very beginning.



Busy during our first year of operation.



Liz Simpson takes a call in 2023.



Our Founding Father, Dr Charles Nelson Perrurle Perkins AO

If you want to talk about Aboriginal Hostels Limited, you must begin with Eastern Arrernte elder Dr Charles Perkins AO – known to all of us as Uncle Charlie.

It was Uncle Charlie who saw a welfare need that also presented an economic opportunity. He began as our founder and to see his vision through, he remained Chairman of the Board of Directors until 1981.

‘Through that time, he was an active Chairman who often engaged with other Board Members, management and staff in the national office and offices around Australia. He was always approachable and personable, making himself available to all,’ as Neville Perkins, the first Aboriginal General Manager of AHL, remembers.

The creation of our organisation was just one of the many, many contributions that Uncle Charlie made to the lives of Australia’s First Nations people. The purpose of his life was to achieve justice for our people and he fought for it with passion and dedication, an outspoken and fearless fighter for what he believed. In recognition of his extraordinary achievements, in 1987 he was awarded the Order of Australia and the National Trust named him a ‘National Treasure’.



From Uncle Charlie's dreams, big things grew – the Kirinari Hostel.



Charles Perkins AO at his graduation with his mother Hetti Perkins, wife Eileen and daughter Hetti, 1968.

Image courtesy of the Charles Perkins Trust



Three 'first' women of Hostels



Aunty Lowitja was our first female Chair of Hostels, serving for nearly 10 years. She engaged with other Board Members and senior management on a personal level, visiting hostels all over the country and taking a close interest in what was going on.

Her career away from Hostels was astounding in the number of 'firsts' she achieved as an Aboriginal woman in both her work and the honours she was given. We are so very fortunate that we were one of those 'firsts'.

Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue, AC CBE DSG
Yankunytjatjara Elder



Aunty Edna was one of those who kept the dream alive. She was the first woman appointed Regional Manager and the first woman to hold the position of General Manager of Aboriginal Hostels Limited. Her career was remarkable, serving with distinction in Hostels, then moving on to further success in the public service and on numerous committees, always advocating for social justice and equity. Edna is honoured by 'Barolits Street' in Canberra.

Edna Barolits OAM
Kungarakana Elder

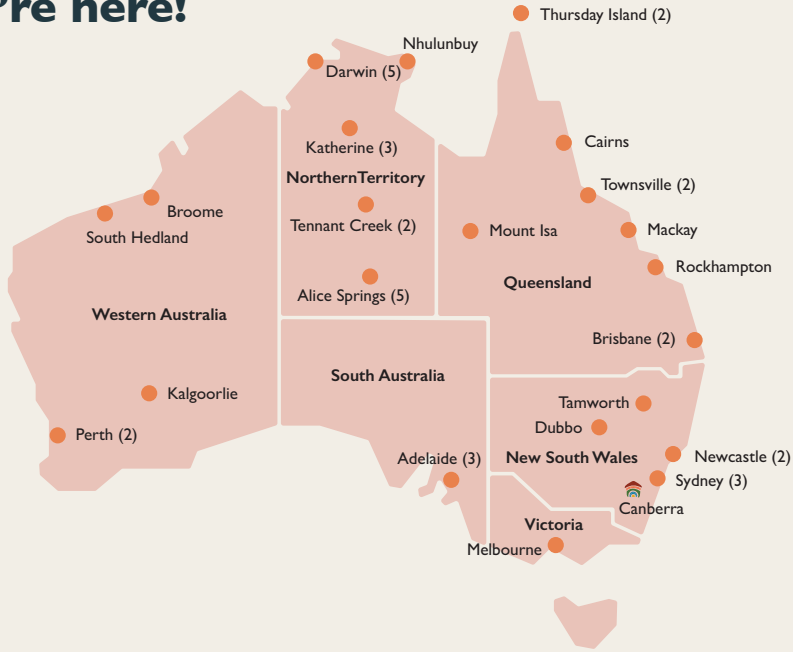


Aunty Gracelyn grew up determined that she would break through the barriers of racism. She trained to become a registered nurse and midwife and in 1985, was appointed the first Aboriginal Nursing Director of the unique Hetti Perkins Home for the Aged at Alice Springs, the first of its kind in Australia. Professor Smallwood is currently an Adjunct Professor with James Cook University in Townsville and she is indeed one of the most decorated Aboriginal achievers.

Professor Gracelyn Smallwood AM
Biri Elder



We're here!



What's in a name?

Our hostels are often named to celebrate people we value such as William Onus, Neville Bonner or Daisy Yamirr. Aunty Daisy was one of the first female members of our Board.

Honouring the lingo

Other hostels names are taken from the local language. 'Yumba', the first hostel to open, means 'town camp' in the local Yuggera language and the Darwin hostel for ante and post-natal care is called 'Gudang Dalba', in the Larrakia language – 'Mother and Baby'.

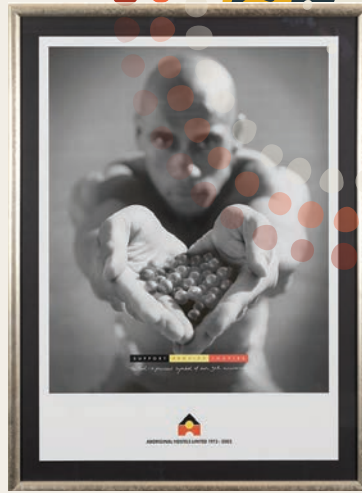


Daisy Yamirr Hostel, Darwin.



Our people, Our pearls

Patrick Johnson holding pearls, the symbol of wisdom, patience and peace – and of a 30 year anniversary.



For 50 years, the thousands of Hostel workers have been the 'pearls' of our organisation. It is their hard work and dedication that keeps the heart of Hostels beating.



Bending our backs, Shonei Aloese making the beds at the Tony Mundine Hostel.

Our mob looking after our mob

The majority of people running our organisation are First Nations people. It has been this way from the start. In 1974 Uncle Charlie wrote, 'an organisation has been developed which is managed in a large majority by Aboriginal people, who express Aboriginal values in their day-to-day operations.'

'We saw aunties who came into the company as cleaners and cooks and house parents,' says Aunty Anne Martin, a former Regional Manager of Hostels.

... working with Hostels really means a lot to me because it's like one big family. People who I have met years ago always come back. I am known as Mum or Aunty Pat.

Pat Ockwell. Aunty Pat was a manager for Hostels at the time of our 25th Anniversary



Delphine Tabuai looking after the mob at Daisy Yarmirr Hostel in Darwin, and looking after a family at Yumba Hostel, Brisbane.



Our Board

Over 50 years, hundreds of people have served on our Board. Some for a short time and some for years, giving us the benefit of their experience and wisdom. How fortunate we have been to have had those guides leading us.



The first Board of Directors of Hostels, 1974-75. Unfortunately, Uncle Charlie is absent from this picture.

Uncle Tom Calma AO is just one of those guiding lights. His distinguished career focusing on Indigenous affairs and social justice has been recognised with significant appointments, and we are most fortunate that one of those appointments was as a Director of the Board. He brought his advice and guidance on employment and training issues, at a time when Hostels was the biggest single employer of First Nations people in Australia.



Professor Tom Calma AO Senior Australian of the Year 2023 Kungarakan and Iwaidja peoples.

Hostel friends

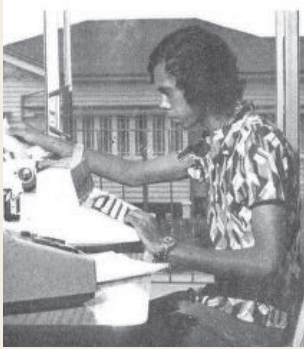
Celebrating our successes with our friends during NAIDOC.



Our office staff

Behind the scenes, not in the headlines, but keeping the organisation going. Dedicated staff have pounded the typewriters, tapped the keyboards and zoomed the meetings to ride the waves of changing budgets, changing community needs, contraction and expansion, to keep our vision alive.

Key matters – 50 years ago and now



Busy during our first year of operation 1973.



Still busy, Karyn Ervin (Director, HR) in 2023.

You are why we all work so hard ...



Life at Nagandji Nagandji-Ba Hostel and Kirinari hostels.



Our hostel staff

It's the staff – all of us, managers, cleaners, cooks, gardeners – who make the hostels the places we first dreamed of 50 years ago.

I think it was just the atmosphere we created that made it easier for [people] to cope with being away from home.

Tony Lake, former manager Wangkana Kari Hostel, Tennant Creek



Auntie Marlene Mitchell,
Hostel Manager, South
Hedland Hostel.

For homesick students, someone looking for a job or catching up with family, a regular dialysis patient – we are here.

Sometimes when I was at uni and ... a bit down, I'd just go back to the hostel and chill out. It was a safe haven – just the support that was there.

Aaron Maybury, Durungaling Hostel

If you'd had a bad day [houseparent] Auntie Barb would always say 'You'll be right, my girl.' ... and she'd always tell you a story of someone who maybe hadn't passed an exam... but managed to get through.

Beth Campbell Tabuai, Durungaling Hostel



Feeding our mob, 50 years ago and now. Christopher Thaiday on the job at Yumba Hostel, Brisbane.

Every year, around 16,000 residents are given 3 meals a day.



Our residents – in their own words



Will Kennedy, member of the NRL's Cronulla Sharks and former resident of Kirinari Hostel, Sydney.

From the cleaners to the kitchen staff and the House Parents, they all helped us kids out. [Without them] I would be just playing footy at home. I felt comfortable staying there just to pursue my dream into NRL. So, they helped me heaps.

Will Kennedy

It was the highlight of my life. You had your own room, structure and stability It was a family environment. You ate together, laughed together and you looked after each other.

Debbie Eades, Kirinari Hostel, Sydney

I need treatment and a safe place to stay. [If I didn't stay here] I would be staying in a town camp and become very sick and have no help.

Resident, Alyerre Hostel, Alice Springs

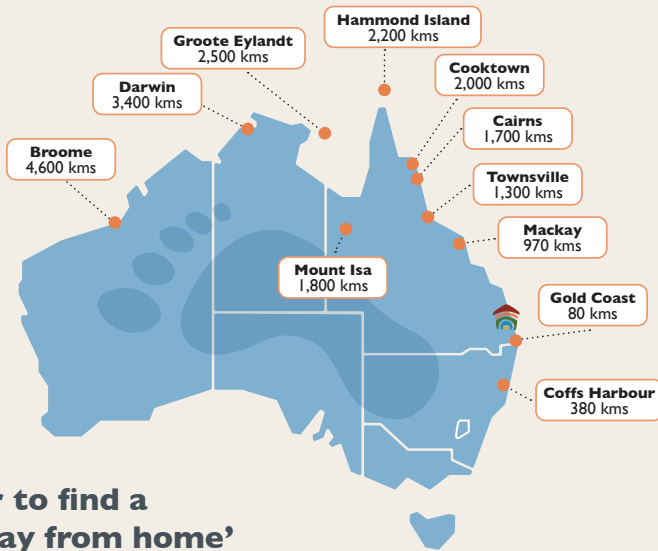


Always a welcoming cuppa at Nagandji Nagandji-Ba Hostel, and at every hostel.



Our residents come from all over.

Yumba residents came from ...



... all over to find a
'home away from home'

Staying at the hostel made me realise that Murris everywhere are different and we can learn a lot from each other.

Jennifer Geia, Daisy Yarmirr Hostel, Darwin

I don't think I would have gone to Perth to do that business course if I hadn't had the hostel to stay in. ... It made life easier because you'd come from your own country to a strange place, and [now] you had a family

Former resident, WA hostel

There was something safe about the hostel. ... it was a real home base. It actually gave me the confidence to stay in Adelaide. Staying at Luprina and being in the [Aboriginal] Task Force were probably the defining events of my life and actually changed the course of it.

Russell Lane, Luprina Hostel, Adelaide



A strong sense of pride and belonging



Whenever we drive past AHL premises, a strong sense of pride and belonging still fills our hearts.

Professor Valerie Cooms, Deputy Chair, AHL



Gudang Dalba Hostel, Darwin.

People used to say, ‘See that place there, that’s a hostel.’ It always looked flash. When our families would come, we’d show off our big house.

Former resident, VIC hostel

Thanks for looking after us.

Residents leaving Galawu Hostel, Darwin.



Sean says ‘Stay deadly’. So, let’s ‘stay deadly at Hostels!’



Partners and Friends

*Many people would not be where they are today
were it not for Hostels.*

Professor Valerie Cooms, Deputy Chair, AHL

AHL has many friends, both individuals and organisations, that have supported us over the last 50 years and continue to do so. We've thanked them at NAIDOC Luncheons, and we thank them now.

So, thank you to all our supporters!





We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the National Museum of Australia, who have assisted with this booklet and the curation of the exhibition. Their research skills and expertise have been invaluable.

