

KNOXBROOKE TRAINING CENTRE

FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

20TH SEPTEMBER, 1968

Fern Tree Gully and Districts Welfare Association for the
Intellectually Handicapped.

This is the first annual report of the Fern Tree Gully and Districts Welfare Association for the Intellectually Handicapped. It will also define the historical background to Knoxbrooke. If not officially recorded at this point these things may be forgotten.

We have, of course, nothing above ground to show you, but in the drawer we have a constitution and files of correspondence, we have the title to three acres of land and a set of working drawings for a day training centre which we believe will not be shamed by any other in the world at this time, we have a bank balance in credit and an organization of some size and complexity.

Historically, these are the details. In March, 1966, the Rotary Club of Belgrave rated as urgent the need in the Dandenongs Ranges area for training facilities for intellectually handicapped children and young people. No schools of any kind existed for them. Parents, independently, were required to transport their children long distances to training centres outside the district. Other children were receiving no expert training and were offered no promise of it. The Rotary Club of Belgrave therefore adopted as its major project for 1966 the raising of funds to buy a bus which would be used to transport children between their homes and the nearest centre able to absorb the intake.

There were unexpected difficulties. All training centres within reasonable reach were fully and indefinitely committed. The bus would offer a service to those children in the Shire of Sherbrooke who were already attending centres but would not assist the larger number of children for whom no training was being provided.

At this time, July, 1966 the Community Service Committee of the Belgrave Rotary Club began regular joint meetings with the Community Service Committee of the Fern Tree Gully Rotary Club. The Fern Tree Gully Club, independently aware of the same situation, had, with the assistance of the Mental Hygiene Department of the State Government, commenced a survey of its own area to determine the precise needs and numbers of the intellectually handicapped. The clubs accepted the wisdom of working together to solve a major problem. The solution seemed to be the establishment of a new Day Training Centre to be located, ideally, at Fern Tree Gully.

By December, 1966, with the help of the Mental Hygiene Department and the Welfare Officers of the Shires of Knox and Sherbrooke (Mrs. M. Rule and Mrs. A. De Prada respectively) the two clubs listed twenty children as known and suitable for training and formally requested by deputation the assistance of both Shire Councils. Consideration was promised by the Councils, subject to the submission of firm proposals. Preliminary research at this time indicated that at least \$60,000 would be needed to cover the purchase of a suitable site and the cost of erection of a Day Training Centre for forty children. Rotary had been advised to plan for a larger number of children than the survey had found; experience throughout the world had shown that others inevitably were brought forward by parents when a centre was established. Of this \$60,000, provided the
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Centre met with the approval of the Mental Hygiene Department, the Minister of Health and the State Treasurer, \$12,000 would have to be raised locally, the balance would be met by the Government, granted on a four-to-one subsidy basis.

It was not until 4th May, 1967, after months of negotiation, that the Mental Hygiene Department agreed to endorse the proposal that a day training centre should be established in the Knox/Sherbrooke area. Prominent in these negotiations were the members of the Community Service Committees of the Belgrave and Fern Tree Gully Rotary Clubs for the years 1966 and 1967, and the Secretary and senior officers of the Mental Hygiene Department. The two Rotary Clubs were thus authorized to "take steps" to purchase land and erect suitable buildings and subsequently to employ and pay the specialist staff needed to run the centre. This, as such, was beyond the scope and capacity of Rotary.

A public meeting was called for 26th July, 1967. The Knox Shire Council made available the Knox Council Chambers and the Shire President, Cr. A. Kleinert chaired the meeting. Several hundred people attended. Dr. Cunningham Dax, Mr. Keith Cathcart and Mr. J. Callahan addressed the meeting. A committee of 22 persons were formed comprising citizens of no previous affiliation and representatives of Rotary. Donations received during the course of the meeting totalled \$2,380. The meeting charged the committee with the responsibility of establishing the day training centre. This committee met for the first time on 1st August, 1967.

Persons present were:

J. J. Eldridge,	F. Appelby,	L. V. Martin,
D. G. Keith,	T. W. Poulter,	Mrs. D. Glen,
D. M. Cook,	W. A. Macaulay,	J. Callahan,
R. W. Lawrence,	Dr. L. Leask,	Mrs. M. Rule,
J. I. Bowler,	I. F. Southall,	G. B. Hicks,
E. H. Breen,	L. R. Kerr,	and E. J. Richardson.

Officers were elected: President, I.F. Southall; Vice-Presidents, J.J. Eldridge and R.W. Lawrence; Secretary, J. Callahan; Treasurer, D. McL. Cook.

The following sub-committees, each of at least three persons, were formed: Site Selection, Finance, Constitution, and Public Relations. An intensive programme of investigation and research was at once initiated. The committee met as a whole on the first and third Tuesdays of each month, often into the small hours; the sub-committees came together as and when required. It was an unusual week when the Knoxbrooke Committee in its several forms did not meet for reports and decisions.

The name, "Fern Tree Gully and Districts Welfare Association for the Intellectually Handicapped" was adopted to identify the organization as a whole, with the following objects:

To establish and maintain a day training centre for the Intellectually Handicapped, which will function in accordance with the standards approved by the Department of Health.

To raise, obtain, and receive funds or other aid for the purpose of achieving the objects of the Association by means of subscriptions, donations, bequests, entertainments or by any other means.

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Doing all such other things which, in the opinion of the Committee, will provide for the economic, social and recreational well-being of the trainees.

To do all such lawful things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the foregoing objects or any of them.

These aims were to be embodied in an establishment to be known as the Knoxbrooke Training Centre. Messrs. G.P. Hayes, M.L.A., A. G. Rich and K. J. Lithgow graciously consented to act as Trustees.

The constitution, necessarily a formidable document, was largely the work of Mr. L. R. Kerr, conceived in collaboration with the Mental Hygiene Department, the Department of Health, the Hospitals and Charities Commission and Mr. T. D. Armstrong, our legal adviser. It was formally adopted on December 11th, 1967, under the authority of the Hospitals and Charities Act 1968 and bears the registration No. 6274.

Under the rules of the constitution the committee was required by law to reduce its numbers to a maximum of 15 contributors, an eligible contributor being any person over 21 years of age making an annual donation of a minimum of \$2.00 to the funds of the Association. Unselfish voluntary resignations simplified this procedure. The following contributors were elected to the new committee: R. W. Lawrence, E. J. Richardson, J. Callahan, E. H. Breen, J. Boyle, Cr. L. Peters, Cr. D.G. Keith, G. B. Hicks, Mrs. D. Glen, J.J. Aldridge, I.F. Southall, D. M. Cook, T.W. Poulter, T. D. Armstrong, and W.A. Macaulay. Office bearers remained as before.

On 14th February, 1968, the organization was strengthened and broadened by the formation of the Knoxbrooke Auxiliary at a public meeting held in the Knox Shire Committee Rooms. Mr. W. A. Macaulay, who was largely responsible for its planning and formation, was elected its President, Secretary, Mrs. D. Glen, Treasurer, Mrs. B. Lynch, Vice-President Mr. K. Wright, Liaison Officer Mrs. D. Glen. The Knoxbrooke Auxiliary is, in effect, the central executive body of a network of regional auxiliaries which operate throughout both shires. Regional auxiliaries have to date been formed at The Basin, Emerald, The Patch and Mountain Gate. The Auxiliary has already contributed significantly to our advance, both financially and in human terms.

Finance planning and action, under Mr. D.M. Cook, included an approach by letter to all schools and churches and to every community service, social and sporting organization in the Knox and Sherbrooke Shires. Approximately 350 letters were despatched. The response was, and continues to be, generous and widespread. Scores of successful functions of many kinds sponsored by these organizations have not only added significantly to our funds but have helped us, by committee representation at most of them, to make our name and objects known. These functions have included dances, barbecues, carnivals, social evenings, and afternoons, picnics, dinners, choral and dramatic performances and sports meetings, even a public auction, regular pony rides, a grandfather's race, a pole-sitting marathon, and a car raffle.

Business men and shopkeepers have been canvassed with encouraging results. Two hundred collection tins have been placed throughout the area. Several hundred letters have been despatched to industry and commerce.

An Opportunity Shop, known as the Knoxbrooke Community Aid Shop, was opened on 13th May, 1968 as a joint venture with Knox Community Aid Service. It incorporates the collection and sale

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of waste materials and is expected, ultimately, to provide a retail outlet for products of the Knoxbrooke Sheltered Workshop. Planning for this venture extended over several months, several alternative forms and sites being considered in detail before the availability of a fortuitously vacant shop at 128 Boronia Road, Boronia, hastened our decision. These spacious premises, ideally suited, were fitted out by voluntary labour. Costs incurred were divided equally between Knoxbrooke and Knox Community Aid Service. It is staffed on alternating weeks by Volunteers from both organizations. Profits will be divided equally. The responsibility for Knoxbrooke's contribution of time and labour to this successful venture has been generously accepted by the Auxiliary. We acknowledge a particular debt to Mrs. M. Rule who first suggested the idea and worked hard to fulfil it. Many others, notably Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Macaulay and Mrs. R. W. Lawrence, have helped significantly.

Generally, finances have progressed satisfactorily towards the huge total of \$32,000 now required. The story of this gigantic leap from \$12,000 to \$32,000 is simply the evolution of the Knoxbrooke idea itself.

Early investigations by the Site Selection sub-Committee led us back repeatedly to a three acre site on the Burwood Highway, Fern Tree Gully, a short distance on the Melbourne side of the area of ground known as the Old Quarry. Rumour had it that the Knox Shire Council was considering the possibility of giving the Old Quarry as a site for the Centre, but despite the obvious benefits of securing a site for nothing, the Quarry offered few advantages and numerous disadvantages for our particular purpose, whereas the three acre site nearby offered virtually everything we were looking for: a narrow highway frontage, gentle slope, air and light, access at the rear to a quiet street, adequate space for development and expansion, sufficient depth for seclusion, and soil suitable not only for lawns, gardens and playing fields, but for building foundations. The Mental Hygiene Department endorsed our viewpoint. In consequence, this site was purchased for \$20,000 on 11th November, 1967. It is all that piece of land being Lot 2 on Plan of Subdivision No. 67132 lodged in the office of Titles and being part of Crown Allotment 53D Parish of Scoresby and being the land now comprised in Certificate of Title Volume 3907 Folio 253. The committee is particularly indebted to Mr. J. Callahan for his conduct of this purchase. The Mental Hygiene Dept. subsidized us to the extent of \$12,800, \$3,200 less than this Committee confidently and perhaps justifiably anticipated. This meant we were required to contribute \$7,200 out of funds. However, this was not the long-term disaster it could have been.

\$2,240.03 of the purchase price was a charge against road making due to the Knox Shire Council. Representation to the Council has enabled us to defer payment over a twenty-year period. We were also a good deal stronger financially than figures on the balance sheet would indicate.

Back in September, 1967, we had prepared a case for presentation to the Knox Shire Council suggesting that the Old Quarry Site would serve our long-term purposes better if it were sold on our behalf and the proceeds held in trust until required. This was to be preferred to the outright gift of a piece of land more suited to business purposes than to ours. Further, if used in bricks and mortar, the proceeds would be substantially enhanced by the addition of the government subsidy at four dollars to one. It would, in effect, be an extraordinarily valuable asset. The Council received our deputation in committee on 1st November, 1967. The deputation consisted of Messrs. Callahan, Armstrong and Southall. Mr. Callahan, father of the idea, presented the case, supported by the others. This highly unorthodox proposal
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received the unanimous endorsement of the Council to the faint surprise of your deputation. We express our deep gratitude to Knox Shire Council, to its Secretary Mr. Neville Haynes, and to Shire Officers, not only for this outstandingly generous decision but for their constant readiness to assist us in numerous ways. The Shire President of this period, Cr. S. Ehrnholm, has been a notable friend.

The gift of the Quarry site, under these terms, to be realized upon when required, has assisted the drive and vision of your Committee and is partly, if indirectly responsible for a year of considerable achievement. However, it must be emphasized, this is an asset in depth which your committee has no intention of using until a later stage of Knoxbrooke's development. It is, nevertheless, a constant security.

Hard upon this gift we had secured an option on the Burwood Highway site and invited a panel of professional architects to meet with the full committee on 12th December, 1967. Architects invited were R. S. Demaine Russell & Associates, Messrs. Saraty and Smith, and W. H. Smart. On 20th December, 1967, W. H. Smart of Vermont was advised that the Committee wished him to be responsible for the design and administration of the construction of the Knoxbrooke Training Centre at a fee calculated at 7% of the cost. Mr. Smart was briefed on our requirements and in collaboration with the Health Dept. and the Mental Hygiene Dept. has produced what we believe to be a distinguished design which offers classroom accommodation for forty children, sheltered workshop facilities for twenty-five persons and associated administration, service, and recreation areas. Provision has been made for extensive future development, to be built in successive stages, until the accommodation provided for in Stage One is doubled. This is the maximum recommended by the Mental Hygiene Department. Mr. Smart estimated the cost of erection of the Stage One complex at \$126,000, approximately double the tentative guesses of a year earlier and greatly in excess of the sum considered by the Mental Hygiene Department to be acceptable. They appeared to have set the ceiling at about \$75,000; this figure, in the opinion of both Mr. Smart and your Committee, was unreasonably low and by almost daily representation over a period of months, we endeavoured to convert them to our point of view.

Current with these critical negotiations your committee used every available means to publicise Knoxbrooke. This was demanding of time and effort. Numerous addresses were given; press, radio and television assisted us on many occasions. Particular acknowledgement must be made to the editors and managements of the "Mountain District Free Press" and "Knox News" for their generous coverage and warm personal interest. An acknowledgement is also due to Mr. Smart who, at this time, added technical support and argument to the moral case your committee sought to put to the Department. The Knoxbrooke idea had evolved to a rounder conception, a more complete service to the intellectually handicapped, catering not only for their initial years of training but for their adult, social, and occupational rights.

In April, 1968, before this issue was resolved, news came to us that Knoxbrooke had won, against world-wide competition, the International Service Award sponsored by the Rotary Club of Oak Harbour, U.S.A. Belgrave Rotary Club had asked your committee in December, 1967, to prepare a case for submission to this body. The award was to be granted to the most significant community project initiated by Rotary outside of the United States in 1968. We believe the granting of this award - largely one of honour and glory - assisted our case with the Department. Within a few days the Knoxbrooke plan was accepted by the Department and recommended without alteration to the Treasury, with the provision
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that we were able to meet our own quota of \$25,000 to qualify for the subsidy in the event of Treasury approval.

Your Committee had foreseen this hurdle, naturally enough; it was one of the primary responsibilities it had been charged with. This sum, together with our share of the cost of the site, had long before convinced us that we would need no less than \$32,000 in hard cash in funds before 1968 was out. To close the gap and thus eliminate delays - because we had nothing like \$32,000 - we had arranged for a substantial loan from the E. S. & A. Bank, Boronia, against the security of your committee's personal guarantees. We had been encouraged to take this drastic step with confidence mainly because the generosity of the Shire of Knox had armed us with the asset of the Old Quarry site.

On 5th June we were informed that the State Treasury had approved Knoxbrooke without modification and would support us with a subsidy of \$101,000.

Earthworks, despite the weather, have begun.

I wish to thank the committee, each of them, personally, for a year of remarkable progress, distinguished by harmony and mutual respect, despite differences of motive and method. It has not been the purpose of this report to publicise committeemen; I believe they do not expect that sort of thing except where names are necessary to identify events or origin. However, I am certain all would detect an omission if I did not acknowledge our debt to Mr. R. W. Lawrence whose wisdom and industry, in a difficult year of serious personal loss, have contributed so much to the vision of Knoxbrooke. I wish, too, to emphasize the constructive and perceptive approach of the Mental Hygiene Department. Perhaps I have portrayed them as the bogey-man of the story. This, of course, is not the case. They were the responsible people we had to convince. They had to respond within the limits imposed by legislation and precedent. We had little respect for precedent and may have trodden upon corns. We do not apologise but thank them for bearing the pain, for ultimately supporting us and for presenting our case to the Treasury with precisely the right words.

I am proud of what the committee has done, it has been my privilege and honour to express that pride, it has been my delight to be a part of it, even if the pressure at times has worn us rather close to the ground.

What a challenge, what an achievement the coming year promises. I am sorry that for personal reasons or for business reasons several committee members are not available for re-election; their departure is both their own loss and ours.

IVAN SOUTHALL
PRESIDENT, 1967-68.