

## The Foundations of Young Life

In 1938, Jim Rayburn, a young Presbyterian youth leader and seminary student in Gainesville, Texas, USA was given a challenge. A local minister invited him to consider the neighbourhood high school as his parish and develop ways of contacting kids who had no interest in church. Rayburn started a weekly club for kids. There was singing, a skit or two and a simple message about Jesus Christ. Club attendance increased dramatically when they started meeting in the homes of the young people.

After graduating from seminary, Rayburn and four other seminarians collaborated, and Young Life was officially born on Oct. 16, 1941, with its own Board of Trustees. They developed the club idea throughout Texas, with an emphasis on showing kids that faith in God can be not only fun, but exhilarating and life changing.

Young Life's mission remains the same — to introduce adolescents to Jesus Christ and to help them grow in their faith. This happens when caring adults build genuine friendships and earn the right to be heard with their young friends. For more than seven decades, God has blessed the Young Life staff, increasing its numbers from five to more than 3,300 — from one club in Texas to clubs in nearly every corner of the world.

### **Young Life Goes Global & Comes to Australia in the '70s**

Young Life's outreach to kids outside of the United States began in 1953 with the work of Rod and Fran Johnston in France. That ministry, under the name of Jeunesse Ardente, continues to this day. At present, a mix of American and national staff and some 19,000 volunteer leaders are reaching kids with the Gospel through more than 700 ministries in over 70 countries.

Young Life Australia has two separate histories in New South Wales and Victoria, dating back to the early 1970s. Young Life literally bounced its way into NSW in 1972 when a team of Young Life basketball players from North America visited Sydney under the umbrella of Campaigners for Christ. As a result, of that visit about 35 kids met Jesus Christ through Young Life's relational approach in the camp setting. These new Christians and a handful of leaders wanted to start Young Life clubs in their schools at Killarney Heights, Carlingford, Northmead, and Caringbah. Sydney's first Young Life clubs were hosted in 1973 by John and Laurice Waller in Killarney Heights, Ivor and Joy Lewis at Miranda, and Dave and Jo Lindsay in North Rocks.

In 1973, a schoolteacher on exchange from Colorado, U.S.A. at Rosebud High School in Victoria began a Young Life club in his house. Cliff and Liz Johnson, because of their years of involvement in Young Life U.S.A., did not know another way to minister to kids in that community other than to invite them around to their house. And come they did,

up to 70-80 kids every week. Most of these kids had never been to a church in their lives! Australian young people were ready for a relational ministry!

The 80's and 90s on the main were good years for Young Life. Under the leadership of Daryl Redford in Victoria and Arthur Ongley in NSW, the respective state organisations saw healthy clubs and camping ministries develop. With large numbers attending clubs each week (up to 150 people) volunteers were the mainstay of Young Life at every level. From regular schools based contact work, community engagement, club, camping, small groups and serving on committees and boards, volunteers were the life of the ministry. They lived and breathed ministry, many went on to serve in churches and overseas mission agencies and continue to do so to this day.

After the failure of a national body in the 1980's, Glyn Henman saw another opportunity to unify the mission again in the late 1990's. With new levels of trust between the respective ministries, talks began in 1999 to look at forming a national entity once again. With Andre Linossier (VIC), Paul McConnell and Glyn Henman (NSW) leading the discussions, there emerged a strong commitment to form a National organisation once again. By March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2000, the deal was completed with Amicus Young Life Australia Inc formed out of the two organisations. Andre Linossier was the first Chairman of the new board and Glyn Henman was appointed as the National Director (CEO). By the end of July 2002, we had settled on Young Life Australia INC as our official name.

Since 2002 there has been the usual challenges of getting a new organisation established in its own right and setting the priorities for the years ahead. 2008-09 were difficult years with the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) impacting the organisations capacity to reach more young people! Despite the challenges Young Life has seen rapid growth in all aspects of its work with young people. With new ministries in Bathurst, Dubbo and Maroubra (NSW), the Barossa Valley (SA), Hobart (TAS) and Redlands (QLD) and the placement of staff in Belarus and Macedonia. Young Life also partners with schools to place chaplains as part of various government programs. God was growing the work.

2015 saw a watershed moment with the purchase of a training facility in Armidale. We are grateful to God for his generosity to Young Life.

At the time of writing (July 2016) Young Life Australia is poised for further growth with new opportunities emerging for God to use the organisation to reach more young people than ever before. The last 6 years has seen Young Life double its size and increase its capacity. We look forward to what God is going to do in the next 10 years.