

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Organisation

Entry ID: AWE2681

War Widows' Guild of Australia (Queensland) Inc

(1947 -)

Born 12 August, 1947, Brisbane Queensland Australia

Occupation Community organisation

Summary

The War Widows' Guild of Australia was formed in 1945 in Victoria by the late Mrs Jessie Mary Vasey OBE, CBE, widow of Major-General George Vasey. In 1947 the Queensland State Branch was formed. The Guild aims to watch over and protect the interests of war widows by lobbying politicians and offering its members friendship, empathy and comfort in times of need, particularly in the loss of a partner. Its motto is as relevant today as it was at the Guild's formation over 60 years ago:-

We all belong to each other
We all need each other
It is in serving each other
And in sacrificing for our common good
That we are finding our true life

(Extract from an Empire Day Message from His Majesty the late King George the Sixth in 1949).

Details

It was Mrs Vasey's belief in "self-help" that led to the establishment of the Guild through craft classes. The sale of crafts also augmented the widows' meagre pensions. Queensland established a very successful weaving school under the leadership of Mrs Connie Hoffman who came up from Melbourne to teach. These craft groups brought the young widows together and gave them a purpose as well as the companionship of other widows.

The first Sub-Branch was formed in Toowoomba on 8 August 1947, just four days before the State Guild. Today there are 24 Sub-Branches throughout Queensland and five Social Groups in Brisbane where volunteer war widows look after the interests of their members by living the words of the Guild Motto.

Today the Guild not only provides a "listening ear", it provides friendship, welfare advice, social functions and activities, new member orientation, tours, a quarterly Bulletin magazine, volunteer hospital visitor service, nursing home visitors, various scholarships to universities in Queensland, Maj-jong, Bridge classes and Alexander Technique classes (the art of gentle exercise).

A further service the Guild provides is that of a Community Services Officer (CSO) who informs members and their families of services available in the community and how to access these services. The CSO will discuss any matters or concerns the members may have, either by a visit to the member's home or by telephone, and make any necessary referrals.

The Queensland Vasey Housing Auxiliary (War Widows' Guild) was established in 1961 to provide suitable accommodation at an affordable price for war widows over 55 years of age and other eligible persons. Today the Auxiliary manages 6 blocks of units in and around Brisbane (110 units) as well as 2 holiday units at Caloundra on the North Coast.

The Queensland Guild owes its success to the early foundation members. Those who took up the challenge at the inaugural meeting in 1947 were Mrs Hazel Sanders (Hopkinson) – President; Mesdames Betty Crombie (Deshon) and Edna Duff – Vice-Presidents; Mrs Doris Houston – Honorary Treasurer and Mrs J. Bird – Honorary Secretary. The subscription was set at one shilling a year. [1]

Subsequent State Presidents

Mrs Betty Crombie (Deshon) 1948-1950
Mrs Gertrude McKay 1950-1951
Mrs Margaret Gordon 1951-1954
Mrs Billie Hughes OAM 1954-1994
Mrs Jean Walters 1994-1997
Mrs Marjory Brown BEM 1997-2000
Mrs Alison Armstrong FCPA 2000 -2003
Mrs Norma Whitfield 2003-2006
Mrs Barbara Murphy 2006-

Mrs Billie Hughes OAM held the position of National President from 1981 to 1986. Mrs Norma Whitfield is the current National President (2004 to date).

Today the Guild is managed by a State Council of 25 comprising the State President, two Vice Presidents, Honorary Treasurer and 21 Council members.

The Guild is represented on various ex-service committees and the State President attends several memorial services throughout the year to lay a wreath on behalf of war widows. Sub-Branch representatives lay wreaths on behalf of their local members in the regional centres.

2007 marks the 60th anniversary of the War Widows' Guild in Queensland and members are proud of the achievements of the strong and dedicated women who have gone before them, particularly the earlier members who laid the foundations for the success of the organisation and the benefits that war widows receive today.

To be eligible for membership, a widow must be designated "War Widow" by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, meaning that their partner's death has been accepted as due to war causes. Re-married war widows, war widowers or Defence Service Widows in receipt of compensation from the Department of Veterans' Affairs are also eligible. The majority of members are widows from the Second World War. As our members age, we are now looking towards our younger widows from subsequent wars as well as Peacekeeping personnel widows to carry on the wonderful work of our forebears and preserve Mrs Vasey's aspiration to have all war widows living with dignity and security.

This entry was provided by Veronica Kratzmann, State Secretary of the War Widows' Guild of Australia (Queensland) Inc., April 2007.

Published resources

Book

No Mean Destiny: The Story of the War Widows' Guild of Australia 1945-85, Clark, Mavis Thorpe, 1986

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

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