

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE3956

Moffit, Constance Pauline

(1906 - 1988)

Born 1 January, 1906, Boulder Western Australia Australia

Died 31 December, 1988

Occupation Social worker

Summary

With her friend and colleague Norma Parker, Constance Moffit was largely responsible for convincing the Catholic Church in Australia to establish the Catholic Social Service Bureau. The Melbourne branch of the CSSB opened in 1936, Sydney in 1941, and Adelaide in 1942.

Details

Constance (or Connie) Moffit was the eldest of five children. Her grandparents, William and Margaret Moffit, migrated from Liverpool to Victoria, Australia, in 1867. William, or Brother Moffit, a blacksmith by trade, was a devout member of the Church of Christ and spent much of his time evangelising. His youngest child – Gilbert Tickle Moffit, born at Mt Gambier in 1875 – was Connie Moffit's father. Her mother, Sarah Emmeline Connolly, was Catholic and hailed from Tasmania. Gilbert and Sarah were married in 1905 and moved to Western Australia where Gilbert found work as an accountant and where Connie was born at the Oroya Brownhill Mine, Boulder.

Connie Moffit was educated at the Loreto Convent, Osborne. She was the only student from the school to sit for the University Public Examinations in 1923, and went on to study at the University of Western Australia, graduating in the late 1920s. With Norma Parker, she received a scholarship to study social work at the National Catholic School of Social Service (NCSSS) in Washington, and went on to complete work placements at the Humane Society in Cleveland, Ohio, and the Los Angeles Catholic Welfare Bureau.

Parker and Moffit returned to Western Australia in 1931 to fairly bleak employment prospects. These were the depression years. Both women moved to Victoria, where Parker began work at St Vincent's Hospital as an almoner, and Moffit was appointed social worker with the Victorian Vocational and Child Guidance Centre. The centre closed two years later, but Moffit was elected to the board of the Victorian Institute of Hospital Almoners in 1934. Both she and Parker were members of the Catholic Women's Social Guild. In August 1935, finding that too many welfare groups were working in isolation, they called a meeting of nearly 150 charity and ancillary workers in an attempt to encourage collaboration.

Moffit's greatest legacy – with Parker – was the formation of the Catholic Social Service Bureau (CSSB) in Melbourne in 1936, and the implementation of changes to Victorian Catholic children's institutions over subsequent decades. Both women fought staunch resistance from existing Catholic welfare providers, including the Sisters of Charity in Melbourne, who felt threatened by the notion of professional (lay) social workers.

Published resources

Thesis

The Professionalisation of Australian Catholic Social Welfare, 1920-1985, Gleeson, Damian John, 2006,
<http://unsworks.unsw.edu.au/fapi/datastream/unsworks:1178/SOURCE1?view=true>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders>

Author Details

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