

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person  
**Entry ID:** AWE4941

## Dobson, Hazel

(1906 - 1961)

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**Born** 27 August, 1906, St Leonards New South Wales Australia

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**Died** 31 December, 1961, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia

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**Occupation** Nurse, Public servant, Social worker

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### Summary

In 1948 Hazel Dobson was commissioned by the first Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell to investigate the living conditions and social problems of newly arrived refugees. Her report successfully recommended the employment by the Department of Immigration of professionally qualified social workers to assist migrants and refugees experiencing settlement difficulties. It also successfully recommended the enlistment of community organizations in helping new arrivals settle through what became the Good Neighbour Movement. She became the first Director of The Department of Immigration's Assimilation and Social Welfare Section and continued in that role until her death.

### Details

Hazel Dobson was born in St Leonards, Sydney, the daughter of Robert and Agnes Dobson. After completing her Leaving Certificate at North Sydney Girls' High School, she trained as a nurse.

She then commenced a course in what was then called Social Study, offered in Sydney from 1929 by the Board of Social Study and Training. She graduated from it at the end of 1939.

During 1942, she and H.E. Howes undertook a study of the wartime living conditions in the NSW town of Lithgow, where the expansion of the Small Arms Factory had caused a major population influx. Their study was published by the Industrial Welfare Division of the Department of Labour and National Service in 1943.

Hazel worked in Canberra with Arthur Calwell before his appointment as the first Minister for Immigration in 1945. In late 1948 she was asked to prepare a research report on the living conditions of aliens living in the community, and of refugees in the Department's Reception and Holding Centres.

Her report successfully suggested that the Department employ professionally qualified social workers to assist migrants and refugees experiencing settlement difficulties. On 1 July 1949, she was appointed the first Officer in Charge, Assimilation and Social Welfare, by the Department of Immigration in Canberra. Her Section started with 39 positions for professionally qualified social workers, initially in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth.

Her report also successfully recommended that the Department co-opt community organisations to assist it in settling newly arrived migrants and refugees. The Good Neighbour Movement fulfilled this role Australia-wide from 1950 to about 1980, with Tasmanian branches operating still.

Hazel Dobson was described by one of her staff as 'a tall, handsome woman with shortish iron-grey hair, decisive but gently spoken, approachable and not at all intimidating, who was supportive of her staff and gave them a great deal of autonomy'. Based in Canberra, she headed the Assimilation and Social Welfare team until her death in about 1961.

## Published resources

### Book

Redefining Australians: Immigration, Citizenship and National Identity, Jordens, Ann-Mari, 1995

Alien to Citizen. Settling migrants in Australia 1945-75 Allen and Unwin in association with Australian Archives., Jordens, Ann-Mari, 1997

### Newspaper Article

'"Good Neighbor" To Aid Migrants', 1949

'More Friendship Should Be Shown To Migrants', 1949

'Social Workers Appointments', 1949

'Plan To Assist Migrants: S.A. "Good Neighbor" Committee Formed', 1949

### Site Exhibition

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg>

### Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

### Author Details

Ann Tündern-Smith and Ann-Mari Jordens

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## Digital resources



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