

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: IMP0264

Parker, Norma Alice

(1906 - 2004)

Born 1 January, 1906, Perth Western Australia Australia

Died 31 December, 2004

Occupation Educator, Social worker

Summary

Norma Parker taught social work at both Sydney University and the University of New South Wales. She was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters from Sydney University, and was appointed as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (Civil) on 3 June 1972, for education and child welfare. The Norma Parker Correctional Centre for Women at Paramatta, New South Wales, is named after her.

Details

Norma Brown (née Parker) was born in Perth to Ernest Parker, an accountant, and his wife, Annie. She attended the Sacred Heart High School and in 1927 completed a BA at the University of Western Australia. She became interested in social work training through Dr Ethel Stoneman, head of the university's course in psychology, who wanted social workers for her child guidance clinic, so she went, on a scholarship, to the Catholic University of America in Washington, where she specialised in psychiatric social work for her MA and Diploma of Social Service.

She returned to Australia in 1931 when her father died, after working briefly as a social worker in Cleveland and Los Angeles. In 1932, after three months of supervised practical work at the Melbourne Hospital, she became an almoner (a hospital worker who looks after the social and material needs of the patient). She was immediately appointed by St Vincent's Hospital at Fitzroy to establish an almoner department, only the third in Melbourne and in Australia. For the next four years she developed her new department, helping to extend medical social work through a professional association, serving on the executive of the Victorian Council for Social Training, and inducing Archbishop Daniel Mannix to establish the Catholic Social Service Bureau.

In 1936 she moved to Sydney, again to found an almoner department at St Vincent's Hospital in Darlinghurst. Sydney was to be her home until she returned to Melbourne to be closer to her family towards the end of her life. In Sydney in the late 1930s, she was involved in the nascent almoners' and social workers' associations, becoming president of the latter from 1940-43. Representing the association on the NSW Council of Social Service, she initiated its publication *Social Service*. In the early 1940s she again worked to set up a Catholic Welfare Bureau.

Sydney University took on the responsibility for general training of social workers in 1940. Until 1945 it was under the direction of Canadian-born Elizabeth Govan. Brown was her assistant from 1941 to 1943, supervising students' field work and teaching social case work. Together, as members of the Delinquency Committee of the Child Welfare Advisory Council, they played a leading part in achieving a new minister, new departmental head and strong reform agenda for the NSW Child Welfare Department. (She lived in the Girls' Industrial School at Parramatta in January 1943, collecting evidence.)

In May 1943 she opened the first social work department in an Australian mental hospital at Callan Park, while continuing as a part-time lecturer at Sydney University. From mid-1944, a Commonwealth Fund of New York fellowship enabled her to study psychiatric social work for six months at the University of Chicago. She spent a further six months visiting other centres.

From 1945 to 1946 she was acting director of Sydney University's department of social studies, taking part in national discussions with the Department of Post-War Reconstruction. From 1946 to 1954 she was senior lecturer in social case work.

In 1946, partly to encourage the Australian Government to consult professional social workers about a projected international social welfare body to assist the United Nations, Brown argued for a national association of social workers and chaired the three interstate discussions which preceded its formation in 1946.

She served, until 1954, as the first president of the Australian Association of Social Workers and continued as vice-president for another four years. From 1949 to the end of 1954, she was again acting director of the Sydney University social work course. In 1955, the department of social studies became the department of social work, with social scientist Morven Brown as the new director and Norma Parker as the department's supervisor of professional training. When, in 1958, Morven Brown moved to the University of NSW as Australia's first professor of sociology, Brown again served as acting director until the appointment of Tom Brennan, another social scientist. Despite the obvious difficulties of having a professional school headed by someone not professionally qualified, Brown made the arrangement work and established excellent personal and professional relationships with both Morven Brown and Brennan.

In 1956 she convened and chaired a committee to establish the NSW Association for Mental Health and, during the 1950s and early 1960s, her initiatives and support contributed greatly to the founding and early development of the peak welfare body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS). In 1966, at the invitation of the UNSW, Brown took up a three-year appointment as associate professor and head of the department of social work in the school of sociology. On her retirement, this department became an independent school, headed by Australia's first professor of social work, John Lawrence. She was awarded an honorary doctorate by Sydney University in 1986.

In 1957, she had married "Mont" Brown, an 8th Division former serviceman who had been a prisoner of war on the notorious Burma Railway. He died in 1964.

Published resources

Edited Book

Focus on migrants : a social work perspective, Parker, Norma, 1973

Journal Article

Professor Norma Parker CBE, Mills, Millie, 1986

Early Social Work in Retrospect, Parker, N., 1979

Book

Norma Parker's Record of Service, Lawrence, R.J., 1969

Newspaper Article

Norma Alice Brown, CBE, Social worker, 1906-2004, Lawrence, John and Baldwin, Gay

Resource Section

Social Worker Profiles, 2004,
<http://www.aasw.asn.au/profile.htm>

Norma Parker Brown 1907–2004, Gleeson, D J, 2004,
<http://www.catholicweekly.com.au/04/may/23/25.html>

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>

Site Exhibition

Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html>

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

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia

[\[Biographical cuttings on Norma Parker, social worker, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals\]](#)

Author Details

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