Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0545

National Council of Women of South Australia

(1902 -)

Born	19020101
Occupation	Voluntary organisation

Summary

The National Council of Women of South Australia is a non-party, non-sectarian, umbrella organisation for a large and diverse number of affiliated women's groups.
Founded in 1902, with Lady Way (the Governor's wife) as president, Its inaugural meeting was addressed by Catherine Helen Spence, who also became its vice-president. The initial group, however, foundered and became inactive around 1909. The Council was revived in 1920 with Lady Hackett as president.

The Council functions as a political lobby group, attempting to influence local, state and federal government. Like all National Councils of Women, it operates though a standing committee system whereby specific issues are brought before the Council and, if there is general agreement that a question should be taken up, a subcommittee is established to investigate the matter.

It provided a major focus for predominantly, middle-class, women's activism until at least the 1940s. Although not an overtly feminist organisation, the Council has supported a wide range of social reform activities, particularly those related to education and to women's, children's and family welfare.

Its aims are:
1. To promote the interest of women and to secure their proper recognition in the community.
2. To educate and uplift the outlook of the community on the status of women, the importance of the family, and the nurture and upbringing of children.
3. To provide a bond of union between women's organisations, and a means of co-ordinated expressions for the societies affiliated with the Council.
4. To represent the interests of women in general before Parliament, local governing bodies and the Courts.
5. To promote the moral and social welfare of the community.

Details

At least 10 organisations joined the first National Council of Women of South Australia in 1902, including the: Young Women's Christian Association; Mother's Union; Woman's Christian Temperance Union; Effective Voting League; Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union; Methodist Ladies Foreign Missions Auxiliary; Working Women's Trade Union; Women's Branch of the Single Tax League and the Girl's Literary Society.

21 groups affiliated to the new Council in 1920, including the: Adelaide Rescue Committee; Adelaide Theosophical Society; Army Nurses Fund; Australian Board of Missions; Australian Trained Nurses Association; Catholic Women's League; Congregational Church Women's Society; Girls' Friendly Society; Free Kindergarten Union; Women Teachers' Progressive League; School for Mothers; Young Women's Christian Association; Women's Branch National Party; Liberal Women's Educational Association; Traveller's aid Society; Women's Teachers' Association. Later, groups such as the Jewish Women's Guild, the Housewives Association and the Country Women's Association also joined the Council. Eight Standing Committees were also formed: Press, Peace and Arbitration, Social, Legislation and Economics, Education, Public Health, Housewives and Immigration. Among the first subject discussed at Council meetings were: registration of nurses and midwives; hours of work for probationary nurse, government reserves for Aborigines; women on hospital boards; the need for a children's court; the cost of living; divorce laws; the nationality of married women; penal reform; the care of migrant women; widows pensions; maternity bonuses; infant and maternal mortality and the detection and training of 'mental defectives'.

Published resources

Book
The history of the National Council of Women in [sic] South Australia, 1902-1980, Pitt, Barbara J, 1986

What's next? : the continuing history of the National Council of Women of South Australia 1980-2000, Hartley, Shirley, 2000

National Council of Women of South Australia, National Council of Women of South Australia, 1927

Greater than their knowing: a glimpse of South Australian women 1836-1986, National Council of Women of South Australia, 1986

Thesis
A history of the National Council of Women of South Australia, 1920-1950, Mitta, Jane, 1989

Report
Women and planning : key issues, National Council of Women of South Australia, 1978

Planning now & for the future : with special emphasis on the southern Adelaide region, Reeves, A. E. (Anne E.) ed., 1978

Book Section
Barbara J Pitt writes 'At all times in every community, there are women who are concerned with maintaining and improving the quality of life.' In this article, she describes their work in the National Council of Women, Pitt, Barbara J, 1986

Journal Article
The City as a Site of Women Teacher's Post-suffrage Activism: Adelaide, South Australia, Trethewey, Lynne and Whitehead, Kay, 2003

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

State Library of South Australia
Radio interview with May Mills [sound recording] Interviewer: Lynne Arnold

National Council of Women of S.A. : SUMMARY RECORD

List of names of South Australian women who served in World War II (research paper)

Kathleen Hilfers : SUMMARY RECORD

Papers relating to National Council of Women of South Australia

Private hands (These records may not be readily available)
National Council of Women of South Australia - Records

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Margaret Davey interviewed by Amy McGrath [sound recording]

Author Details
Jane Carey

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