Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0555

National Council of Women of New South Wales

(1896 -)

Born 18960101

Summary

Founded in 1896 (the first such council in Australia) the National Council of Women of New South Wales is a non-party, non-sectarian, umbrella organisation for a large and diverse number of affiliated women's organisations. It functions as a political lobby group, particularly for the interests of women and children, attempting to influence local, state and federal government, and as a coordinating body to enable concerted effort on specific issues. The Council emerged as a largely middle-class women's organisation and, until the 1940s at least, was a major focal point for such women's activism. Although not overtly feminist, the Council has campaigned for a wide range of social and political reforms.

Details

The National Council of Women of New South Wales was founded on 26 June 1896 at a public meeting in the Sydney Town Hall. Its formation was largely instigated by Margaret Windeyer, its first honorary secretary, supported by Rose Scott, who was a member of the executive committee from 1896-1921 and also served as International Secretary. The eleven original affiliated groups outlined a very broad agenda:

• 'To promote the social, civil, moral and religious welfare of the community;
• To work for the removal of all disabilities of women, whether legal, economic or social;
• To promote such conditions of life as would assure to every child an opportunity for full and free development.'

By 1936 it included 68 organisations; rising to 108 by 1978.

Although encompassing a diverse range of organisations, the Council has always been dominated by women of the middle and upper classes. Its first five presidents (1899-1918) were wives or daughters of the incumbent governor of New South Wales.

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. Women's suffrage was the first issue taken up by the Council and its early concerns included the provision of Domestic Economy class in public schools; temperance; the need for Women Factory Inspectors; improved working conditions for women; the establishment of Kindergartens and Nursery Schools. In 1908 they established the Alice Rawson School for Mothers out of which emerged the Baby Health Clinics administered by the Department of Health from 1914. Later they concentrated on legal reforms such as the Nationality of Married Women and Guardianship of Children. In 1929 the Council established the Board of Social Study and Training which pioneered the training of social workers until it was taken over by the University of Sydney.

Other fields of activity/interest for the Council have included: the extension of health and education services; widows pensions; integration of migrants; children welfare and social welfare; nursing standards; family maintenance; legal marriage age; youth problems; consumer protection and standards of quality; unemployment insurance; road safety; welfare of the aged; hire purchase; drug addiction housing and town planning; welfare of Aborigines; a Women's Bureau; community centres; parks and playgrounds; shopping hours; women police; children's flammable clothing; driver's licences (women's); apprenticeship for girls; marriage guidance; prison reform; film censorship; care of the 'feeble minded'.

Published resources

Report
Report of the National Council of Women of New South Wales of an Informal Conference with Mrs May Wright Sewell, President of the International Council of Women, Vida Goldstein, 1902

Book
Endeavour: Women's organisations in New South Wales, 1896-1978 / National Council of Women of New South Wales, [1980]

Seventy five years, 1896-1971, 1971

Pamphlet
White Slave Traffic (Petition from certain officers of the National Council of Women of New South Wales Against), 1913

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection
National Council of Women of NSW - program for the launch of the Centenary Stamp Issue and a complete set of the issue, 1996

National Council of Women of New South Wales further papers, 1895-1981

National Council of Women of NSW Inc. - further records, 1926-1927, 1937-1990

Papers relating to National Council of Women of New South Wales, 1895-1897

National Council of Women of New South Wales further records, 1895-1997

Box 09: Fry family - papers of Edith Fry, 1881 - 1940

National Council of Women of New South Wales records, 1895-1976

Jean Arnot Memorial Luncheon - Book of Honour, 1994-1997, being a selected compilation

National Council of Women of New South Wales further records, ca. 1891-2002

State Library of New South Wales
Scott family - Manuscript and pictorial material, 1777-1925

Rose Scott papers, 1862-1923

Windeyer family - Papers, 1827-1928

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