Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE2714

Davidson, Eileen

(1909 - 2007)

Born	19090612, Subiaco Western Australia Australia
Died	20070519, Wemberley Western Australia Australia
Occupation	Social worker

Summary

Catholic social worker Eileen Davidson worked for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration’s child search operation, and for the International Refugee Organisation, after the Second World War. She raised ?70,000 for the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund.

Details

Born in Perth to Robert Alexander and Mary Ellen (née McBreen) Davidson, Mary Eileen Davidson was the eldest of six children. She completed a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Western Australia in 1931, before winning a scholarship to study Social Work at the Catholic University of American in Washington. She graduated in 1935 with a Master of Arts and Diploma in Social Services, and took on work at a children’s aid society in Baltimore and at the New York Foundling Hospital. In 1936 she travelled to England, where she completed an almoner’s certificate and worked at St Thomas’ Hospital, London.

Back home in 1937, Davidson set up a Department of Social Work at Lewisham Hospital. One of Australia’s first qualified social workers, she guided the development of the profession in this country and helped to establish the Catholic Trained Social Workers Association in Sydney in 1940. She later taught at St Vincent’s and Royal Prince Alfred Hospitals in Sydney, and was the inaugural secretary of the NSW Association for Mental Health.

In 1945 Davidson was recruited to join the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration’s child search operation, helping children of Eastern occupied territories who were displaced, orphaned or had survived concentration camps, to find their families. On her return to Australia she raised ?70,000 for the United Nations International Children’s Fund with public speeches about postwar European children. She later worked for the World Health Organisation in Germany and Thailand.

Davidson was awarded a Papal Cross in 1992, and became a Member in the Order of Australia (AM) in 2001. Never married, she outlived her five siblings and died at the age of 97 in Perth.

Published resources

Article
Chronological History of the Medical Benevolent Association of N.S.W., Pope, D., and M. Doughty, 2005, http://www.mbansw.org.au/mba/history.htm

A voice for lost children of war: Eileen Davidson, 1909-2007, Sankey, Mary, 2007, http://www.smh.com.au/news/obituaries/a-voice-for-lost-children-of-war/2007/06/25/1182623818041.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

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

Archival resources

National Archives of Australia, National Office, Canberra
Seven social workers from Asia

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