Entry type: Organisation
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Marymead Auxiliary

Occupation Social services, Volunteer fundraising organisation

Summary

The Auxiliary of Marymead Child and Family Centre is a volunteer group established in 1966 to raise funds in support of the services provided by Marymead to Canberra children and families in need. Over the ensuing years the Auxiliary initiated Canberra’s first Walkathon which, together with an annual Button Day and numerous other fundraising activities, raised significant sums annually to help Marymead’s work with disadvantaged and vulnerable children. In the process, the Auxiliary has galvanised the active participation of thousands of members of schools, businesses, sporting and service groups and embassies across the Australian Capital Territory. It continues today to be a major source of non-government funds for the agency.

Details

In the early 1960s Canberra was a rapidly growing city with a very young population. Between 1950 and 1975, almost 40% of the population were under 21 years of age. At the same time, few people had an extended family base because most had only recently arrived in Canberra to work in the burgeoning Commonwealth public service and service industries. Social services were embryonic.

Marymead Children's Centre (now Marymead Child and Family Centre) was established by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) in 1967 to provide residential care for children of families in temporary crisis – for example,. a mother in hospital, a family breaking up, a child neglected or in danger. The nuns left Canberra in 1986. Marymead today is a landmark Canberra agency serving vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families both at home and through out of home care across an extensive range of child protection, disability support and family support programs. However, although Marymead's services have always been funded by government, the funds have never been sufficient to meet the needs or to give Marymead a ready flexibility to introduce new programs to meet emerging needs outside the orbit of government funding processes.

Marymead owed its creation not only to the efforts of a determined group of FMM nuns, but also to an equally determined collection of, largely very senior, members of the Commonwealth public service and their wives. In the 1960s many married women, unable to work in the Commonwealth Public Service because of the marriage bar, used their education, experience and energies instead to create volunteer organisations to support the much-needed, emerging social and welfare services. It was just such a group of women who created the Marymead Auxiliary in 1966.

At its first meeting on 31 March 1966 Lady Nora Randall was elected President of the Auxiliary with Mrs Nell Nimmo and Mrs Mary Nicholl as Vice Presidents. They were the first of over 1000 people – almost all women – who have been active in the Auxiliary over the last 45 years, not counting the many thousands more who have attended fashion parades, lunches and morning teas in splendid venues, bought raffle tickets, plants and fete 'goodies', and played cards and tennis. Little by little, over $2 million has been raised (in 2007 dollar terms).

The Auxiliary established a number of 'firsts' for Canberra – most notably the city's first Walkathon in 1967 which was a huge success for over 20 years. Generations of Canberrans know Marymead because they walked or ran in the Walkathon along with classmates or as a family. Local schools, sporting and service clubs were roped in to help in a major annual button day appeal. A close connection with embassies was developed early on, and many fundraising events have taken place ever since in diplomatic residences.

Although its primary purpose was to raise funds for Marymead, the Auxiliary also played an important role in the early years in behind-the-scenes lobbying for improved funding levels, and garnering financial and practical support for Marymead from local businesses and service groups like Lions and Rotary. In addition, the Auxiliary President was for many years a member of the Marymead Board of Management.

The Auxiliary's membership has reflected broader changes in women's lives. Where, in the 1960s, the Auxiliary comprised married women not in the paid workforce, by the end of the century, most members were retired or working part-time. In the early 21st century, online social media and new types of events are attracting a younger membership who fit their fundraising activities around work and young families. The Auxiliary now works with professional development staff within Marymead and a growing number of corporate sponsorships of Marymead's programs.

Published resources

Newspaper Article
The auxiliary's proud past and positive future, 2012,
http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/the-auxiliarys-proud-past-and-positive-future-20120427-1xond.html

Magazine article
The Marymead Auxiliary, Barlin, Beryl, 2003

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

Archival resources

Marymead Child and Family Centre
Papers of Marymead Auxiliary

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Digital resources



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