Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE4902

Emergency Housekeeper Service

(1947 -)

Born	19470101, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia
Occupation	Community organisation

Summary

Following preparatory work and approaches to government by the National Council of Women (ACT) and the Nursery Kindergarten Society, the Emergency Housekeeper Service commenced in Canberra in April 1947. A Committee of Management, chaired by the National Council of Women, was established in February 1947 with representatives from the Canberra Mothercraft Society, the Nursery Kindergarten Society and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). An organising secretary, Ella Buttsworth, was appointed in March 1947. In July 1977, responsibility for providing the service passed to the ACT Division of the Australian Red Cross Society. With ACT self-government in 1989, Home Help Service ACT adopted its own constitution, becoming an incorporated association. It now operates as a community sector not-for-profit organisation that provides quality in-home support to the elderly and people with disabilities and their carers in the ACT, under the Home and Community Care Program and the Veterans' Home Care Program.

Details

The desirability of establishing an Emergency Housekeeper Service, along the lines of the NSW service, was first discussed at a meeting of the National Council of Women of the ACT in November 1943. Although there was support for the idea, nobody was willing to take the lead and it was not raised again until May 1945 when it became the Council's first big project. The vice-president, Yseult Bailey, undertook to collect information about other State services and formulate a plan for presentation to the Department of the Interior.

At the same time, the Nursery Kindergarten Society was collecting information about the working of housekeeper services and had advised the Minister for the Interior, Senator Collings, and Mr Daley in the Civic Administrator's Office of their interests.

On 26 September 1945 a joint meeting of interested groups, the National Council of Women, the Nursery Kindergarten Society, the Canberra Mothercraft Society and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), was held to discuss an Emergency Housekeeper Service (EHS) for Canberra. In 1946 a delegation from the National Council of Women met with the Secretary of the Department of the Interior to urge that a subsidy be given by the government towards the cost of the service. In February 1947 the Council agreed to accept responsibility for the EHS, through a Committee of Management with representatives from the four organisations.

An organising secretary was to be appointed (at first part-time) by the Committee to carry out the executive work of the service and to attend its meetings. The first organising secretary was a Canberra war widow, Mrs Ella Buttsworth who took up duty in March 1947. Helen Crisp and Loma Rudduck in 'The Mothering Years' reported that she helped to get the service off to a good start. Robbie Christian was the President from 1948 and held the position for eight years through the difficult formative years.

The aim of the service was to enable young children or the elderly to be cared for when illness, accident or hospitalisation prevented the usual care-giver from carrying out the task. The main qualifications required of housekeepers were a knowledge and ability to care for and manage various types of households, the ability to understand and care for children, and good health. They were to live out, with the Committee responsible for finding accommodation.

In November 1947, it was proposed that a social worker should be made available from the Department of the Interior to assist the EHS and, as a result, Canberra's first social worker, Miss Horswell, was appointed. The social worker would advise on the conditions of employment of the housekeepers, investigate relative family needs and decide the amount which a family should be asked to pay for the services provided.

The early years of the service were difficult with accommodation shortages and a lack of suitable housekeepers. Efforts were made to recruit post-war migrants as housekeepers and in 1950, Robbie Christian and Alice Halsey visited Bonegilla and selected two women for training. Although language proved a difficulty, the housekeepers were taken into Canberra homes where, with the aid of store catalogues and at least one German speaker (Dymphna Clark) they were able to manage within a short period of time.

In July 1962, at the request of the Department of the Interior, the EHS offered an Emergency Homehelp Service that provided help on an hourly basis, mainly to assist people who because of age or poor health, needed some part-time assistance to enable them to continue living in their own home. Joyce McConnell took over the chair of the EHS Standing Committee on the retirement of Robbie Christian. The demand for both forms of the service was increasing rapidly with the growth in Canberra's population and by May 1963, 25 full-time and part-time home helps were employed.
The organising secretaries of both the Housekeeper Service and the Home Help Service resigned at this time. Following pressure from the Department of the Interior, the Committee of Management proposed to advertise for a Secretary for both services who would use her own car, use her home as an office and receive a salary of between one thousand and thirteen hundred pounds.

Because of the growth in the service, an ever increasing subsidy was required and there was a constant tendency for the subsidy to lag behind financial commitments. The September 1965 Annual Report of the EHS reported that the Home Help division of the service had practically doubled in the previous twelve months. This hourly type service was increasingly used by pensioners and since charges were nominal, payments were meeting less than half of salary costs. The National Council of Women (ACT) recognised that it was becoming difficult for a voluntary committee to manage such a large community service. Financial problems continued, with outstanding debts and the costs of staff transport being particular issues of concern to the Committee of Management. In October 1966, the Council reported that the Department of the Interior had agreed to meet all administrative costs and that charges could be adjusted to New South Wales rates. A revised system agreed by the Department was also adopted to reduce charges depending on family circumstances. This new system would bring the EHS within the financial means of every applicant. After a trial period, the Committee recognised that the EHS was helping pensioners and the affluent but the Committee's attempt to bring the service within the financial means of every applicant had been unsuccessful.

Following approaches to the Department of the Interior, a new Committee was established from July 1971 to administer the Emergency Housekeeper and Home Help Service Inc. The Committee consisted of two nominees from the National Council of Women (ACT), one from the ACT Council of Social Service, one from the Association of Social Workers and two from the Department of the Interior. In July 1977, responsibility for providing the service passed to the ACT Division of the Australian Red Cross Society.

With ACT self-government in 1989, Home Help Service ACT adopted its own constitution, becoming an incorporated association. On 1 July 2007 Handyhelp ACT Inc. and its programs were assimilated under its umbrella. On 1 July 2011 the organisation became Home Help Service ACT Limited. It operates as a community sector not-for-profit organisation that provides quality in-home support to the elderly and people with disabilities and their carers in the ACT under the Home and Community Care Program and Veterans' Home Care Program.

Published resources

Resource
Home Help Service ACT Limited,
http://www.homehelp.org.au

Home Help Service ACT - HACC Programs,
http://health.act.gov.au

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

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

Book
Capital women : a history of the work of the National Council of Women (A.C.T.) in Canberra, 1939-1979, Stephenson, Freda, 1992

Archival resources

Archives ACT
Report from ACT Child Welfare Committee and Emergency Housekeeper Service; ACT Advisory Council 1963/6

National Council of Women [of the Australian Capital Territory]. Emergency Housekeeper Service.

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