

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person  
**Entry ID:** AWE0160

## Onians, Edith Charlotte

(1866 - 1955)

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**Born** 2 February, 1866, Lancefield Victoria Australia

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**Died** 16 August, 1955, Heidelberg Victoria Australia

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**Occupation** Philanthropist

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### Summary

Edith Onians was a full-time volunteer (organiser and honorary secretary) from 1897 until her death in 1955 of the Melbourne Newsboys Society. She was the first woman Special Magistrate appointed to Children's Court Melbourne in 1927, and was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (Civil) on 2 January 1933 for services to child welfare in Victoria.

### Details

The daughter of Richard and Charlotte (née Smith) Onians, Edith Onians attended Fontainebleau Ladies College, St Kilda, as a boarder, and then taught Sunday school. In 1897, Onians became interested in the work of the Newsboys Try Society – an organisation devoted to the wellbeing of homeless children. The name came from the founder, Mark Forster's, belief that "if a boy continued to try, he could succeed in whatever he attempted." Many of the boys became newspaper sellers.

Onians offered her services in an honorary capacity, and before going on a trip to England in 1900, she took over the teaching and generally helped with the work amongst the boys. By 1903 Onians was Honorary Secretary of the new organisation the City Newsboys' Society.

The Melbourne Newsboys Club Foundation history states that:

It was also in 1923 that a young man named Norman Craig joined Miss Onians in her work. Between them they built up an extensive network of welfare services, including family counselling, extension of education, instruction in technical skills – then not available elsewhere – free medical and dental services, camping at their property at Millgrove, advice on dealing with newsagents, their legal rights and requirements, free meals and clothing, extra food for needy brothers and sisters.

Both Miss Onians and Mr. Craig were very active in pushing through legislation aimed at the care and protection of working children in Victoria and were members of the Street Traders Board, which met at the Club headquarters.

The Street Trading Act was passed in 1926, and in 1927 Onians was appointed justice of the peace. She was also vice-president of the Victorian Council for Mental Hygiene and of the Vocational Guidance Centre.

### Events

#### 1970 - 1970

Honourary Organiser and Honourary Secretary Melbourne Newsboys' Society

#### 1927 - 1927

First woman Special Magistrate appointed to Children's Court Melbourne

#### 1926 - 1926

First woman member of Street Trading Board

## Published resources

### Book

The Men of To-morrow, Onians, Edith C., [1914]

### Thesis

Keeping them off the streets - youth organisations as instruments of hegemony in Victoria 1850-1950, Maunders, David, 1987

### Resource Section

The Herald Cry,  
<http://www.kitezh.com/gkw/whistle/herald.htm>

Onians, Edith Charlotte (1866-1955), Ramsland, John, 2006,  
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A110097b.htm>

### Resource

History of Melbourne Newsboys Club Foundation, Melbourne Newsboys Club Foundation,  
<http://www.tryyouth.org.au/newsboys/aboutus.html>

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

### Edited Book

200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology, Radi, Heather, 1988

Who's Who in Australia 1950, Alexander, Joseph A, 1950

### Site Exhibition

Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html>

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders>

## Archival resources

### State Library of Victoria

[Records, 1897-1976. \[manuscript\].](#)

### Author Details

Anne Heywood

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