

Entry type: Organisation

Entry ID: AWE1052

National Council of Jewish Women of Australia

(1923 -)

Born 1 January, 1923, Sydney

Occupation Lobby group, Membership organisation, Philanthropic organisation, Religious organisation, Women's Rights Organ

Summary

The Council of Jewish Women was founded in Sydney in 1923, due largely to the efforts of Dr Fanny Reading. Its initial purpose was to gather Jewish women together to undertake religious and community service, in addition to educational and philanthropic work. Membership of the Council also included membership of the Australian Zionist Organisation. Its first activities revolved around community service to alleviate poverty and unemployment. By the end of its first year the Council had 377 members, and was growing steadily across the country. The first National Conference of the Council was held in Sydney in May 1929, when its present name was adopted: The National Council of Jewish Women of Australia. The Council continues today as a non-profit, voluntary organisation acting for the advancement of Jewish women, and for social justice generally.

Details

The National Council of Jewish Women of Australia affiliated with the International Council of Jewish Women in 1925, and commenced its national quarterly journal, the *Council Bulletin*, in 1926. Interstate Sections of the Council were formed in Brisbane and Victoria in 1927. Later that year, Council Sections formed in South Australia, Western Australia, Kalgoorlie, Newcastle, Ballarat, and Geelong. A Hobart Section was formed in 1932, but has had a fluctuating existence. From 1929, Council Juniors and Council Younger Sets were established to encourage girls and young women to join the organisation.

In its long history the organisation has been concerned with an enormous array of issues, as well as charitable, educational and social activities. It has particularly been involved in fundraising to support Jewish causes (especially Zionist organisations) and provide services to the Jewish community (and sometimes the broader community as well). Since its inception, the Council has also shown an interest in issues relating to women and children generally. From the 1930s, many sections took a particular interest in assisting new Jewish migrants, often meeting them at the ports when they arrived. The Council has also encouraged Jewish women to take up leadership roles, although largely through voluntary activities. This has become a major focus since the 1970s.

In June 2005 a new affiliate was launched. The Australian Jewish Women in the Arts is a database of women with careers or serious involvement in Music, Literature, Visual or Performing Arts. Its Patron is Mrs Jeanne Pratt AC, a well known supporter of the Jewish community and of the arts in Australia. This group is established with the aims of sharing of ideas, collaborative projects and mentoring of emerging talent.

As of 2005, the Council continues to function as a non-profit, voluntary organisation for Jewish women, which presents their views, needs, interests and concerns to Federal and State governments, politicians, media, other organisations and communal sectors. The Council website described its aims and activities thus:

'The purpose of NCJW of Australia is, in the spirit of Judaism, to promote social justice, welfare and the advancement of women in Jewish and general communities locally, nationally, and internationally.

These aims are implemented through social activism, education, community services, promotion of multicultural tolerance and harmony.

The NCJW agenda includes areas of environment and health, the family, education and youth, the elderly and migrants.

Women's issues are prominent in NCJW's platform: the empowerment and education of women as leaders and community members, the advancement of women as individuals and activities on behalf of disadvantaged women.'

Published resources

Report

Official report of the Second Jewish Women's Conference of Australasia : under the auspices of the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia, held at Sydney, N.S.W., March 8th to 16th, 1932., 1932

Conference Proceedings

First Jewish Women's Conference, May 21st to 27th, 1929, 1929

Newsletter

The Council bulletin / National Council of Jewish Women, 1926-

Book

Making a Difference: A History of the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia, Newton, Marlo Leigh, 2000

Meeting new migrants on the wharves: A significant part of National Council of Jewish Women history from the 1920s to the 1950s, 2003

Journal Article

Perspectives from the Australian Jewish community, Rutland, Suzanne, 2002

From Germany and Austria to Australia: experiences of Jewish Women Refugees in the 1930s, Kirchhof, Astrid Mignon, 2000

The law of loving kindness: a tribute to Dr Fanny Reading, founder of the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia in 1923, Andgel, Anne, 1998

Not merely housewives. Australian Jewish Women. Paper presented to Australian Jewish Historical Society. Meeting (1980: Sydney)-, Cohen, Lysbeth, 1981

Book Section

Dr Fanny Reading, Cohen, Lysbeth, 1988

The changing role of women in Australian Jewry's communal structure, Rutland, Suzanne D., 1987

Newspaper Article

Service to Women: Dr Fanny's lifestyle, Cohen, Lysbeth, 1981

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Australian Jewish Historical Society Archives

[National Council Jewish Women](#)

State Library of New South Wales

[Dr Fanny Reading papers, photographs and realia, ca. 1890-1974](#)

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Queenie Symonds interviewed by Brenda Factor in the NSW Bicentennial oral history collection \[sound recording\]](#)

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