

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0936

Leigh, Virginia

(1916 - 2004)

Born	11 October, 1916
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Died	13 February, 2004
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Occupation	Social worker
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Summary

Gia to some and Ginny to others, Virginia Leigh served in the Australian Red Cross Field Force from World War II to 1974. She was awarded the Australian Red Cross Society Distinguished Service Medal in 1968. For many years Leigh was honorary secretary with the Victorian Council of Social Service. She was awarded an honorary life membership in 1969. Leigh joined the Hanover Centre committee of management, and became one of the first directors of Hanover welfare services company from 1972-73.

Details

The daughter of Daniel and Maie Hoban, Virginia Leigh was educated at Loreto Abbey, Marys Mount, Ballarat before attending Melbourne University. She switched from a law degree to teaching before being accepted into the school of social work.

Leigh was the first social worker employed by the Australian Red Cross Society. Appointed to the Victorian division in 1939, she was responsible for veterans of World War 1. In 1942 Leigh was seconded to the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) Women's Association to establish a department. In 1943 she joined the Australian Red Cross field force. Leigh served for a year with 2/9th Australian General Hospital, in New Guinea, before being sent to the United Kingdom with a Prisoner of War (PoW) reception unit. While there she was also in charge of the club for Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) ex-PoWs. After a year in the United Kingdom, and promotion to senior superintendent, Leigh joined a PoW reception unit in Singapore in 1945.

In 1946, Leigh resumed work as assistant director with Victorian Division, Social Service Australian Red Cross Society. Early in 1948, she was seconded by the government to establish a social work service in the Commonwealth Department of Labour and National Service, leaving to marry in 1949. Following the birth of two children and the collapse of her marriage, Leigh returned to work in 1957. She resumed a full-time position in 1961.

Leigh became assistant director and, at times, acting director – a position she declined – of social work service, Victorian division Australian Red Cross. Her work included the development of public policy in the areas of homelessness, alcoholism and drug dependence, families of veterans and immigrant veterans and aged services. Leigh was also involved in disaster relief projects, Cyclone Tracey in Darwin, the Tasmanian bushfires, and the refugee reception at Melbourne Airport. She was awarded the Australian Red Cross Society Distinguished Service Medal in 1968.

During this time Leigh was, for many years, honorary secretary of the Victorian Council of Social Service. She was awarded an honorary life membership in 1969. She was also a committee member of the Alcoholism Foundation of Victoria. In 1964, Leigh joined the Hanover Centre committee of management, and became one of the first directors of the Hanover welfare services company from 1972 to 1973.

Following her retirement, in 1974, Leigh focused on her love for history. Her main interests included genealogy, local historical societies and being a member of the Genealogical Society of Victoria, 1850s Group.

Published resources

Newspaper Article

Pioneer social worker had passion for writing history, 2004

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>

Author Details

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