
**A Brief History of
the Founder of Carers NSW
Clare Grant Stevenson**
by
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1988

A second-generation Australian, Clare Grant Stevenson was born on 18 July 1902 at Wangaratta, Victoria, and four years later the family moved to Essendon. The second youngest of six children, she developed a sturdy independence, riding her pony at will over the 12 acres of paddock surrounding the house.

Clare passed the School Leaving Examination in February 1922 at Essendon High and that year was admitted to the Faculty of Science at the University of Melbourne. Contemporaries remember Clare as a prominent figure in student affairs, particularly those concerning the status of women. Immersed in student life generally rather than in study, she failed chemistry in her final degree year and, unable to repeat owing to lack of finance, enrolled for the Diploma of Education, which she obtained at the end of 1925. During her diploma year, Clare had been keenly interested in the effects of training on human development: the building up of confidence through knowledge to enable people fully to use their ability.

In 1926 she was appointed organiser of business girls' clubs in the Young Women's Christian Association, Sydney and after three years, became general secretary of the Rockhampton Branch. During this time she had the chance to put her theories into practice and never forgot a lesson she learned in the process – "Never give up trying to change Government policy!"

Late in 1931 Clare accepted the position of Training and Research Officer offered by Mr Fred Burley, Governing Director of Berlei Limited, and was sent first to the New Zealand subsidiary and then to London for four years to help develop a new company, Berlei (UK). When she returned to head office in Sydney early in 1939, she was one of the few women in Australia holding a senior executive position in industry.

Whilst still working at Berlei, although she had not applied for the position, Clare was selected by Air Marshall Sir Charles Burnett, then Chief of Air Staff, and the Minister for Air, Mr John McEwan, as Director of the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) and she took up her appointment at Air Force Headquarters, Melbourne on 9 June 1941. She was head of the advisory responsibility to the various RAAF Directors on all matters affecting airwomen and their officers and was faced with the need to house, clothe and train over 27,000 women who passed through the Service. When she retired from the WAAAF on 18 March 1946, Clare was a Group Officer, the most senior officer of the four Women's Services within the Defence Forces of Australia during World War II, and had worked to improve the standards of living, legal status and opportunities of the women in all the Services. She was respected by the men with whom she worked, even though at times they strongly disagreed with her aims, and she had the admiration and affection of thousands of her officers and airwomen.

When it was formed in 1946, Clare was appointed as the only woman among the nine Trustees of the Services Canteens Trust Fund based in Melbourne and was its Deputy Chairman for many years. She remained a Trustee until the Trust Fund was wound up at the end of 1986, travelling between Sydney and Melbourne regularly, sometimes at frequent intervals, and at all times enthusiastically participating in the administration of the Fund. Throughout the life of the Fund the Trustees had taken charge of assets and investment earnings totalling many millions of dollars and their work earned them the gratitude of thousands of ex-servicemen and women of World War II, as well as widows and children of those who had served in that war.

At the conclusion of her war service, Clare resumed employment with Berlei and in 1947 was admitted to do the post graduate course, Bachelor of Education at the University of Melbourne, this course being undertaken as an after work occupation. Later, Clare worked with the then Dr Harold Wyndham when the Wyndham Report on Education was being set up.

After her retirement from Berlei in 1960, Clare's love of her fellow men and women and her desire to improve their lot through education and caring led to her fighting the cause of the under-privileged for the rest of her life. She spent some time with Dr Barnardo's in Australia and served on many committees to assist the plight of civilian widows and their children, also being a member of the Research Committee of 'Widows in Australia' which was published by the NSW Council of Social

Services in 1962. This piece of research changed the policy of the Commonwealth Government. She involved herself in the Association of Civilian Widows and organised a scholarship scheme for civilian widows' children, after suggesting the idea.

Clare worked for two periods with the NSW Council on the Ageing (COTA), the second time with Mrs Averil Fink (who would succeed her as President of Carers NSW when ill health forced Clare to retire) for ten years, as an organiser and Research Officer. She edited the first Directory of Meals on Wheels, edited the first edition of Services for the Aged and researched and wrote "*Dedication*", a report of a survey on caring for the aged at home and carried out in New South Wales in 1975. This resulted in the setting up of The Carers Group as part of COTA. It was founded by Clare who chaired its meetings and later The Carers Association of New South Wales was established as an independent body with Clare as its President.

As a result of Clare's lobbying, pressuring and representations over a number of years, in November 1985 the Carers Pension was introduced and it brought financial relief to thousands of carers, many of whom had to give up their jobs to look after parents, siblings and friends in private dwellings. Carers at last became eligible for pensioner benefits and concessions, as well as receiving counselling, assistance and moral support from the Association and Clare was responsible for the word "carer" becoming part of legislation. Her resignation, because of her ill health, was received with regret this year.

The Kings Cross Community Aid and Information Service was established in 1975 by Clare, who was President of the Service for some years and a member of the Management Committee, resigning in 1987. She extended herself on behalf of the people of the area and committed herself to the needy. The Service published a social history titled "*Memories of Kings Cross 1936-1947*", edited by Clare, and gives practical assistance to residents of the Cross and others who seek it. Its premises are known by her name, Clare Stevenson, a gesture by the Council of the City of Sydney because of her untiring and selfless community work in the area.

As Patron of the Council of Ex-Servicewomen's Associations (NSW) from its inaugural meeting in 1975, as well as being Patron of various WAAAF organisations throughout Australia, Clare continued her work in the interests of wartime servicewomen and her advice and expertise were greatly appreciated. A short time before her death she was preparing a submission hoping to rectify an anomaly in the pension system and to benefit disabled veterans.

For over three years she headed an editorial committee producing "*The WAAAF Book*" which contains stories of personal experiences of women who made up the first of the four wartime women's Services and which was launched early in 1985.

In 1960 Clare was honoured in The Queen's Birthday Honours List by being made a Member of the Order of the British Empire for her services to the community and she became a Member of the Order of Australia in the 1988 Australia Day Honours for services to the community and veterans. In January 1987 the Council of the City of Sydney presented Clare, together with four others, with its Australia Day 1987 Community Award in recognition of her outstanding contribution in caring for her fellow citizens of Sydney in a voluntary capacity. The Australian Bicentennial Authority also recognised Clare's work when it announced the names of the 200 Australian unsung heroes and heroines to be honoured, in October 1988.

Australians from all spheres will remember Clare Stevenson always with respect and affection. She sought nothing for herself and most of her work had been undertaken on a voluntary basis because of her concern for others, particularly those who lacked the ability to speak for themselves. She was a leader, an achiever and a motivator – she cared and she was a friend.

After a lifetime of caring and service, Clare put her work aside on 22nd October 1988.