

## **Evelyn Mary Beckenham OAM**

1923 – 2017

Evelyn was a Ballerina in the First Australian Ballet and with JC Williamson.

In 1944 she married Norman Sydney Beckenham.

Evelyn's first involvement with G.F.S. was in 1958 as a helper at a new branch of GFS at St Paul's Gympie and led to 17 years of service in the Branch as Leader-in-Charge.

She was also District Co-ordinator for many years.

Her service to the Sydney Diocesan Council extends back to 1962 when she became an Elected Member. Ev served on the G.F.S. Hostel Committee, was Vice Chairman and then Chairman of the GFS Sydney Centenary Committee and a member of the Diocesan Executive.



In 1979 she attended the Australian GFS Council in Adelaide. It was here she was elected as Australian Vice Chairman for 3 years and subsequently 3 years as Australian Chairman and 3 years as Immediate Past Chairman. In her role as Australian Chairman, Ev travelled great distances to visit and encourage G.F.S. branches throughout Australia. As Australian Chairman she became the Australian Senior Delegate to GFS World Council held in Japan.

She attended 5 World Councils – 1972 Melbourne, Australia; 1975 London, England; 1981 Ireland; 1984 Japan; 1987 Wales.

In 1987 Ev was appointed Chairman of G.F.S. in the Sydney Diocese on the retirement of Mrs Marie Robinson. This is a position she held for 10 years.

During the Bicentenary Celebrations of 1988 she was named on the "Women of Australia Honours List"

A great deal of time has also been given by both Ev and Norm to the establishment of a cottage for homeless girls at Unanderra which was financially supported by GFS. Both Ev and Norm were active members of the management committee for the cottage and it was fitting that the cottage was named "Evelyn Cottage" when it opened in 1992.

In 1993 GFS Sydney Council awarded Life Membership to Evelyn Beckenham in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the Girls' Friendly Society.

Ev and Norm were involved in "Elizabeth Cottage" the second cottage GFS Sydney owned and managed for homeless young women. It was opened in 1995, by the Archbishop of Sydney, The Most Reverend R H Goodhew. Elizabeth Cottage, near Campbelltown, was a home to five young women, providing a secure environment for them to pursue their education.

Both houses catered for young women aged 15-22, who had come from broken homes or have suffered physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

Evelyn's community service extended over some 30 years of tireless and continuing work for girls and women through the Girls' Friendly Society. In 1998 members of GFS submitted Ev's name for an Australia Day Award. Thus she was awarded the Order of Australia on 23 Mar 1998 for service to GFS An Anglican Ministry.

The home of Ev and Norm, was always open to visitors and for meetings and functions with GFS members. She enjoyed having guests stay in her home. Many GFS visitors from Australia and overseas were welcomed into Ev's home including 2 English GFS bursary girls who visited Australia for 6 weeks and participated in branch activities. They were transported to 3 dioceses by Ev and Norm during their time in Australia. She also provided a highly valued pastoral care ministry to GFS leaders and members. Ev was an incredible letter writer and even when she struggled to hold a pen, she would type with one finger on a computer so that she could communicate and support others.

Norm Beckenham also gave countless hours in support of Ev as well as those he gave to the work of GFS in general.

After many years of research Ev wrote a book named "A Faithful Journey – The story of GFS in the Diocese of Sydney". It was published in 2006. It is a marvelous history of the many women who have worked tirelessly in GFS to share their faith to girls and women.

Evelyn Beckenham was a caring Christian woman, who was actively involved in her local church. Ev's skills were numerous. She was a very talented craftswoman who used her talents to benefit others.

Ev was always guided by her daily prayer and reading of the bible. One of her favourite verses was Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens me."

Despite health problems, she never gave in to self-pity, and continued to serve others. Evelyn was an example to all who knew her of loving concern demonstrated in her selfless actions to help others, but without any thought of reward.

