

“And all shall be well”

On Saturday 20 November, a group of ANZASW members attended a Celebration of the life of one our life members Bertha Zurcher. June Mac Millan has written a biography on Bertha's life and the Wesley Methodist Church was packed with people whose life Bertha had touched in some way, including some of the children she supported. It is clear from her biography that Bertha had many careers but all of them caring for others.

Bertha was born in 1913 as a second generation New Zealander and grew up in Palmerston North. At 12 years of age, she found herself having to takeover the Zurcher household and work on the family farm. Bertha became involved in the Methodist Church. Methodism offered her well balanced role models that set the course for future service to others.

Bertha trained as a nurse in Wellington from 1943-1946 and then moved to Auckland later to Invercargill to complete maternity training. She returned to work in Palmerston North to do district nursing for five years. She was offered post-graduate study for a year and was then offered the position of Assistant Medical Social Worker at Palmerston North Hospital. Merv Hancock became Bertha's supervisor.

When the Social Work Association was established in 1964, Bertha and Merv were founding members and Bertha was a member of the original Education and Training Standing Committee and was keen to see social workers gain professional qualifications. During her time as a social worker, Bertha kept abreast of the field of social work through attending NZASW national conferences. In recognition of her contribution to the development of professional social work, Bertha was awarded Life Membership of the Association.

Bertha retired from the position as senior medical social worker at the age of sixty and began another innovative phase of her life into a mode of family support service for Methodist Social Services. This was a voluntary service in the order of St. Stephen which is normally for one year but Bertha found it so satisfying that she continued for 13 years. She was well known for living in a caravan parked around town while she assisted families in need with everyday

living tasks. She had a special gift with children. She assisted hundreds of families during this time.

Bertha embraced all the learning opportunities available to her during her full life. To assist with the development of the Home Help Service, she travelled to a Conference in Stockholm and in 1982; she assisted the Methodist Centre to sponsor the first national conference on Home Support held at Massey University.

Bertha was involved in numerous other 'helping' and ministry services over her lifetime and these did not stop once she retired from home care. She became a visitor to those in need and travelled from one end to town to the other on her mobility scooter. Bertha now lives at the Brightwater Home in Palmerston North and at the age of ninety six she still attends her Book Club.

Bertha's Celebration was testimony to the esteem in which her friends, family and extended family / whanau hold this remarkable, yet humble woman. As social workers, we agreed that great social work and social workers should be celebrated more often.

Mary Nash, Mary Ann Baskerville and Helen Simmons



Pictured are Jackie Sayers, Erica Henderson, Debbie Green, Helen Simmons, Mary Nash, Bertha, Merv Hancock, Lee Hefford and Mary Ann Baskerville - all members of ANZASW that attended the launch of Bertha's story.