



Speech made Jennifer Collins (Non -Member Director and former Deputy Commissioner NSW, Department of Veterans' Affairs) at the AGM on Thursday 27th August 2020.

The story of the Guild is a story about women helping women and holding governments accountable. It was established by Jessie Vasey in 1945 and the mission was to improve the financial and social circumstance for women.

Mrs Vasey was a very strategic thinker. In 1955 she was concerned that the states were limiting who should become members. She was that concerned that she throw down the gauntlet in 1956 at a public meeting and stated " We are now becoming an older women's group and I feel that if we remain as such the organisation we will die" . She believed the added strength of greater numbers and the number of able women working to achieve benefits and support was critical.

She said, "We must become an inclusive group if we are to survive". Very, very wise words from **your** founder from 65 years ago. And very relevant for today's discussion.

Nothing has changed in our mission; the Board is very focussed on you as members and will continue to advocacy and implement support and services for you as our members.

A BIT OF HISTORY

The term War Widow was introduced in legalisation in 1914.

Our members are Widows both from death of their partners from war injuries or from non-war service in a true sense, our members are not all war widows. Many of you are members because your partner died of war injuries or died many years after they returned from war.

These days most of our widows under the VEA are classified as War Widows because their partner served in the ADF and have not seen war. This law was introduced in **1976** over 44 years ago and their benefits are the same as a war widow.

NSW was the first state to accept these widows in September 1977 with National finally agreeing to the membership in 1986. Success a last.

For example, a wife of 55 years old of a serving member 58 who has a training accident in Darwin. She is awarded a DVA war widows' pension and becomes a member in 1976. She initially was refused membership of the WW but become a member in 1977, 45 years ago.

Another example is my niece, Cynthia whose husband whilst in service died from Cancer caused by his non war service at the age of 40. My niece was left with a son aged 10 and is a member of the War Widows.

This person is called a Defence widow

Another example where sailors were cleaning fuel tanks on navy ships and acquired many medical conditions and in some cases death. These widows are classified as war widows, but their partners never seen war like service. He discharged from the Navy and 15 years post service died of service injuries. My Niece Pricilla was awarded a War Widows. She was left three children under 8. She is our member

The person is called non war like widow

Since 2004 just on 16 years widows/widowers who partners were killed in war like services or died due to non-war service (such as training accidents) are not given the title of war widow but a dependant person. These widows are members of the war widows and many think they cannot become members as their partners did not die in war!

This person is called a Dependant

There are five categories of widows

- 1) War Widows
- 2) Defence Widows
- 3) Non war like widows
- 4) Dependants
- 5) Widowers

All of these can be members under our current constitution and in some cases have been members since 1977. The term war widow actually discriminates against 4 of our members category.

Discrimination occurs when a person or a group of people are treated less favourable or are refused membership of an organisation such as Australian War Widows NSW. As a charitable organisation we are required by Law to comply with all state and commonwealth Discrimination Law. We have no choice in this

Jessie Vasey was a very wise lady and we are where we are today because she knew if we did not have the numbers and therefore the strength we would die.

We must become inclusive to ensure your benefits and entitlements are not eroded by any government because of budget deficit (and do think this would not happen) and that our future widows have the same access to services and support as you have enjoyed. We do not know what the future brings but lest we forget our past and we MUST focus on our future.

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