

SHE LIT THE SPARK OF VOLUNTEERISM HISTORICALLY AND TODAY.

I would like to invite Dr Fanny Reading to my Sukkah this year, a ground-breaking Jewish woman who would make a fascinating and educational guest. She is close to my heart as I am a Jewish woman and migrant, musician, scientist and feminist and owe Fanny a debt to her legacy in the Jewish Community. Fanny merged her ethos as a suffragist, her high level education, her Jewish culture and the migrant experience to create a space for the empowerment of women in our community, for women to improve our world. She has created a legacy of women walking, moving and growing in her footsteps through the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW).

Fanny was born into a Russian Jewish family who migrated to Ballarat in 1884. She lit the spark of volunteerism by Jewish women in the Victorian community and beyond that we see historically and today. She was also a University educated musician and then medical doctor at a time when women engaging in higher learning was not the norm. Most interestingly she was an active and important part of the Australian and overseas Suffragette movement.

The Suffragist movement (1830's to 1900's) is considered the first wave of feminism which fought for political power to bring about change for women, including the right to vote and improved working conditions. A movement that believed that women had the potential to contribute as much if not more than men, paving the way for future important achievements for women in society. As a Jewish woman she broke ground by being

highly active in a movement that was largely the domain of white Protestant Anglo-Saxon middle to upper class women. Turning to her community, Fanny, as a highly educated Jewish woman and suffragist integrated her beliefs, experiences and key aspects of Judaism in the formation of a Jewish woman's organisation: the NCJW. Zionism was her initial influence in this endeavour. She embedded in the ethos of the organisation the fundamental Jewish concept of Tikkun Olam: healing the world, and seeing the importance of philanthropy to do so. As a migrant and experiencing the isolation of her family post immigration, she used this personal lens in the ethos that service be provided beyond the Jewish community, be non-discriminatory and include both migrants and the broader Australian society. As an educated woman Fanny brought the concept that any mitzvot performed should be underpinned and informed by education.

Sukkot looks different in COVID-19 2020. We are unable to celebrate fully with our family and community, we are isolated. Having Fanny at my table might reassure me that the isolation she felt as a migrant, as well as any isolation she may have experienced in being a 'first' in so many areas can bring wonderful things. A

reassurance that society and women will continue important work into the future.



Rachael Bareket - Rachael is an author, academic and musician. She is interested in exploring the intersection of Jewish society and female modern orthodoxy.