

SHEILA DRUMMOND AO

Pioneer in speech therapy

SPEECH THERAPIST

Born: April 9, 1915

Died: December 21, 2006

SHEILA Drummond was a national pioneering speech therapist.

Patients enjoyed talking to Sheila, a wonderful listener with a cheerful demeanour.

Her tact and ability to tolerate trying circumstances enabled her patients and their families to relate to her easily.

Once she gave patients her "therapeutic nod" they opened up like a flower.

With her perseverance, capacity to break new ground and strong sense of purpose, Sheila paved the way for speech therapists not only in Victoria but across Australia.

Born Sheila Plumb in Footscray, she was educated at

MacRobertson Girls' High School, in Albert Park.

She spent "one of the happiest years" of her life in classes at the otherwise closed Government House during the Depression.

A brilliant student, Sheila won a teaching scholarship and trained in infant and primary schools.

Her first appointment was back at her old school — Hyde St, Footscray.

In 1939 Sheila was on holiday in Lorne when she met army officer Jack Drummond.

She never forgot the devastating bushfires that year and how she and others stood in the water with suitcases as the flames licked the beach.

Jack and Sheila wed in the Footscray Presbyterian Church in September 1941.

She was shattered when Jack died suddenly in 1946.



Sheila Drummond

However, Jack's death was the catalyst for a new chapter in her life and she enrolled in Melbourne's first speech therapy course.

She completed the course but then discovered there were no positions available for speech therapists.

Sheila set about, sometimes without pay — first with the Repatriation Department and then with the Eye and Ear Hospital and colleges — opening clinics.

In this respect, she was a pioneer in the field of speech therapy, later known as speech pathology.

She was a founding member of the Australian College of Speech Therapists and served in several capacities in various professional groups.

She was the driving force behind the college's journal and one of the first to practise privately in Melbourne.

In 1966 she was awarded a fellowship from the college for outstanding work with laryngectomy patients.

The next year she became the first speech therapist to be awarded a fellowship of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust.

The fellowship gave her a chance to visit many countries and study the methods of treatment in her fields.

As president of the Speech Pathology Private Practitioners' Association (Victoria) she was instrumental in the final draft of the association's constitution.

Always ready to share her knowledge and help others to learn, she opened her home for day, evening and weekend seminars and workshops. She became a life member of Speech Pathology Australia.

In 1989 Sheila was honoured with an Order of Australia for her services as a speech therapist among disabled people.

She devised and made much of her own equipment, including puppets and other toys which she used in her work to stimulate and educate child patients.

From 1990 Sheila was a member of Quota International, an organisation linking people of all ages, occupations and nationalities in a network of service and friendship.

Quotarians are known especially for their service to the deaf, hard-of-hearing and speech-impaired and disadvantaged women and children.

Sheila convinced Quota members in the South Pacific to pool resources and set up a bursary program for speech and hearing-related study.

The scholarship is now a major awards program which benefits students from New Zealand as well as Australia.

Her hobbies included gardening, flower arrangement, travel, discussion, hats, knitting, crocheting and tapestry.

Sheila, 91, died at Broughton Hall, Camberwell, of natural causes.