



Suffrage stories

Helen became a fervent temperance worker after seeing how alcohol damaged the lives of children she taught in Dunedin Sunday School. Temperance was a social movement which promoted abstinence from alcohol due to the damage it caused to individuals, families and society.

Through her temperance work, Helen became involved in women's suffrage. She believed that if women could vote, they would put men in parliament who could reform society. Helen helped lead the movement in Dunedin. She corresponded regularly with Kate Sheppard and John Hall, wrote to the local press and spoke at public meetings.

Helen was good friends with Harriet Morison, secretary of the Dunedin Tailoresses' Union (DTU). This union worked to overcome poor conditions and pay for Dunedin's female workers. Helen and Harriet successfully turned these workers into suffragists. Suffrage petitions were circulated in shops and factories. Dunedin had the highest number of signatures of anywhere in New Zealand and two-thirds of these came from working women.

In the late 1890s, Helen pulled back on her public activities to concentrate on bringing up her three nephews. But in 1914 she wrote that she 'never regretted spending the best years of my life in working to secure the enfranchisement of our New Zealand women'.

Helen Nicol

1854-1932



■ Helen Nicol and her family outside her home at 16 William Street, Dunedin, c. 1897. Credit: 1/4-065784-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.



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