

## A Brief History of the Girls' Brigade



### The beginning

It was a particularly cold Saturday afternoon in Dublin, Ireland and the girls of the Sandymount Presbyterian Church were practicing for the upcoming choral singing competitions. However the girls were finding it really difficult to sing through their shivers so their leader, Miss Margaret Lyttle, suggested that they should do some physical exercises to warm up, and this did the trick. The girls enjoyed doing the exercises so much that they asked if this could be included every week. One of the girls had a brother in The Boys' Brigade so suggested that their group could be called The Girls' Brigade. The year was 1893. This was the same year as New Zealand women won the right to vote in the Parliamentary General Elections.

Similar organisations were established for girls in Scotland (The Girls' Guildry) in 1900 and in England (The Girls' Life Brigade) in 1902. In 1964 these three groups amalgamated and became known as The Girls' Brigade.

### Girls' Life Brigade Comes to New Zealand

The first Girls' Life Brigade Company (GLB) began at the Caversham Baptist Church in Dunedin in 1928. There is still a Girls' Brigade Company called 1<sup>st</sup> Dunedin there today (2018). On the roll of the founding members the name of the Sunday School attended is included. There were 2 Presbyterians, 8 Baptist, 10 Methodists, 1 Salvation Army and 1 Brethren.

The couple responsible for founding this GLB Company were Horace and Ada Grocott.

The Grocotts had spent five years as missionaries in Bolivia but the high altitude and the primitive living conditions had taken a heavy toll on their health and they were required in return to NZ bitterly disappointed but expecting in faith that God would open new doors for them. Horace had a real heart for providing positive recreational opportunities for boys in Caversham eventually opening a Boy's Life Brigade Company. With the boys now sorted Horace began to work on his wife, a quiet retiring person, to establish a GLB Company. Girls were also asking for a girls' version of the Boys' Brigade for themselves. You may be surprised to know that there was

strong opposition from the ladies of the church who considered it unseemly for girls to take part in any sort of physical activities.

### The Growth Years

Although she was not really a front line person, and it was actually her daughter who stepped into the role of Company Captain (Senior Leader), today we would describe Ada as having the gift of administration, and it was her dream to have GLB Companies throughout NZ. She spent much time writing and dispatching leaflets to churches, but it was two long years before a second Company was established. From then on the network expanded and in 1963 just before the amalgamation there were 368 Companies in NZ with 17,256 girls and 1,229 leaders.

### Recent times

The number of Girls' Brigade Companies in NZ has been in decline in recent years, having reduced to 90 Companies at the time the new iconz4girlz programme was introduced in 2009; and down to 70 Companies by 2014.

iconz4girlz espouses the same aims and principles as GB and honours the pioneers of the movement by sharing their vision for the girls of New Zealand based on their motto 'Seek, serve and follow Christ'.



GLB National Council Dunedin circa 1935. Ada Grocott front row, second from right.