

HISTORY OF ASSISTANCE LEAGUE®

Assistance League was the first nonprofit, nonpolitical, nonsectarian organization founded in the West to recognize the potential of volunteers in helping those less fortunate to a better, more meaningful life. Today, chapters across America address the emotional and physical needs of children and adults of all ages regardless of race or creed.

Mrs. Hancock Banning, was born Anne Ophelia Smith in 1871 in Los Angeles. Her mother, Susan Glassell Patton came to Los Angeles in 1865 as a widow. Susan married Attorney George Hugh Smith, who was a former beau and also a classmate of her late husband. They had two children: Eltinge Hugh who died at an early age and Anne. Anne was educated at home until age 12 when her mother died, and she was sent to Virginia to live with her parents' family. At 18, she returned to Los Angeles, and in 1890, married Hancock Banning, son of Los Angeles pioneer Phineas Banning.

Anne Banning was a member of a small group of prominent Los Angeles ladies who did local charitable work beginning in the early 1890's. In April 1906, Mrs. Banning responded to the San Francisco earthquake and fire by organizing a relief unit, calling it Assistance League. The next year, the newspaper reported the ladies "wished to be a permanent organization and be of assistance to everyone who needs it." As America entered the war in Europe, Anne Banning organized the Los Angeles Red Cross unit in 1917 and served as Director. Its fundraising unit was the Red Cross Shop, which became the model for thrift shops across the country, using Anne Banning's printed guidelines.

In 1919, Mrs. Hancock Banning organized Assistance League of Southern California, also known as Founder Chapter. Anne Banning and a group of twelve friends, including Ada Edwards Laughlin, formed Assistance League to provide food and clothing for local families severely impacted by World War I. The first offices were downtown and in 1923 new headquarters were purchased in the Hollywood neighborhood where Founder Chapter remains today. The first services were Good Samaritan, Day Nursery, Girls' Club and Theatre for Children. Film Location Bureau, Attic Tearoom, Women's Exchange and Trousseau Shop provided the revenue. These projects, originating between 1920 and 1930, were pioneer services emulated by both public and private agencies.

As needs in adjoining communities were recognized, other organizations wished to follow this philanthropic philosophy. Anne Banning and Ada Laughlin organized National Assistance League® in 1935 to promote the growth of effective volunteerism

through leadership training and education. The first office was located in a room provided by Founder Chapter in the Day Nursery building. Nine organizations, including Junior Charity League of San Pedro and the Glendale and Pasadena auxiliaries of Founder Chapter, petitioned to be chartered as chapters of National Assistance League. By the time Anne and Ada retired in 1948, there were chapters in San Pedro, Santa Ana, Santa Monica, Long Beach, Pasadena, Glendale, Pomona Valley, San Bernardino and Santa Barbara.

Mrs. Banning continued as President of Founder Chapter and National Assistance League through 1948. National Assistance League was incorporated in August 1949 as an organization separate from Assistance League of Southern California. The first meeting of the National Council was held in September 1949 with representatives and alternates from 10 chapters in attendance.

In 1951, Anne Banning died and Ada Edwards Laughlin retired from social and civic affairs due to illness. The number of chapters increased and the expanded areas were divided into regions. Assistance League of San Mateo County was the first chapter outside of Southern California (1953). In 1958, Assistance League of Denver became the first chapter in Colorado and the first outside of California to be chartered. That same year Assistance League of Bakersfield was chartered, bringing with it the philanthropic project Operation School Bell[®], formed by member Ruth Ann Montgomery and her Volunteer Service Guild.

"Interim Regions" were established until three or more chapters in a region were chartered. The first meeting of Region I Council was held in 1956 with representatives of 22 chapters attending. In 1967, with 42 chapters of the national organization, the United States was divided into six regions and grew to eight regions. In June 1996, the regions were realigned into districts.

Anne Banning felt it was fine to serve youth, but important for youth to serve. Informal "girl groups" began in the 1930's and were consolidated in 1944. Shirley Temple was a member of the Beverly Thrifties who supported the thrift shop. In 1959, guidelines were prepared for auxiliaries of members under the age of twenty-one. The name "Assisteens[®]" was adopted in 1961 and registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark office in 1965. The first Assisteens Assembly was held in 1964 with 18 auxiliaries represented.

In 1965, a cottage at 5538 Fernwood Avenue was purchased by National Assistance League for its headquarters. In 1970, a four-unit apartment building at 5627 Fernwood

Avenue was purchased and remodeled for headquarters, following the sale of the cottage to Founder Chapter. Seven years later, with the increased expansion of Assistance League, the Executive Committee approved the recommendation to build a larger building on the same property. In 1982, the new headquarters was dedicated by Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley. In June 2003, the building was sold and the national organization moved to office space in Burbank, CA.

In 1985, the first fifty years of service were celebrated. The golden chain of chapter links, which then encompassed 72 chapters in 17 states, represented 16,155 dedicated volunteer members.

The first issue of the National Assistance League Newsletter was published in 1957 and continued as *NewsLink*. The names National Assistance League and Assistance League were registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark office in 1962. In 1998, Operation School Bell was adopted as the national project. The next year a website www.nal.org was launched.

Convention 2003 introduced members to the new brand that makes a strong visual appeal and with the intent to unite all chapters nationally. The national website was updated and renamed www.AssistanceLeague.org. Many chapters have formed partnerships and associations with large corporations that not only help local chapters, but increase recognition of the national organization. Continued growth in 2009 has brought the number of chapters and guilds to 122 with more than 26,000 member volunteers who give 2.6 million service hours, return \$36 million to local communities and assist 1.2 million people in need.

Through the gift of service to their communities, Assistance League chapters continue to fulfill Anne Banning's philosophy of volunteer service: "To act as a friend at any and all times to men, women and children in need of care, guidance and assistance, spiritually, materially and physically." Today, Assistance League is a national nonprofit organization that puts caring and commitment into action through community-based philanthropic programs.