

## **Dr Leonard James Tierney**

O.A.M.

Born: May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1925 Died: April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1996

Len Tierney was a leader in Social Work at the University of Melbourne from 1961 until his retirement in 1990. He was appointed Reader in Charge in 1964. For Len, social work was a vocation requiring life-long commitment, a vision with which he imbued several generations of graduates, many of whom became leaders in education and practice. Len was a practitioner and scholar with a broad vision of social work's goals and means. He promoted a thorough and wide-ranging curriculum at both pre-service and advanced levels, building a thriving school of social work with the first major post-graduate program of social work education in the country. He stamped the identity of the school as having a clear commitment to practice-based research, theoretical rigour and engagement with the field.

A country boy from a large family on a soldier settlement farm in the Mallee, Len valued the place of family and ties between kith and kin, compassion, dignity and independence within a civil society. He lived independently in Melbourne from an early age, supporting himself at university until he graduated from the University of Melbourne with a Bachelor of Arts and a Diploma of Social Studies in 1947. Actively pursuing further education abroad, he subsequently obtained a Masters Degree and later a Doctorate from Columbia University School of Social Work in New York, in addition to research experience in the U.K.

Len's work with families in post-war emergency housing in the 1950s strengthened his enduring compassion and respect for 'excluded' families struggling with the many crises of daily living. This experience directly informed his doctoral dissertation *Excluded Families* and influenced much of his later scholarship. Although his scholarly and community contributions were diverse, he worked and wrote most extensively in family and child welfare, a field in which he was an inspirational mentor for many scholars and community-based researchers. His ground-breaking 1964 book *Children Who Need Help: An analysis of why children become Wards of the State* provided a basis for substantial and continuing developments in both out-of-home care for children and services to families in difficulty.

Throughout his professional life, Len was an active member of many government and non-government community organisations; advising, teaching, consulting, researching and sitting on many Boards of Management. He was made an Honorary Life Member of the Australian Association of Social Workers, received the Victorian Council of Social Services Award for service to the Victorian Community in 1971, and an Order of Australia Medal in 1992.