

## Marie Coleman AO PSM

Marie Coleman is a tireless campaigner for paid parental leave, access to quality affordable childcare, increased workforce participation rates and single parent families. Feminist, community activist, educator, researcher, public servant and journalist, Marie is not afraid to call governments to account on policies which discriminate against women and low income families. Marie's public activism has taken many forms. Her responses to the federal budget have reached national circulation via the entire Fairfax online stable (*Age*, *SMH*, *Brisbane Times* and *Canberra Times*), where her criticism of the erosion of universal paid parental leave has been incisive. Her call for 'radical re-thinking about public policy and women' (*SMH* 13 May 2015) characteristically captures the feminist zeitgeist. Her contribution to community activism has been longstanding, sustained, and of national significance.

Marie Coleman has achieved a number of important firsts: she was the first woman to head a Commonwealth Government statutory agency, and the first woman to hold the powers of Permanent Head under the Public Service Act. She was founding Secretary of the National Foundation for Australian Women, one of the NFAW Board of Directors who worked to establish the Australian Women's Archives Project (AWAP), and remains active in community organisations and public life in her retirement. She was awarded the Public Service Medal in 1989 for contributions to public administration, the Centenary Medal in 2001, and an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2011 "[f]or distinguished service to the advancement of women, particularly through the National Foundation for Australian Women and the Australian Women's Archives Project." Marie is also named in the Victorian Parliament's Honor Roll of Women, in recognition of services to Victoria and the Nation.

Marie was born in Dubbo, New South Wales. She was educated initially by correspondence, and later at Dubbo Primary School, Orange Primary School, Orange High School, and Lithgow High School. Marie undertook an Arts degree at University of Sydney, majoring in Economics and Philosophy, followed by a Diploma in Social Studies. From 1950-1952 she was a resident of Women's College. During her University career she was a member of the Student Representative Council, the Board of Manning Clark House, and editor of the student newspaper *Honi Soit*—at that time only the second woman to hold that position. She represented the University in district women's cricket and Inter-Varsity women's cricket, as well as Inter-Varsity and international debating.

Marie held a variety of roles during her long career in public life: she was a teacher, a scriptwriter for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and a medical social worker. She held successive roles as Director of the Victorian Council of Social Service, Head of the Social Welfare Commission, Special Adviser in the Social Welfare Policy Secretariat, and Director of the Office of Child Care. Marie's contributions in this sector are impressive: during the period of her appointment the Commonwealth commenced support for Aboriginal Child agencies, expanded provision of full day care and out-of-school-hours care services and programs, as well as childcare in women's and youth refuges.

Later roles include Acting Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies in Melbourne and First Assistant Secretary to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Community Services, as well as Director of the Indigenous Social Development Institute and most recently Chair of the Advisory Board to the Hindmarsh Education Centre, at the Quamby Youth Detention Centre,

Australian Capital Territory. Marie retired from the Australian Public Service in 1995, recommencing journalism as a regular columnist with *the Canberra Times* until 2003.

Marie Coleman's strong contributions to the University during her student days were clearly a harbinger of great things to come. As a public campaigner she has used her voice for improving the status of women and families through her senior roles in the Australian Public Service, and she has continued to voice the considerable weight of her opinion unstintingly, and for the greater public good, until the present day.