

Pioneer women psychologists in the New Zealand Psychological Society

Betty Bernardelli

Betty Bernardelli was the first woman to sit on the NZPsS Council. An immediate priority for the new Council was to begin discussions with the Ministry of Health and the Parliamentary Law Drafting Office on a Psychologists Bill to protect the public through registration of psychologists. Betty was one of three Council representatives appointed to begin this dialogue.

She had studied at Cambridge University but at that stage women were allowed to study and sit exams but received only titular degrees to acknowledge their achievement. It was not until 1948 that Cambridge finally conferred degrees on the more than 900 women who had graduated from Girton and Newnham colleges, including Betty Bernardelli.

Betty had a strong background in physiological, and psychology had been officer in charge of psychological testing in the Royal Air Force during WWII. She and her economist husband Harro came to take up positions at the University of Otago in 1948.

Betty was head of the psychology laboratory at Otago until she was invited by Professor Barney Sampson to take up a senior lectureship at the University of Auckland in 1962. Her appointment as a married woman to a senior position is reported to have been seen as real progress for women in academia. In earlier generations women had been single when they were appointed and usually resigned if they married. At Auckland she is said to have been especially supportive of senior women students. She taught BSc and BCom classes in the Department of Psychology and post-graduate papers in the history of Psychology. In 1976 she took over administration of the Behavioural Science programme at the Auckland School of Medicine and taught there until 1984.

Pioneer women psychologists in the New Zealand Psychological Society

Dame Reubina Ann Ballin *ONZ, DBE*



Ann Ballin became the first woman president of the Society in 1979. Over the following years she also became our most decorated member. In 1982 she was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for her services to the disabled and was promoted to Dame Commander in 1993 for services to the community. Ann received the New Zealand 1990 Commemoration Medal and was awarded an honorary LittD degree by the University of Canterbury in 2001. She was appointed a member of the Order of New Zealand in 2002.

Ann was a pioneer and a high-achiever from an early age. She suffered from a neurological condition that required her to use a wheelchair for mobility from her mid-teens. She gained a BA from the University of Canterbury in 1961 and graduated MA in 1964. She worked as a student counsellor at the University of Canterbury from 1974 to 1986. She was a life-long advocate for people with disabilities and for victims' rights. She chaired the Victims' Task Force from 1988 to 1993, pioneering changes in the criminal justice system to improve justice for victims of crime. Between 1987 and 1995, she chaired the New Zealand Council for Recreation and served on the Hillary Commission on recreation and Sport from 1987 to 1990.

From 1987 to 1988, she was a member of the Royal Commission on Social Policy and between 1980 and 1982 she was chairperson of the national committee of the International Year of Disabled Persons.

Dame Ann died in 2003 and continues to be recognised by the NZPsS in the Ballin Award. This is presented every four years to a Member or Fellow of the Society who is deemed to have made a notably significant contribution in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context to the development or enhancement of clinical psychology.

Pioneer women psychologists in the New Zealand Psychological Society

Dr Aloma Parker



Aloma Parker was the second woman to become President of the Society in 1984. She joined the Society in 1971, just three years after it transitioned from being a branch of the BPS. She was Chair of the Auckland Branch from 1975 to 1981 and at various times served on the Professional Issues and Ethics committee and complaints committees. This was a time of the civil rights movement and great social change, and she successfully moved a remit to establish a Women's Division in 1976. Aloma was President of the Society from 1984 to 1985.

Aloma enrolled at Victoria University of Wellington in 1966 at a time when universities did not cater for mothers so helped set up the VUW creche in 1968. She graduated from the first Auckland DipClinPsych programme in 1976 and completed a PhD in 1979. She had developed a strong interest in women's issues and began working in sex therapy, women's sexuality and later eating disorders. From 1996 to 1999 she set up and managed a specialist eating disorders service for the Central Region and developed and ran a multi-disciplinary post-graduate Certificate in Eating Disorders at Victoria University.

She had been the first Manager of Mental Health for Auckland city in 1985, responsible for setting up community residential services and mental health services in the Auckland isthmus for patients and staff moving from wards in Carrington Hospital. Since 1999 she has been involved in developmental evaluation for the Ministry of Health to ensure people with disabilities are receiving quality care in community residential services.