

PROFILE: Val French AM MLitStd BA

Born in 1927, Val is a journalist by profession and inclination in radio, television and print. She was brought up in NSW mental hospitals where her father was a psychiatrist involved in reform mental hospital system. She was educated in Sydney, graduating from Sydney University, and later the University of Queensland.

Professional Career

She also taught at Queenwood School and Ravenswood College before moving to Queensland in her late twenties, where she has worked in and with the media ever since.

She was one of the first female current affairs interviewers, and worked in radio and print journalism.

She taught in the English Department at the University of Queensland, and co-designed and taught the journalism course at QIT (now QUT), lecturing there for 19 years until 1988, including 10 years broadcasting news and current affairs daily with her students for radio 4EB

Voluntary Work

When she came to Queensland in the fifties she introduced debating to the girls' schools, and founded the Portia Club to train women in debating and public speaking.

In the sixties she introduced debating into the prisons and established a school and self-help organisation in Queensland prisons, running a media campaign to get the old Boggo Road replaced.

In the seventies she was co-founder of Women's Radio, and successfully working for the rights of women in the media and ensuring placements in the media for her QIT students.

In the eighties she was vice president of the Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill, and of the Queensland Association of Mental Health, representing Queensland on the National Mental Health Association, helping

to have the mentally ill recognised as having a disability and therefore able to receive pensions.

She initiated the concept of a Council of Carers, and with a small group of volunteers established the Council of Carers which later became the Queensland Carers Association, and also the National Carers Association.

She also chaired the Queensland branch of the Commonwealth Forum for the Aged and then the Older Australian's Advisory Council in the nineties, and the Appeals Committee for nursing homes.

She served on the Home and Community Care, the Rural Health and Women's Health committees.

As president of the voluntary advocacy organisation Older People Speak Out (OPSO) since it began in 1993 she travels with members to seek the issues of older people and takes these to state and federal governments or finds local solutions. She trains seniors' organisations in working with the media. She represents older people on the Qld Road Safety Ministerial Advisory Committee and the Seniors Police Task Force [on crime against seniors] and is an active member of committees on elder abuse prevention, grandparents bringing up grandchildren, nursing homes, seniors housing and intergenerational projects such as the OPSO 'Granfriends' program. She continues to speak in the media as part of her advocacy role. She supervises tertiary students in research projects on older people.

As part of this role she worked for 10 years with Aged Care Queensland to introduce and develop accreditation for the retirement villages.

She initiated and helps organise the OPSO Positive Ageing Media Awards which OPSO has conducted since 1994. She is one of the foundation members of the Queensland Roundtable which presents older peoples' issues to the Queensland Government. She was one of the delegates to the 2020 Summit and was a member of the recent Harmer Pension Review Committee in Canberra to increase pensions, and a member of the Consultative Forum on Mature-Age Participation in the workforce.

She is patron of Brisbane Seniors on Line and on the board of Volunteering Queensland.

From 1950 her focus has been social change and the empowerment of people. Empowerment topics included: teaching debating to girls in schools, prison reform, Women's Radio and the first Women in the Media Conference, fighting for the rights of women journalists. She represented Qld on the Australian National Association of Mental Health, was vice-president of the Qld Association of Mental Health and of Qld Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally , co-founder and foundation president of the Queensland Council of Carers (now Qld Carers Association) and was on the foundation committee of Carers Australia

She was Qld chair of the Commonwealth Forum for the Aged, and then the Commonwealth Older Australians Advisory Council in the 1990s, chaired the Nursing Home Appeals Committee in Qld in mid '90s and was a surveyor for retirement village accreditation from 1996 for 10 years.

She was awarded as Member of the Order of Australia in 2001, received a Commonwealth Senior Achiever Award, has a Centenary Medal, and was a finalist in the Senior Australian of the Year Awards in 2006, and 2007.