

## Ms Jan Owen AM

The honorary degree of Doctor of Letters was conferred upon Jan Owen AM by the Pro-Chancellor at the Faculty of Education and Social Work graduation ceremony held in the Great Hall at 9.30am on Friday 11 April 2014.

Ms Owen gave the occasional address at the ceremony.

Jan is CEO of the Foundation for Young Australians and a significant community leader whose work continues to influence and shape public policy and the ways in which services, institutions and organisations engage with children and young people.

### Citation

Pro-Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to commend Jan Owen AM to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*). Jan has distinguished herself as a pioneer of the youth sector, social innovation and venture philanthropy.

Jan's strong sense of social justice was instilled early. As a young girl she often accompanied her parents – who were involved in the establishment of Lifeline – to crisis situations, including domestic violence, bringing women and children to settle into their family home until they got back on their feet. Those experiences instilled within her a profound commitment to redressing social disadvantage. When Jan started working with disadvantaged young people she quickly formed the view that she would focus her efforts on systemic change. This led her to engage in policy and advocacy as Chair of the National Youth Council of Australia and, at 24, as President of the Youth Affairs Council of Australia.

Jan went on to establish the CREATE Foundation, the consumer body for young people in foster care. Adopted herself, she has deep empathy with children in care. Through her work she saw that these intensely vulnerable children and young people had no voice when decisions were being made about their own lives or the system of care that stood as *loco parentis* to them. Starting with a small grant and working from her home garage, Jan built CREATE to a national organisation with staff, which included young people from care themselves, in every State and Territory. As a result, young people in care today are more involved in decision-making about their own lives, and are key stakeholders in system reform and development.

In 2000, Jan's service to children and young people was recognised by her appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia and a Peter Drucker Foundation fellowship for leadership and innovation, the first non-US citizen to receive such a honour.

As Executive Director at Social Ventures Australia, which broke new ground in social investment and venture philanthropy in Australia, Jan brought corporate partners, leading philanthropists and social entrepreneurs together to develop solutions to some of our community's most pressing challenges. Jan convened the Social Enterprise World Forum in Australia in 2009 and was instrumental in establishing the School for Social Entrepreneurs, which now operates across the country.

As Chief Executive of the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), Jan has overseen significant growth in the prominence and standing of the organisation as an independent, non-profit inspiring and supporting over 200,000 young people to shape their education and create social change.

The University, as one of the partners in the innovative \$30M Bridges to Higher Education initiative, has been proud to work with Jan to improve the participation of students from disadvantaged communities into higher education.

In 2012, Jan was awarded the inaugural Australian Financial Review and Westpac Group overall Woman of Influence title. The panel said about her nomination: "It is the breadth of Owen's work and her commitment to energising Australia's youth that makes her a compelling choice as winner." Jan is the author of *Every Childhood Lasts a Lifetime* and the upcoming book *The Future Chasers* to be released this year.

Jan's great contribution to Australian public life is her passion and belief in young people. She brings an unrelenting optimism about the courage, imagination and will of our young people, together with a great sense of urgency, to create initiatives that unleash this energy, challenge social disadvantage, and ultimately

contribute to shaping the future of Australia.

Pro-Chancellor, I have great pleasure in presenting Jan Owen AM for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa), and I invite you to confer the degree upon her.