

Rally Day ²⁰²¹



“I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.” *Audre Lorde*

Clare Coleman '92, is at the forefront of fighting for all women (and men) to have access to high quality and accessible family planning and sexual health care. For over a decade, in various roles, she has been at center stage in political debates over reproductive health, rights and justice. She has skillfully championed for equal access to care and over the last 10 years, growing the National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association to over 850 organizations around the country. To do all of this, she has used her excellent public speaking skills, her gift for empathy and advocacy, and her passion for working on behalf of all women no matter the circumstances under which they live. She is regularly quoted in The Washington Post, CBS News, and U.S. News & World Report, and Huffington Post.

Anyone who has known Clare since her days at Smith is not surprised by her accomplishments. For those of us who knew her at Smith or right after (like me), her natural passion for people, willingness to speak up and fight, and love for life shone through even then. The question was only to what issue would she apply these talents? Working as a new alum on Capitol Hill only honed her analytical and policy and advocacy skills. We should all be grateful that she chose women's issues and specifically family planning and reproductive health.

Throughout her rise professionally, she has maintained her connection to Smith. Clare says Smith helped her challenge her assumptions and exposed her to a wider range of women than she had met previously. She has continually come back to campus, shared information with students and supported students in their endeavors. Clare has been extraordinarily generous with her time.

One of her nominators described Clare's visits to the campus: Clare held the students' rapt attention as she spoke about her career path. She had rarely seen such an engaged student audience. Clare was able to help the students distinguish between reproductive health, rights, and justice. She stayed late to talk to every single student who had questions, offering specific resources and advice. She demonstrated to Smith students and alums the same type of dynamism and commitment that she puts to her work. Clare has helped coordinate site visits for students to explore careers in the field of reproductive health. Her ability to connect with students is proven. She is a rock star!

In the last four years, Clare has had to fight even harder to protect family planning access, especially after the former administration changed the way federal funds are used in supporting family planning. Her tools included suing the federal government to change the rules being applied to title X, the only federal funding source dedicated to family planning. The current administration is luckily proposing more dollars for family planning services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Clare and her organization are alongside them, pushing for real change. And add to this work, her advocacy for women who have been hurt disproportionately by the pandemic.

Smith College is proud to honor Clare Coleman as a 2021 Medalist. She exemplifies how a liberal arts education can support its students to create incredible change in our world. Women in this country should be thankful that we have Clare fighting for our rights to family planning and sexual health supports. And she's just getting started. When asked what she sees as her future endeavor: "There's good to be had and good to be done. The question is: Are we going to do it?"

Tribute by Medal Committee researcher Dale Robinson Anglin '86