

Professor Marea Nicholson

When you wear as many hats as Professor Marea Nicholson, the difficulty for award committees – not to mention presenters – is knowing which area of involvement to focus on. Should we recognise her work as the Associate Vice-Chancellor of the Australian Catholic University? Or as a Professor of Teacher Education at the same place – the first appointment made to this Chair? A member of government advisory councils? Or an active and passionate advocate for child protection?

While each of Marea's roles could be the stand-alone subject of a presentation and an award, fortunately there is also a common thread running through them. Let me join the dots.

In 2002 Marea completed her PhD on personal safety programs for beginner teachers. This paper provided a foundation for her future work and a consolidation of her past experience in the area of child protection, a field in which she has been a leading figure for over 25 years starting with her early studies in psychology and job as a student counsellor. In 1991 she was awarded the NSW Police Commissioner's Award for her contribution to child protection, reflecting her commitment in this vital field.

In Marea's work advising the NSW government and on non-government councils, she has been instrumental in developing quality standards for teachers across schools, TAFE and universities. A reflection of her success is that the programs she developed have not only been adopted by her own university in degree courses, but also by many other universities in Australia and around the world, that have picked up similar courses in their teacher-training curricula.

So where does this desire to train teachers come from? And how does it link with Marea's PhD, her career and her advisory positions?

Early on in her career, Marea realised that the best way to influence the practices of teachers is to influence their training and, as a result, help protect children. From that starting point, every step on her path has been focussed on that goal. Her foresight, ability to see the bigger picture and make things happen is legendary among her colleagues. One example is that, long before bullying popped up on the radar of community and government consciousness, Marea helped make the first video for young people to address the issue.

The ethical positions Marea takes on many issues ensures their integrity and success. Her advocacy, advice, papers and programs have had tremendous impact on the youth of Australia because they have had a direct effect on the formation of government and teaching policies, as well as law.

Acknowledged internationally and in Australia, Rotary would now add our own recognition of Marea's superb work with the Vocational Excellence Award.