

MEDIA RELEASE

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Child protection advocate Dr Robyn Miller AM accepts honorary doctorate

Australian Catholic University has conferred an honorary doctorate on social worker and family therapist, Dr Robyn Miller AM, for her decades-long work advocating for the protection children and vulnerable families.

The CEO of MacKillop Family Services, who has spent 40 years transforming the lives of victims of child abuse through clinical work and advocacy, accepted a Doctor of the University (Honoris Causa) from ACU on 26 October 2026.

Dr Miller said she was “very humbled and deeply honoured” to be recognised by ACU.

“It came as a total surprise and it is very heartwarming to have social work honoured in this way by the university,” Dr Miller said.

Born and raised in Melbourne, Dr Miller was educated by the Good Samaritan Sisters and initially worked in Catholic family welfare before specialising in child protection support.

Propelled by her Catholic faith and commitment to social justice, Dr Miller has worked at the frontline of the child and welfare sector, supporting victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

The former Chief Practitioner at the Department of Human Services in Victoria served as an expert consultant during the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

“Doing something to make sure that the sexual abuse of children is prevented is something that I have been strongly committed to, and I have been fortunate to be able to contribute to child safeguarding standards more systemically,” Dr Miller said.

Over the course of her career, Dr Miller has witnessed the rise of social media and smart phones cause great harm to children.

While widespread social media use has not changed the fact that most sexual abuse occurs within a family setting by known and trust family members, she said it had widened the circle of potential perpetrators.

“What has changed is the radical increase of unknown adults who target children and young people online, manipulating them and very quickly exploiting them,” she said.

“We are seeing this also in the criminal space, and the largest risk group is peer-to-peer abuse.”

The best intervention, according to Dr Miller, was helping parents deal with issues that put vulnerable children at risk.

“There are usually patterns of unresolved intergenerational trauma, mental health problems, drug and alcohol abuse, partner violence, housing problems, poverty - families who are overwhelmed and struggling,” Dr Miller said.

“If there was a stronger support system with a public health approach, we would have a decrease in child abuse. Child Protection cannot do this alone, and education, health, justice, housing and disability sectors are vital to a more effective community response.”

While child protection work is confronting and comes with immense responsibility, Dr Miller said the children and young people she worked with were “a joy”.

“Their suffering is often beyond words, and I have had a passion to make the justice system more attuned to children and understanding of trauma,” she said.

“I love what we can do together to turn things around and have always found great meaning through the relationships and work with young people and their families through times of trouble.”

Watching young people transform their lives has been profoundly rewarding.

“My proudest moments are when you see a young person regain their confidence and get on with their lives. For example, to go back to school, to know that they are a delight, are not responsible for the abuse, to let go of the shame,” Dr Miller said.

“I delight in their recovery and courage. I feel very privileged that they and their families have trusted me to have been part of their journey.”

ACU Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Zlatko Skrbis said Dr Miller’s leadership in the area of child protection was an inspiration.

“Dr Miller’s leadership in advocating for better outcomes for children, young people and families experiencing vulnerability is exactly the type of transformative leadership and impact that ACU seeks to honour through an honorary degree,” Professor Skrbis said.

“It is also the kind of leadership we strive to cultivate in our students, from the day they step into our lecture theatres.

“We thank Dr Miller for her service and congratulate her on this honour.”

Additional photos available on request.

Media contact: Emilie Ng, 0475 963 606 or emilie.ng@acu.edu.au

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