Freda Briggs – Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs AO to give her her proper due – was, as we all know, a London copper.

She was recruited and trained to work in the care and protection of children, organising children’s courts and child abuse cases.

She saw life’s underbelly - and she did something about it.

She became one of the first mature age students to be accepted at Warwick University where she started teacher training.

Her police experience and her teacher training showed her the importance of identifying children who were being abused and neglected and

as soon as she became a lecturer she introduced students to issues relating to child protection.
In 1975 Freda and her family came to Australia where she became Director of Early Childhood Studies at the State College of Victoria.

This was a pioneering position and the first course of its kind in Australia.

Five years later Freda was appointed Foundation Dean of the De Lissa Institute of Early Childhood and Family Studies at the University of South Australia.

It was here that she established a pioneering multi-professional course in child protection and helped universities the world over to create similar courses.

And while her career took off, her activism grew apace.

She was a vocal and passionate defender of children, particularly vulnerable children.
Her research covered a wide area, from evaluating school-based drug education programs and parent counselling services, to riding with 50 bikers across the top of Australia to raise awareness of child abuse in remote areas.

Hers was an outspoken advocacy and she wasn’t afraid to challenge myths, assumptions and misinformation.

She was a warrior in the cause of protecting society’s most vulnerable, children who were mute and unprotected and at the mercy of those whose power and strength depended upon the smallness of their targets.

She was their voice, their champion. She not only sought to protect children, she sought to heal their wounds and then took steps to stop the abuse from happening.
And she wasn’t afraid of the underbelly. She regularly visited prisons and talked with child sex offenders in order to understand how they manipulate not just the child victims but the adults responsible for the children’s safety.

In 2004, the then Australian Prime Minister John Howard recognised Freda Briggs’ research and expertise with a $10 million endowment for the creation of a National Child Protection Research Centre at UniSA.

Freda was an expert witness in child abuse trials; she advised the Scouts, the Christian Brothers, cadets of the Australian Defence Force and the Anglican and Catholic Churches on the development of child protection protocols and guidelines.

She provided assistance to royal commissions and parliamentary enquiries relating to child protection.
She advised police forces in Australia and New Zealand and was considered one of Australia’s leading experts on child abuse issues.

She wrote more than 20 books on child development and safe parenting,

and she railed against governments, departments and people who, she felt, had let slip the responsibilities with which they had been entrusted.

In an interview she once said:

“My energy probably comes from anger. I get very angry with the way that people, governments and courts treat children. It makes me angry that governments can waste millions of dollars advertising their own policies while departments fail to investigate child abuse cases because they don’t have sufficient resources.”
She never let up.

At the tender age of 85 when she died, she was returning from Europe where she had run workshops and lectures for teachers about the devastating impact child-on-child abuse can have,

and on the way back she spoke in Jakarta about the importance of child safety.

She was due to speak at a public meeting in Mount Gambier, alongside domestic violence advocate Rosie Batty, about the impact of family violence.

She never made it.

I’ve said before that Freda was an inspiration and a role model for students studying in the field of child development.
We’re doing our bit to further her legacy with a memorial fund to support higher degree scholarships for child protection in law, education or social work.

But for now, today, I would ask all of you to be inspired by Freda – not just to chase academic excellence, because we expect that.

No, today I want you all – academic and non-academic alike - to be inspired by Freda’s activist self, to be aware of the children around you, kids in the street, kids in the playground, kids anywhere you find them.

And if you see anything amiss, in Freda Briggs’ name, do something about it.