



The MacKillop Family Services Western Region brings together the St Anthony's and St Joseph's programs. The new Regional structure was established in April 2001, by dividing the previous Metropolitan region. The aim was to implement a 'flatter' management structure, able to link more closely with communities and other services in the Western suburbs. The new structure also brings together a unique range of family support services (at St Anthony's) with a broad range of out of home care services for children and young people (at St Joseph's).

For the staff and clients at St Joseph's the change in the regional structure came at the end of a major redevelopment of residential services. A number of group homes were closed, and two new houses with rostered staffing were opened. These changes were motivated by the increased needs of young people needing out of home care, and the difficulty of recruiting carers to live in group homes. The success of this redevelopment was made possible by the goodwill of staff and their willingness to embrace new ways of working.

A review of the foster care service was undertaken in the first part of 2001. The foster care service had developed over many years, through the Sisters of St Joseph Glenroy Babies Home. The review identified both the strengths of the existing service and directions for the future development of our foster care service.

St Anthony's has continued to offer support to families with a range of needs – for families where children would otherwise be placed in care, families coping with the needs of a child with a disability, and situations where parents have substance abuse problems. The support offered by St Anthony's staff and volunteers is based on solid 'tried and true' practice principles, which continue to innovate and adapt to changing needs.

A highlight of the year has been the establishment of "Companion Families", an initiative which will match vulnerable families with volunteer families able to offer emotional, social and practical support. This service is an important extension to St Anthony's work in local communities and in developing links between families and their communities. This service will build on other services such as the Vietnamese parenting group, Placement Prevention Service, and the foster care service.

Funding difficulties have affected some St Anthony's services over the last few months of the financial year. Fortunately these issues have been largely resolved, and St Anthony's is able to look forward to new developments over the coming year.

The challenge ahead for the Western Region will be to further develop links within local communities, and to work with other people and organisations to give all our families and young people the support they need and opportunities for the future.

I would like to thank the Western Region staff whose energy and commitment to children, young people and families ensures the quality of our work. In this International Year of Volunteers I would like to offer particular thanks to the many volunteers involved with MacKillop's work in the region. The families who give a home to children and young people through foster care and Specialised Home Based Care, lead tenants who take on the demanding task of role models, those families becoming part of Companion Families and the many individuals who undertake a myriad of tasks at St Anthony's through the Volunteer Service. The contributions of all these people are greatly valued and add an important extra dimension to our work.

Helen Burt
Regional Director, Western Region

