

### Heritage and Information Service

The Heritage and Information Service continues to be a most sought after and positive service. Not only does it actively connect former residents and clients to their records and personal information, but in doing so connects MacKillop's past to its present.

The Co-ordinator of the Heritage and Information Service, Jenny Glare, sensitively and personally deals with each request for information from former residents and clients. During 2000/01, the number of new requests for information increased substantially over the previous year, with a 20% increase in requests. Every person who made a request for information was spoken with by telephone at least once. Many people from all parts of Australia have visited to receive their information in person, with the visits treated with great delight by the Heritage staff. The photographic collection, in particular, continues to be a great source of interest to former residents. The purchase of a scanner and laminator has greatly enhanced our capacity to provide copies of photographs as requested.

#### Staff:

Five staff – Co ordinator, receptionist/admin; computer entry, archivist, reunions assistant (from March 2000)

**Volunteers:** Two; and thirty volunteers for reunions

### Highlights

- Completion of the computerisation of the client records of the founding agencies of MacKillop Family Services Project. A total of 100,348 client records, dating from 1854 until the formation of MacKillop Family Services on 1 July 1997 comprise this database. Two part-time staff, Madeline Campbell and Carmel Apap, were responsible for achieving this mammoth task.
- Family reunions are always a highlight. During 2000/01 eleven former residents were connected with members of their extended family, the most memorable being the connection between a brother and sister born during the 1920s, who were in care at separate founding agencies.
- The Ian Potter Foundation provided funding for a two year period to enable the Heritage and Information Service to extend its service to former residents wishing to embark on this important journey to their past.

### “Remember When.....” Reunions

The most significant highlight for the Heritage and Information Service has been the “Remember When...” Reunions 2001, a very special project for MacKillop Family Services which the Heritage and Information Service has had the privilege of overseeing.

The series of Reunions was launched on Sunday 29 April 2001 as part of the commemoration of the centenary of the establishment of **St Joseph's Babies Home, Broadmeadows**. More than 800 former residents, former staff and their families joined with the Sisters of St Joseph and MacKillop Family Services at Penola College, Broadmeadows, the site of the former Home.

Other reunions have since been held in July for former residents of St Anthony's Home, Kew and St Joseph's Home, Surrey Hills, and in August 2001 for former residents of St Augustine's Orphanage, Geelong. Other reunions are being held throughout 2001.

The reunions provided the opportunity for people to reconnect with a significant place and significant people from their childhood. Many former residents have re-visited for the first time since their childhood. In other instances, the families of former residents have attended to see where their parents or other relatives grew up.

At each reunion, a short ritual takes place to dedicate a plaque to be placed at each of the original sites of the Home or Orphanage. The wording on the plaque describes the name, date of establishment and location of each place and the number of children residing there, followed by these words:

This plaque commemorates and honours the lives of these children and acknowledges this site as a special and significant place.

At each reunion, there will be an extensive photographic display drawn from the Archives of MacKillop Family Services. Those attending have found this to be especially meaningful and many have been able to recognise themselves as children. At the first reunion, one man found a photograph of himself as a baby in the early 1930s. In the photograph he was being held by a trainee mothercraft nurse. What was more remarkable was that the nurse, who later became a Sister of St Joseph, was present at the reunion and both were able to meet up again after more than 65 years.

#### Extracted from a letter received from a former resident:

*“The reunion was a valuable way of expressing gratitude and also working through some extremely sensitive emotions. I admit to ‘choking up’ on no less than three occasions – I improved as the afternoon wore on, so it must have been therapeutic.”*

