

Chair of the Board's Report

MacKillop Family Services is about families - and essentially it is about children. Our commitment is to those families in greatest need.

Some families have struggled with tragedy and disadvantage for generations. Some families are stretched beyond their limits by the birth of a child, or several children, with a disability. Always, the intention is to assist the parents to do what they can ideally do best – to rear their children.

MacKillop Family Services' objective is to develop even more innovative and effective programs for children who suffer, programs relating to every stage of life for children in greatest need of care and/or protection.

If only this world could be as it should be, we would see children raised in a caring family, and the family surrounded by a caring community. But since MacKillop Family Services has made a commitment to be where need is very great, we know that what 'should' happen sometimes cannot. We are committed to making every effort to support parents to rear their children, whilst being sensitive to cultural and social differences. We try to link families and children to community, especially when isolation is a large part of their problem. But our workers are realistic and professional. Sometimes parents cannot be left to care for their children at home; the risk is sometimes too great.

To the utmost extent possible, a child's own family and surrounding community remain part of the circle of care. Where family and community are not appropriate to providing what the child needs, MacKillop Family Services tries to fashion a safe and caring alternative.

This is an immense task. It requires talent and commitment from staff working as a team. Alternate care for children in a foster family or a small unit with qualified staff is a large component of our work. Where the child cannot be helped in a local school, we have special educational services. Often there is need for a therapeutic approach. Imagining pathways to enable a troubled young person to develop into a responsible adult, and creating a program for this, often takes creativity and a dash of daring.

One such innovation is Cedar Works, a youth training program providing young people with the business and hands-on skills needed to run a venture in restoring antique furniture.

The Pregnancy Support Service, where isolated and very young mothers can be supported during pregnancy and the first years of their child's life, is another program which calls for the commitment and professionalism of our caring staff.

A major concern of MacKillop Family Services is obtaining specialist psychological, medical or educational services for children who have suffered abuse or neglect. We pilot innovative approaches for children in greatest need to achieve the best possible outcomes for their circumstances.

On the other hand, we know unjust structures in society mean the cards are stacked against the most vulnerable families. Where the suffering of children and families is the result of unjust systems there is a moral imperative to advocate for change. Our research makes a valuable contribution to the debate on child and family justice issues in Victoria.

In the coming year, each of these aspects of our work will be a priority.

We will pilot innovative services to assist children coming into care and we will further develop our capacity for research and advocacy to strengthen families.

Each time I come into close contact with one of the MacKillop Family Service programs, I notice an extra dimension which is best described as beyond 'duty of care'. It is a passionate commitment to the vision, to the developing ethos of this agency. It was clearly visible at 'MacKillop the Gathering' in May at St Vincent's School, where staff from across the organisation came together to share details of their programs. Projects were different, but the spirit was the same.

The spirit of MacKillop Family Services is intangible. It is built on a long tradition. It is expressed in the values. **Commitment ...** staying with difficult issues and situations until positive change is evident. **Respect ...** accepting the unique dignity of every person. **Compassion ...** an unqualified embracing of others and their circumstances – an attitude of heart.

I take this opportunity to thank all who identify with MacKillop Family Services, ... the staff, made up of childcare, family care, educational and social workers. All who support the work administratively or manually – together an impressive team, ... the volunteers, ... those who support with donations and gifts, ... those who have used and who continue to use the programs.

Such a large organisation cannot act responsibly without careful planning and accountability, seeking and prudently using scarce resources. I acknowledge the Board and its committees for the generous sharing of their expertise. I acknowledge the members who place such trust in the organisation. In particular I acknowledge the outstanding leadership of Paul Linossier and of the Senior Management Team.

This spirit of MacKillop Family Services connects us all as we move forward in our endeavours for the sake of the children.



**Sr Joan Healy RSJ
Chair
Board of MacKillop
Family Services**