

# Alternate Care (North West) Program

## Who is MacKillop Family Services?

MacKillop Family Services was formed in 1997 with the refounding of seven Victorian child welfare agencies of the Sisters of Mercy, Christian Brothers and Sisters of St Joseph.

We are one of the largest providers of specialist support services to vulnerable and disadvantaged children, young people and their families through five core areas of service:

- » Supporting Families experiencing disadvantage and crisis;
- » Supporting Families raising a child with a disability;
- » Education and training services for children and young people;
- » Services for children and young people who are not able to live at home; and
- » Services for the former residents of our founding agencies.

Our services are clustered in twelve Programs which are in turn grouped into three Divisions. The three Divisions are Barwon Services, Community Programs and Alternate Care. Some 400 staff and 400 volunteers are involved each fortnight in our services across Melbourne and Geelong.

## About this Program

The Alternate Care (North West) Program is part of the Alternate Care Division, which also includes the MacKillop Youth Services (North West) and the Southern Services Programs.

The Alternate Care (North West) Program provides respite, short term and long term home based (foster) care, long term specialized residential care and lead tenant placements and case management support, for children and young people in Melbourne's Northern and Western suburbs.

## The need for this Program

Children or young people need to be protected when they are under threat of physical or sexual violence; emotional or physical neglect; substance abuse or undiagnosed or uncontrolled mental health episodes. In these cases, the children or young people are removed from their family and placed into alternate care. Sometimes families recognize that they need space to resolve a moment of crisis or hardship and they also place their children into our care for a short period of time.

## Services provided

There are three core services provided for the children and young people. A MacKillop case manager is appointed to each child or young person to help them understand what is happening.

### Foster care

This service is generally provided to children from birth to twelve years of age if their behaviours enable them to reside in a family environment.

Volunteer foster carers provide a supportive home environment for these children. The foster care placement can be short term, or long term, depending on whether reunification with the family can be achieved.

Foster carers are well supported by both a MacKillop case manager and a support worker who provides training and encouragement. Foster Carers receive an allowance to cover the additional costs of caring for a child.

### Long term specialist care

Typically, the majority of young people in long term specialist care are between twelve and fifteen years of age. Most have a dual diagnosis of one or more mental health conditions coupled with an intellectual disability.

MacKillop provides a house and staff, who are trained to manage difficult behaviours which require protective interventions.

### Independent living skills

For fifteen to eighteen year olds, we provide services to assist them to exit the alternate care system. At the beginning, these young people live in a MacKillop house staffed by volunteers who provide them with supervision and role modelling.

Ultimately these young people move to independent living. To make this possible living skills instruction is provided by the allocated case manager and other MacKillop staff.





I live with my mummy and daddy. I have another mummy but I don't see her very often. I know that I came from her stomach. I have lived with my mummy and daddy for 5 years and will continue to live here until I am a teenager. I live here and I am happy.

— Jane, Aged 6

## How to contact us

### Alternate Care (North West) Program

Mackillop Family Services

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## Achievements Sought

We work toward reunification of the family where this is possible. To achieve this we have a care team working with the family. Through the engagement of external specialists such as anger management or alcohol and drug addiction counsellors, mental health professionals and social workers specializing in working with adults, we work towards addressing the underlying causes that prevent the child or young person from going home. At all times we try to provide a safe and secure alternative home for the children and young people involved, and to encourage them to express their feelings and issues.