

Former residents and their families

Why do we have this focus?

More than 110,000 children and young people were in the care of MacKillop Family Services founding agencies. For many former residents the record of their time in care is a window to their family's story – often unexplored or hitherto unknown. Similarly their time in care may stand as 'unfinished business' for them and access to their records or story and reunification with friends, family and/or carers can mean both reconciliation and healing.

How we address this identified need

The **Heritage and Information Service** is located at the Office of the Chief Executive Officer in the former St Vincent's Boys' Home at South Melbourne. The service is responsible for the care and management of historical records, the most significant being more than 110,000 records relating to children who were in care in the homes and orphanages that preceded the founding agencies of MacKillop Family Services.

It supports former residents and their families, helping people to piece together their family history, access records and to search for separated family members.

People make contact from all parts of Australia and overseas by telephone, letter and increasingly by email. Many people visit in person and a special part of each visit is looking at the photographic collection (some 8,000 items) related to each of the original homes.

Regular reunions are held for former residents and a bi-annual newsletter which includes their contributions connects people, linking individual experience to a larger story.

Notable achievements this year

This year we received 210 individual requests for access to information and a similar number of requests were received for information about how to go about this task. Many more former residents were involved in our reunions.

- The **Heritage and Information Service** supported reunions for St Augustine's Boys Home, Geelong, St Catherine's Girls Home, Geelong and St Vincent's Girls' and Boys, South Melbourne.
- Small group gatherings were held: a morning tea for older men from St Vincent's Boys' Home, an afternoon tea for 1970s residents of St Joseph's, Surrey Hills, a pizza night for 1960s and 70s residents of St Vincent's and a lunch for women who were at St Vincent's Girls' in the 1940s and 50s
- The **Heritage and Information Service** was recognised by Catholic Social Services Australia in October 2005 being the winner of the Award for Excellence in Service (organisational category). This has led to Ms Jenny Glare, Manager of the Heritage and Information Service, undertaking a part-time secondment to Catholic Social Services Australia to assist the wider Church develop a best practice response consistent with the "Forgotten Australians" recommendations.
- Participation in the Centre for Excellence working party on "Forgotten Australians".
- Participation in the Federal Government's *Forgotten Australians* Conference in June 2006.
- Research project though RMIT commenced exploring the future life



Toni* - Laugh Don't Cry

There two faces on this painting. Two sides to Toni. Her motto is to laugh, don't cry. Toni is into alternate stuff. She likes all of her carers.

impact of being in care as a child. This research is highly significant and much needed.

- Many reunions between separated family members were facilitated.
- The Connect newsletter for former residents was sent to more than 1,500 people.
- We provided consultation and advice to other organisations in the process of establishing services to former residents.

List of current services

Heritage & Information Service – including archival services and reunions.



Group - Youth in the Urban Landscape

A group of twelve young people from St Augustine's Education and Training got together to produce this piece of art. They felt it portrayed their lives, interests, feelings that they have experienced, friendships and relationships they had formed, pressures and influences they have had to deal with and overall how they fit into life.

Patricia's story

There have been many interesting stories that could be told in this annual report. In the year just ended there have been reunions between birth mothers and their adult children, between brothers and sisters, between people who grew up in the homes together, between carers and children who were in care and between former residents and their extended family. Here is one story (name changed to protect her privacy):

Patricia was born in 1940 and spent her childhood years at St Joseph's Babies Homes at Broadmeadows and St Catherine's Home at Geelong. In 2002, whilst attending a reunion for former residents, she first broached the idea of accessing the records about her years at the homes. Patricia also wanted to find out as much as she could about her mother. All Patricia knew about her mother was the information recorded on her birth certificate. Patricia also has one brother to whom she is very close. Patricia and her brother met up during her teenage years.

It took Patricia almost a year to say that she was ready to begin the process

of reading through her records. There was very little information on Patricia's records from the homes, just a few pages. Patricia had been a ward of the state and with the support of the Heritage and Information Service an application was made to the Department of Human Services for her ward file. This provided more information about Patricia's mother and some very significant clues about where to search next. From a one line entry on Patricia's state ward record there was enough information to piece together where Patricia's mother went to live after Patricia was placed in care.

Further searching revealed additional records about Patricia's mother and eventually her death certificate was located. Included with the information was a photograph of Patricia's mother. Receiving the photograph was a very significant moment for Patricia as it was the first time that she had ever known what her mother looked like.

In 2005 Patricia decided that she would like the Heritage and Information Service to follow up some of the threads from her mother's records and find family if possible. Eventually after many searches through the Registry of Births, Deaths and

Marriages, cemetery records, the State Trustees, electoral rolls and telephone directories, a first cousin was located. Contact with this cousin then led to more cousins being located.

A reunion has now been held between Patricia and two of her cousins. This was a very emotional time for Patricia as she was both excited and apprehensive about how the meeting would go. Since this reunion, there has been ongoing contact, photographs and family information have been exchanged and shared. Patricia's cousins know lots of pieces of 'family' information and this has helped Patricia to learn more about her own mother and in doing so fill in so many gaps in her own history.

Patricia was over 60 years of age when she began her search. She did not know what the outcome would be or how long it would take. The journey has taken several years and there have been lots of pieces of information for Patricia to come to terms with. Patricia feels great contentment with the process of receiving her records, finding information about her mother, learning about her extended family and with meeting her cousins.