

Area of focus

Supporting Families experiencing disadvantage and crisis

Why do we have this focus?

A healthy and positive childhood is best achieved within a healthy and positive family. MacKillop works with a wide range of families to support and enable them to be the best environment possible for their children. Our particular focus is vulnerable families where the natural skills and commitment of the parents have been disrupted by one or more traumatizing circumstances. Strengthening family dynamics to ensure children are protected and that they thrive is fundamental to our mission.

How we address this identified need

MacKillop's philosophy is to build on the strengths of individuals, family units and communities to overcome disadvantage. Our focus entails building the resilience within children, parents, families and communities, and recognizes that disadvantage has both interpersonal and structural dimensions.

This approach requires significant resources and many partnerships with other agencies and with government. Our current work centres within areas of significant disadvantage. This includes Melton, Footscray, Maidstone, Sunshine, Braybrook, St Albans and Geelong.

The **Family and Community Services** program operates from three sites at Footscray, Kensington and Melton. The services offered include a variety of family support programs, drug and alcohol services, education support services and the regional parenting service.

Family Services provides case management and support to vulnerable and "at risk"

families. This support can be as little as a one to two hour telephone consultation or working intensely in a two worker model of service to support families facing statutory intervention. Services are provided through two integrated teams, one at Melton and the other at Footscray, which include staff with specialist skills

and knowledge across drug and alcohol services, counselling, case management, family support, groups for parents and groups for children.

ParentsLink is a regional parenting service which also works in partnership with Jesuit Social Services to deliver this program in



Danny* - Crazy Bunny

Danny has painted this picture of a crazy bunny and he says, "it shows all my feelings about life", he hopes that it shows that he has a chance to see his Mum again. Danny has been in care for two years and lives in a residential unit. He describes his carer as bringing energy to the unit and the positive impact he has.



Tam* - Different
Tam's artwork is all about the 'skating culture'. He has mainly used images to do with skating graphics, logos and street art. Tam's biggest interests are skating and free style bike riding. He loves being able to express himself creatively in his technology and art studies classes.

the Western Suburbs of Melbourne. This service provides parenting education and information to both parents and professionals. It also is a partner in the Maribyrnong Best Start project and the Brimbank Communities for Children Project. As part of this work it supports the development of groups for newly arrived communities in the Western suburbs and undertakes a number of community development projects each year.

Reconnect is part of **MacKillop Youth Services Barwon** and is a Federally funded program working in partnership with BAYSA Youth Services and Barwon Youth Accommodation Service to support young people who are at risk of homelessness or homeless and reconnect them to family, education, training, employment and community. MacKillop Family Services provides intensive support to young people and their families.

Mercy Respite Centre is part of **Mercy Children's Services** in Geelong and provides respite care for women with children, who require a break from the daily stresses of life following lengthy periods of care for others, illness, or surgery. Families can stay from a few days to a week in a restful location at Pt Lonsdale.

At **St. Augustine's Education and Training**, with the support of United Way funding, a part time Family Worker position was established towards the end of the year to assist families of students attending the special education services.

[Our work with families raising a child with a disability is highlighted within the 'Supporting families raising a child with a disability' section of this report from page 12.](#)

Notable achievements this year

Some of our notable achievements this year were:

Family and Community Services

- Eight CALD parenting and playgroups will now be able to operate in the Western suburbs for three years as we were successful in accessing trust funding, Commonwealth Local Answers funding and Communities for Children funding. These groups will be trained and supported by us in partnership with the Brimbank Communities for Children project, VICSEG and the New Hope Foundation.
- Families with complex needs have experienced more cohesive quality services via our work in developing an integrated assessment, immediate response and crisis support service with our partnering family service agencies in Maribyrnong. We were selected to host several visits from

the Deputy Premier, the Hon John Thwaites and senior DHS executives so they could learn about our service model.

- Many children and young people benefited from Council holiday programs through developing protocols and priority access arrangements for children who are most at risk.
- We launched our Social Inclusion project and outcomes of this work include ensuring that every child has their own social inclusion goals and that we spend time working with community groups so they can include marginalised children and families. Many talents have emerged for children and their parents within this process, including bowling, football, basketball, swimming and music lessons.
- A group of former clients working as consultants to the organisation have produced a report and recommendations about how MacKillop can improve client participation within our services. This creative work will continue as we implement the recommendations from their report.
- Families who have a member who is trapped in substance abuse will continue to receive a service after the successful evaluation of the Commonwealth funded Substance Abuse Program resulting in an extension of this funding for a further two years.
- We continue to ensure that the growth corridors of Melton Shire are afforded new services by undertaking a number of developments in Melton including a new *Pregnancy and Parenting Support* program with DHS and trust funding; the further development of partnerships with Caroline Chisholm Society to provide a more integrated service to mothers with babies who

require individual support or self help groups; supporting a group of young people who have a parent with a mental health issue.

- Four staff completed post graduate and masters qualifications in relevant disciplines, two coordinators completed their Diploma in Front line Management and the entire team of the *Regional Parenting Service* obtained their Certificate IV in Work Based Training and Assessment.
- A successful move to temporary premises and working on the design and refit for the new St Anthony's Family Centre.

Reconnect, a service of **MacKillop Youth Services (Barwon)**, has established a support group for parents of young people accessing the program, which has proved very successful. A group for Aboriginal parents is currently being established in liaison with the Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative in Geelong.

Mercy Respite Centre, part of **Mercy Children's Services**, was reviewed during the year and families who had used the service were contacted. Wonderful comments were received reflecting the positive changes experienced by families - "the stay changed my life"; "my story was listened to"; "I was better able to cope with life after a little break"; "helped with my grief and loss issues".

St. Augustine's Education and Training

Family Support Service - although just established, the value of the service can already be seen with parent groups started and individual families being supported.

List of current services

Family and Community Services

- *Family Support – Inner West*
- *Family Support – Outer West*
- *Substance Abuse Family Support (SAFS)*
- *Drug & Alcohol Family Counselling Service*
- *Maribyrnong Innovations Family Support*

- *Family Support Service Intensive*
- *Pregnancy and Early Parenting Support*
- *Regional Parenting Service*
- *Family Skills Training*
- *CALD Parenting Group*
- *Western Education Centre*
- *School Focused Youth Service*

MacKillop Youth Services (Barwon)

- *Reconnect – Early Intervention*

Mercy Children's Services

- *Mercy Respite Centre*

St. Augustine's Education and Training

- *Family Support Service*