

MacKillop Family Services

At the crossroads: the challenges of child sexual abuse to our mission and identity

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MacKillop Family Services

MacKillop Family Services was founded by the Sisters of Mercy, Christian Brothers and Sisters of St Joseph.

MacKillop Family Services: History and context

- MacKillop formed in 1997
- Grew out of work of three founding congregations: Christian Brothers, Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of St Joseph

“It is big step from criticising what you think is wrong to working out and implementing what you think is right.”

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At the crossroads

- What can we learn from our history?
 - Examine past policies and practices
 - Ensure that children in our care are safe
 - Ensure our culture is child safe
 - Build on our shared story

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Today’s workshop

Questions:

- Who do we listen to?
- How do we learn?
- Where do we find inspirational leadership?

Challenges to mission and identity:

- Credibility and reputation
- Making organisations safe for children in our care
- Understanding the ongoing trauma of sexual abuse
- Responding to disclosures of historical abuse

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Today's workshop

How has MacKillop responded to these challenges?

- Providing mechanisms for complaints and feedback
- Quality and standards
- Understanding the shadow side of our organisational history
- Developing cultural competence across the organisation

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MacKillop's work

- Institutional care has evolved into different forms of residential care, foster care, education and family support services
- MacKillop founded in 1997 against backdrop of media scrutiny into institutional care
- MacKillop's inaugural board committed to the rights of former residents
- Set up a service to work and support with former residents: The Heritage and Information Service

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MacKillop today

Neil Ormerod:

"Church-based agencies share ... the identity and mission of the Church. They may do so in different ways with different emphasis."

- MacKillop provides services in Vic, NSW and WA
- Foster care, residential care, disability services, youth support, education and training, family support, refugee services
- Government funded – accountable to range of stakeholders, including funders

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MacKillop today

MacKillop's work guided by our values:

- Justice
- Hope
- Collaboration
- Compassion
- Respect

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Challenges

- Credibility and reputation
 - Systems failed to prevent abuse of children
 - Abuse was then covered up or denied
 - Range of inquiries bring past practices to the fore
 - MacKillop’s response is to support and validate victims
- Making organisations safe for children
 - Create safe and nurturing environments
 - Listen to the voices of those in our care – now and in the past
 - Sanctuary Model
 - Strong recruitment and supervision practices
 - Robust responses to allegations of abuse

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Challenges

- Responding to disclosures of historical abuse
 - Critically examine past practices
 - Learn from our former residents
 - Embrace the stories of former residents
- Complaints and feedback
 - Regular client and staff surveys

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Understanding the “shadow side”

- People who complained of abuse were sometimes blamed, silenced, disbelieved
- People who experienced abuse felt their experiences were minimised, not understood

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Responding to the challenges

The Sanctuary Model:

- A framework for understanding trauma
- Equip staff to be able to create a safe and nurturing environment
- Sanctuary asks: “What happened to you?”

Quality and standards

- Ongoing scrutiny of the services we provide
- Ongoing practice improvement through support of staff and carers

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Responding to the challenges

Cultural competence

- Build an understanding of the various cultural contexts in which we operate
- Iftar dinner
- Koori Youth Traineeships

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Concluding comments

- What can be learnt from our practice at MacKillop?
 - Understand what it means to be traumatised
 - Accept the range of needs a person has on their healing journey
 - Support former residents and listen to and acknowledge their stories
- Leadership
 - Rational, emotional and symbolic intelligence
 - Bear witness to the suffering of others
 - Challenge authority
 - Practice wisdom, imagination and vision