

Family and Community Development Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

fcdc@parliament.vic.gov.au

16 August 2012

Dear Ms. Crozier,

**Response to the
Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations (the Inquiry). MacKillop Family Services recognises the pain being suffered by people who have been abused and believes the Inquiry provides a timely and critical opportunity to focus on better protecting the most vulnerable members of the Victorian community.

MacKillop is a leading provider of services for children, young people and their families in Melbourne, Geelong, Warrnambool, western Sydney and southern New South Wales. The programs we deliver include home based and residential care, disability services, youth support, refugee services, education and training, family support and support to women and men who, as children, were in the care of our founding agencies.

Founded in 1997 by the Sisters of Mercy, the Christian Brothers and the Sisters of St Joseph, MacKillop exists to support, to foster hope and to promote justice for children, young people and their families, particularly those who experience distress, disadvantage and abuse.

At this time MacKillop implemented rigorous processes to provide protection to the children and young people we work with. Through comprehensive practices of recruiting, screening, accrediting, supervising and supporting staff and volunteers, we strive to create a safe environment for the children and young people in our care. MacKillop continues to invest significant resources in these areas.

Additionally, there is a clear imperative to respond to instances where those most vulnerable have been abused. MacKillop has in place policies which ensure we respond to allegations or instances of abuse in a manner that is transparent, timely, confidential and just. Our aim is to put the best interests of vulnerable children and young people at the centre of these processes. Our procedures to respond to

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COLLABORATION
COMPASSION
RESPECT**

allegations of abuse focus on clear roles and accountabilities, timelines, transparency, due process and effective oversight.

MacKillop acknowledges the significant work in recent years undertaken by government agencies to better protect children and young people and monitor the quality of care provided by community service organisations. The Department of Human Services' (DHS) *Guidelines for responding to quality of care concerns in out-of-home care* (2009) provides a comprehensive framework to improve standards of care which means that DHS now takes the lead role in the investigation of allegations of abuse and other quality of care concerns in the out-of-home care sector, including within MacKillop.

Creating safety for vulnerable children, young people and adults is a key task for all community service organisations. To this end, MacKillop is implementing the Sanctuary Model across all levels of the organisation. Sanctuary is a model for clinical and organisational change which, at its core, promotes safety and recovery from adversity through the active creation of a trauma-informed community. The focus on safety aligns closely with the interests of the people we work with. The model aims to create organisations that are safe and caring and maintain a culture that reflects these qualities at every level and we believe it will significantly enhance the quality and responsiveness of our services.

MacKillop is also committed to supporting adults who grew up in the care of the Sisters of Mercy, the Christian Brothers and the Sisters of St Joseph, prior to the founding of MacKillop in 1997. Our Heritage and Information Service (H&IS) was formed to assist former residents of institutional care, those placed with foster parents through these institutions and mothers separated from their children.

The H&IS holds a substantial archival repository containing approximately 115,000 records of the former institutions, dating back to 1854. The H&IS is responsible for the preservation, management and provision of supported access to the contemporary (post 1997 client) records of MacKillop.

MacKillop social workers assist these adults through supported release and interpretation of records. Our practice with former residents acknowledges that in the course of accessing their records, adults may disclose abuse that occurred during their time in institutional care. We have implemented clear procedures to respond when this occurs, which includes providing support and advice.

The Victorian community invests considerable trust in organisations responding to the needs of vulnerable children, young people and adults. The abuse of this trust, in all its forms, is totally unacceptable. MacKillop has always been supportive of processes that provide safety, accountability and respect for the rights of all individuals.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the Inquiry. MacKillop Family Services would be pleased to address the Inquiry to expand on this submission. If required, please contact Micaela Cronin, Chief Executive Officer on 9699 9177.

Yours sincerely,



Frank Peppard
Chairperson



Micaela Cronin
Chief Executive Officer