

Media release

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HESTA 'Unsung Hero' Award recognises pioneering work supporting people who grew up in care

The pioneering work of Jenny Glare, the General Manager of the Heritage and Information Service at MacKillop Family Services, has been recognised at the 2017 HESTA Community Sector Awards.

Jenny received the 'Unsung Hero' award, which recognises an individual working within the community sector who has made an exceptional contribution to social justice in Australia, by enhancing the wellbeing of individuals or communities experiencing disadvantage.

In her role at MacKillop, Jenny is entrusted with the responsibility of preserving and protecting the records of former residents dating back to the 1850s, and enabling residents or their family members to access these records

For the past 20 years, Jenny's ground-breaking work in the supported release of records to care leavers has had a profound impact on thousands of Australians who grew up in former child institutions, by helping them to construct their life story, establish a sense of self and identity, and reconnect with long-lost family members.

MacKillop's Community Relations Director, Sam Patterson, said Jenny's work has revolutionised the approach to the supported release of records.

"We all need a sense of who we are and where we come from," he said, "and Jenny has transformed the lives of thousands of people who grew up in care by helping them to understand their life story."

"Jenny is a beautiful combination of a historian and a social worker. This unique set of skills enables her to piece together seemingly disparate fragments of information into a coherent narrative, and then provide a calm and supportive environment to guide people through the emotional process of unlocking their past."

"The hallmark of Jenny's work is her compassion, and her fierce commitment to social justice and to supporting care-leavers to reconstruct their family history. The care-leaver is always at the centre of her work."

Jenny receives more than 60 requests for information every month and painstakingly searches through historical records to enable people to understand their childhood, where they lived, who they lived with and who they were connected to.

Jenny says she is always conscious that the process of reading historical records of their childhood can be traumatising for some people.

"For this reason, we take particular care to personally hand over files to people, and we introduce them to the files slowly to ensure they are prepared for what they are about to read. They must be supported to deal with what can sometimes be very confronting information."

JUSTICE
HOPE
COLLABORATION
COMPASSION
RESPECT

Jenny said it was an unexpected honour to receive the HESTA 'Unsung Hero' Award, and she hoped it would encourage other institutions to be more transparent and more willing to share records with their care-leavers.

"Internationally, we are starting to have a better recognition of the importance of supporting people through the often highly emotional process of receiving their records, and I hope this will lead to an improved understanding of the experiences of people who grew up in care in Australia," she said

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