

# Media Release

## MacKillop's work with vulnerable families recognised in 2019 Victorian Protecting Children Awards

**4 September 2019:** MacKillop Family Services (MacKillop) has been recognised for its work supporting vulnerable children, young people and families, with five finalists in the 2019 Victorian Protecting Children Awards (VPCA), hosted by the Department of Health and Human Services last night, Tuesday 3 September.

One of two MacKillop entries shortlisted for the *Robin Clark Making a Difference Award*, the Family Focus MST program – based in Geelong and Western Melbourne – is the first of its kind in Victoria and takes a whole of community approach to support vulnerable families and prevent their children entering out of home care. The program was Highly Commended at the Awards.

Also a finalist in this category was one of MacKillop's residential care homes in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne, which has been recognised for creating a safe and nurturing environment for an extremely high-risk young person, and successfully transitioning him into independent living.

MacKillop School Café was a finalist for the *Education Initiative Award*. MacKillop Education's VCAL Program supports young people from 12–17 years of age in Geelong and the surrounding areas, who are at risk of disengaging from education. The Bittersweet café project enables students to complete their level 1 barista certificate and develop safe food-handling skills and basic food preparation experience, as well as gaining confidence for future employment.

Foster carers Chelsea and Michael Tobin were finalists for the *Carer Award*. Chelsea and Michael care for a young girl who came into their lives when she was just two weeks old. The little girl had suffered several strokes during her birth. Chelsea's love and persistence ensured the child had early access to the medical intervention and therapies required to help her to thrive. Now three, the little girl continues to defy the odds, and thanks to Chelsea and Michael, she has a much more hopeful future than her prognosis at birth predicted.

Recognised for his deep care and commitment to improving the lives of vulnerable children and young people, and exceptional passion and skill at engaging others in his vision, MacKillop's Deputy CEO, Gerard Jones, was Highly Commended for the *Robin Clark Leadership Award*. Gerard's collaborative approach and inspirational leadership saw the creation of a government and sector partnership that jointly redeveloped residential care into the trauma-informed model, Sanctuary, that underpins MacKillop's practice today.

Robyn Miller, CEO of MacKillop, congratulated all staff who were nominated for the Awards as well as those who were selected as finalists.

"To have five finalists in this year's Victorian Protecting Children Awards reflects the commitment of our staff to go above and beyond to support the families, children and young people they work with. I am constantly inspired by the passion and dedication that MacKillop staff put into their work every day, and to see that commitment celebrated and validated by the sector means a great deal to our entire organisation."

The VPCA were held at the Glasshouse, Olympic Park, Olympic Boulevard on Tuesday 3 September, from 5pm.

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