



## **Minnamurra**

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### **Hours of Service:**

24 hours a day, seven days a week

### **Director:**

Paul Drielsma

### **Manager:**

Andrew O'Brien

### **Coordinator:**

Fraser Forsyth

### **Staffing:**

One full-time coordinator;

Four full-time youth workers

One part-time education support worker

### **Sources of Funding:**

75% Department of Community Services

25% UnitingCare Burnside

### **Referral Sources:**

DoCS is the main source of referrals although others are accepted from youth crisis refuges, schools, health services etc.

### **Description of Service:**

Minnamurra began in 1975 as a Family Group Home with houseparents who lived in full-time and had their own children there with them. Minnamurra is now a long-term residential program for six young people, mostly with care orders and aged between approximately 14 and 18 years. With low staff ratios and five other young people to live with, residents need to have a certain level of emotional maturity and social skill.

Minnamurra does not accept young people with intensive support needs. Young people often stay for several years and, in conjunction with the Aftercare Program, continue to be supported once they move on into semi-supported or independent living.

### **Method of Working:**

Minnamurra is a community rather than an institution.

The program works with young people from a strengths-based perspective and utilises creative, individual negotiation rather than rules. Discipline does not operate on a crime and punishment model but is based on social inclusion. Experience dictates that young people want to do the right thing for themselves and for those who are close to them.

Genuine and respectful relationships between workers and young people plus mechanisms that allow for the exploration of power issues form the basis of this participatory community. Appropriate boundaries are maintained by the acceptance of normal societal constructs and the understanding that adult responsibilities are in many cases different than young peoples.

One proof of the success of Minnamurra is that it has weathered many long battles with drugs and alcohol, with chronic school resistance and with a variety of unsafe behaviours. These have hardly ever been acted-out onto the program or resulted in the workers not being able to hold on to a young person. Given the proven detrimental effects of multiple placements, Minnamurra has a policy of maintaining young people's placements through thick and thin.

Two other important facets of the work are:

1. To maintain, and where possible enhance, young people's relationships with their families, as the family is a very important part of young people's identities.
2. To keep young people in education as long as possible. The Australian researcher, the late Robyn Clark, commented that young people grow up and grow out of the behaviours that led to their referral but are then disadvantaged as adults by poor education outcomes. This is a huge and deeply systemic problem with roots that, for most young people, long precede the care years.

### **Service User Perspective:**

The impact of Minnamurra changed my life from the age of 13. I remember the first day when I came to this home and I met the workers. I felt that they were going to be my true family from now until the end. I was in Year 9 and I remember my closest worker from that first day was Joanne and she made everything seem all right. She became my caseworker and made sure I was in good support and always made everything up to date and helped me whenever I needed help.

Having the workers of Minnamurra on my back about my education and always going to school seemed very important to them. Later the following year I was in Year 10. From this year it began to be tough on me to earn my School Certificate. I meant to show the workers that I was a smart student and to prove I really wanted to do my education more than anything. During that time I was having contact with my mum but she never really thought I could

do it but by proving her wrong with the help of Minnamurra I passed the School Certificate and was happy.

There was a young man that used to live with us in this house that I got close to a lot. He was a bright student in Year 11. He was a very quiet guy and one night in December a priest from the young man's school came to our home. He told us the bad news that the young man was killed in an accident. That night changed my life for good. But thankfully having the support of all workers driving from their homes very late at night to comfort us was a moment that I could never think we would ever forget.

The next year I was in Year 11 and slowly trying to get through the year and meet some new friends. The help of the workers changed my life and everyone else's. Workers took us out on nice outings and out for dinner and to movies every time a new film came out we all wanted to see. Minnamurra is a very good organisation and helps young kids with study and makes sure they get where they want to be in their lives from here now and also in the future. I know that from experience. Now I am 17 and doing my HSC and these workers bought a lot of luck to me. Sometimes I have arguments with them and don't get my way - but that's part of life. These people are like my parents. They do it because they care for us so much. They look to us like their own kids and they wonder that if they were to never help us, they might regret seeing us failing in the future.

Being here has taught me a lot about being independent. I have been in so many jobs and they count on me being reliable. The workers here know that I clean around the house a lot and sometimes cook. It shows them that I have learnt skills and although not a housewife yet, I am a clean person and what I do with my life is what I want to do and nobody can stop me. I mean, sure there are sometimes in my life I have not been myself here, and done things that have made these workers worry about me. It shows that they care and never want to see me in places where I shouldn't be.

Although it's hard in my life I'm still coping through one thing - I have learnt much from this home. I also know that although my parents aren't here for me when I need them or even though I don't hardly see them, these workers have really cared for me and showed me what I need to become to get where I want in my life. Some young people think that youth workers never care but I tell you this from my own experience they do cause if they never did they would not be here today and missing their lives with their partners to take care of us.

I think that although my whole childhood has been from country to country and home to home since I was 10, it has shown me a lot of things other young kids wouldn't see. I have experienced bad things in my life but as soon as I met these workers they helped me. I'm grateful for it and I don't think I could ever love someone as my own family like I do these workers in Minnamurra. I can trust them and know that whenever I need them they are here for me.