

Newsletter article: Paws for Kids

Paws 4 kids support for children and young people in care to learn

For some children, school isn't always an easy place to be, this is especially true for many children living in residential or foster care. They often find it hard because beyond the school gate they're dealing with some tough issues: family violence, neglect, living out of home or social and/or emotional behaviours, which mainstream schools can find difficult to manage.

MacKillop Family Services' specialist school in Maidstone and educational outreach programs, support hundreds of children living in Melbourne's west to get the best education they can. One of the innovative programs they have introduced is PawPals, a canine-assisted learning program to make school and learning a fun, positive experience for kids who have struggled to engage with mainstream education.

Over the last year, Millie, PawPals' first education therapy dog, has worked her magic with kids living in residential or foster care. Kids like 16-year-old Laura*, who says,

"I never really liked school because of the bullying. My emotional state was so bad I couldn't focus. I did try and push through, but it got really difficult.

"Working with Millie made me feel much safer and more confident. I used to be so quiet and, in a shell that I didn't want to come out of. But knowing that Millie can come with me and that I'll have that support has made me feel like I can do anything.

"When I'm with Millie, I forget about everything bad. Every bit of stress that I'm latching onto just goes."

PawPals has been so successful, that demand has already exceeded capacity. To expand the program, MacKillop is holding a matched giving day, **Paws 4 Kids**, on **Wednesday 6 March**. Paws 4 Kids is a one-day campaign where key supporters will multiply all donations by 4 to help reach the fundraising goal of \$200,000.

The funds raised by the campaign will allow MacKillop to recruit and train two staff members, and up to four dogs, to deliver canine-assisted learning support for up to 500 children.

Principal of MacKillop Specialist School, Anne Henderson, sees how children who find it difficult to engage with learning have benefited from their interactions with Millie,

"The change has been remarkable. We've seen children who wouldn't previously open their bedroom doors to interact with our education outreach workers, now get so excited about Millie's visits, that they plan in advance what books they want to read to her. One of our teenagers who hadn't been to school for months, has developed an interest in photography and is designing a calendar featuring the pictures she has taken of Millie.

Help expand the Paw Pals program by donating on or before **Wednesday 6 March 2019** to have your donation multiplied by 4. If you give \$25, MacKillop will receive \$100. Have four times the impact and give four times the hope at www.paws4kids.org.au