

**Thanking our volunteers at Goulburn Valley Pregnancy and Family Support
Helen Cooney, CEO, Caroline Chisholm Society
15 May 2015, Speaking notes**

When I last visited, we told you all how 'excited' we were about a boost of funding to help us revitalise our service in Goulburn Valley. That wasn't quite true. We were actually 'nervous'. Today, I tell you honestly that I am here now very 'proud'. And I'll tell you why in a moment.

Many of you know about Caroline Chisholm Society, but for those of you who do not: we are a grassroots agency that supports women during and after pregnancy.

We are located at three sites,

- Moonee Valley where we have been for over 40 years offering counselling, new and pre-loved goods and help with offering and/or navigating the service system,
- Caroline Springs which is in Melbourne's western growth corridor where there is many vulnerable families being established who we visit at home, and
- Here, in the Goulburn Valley. We operate with Margaret overseeing our approach to welfare and Aneta is working on our special project for volunteering.

The Caroline Chisholm Society grew up as a group here in Goulburn Valley and in Moonee Valley offering support to those in need. Our services here in Shepparton include:

- Offering new and pre-loved baby maternity goods, for which we get help from many donors including the much appreciated the Love to Sew team, who prepare remarkable packs of goods for an expectant mum to take to hospital with her.
- We also offer a supportive and listening ear. We help new families learn about what services are available for them.

While many of our families are facing concerns about parenting and financial issues, our data suggests their next top issues are risk of homelessness, family violence, and mental health concerns. These issues are at times intertwined. Some are only struggling with being expectant or new mums. But some of our clients are in very controlling relationships and they get worse over time. If those mums choose to leave, they often need the very practical support of a team like this one.

Our desire to be locals in our communities and volunteer in a range of ways to help parents is evident here today.

- It's delightful to see our volunteers from Vernie Road helping with the catering.
- The team at Shepparton Villages also makes a remarkable contribution, so I'm pleased they're here too.
- And I know that the poster competition is wonderful way to have the children of our local community involved.
- I'm particularly impressed by the family values posters. Do look at them, they tell you some important things about life.

Briefly back to 'why are we proud?' Because last time I was here, we were about to advertise a job to help keep the office open so that people needing help knew we'd be here for them regularly.

Not only are we now open 5 day, not only have increased our number of volunteers, we are now helping more families. And that is what it is about – purposeful volunteering.

Thank you again to all our volunteers, and to Aneta for coordinating volunteers here in Shepparton.

Closing remarks:

A reminder of what I said, we were nervous but now we're very proud. Proud of the great sense of community, evidenced by Chris' remarks about a great match of qualities. We're proud of the support we give to expectant and new mums. And we look forward to doing so into the future.

Thank you to Aneta for organising such a remarkable event. Thank you, Wendy, Suzanna, Fern and Michael for being here. But most of all, thank you to our volunteers.