

From the CEO

For 50 years, those who care about unborn babies have served pregnant women, babies and toddlers and families raising them through the Caroline Chisholm Society. I've been privileged to be part preparing a history to tell that story.

From the very beginning, our predecessors found that pregnant mothers were experiencing complex situations of poverty, homelessness, family violence and mental health concerns. They were also socially isolated.

It's still true today. But social isolation has sky rocketed – at times it's because of the public transport, sometimes it's because they've got limited family and friends, and sometimes it's language. It's always got something to do with that which is inherent in parenting. It's beautiful, but it can be tough.

Mental health issues are increasing too. If you put the data we have on prevention (social isolation) and the issue (mental health) together, the number one issue facing the families who come to us is perinatal mental health.

In the lead up to the next federal election, the Australian Government has announced \$1.3 billion in mental health. The Victorian Government announced a Royal Commission into Mental Health. Neither were clear enough on supporting families during pregnancy. I hope that changes.

Some case studies are provided in this newsletter, and while the stories are sometimes harrowing, they're also inspiring. They remind us that perinatal mental health is about mum and bub and family, not just one person's mind.

Please, as we progress towards a federal election, ask your candidates to help prevent perinatal mental health issues.

Since I joined Caroline Chisholm Society in 2009, I have often asked you to raise issues with your candidates. Before joining CCS, I knew about brain development between conception and three years, the first 1000 days of a child's life. I thought I knew about poverty, disadvantage and vulnerability.

It's fair to say that I certainly know more now than I did then. I'm grateful for what I have learnt at Caroline Chisholm Society. I hope that in my time at the Society, I have supported you to learn too. Together, we've questioned, professionalised and loved humanity. I thank you.

In the spirit of Caroline Chisholm,



Helen Cooney

Working with perinatal mental health

Here at Caroline Chisholm Society, we see heartbreaking examples of the impact of a lack of a mental health system that supports families.

One mother was seeking support from CCS during her pregnancy, and upon the birth of her child, her mental health deteriorated. Within two weeks of the birth of her baby, this mother was placed in a secure psychiatric unit. Due to the risks presented by other patients, the baby was not able to stay with the mother which resulted in her mental health worsening and the baby missing out on critical times to bond.

We have told that story to a parliamentary inquiry into perinatal services. That inquiry got the message almost universally that perinatal mental health had to be a priority.

While that mother was in a secure unit, some families need help with other kinds of support.

When we first met, one mum and dad had a 3-week-old and an 18-month-old were living in the grandmother's family home. Mum let us know that she lives with depression and was having contemplating suicide. The mental health of Mum impacted her ability to respond to the cues her baby was giving her which resulted in difficulty with soothing and sleep. The toddler was having behavioural outbursts which were difficult for the mother to manage. Living with the grandmother increased stress and pressure in the family.

Our team supported the mum and dad to explore their own parenting styles and how they parent as a team. Together, the parents set a goal of increasing the support for mum so that they could reduce her feeling like she was parenting in isolation.

Mum and Dad identified ways they could support one another and began to step in and help with parenting when they could tell that the other was feeling stressed when raising their child. Increasing the support around the mum saw her better able to regulate her emotions when she was parenting two little kids. The parents started to tell us about the positive impact that helping each other and being calm had on their baby.

It was still challenging to change the behaviour of their toddler. Our worker, who has expertise in psychology, supported them with emotion coaching techniques to better understand what was going on for the toddler. Overtime, mum and dad could see improvements in their response. Mum appreciated that her change in behaviour resulted in better behaviour from her toddler.

Our time was also spent focused on supporting the mother and father to establish boundaries between their immediate family and the grandparents they lived with. Over a number of months, the mum was able to do this, which resulted in more support from her family.

The support for this family from Caroline Chisholm Society resulted in better support for the mum from the whole family which decreases the risk of mental health issues developing in her, her infant and her toddler.

We wish them well for the future.

How are we going in Essendon?

In March of 2017, we opened our Essendon office. We're grateful to the donors who helped us achieve the building, and we're wanting to acknowledge now those who are now helping the service to operate. Last financial year, we assisted an additional 150 families from the Moonee Valley. That is, we helped mums and bubs at 579 appointments.

Essendon Fields...

...provides sponsorship of the appointments program. We're best known for giving and receiving new and pre-loved baby and maternity goods, and Essendon Fields helps us make sure that can be done with quality assurance.

Moonee Valley City Council...

...helps us with our a reception, so that when you get to our office it's a warm and welcoming environment. The support also ensures the office is a hub where other organisations can book space.

Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association...

...helps with our phone line, so that when they deal with industrial issues for pregnant mums and those with young children, their organisers can make a referral for help if social issues arise.

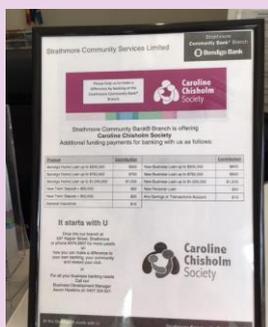
A recent addition to the list

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Strathmore Community Bank® Branch of Bendigo Bank

Like Essendon Fields, the Strathmore Community Bank® is sponsoring the ability for Caroline Chisholm Society to offer appointments. They're making sure the lights can turn on!

If you open an account, be sure to mention us! They'll give us a donation. Details available at our reception.



Farewell to our CEO

This year marks 50 years for the Caroline Chisholm Society. For the last 10 years, Helen Cooney has given great leadership to the Society, first as a board member and President of the Society, and from 2012 as its Chief Executive Officer. The pregnancy and family support service is best known for giving out new and pre-loved baby and maternity goods and working to prevent homelessness and prevent the removal of children from their families.

Since joining Society, Helen's major achievements have included:

- Opening a new pregnancy and family support service hub at Essendon which makes receiving of goods more dignified for new mothers, and which is more welcoming for families, safer for staff and volunteers and more focussed on early intervention and collaborative practice.
- An innovative baby-bassinet-box project based on a Finish model, which operates at the Goulburn Valley Pregnancy and Family Support Service. She also achieved unprecedented levels of funding for the service which is now accredited.
- Implementing evidence-based outcome measures and an outcome framework for family services to support the prevention of removal of children from their families.
- Major upgrades to aging property, fleet and IT infrastructure and to the Society's approach to strategy, risk and reporting.

Throughout her time, Helen has changed what we do, but not who we are. She has remained true to the Society's values. Caroline Chisholm Society has achieved our governance, financial and quality goals under her leadership.

In February last year, the Society adopted a new strategy. It includes a renewed focus on raising funds so we can help more mothers and their babies and toddlers, risk management in the context of increasing complex situations for families and quality practice especially in relation to pregnancy.

Helen plans to take a well-deserved and much-needed rest, which should allow her to focus on her studies. Helen Cooney said, "For 10 years, I've been fighting for the rights of pregnant women, their babies and toddlers. All the while, I was delivering services for families. I started a course last year, and I can't focus on it and give CCS what its needs. It's time to take a breath and think about what next."

The Board is mapping out a considered process so that the next CEO can implement the Society's revised strategy. The process will begin in the months ahead.

A letter from the President to the Society about Helen's departure is available at:

<https://caroline.org.au/team/helen-cooney/>

Contact us...

www.caroline.org.au

Caroline Springs
1 Darebin Place
Caroline Springs VIC 3023
T 03 9361 7000
E secretary@caroline.org.au

Moonee Valley
977 Mt Alexander Road
Essendon VIC 3040
T 03 9361 7000
E secretary@caroline.org.au

Goulburn Valley
15A St Andrews Road
Shepparton VIC 3630
T 03 5821 0826
E gv@caroline.org.au