



Deer Park's Helene Noonan gets food from Loaves and Fishes after a family emergency left the pensioner with crippling debts.

Picture: MARK WILSON

MOONEE PONDS

Deal will assist parent support

COMMITTED TO BACK SERVICES

THE Caroline Chisholm Society has welcomed a State Government commitment to fund intensive in-home early childhood support services for vulnerable children and programs to build parents' resilience.

The initiatives are part of \$33.8 million of service funding allocated under the government's Roadmap for Reform, released last week following the Victorian Royal Commission's report into family violence.

The Caroline Chisholm Society is a non-profit organisation that provides support and counselling services for disadvantaged families in Moonee Ponds and surrounding areas.

Society chief executive Helen Cooney said she welcomed the new intensive service for expectant and new families.

"I look forward to working with the Government on a model that builds on the skills of midwives and maternal and child health nurses," she said.

"If this new service gives

them a non-stigmatising place to suggest families can go for help without a long waiting list, it's worked."

Ms Cooney said helping build parents' resilience was also important.

"It's incredibly difficult to find money for evidence-based programs that teach practical parenting skills," she said.

"These programs are often seen as fluffy, but culture classes help with recovery from trauma and cooking classes help with nutrition – and at the same time they offer a very simple way to offer a non-stigmatising entry point for more intensive services."

Ms Cooney said services needed to be accessible.

"It should be as easy as this – if you're pregnant you get yourself to a GP and you talk to the midwife and you work with a maternal and child health nurse," she said.

"It has to be intuitive and the support team at the entry point need to know how to navigate the rest."

Ex-carer now needs help herself

VISIT a community meals program or charity food bank and one thing becomes immediately apparent.

Hunger does not discriminate.

Single parents with children share tables with pensioners, migrants and students, people with disabilities or mental illness, the long-term unemployed and the homeless.

These people come from many walks of life but have one thing in common – they are all struggling to put food on the table.

Helene Noonan spent many years looking after others as a care worker but now she needs a little help herself.

The Deer Park pensioner said she was able to keep afloat with bills and living costs until a family emergency led to an unexpectedly high credit card bill and a mortgage redraw.

She now attends St Albans food relief charity Loaves and Fishes every week for items such as fresh fruits, vegetables, milk and cheese.

"If I didn't have to pay this bill I probably would have been able to manage," Ms Noonan said.

"But it's hard to just be on the pension. With supermarket prices the way they are, a pensioner could afford one piece of red meat a fortnight."

She said the Loaves and Fishes volunteers did a great job.

"It's very important to have places like this and it's important that people know about them so there are places they can go if they need help," she said.

Loaves and Fishes co-founder Charlie Desira said

volunteers at the food bank handed out 12 tonnes of food every Friday – which was often still not enough to

turn people away," Mr Desira said.

People often lined up at the headquarters up to two hours before it opened.

"We couldn't get more food because we just haven't got the capacity in our cool room at the moment."

But a \$15,000 grant from the 2015 Feed Melbourne Appeal will change that.

It has enabled the charity to pay for a \$10,000 extension on its cool room.

The rest of the money will top up supplies for food parcels.

"We hope to be able to supply food for up to 100 more families," Mr Desira said. "Without the Feed Melbourne money we wouldn't have been able to even consider expanding the cool room."

"We wouldn't even be able to do what we do now."

GET INVOLVED!

Have you registered to run a Feed Melbourne Appeal fundraiser? Get creative using only what you've got in the pantry or fridge and host a Feed Melbourne Feast. Invite your friends and ask them to donate to the appeal. You can also host a Shout Lunch Day by getting your work colleagues to bring in food and donate their lunch money. Register to receive your starter kit and tips for your Feed Melbourne Feast or Shout Lunch Day at feedmelbourne.org.au

meet the growing demand.

"We help about 240 families each week but we have run out of food that we can hand out and we've had to

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