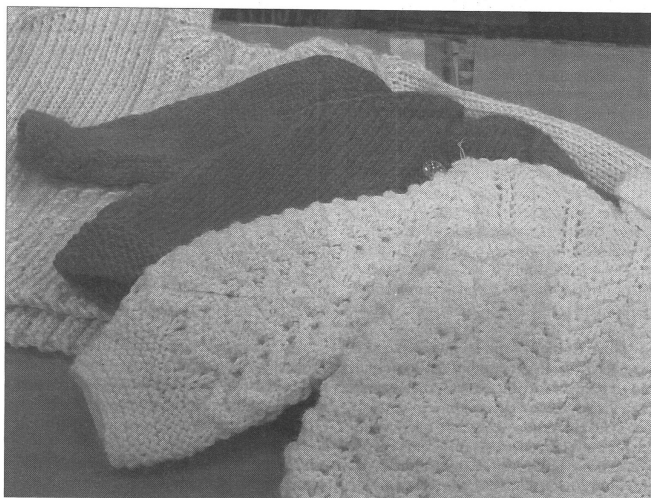




Grand Opening - Caroline Chisholm Society's new Building

June Potts

My first introduction to the Caroline Chisholm Society was several decades ago, whilst visiting my mother, Phebe Osborne, in Moonee Ponds. I found her busily knitting baby garments for Caroline Chisholm. Every Friday, after a week's daily knitting, Mum would take her pile of beautifully knitted matinee jackets, jumpers and booties into Caroline Chisholm in Shuter Street. Many local volunteers would, no doubt, have also been

so wonderfully generous and hardworking in their contributions to the Society.

Caroline Chisholm strove, in 1800s England, to improve the lives of women by providing schools and housing. The Caroline Chisholm Society named for her was initially established by a doctor and a group of volunteers, in response to an obvious need in the community. They initially provided practical aid and pregnancy counselling services. The aims of these pioneers are brightly and ably reflected in the current

mission, values and objectives which form the core of the Society's current direction.

The Society, initially at Park St, Moonee Ponds, then operated at Shuter St for many years. It evolved to provide services to pregnant women, their families, and preschool children needing assistance and support. There is an enthusiastic band of approximately 100 volunteers.

10am on Saturday 4th March, 2017 saw the Grand Opening of the new Caroline Chisholm Society building at 977 Mt Alexander Rd., Essendon. All the chairs were soon filled, the main ground floor room quickly became standing room only! The speeches which followed were received by a very happy crowd.

Helen Cooney, CEO of the Society, commenced by acknowledging the Wurundjeri Aboriginal Nation and their elders. She commended builder Jeff Schultz, architect Rowan Adam, all donors and committed volunteers. Helen highlighted that the Caroline Chisholm Essendon Early Parenting Hub is "highly valued by the community" and "a great space for young, pregnant women with easy access to services and good multifunctional space, perfect for providing goods and services. There is also a Home Handy Service for vulnerable young women and families."

Next was an address by Diane Kerr, a Wurundjeri elder of the Ganun William Balak Clan. Resplendent in her possum shoulder wrap, Auntie Di, as she is fondly and respectfully known, had earlier conducted a traditional smoking ceremony throughout the building, the eucalyptus smoke tendrils gradually dissipating as the speeches progressed.

Auntie Di also acknowledged ancestors and elders, reminding us that their tribe had lived along the Maribyrnong River for thousands of years. Auntie Di thanked the Society for making the building possible, and caring for community, noting "sometimes the families are embarrassed to ask for help. We are fortunate to live in a society where people can live without harm," finally noting "open heart and open hand" which those present greeted with heartfelt murmurs of assent.

Julia Watson, a current Year 12 student at Loyola College, Watsonia, vibrantly outlined the origins of the Society, updating attendees on the many, varied ways her college has raised funds for Caroline Chisholm throughout the past year, including Pizza Nights, Baby Goods Drive and Annual 8km Fun Run.

Rose, a Caroline Chisholm client, spoke of the Society's care for mothers in our community. Rose became an avid quilter in gratitude, "in order to give back after being helped by Caroline Chisholm", urging "We all have a skill that we can share," concluding "We will celebrate and give thanks, and hope that one day there will be no need for this Society."

The Deputy Premier of Victoria, the Hon. James Merlino conducted the official opening, unveiling a plaque, acknowledging the Wurundjeri Nation and the State Government's contribution of \$950,000 to the new building, which he described as "a warm and welcoming environment," concluding "the Caroline Chisholm Society provides dignity for those in need."

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