

# TRANSCRIPT

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into perinatal services

Warrnambool — 11 October 2017

#### Members

Mr Paul Edbrooke — Chair

Ms Cindy McLeish — Deputy Chair

Ms Roma Britnell

Dr Rachel Carling-Jenkins

Ms Chris Couzens

Ms Maree Edwards

Mr Bernie Finn

#### Witness

Ms Melissa Maher.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome, Melissa. We are aware you have got a little person there, so take your time. If the little one gets a little bit upset, we have got all the patience in the world.

**Ms MAHER** — She is sitting grinning at me now, so she is all right.

**Ms BRITNELL** — And if she needs a feed, go right ahead.

**The CHAIR** — I am very much looking forward to seeing how Hansard translates baby's language.

**Ms MAHER** — Thank you very much for the opportunity to come and talk to you today. I am here to talk about the Warrnambool Breastfeeding Centre and my experience with that. Leila here is four months old. She is my second child. My older son is three and a half years old. I found breastfeeding to be incredibly challenging on both occasions, and having Barb there — I cannot believe I am going to get emotional.

**The CHAIR** — You are going to set us all off.

**Ms MAHER** — Having Barb there and having the centre there — the centre just provides a safe place to go. When you are sick of being home all day as a new mother, you can go to the centre. Somebody else is always there. There is another mum to talk to. It is a comfortable, easy place to feed your child and to get support. You can get it from maternal and child health nurses, which is just fantastic, but the opportunity to have the breastfeeding centre there, where you can pop in whenever it is convenient for you and you can feel secure in leaving the house and knowing that you do not have to be in the car or at a cafe if you are uncomfortable. For some people it is incredibly difficult, and for me it certainly was. On both occasions I had a lot of trouble. Both of my children have had failure to thrive, with a lot of pressure for formula feeding to help that.

**Ms BRITNELL** — It did not look like it was hard. You did that very well.

**Ms MAHER** — The second time around has been easier, but I tell you what, it has been difficult. The pressure to formula feed is immense from the medical community and from family and support. A lot of my friends have children that are a lot older. They all formula fed their children. As a breastfeeding mother I was incredibly determined on both occasions to do that. Having the breastfeeding centre there — the support and information that you can get and the drop-in days to see Barb, the lactation consultant, on Thursdays. I have seen her many times up at the hospital and had appointments, but the ability to just pop in when it is convenient for me — so many times, particularly with my first, I would go just to ask another mum another a question, because there is always somebody else there. There is always support and a friend to find at the centre. I just think it has been a lifesaver for me and for my children. I just think it is awesome.

**The CHAIR** — Is Barb still here? I am glad you are still here, Barb, to hear that.

**Ms MAHER** — Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Fantastic, thank you. Just one question. Do you see yourself volunteering at the centre as a result of the experience you have had to help other mums?

**Ms MAHER** — Yes, certainly. I saw Barb I think on day four or five after having Leila. I am quite a motivated person that does not like to sit still for long, and I was commenting to Barb, 'What am I going to do, and what can I help with at the centre?'. They have given so much to me that even coming here and talking to all of you guys, I would do whatever needs to be done to help that centre and to support it. It has supported me. I would not have had the experiences that I have had with both of my children now without it being there and the support that I have got from Barb and from all the other mums that just drop in. Then there is support that I have then given at work. There are lots of other mums, and every time I see a pregnant belly — you know, women all get talking and clucking — the first thing I say is, 'Go to the breastfeeding centre. It is fantastic. The support is there'. I tell them my experiences at the centre and sort of let people know that it is there and that it is a really great service.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks for giving us a living example of how well it works.

**Ms MAHER** — Thank you very much.

**Witness withdrew.**