

# 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 Jess Stretton.

**The CHAIR** — We are doing well today. Do you need someone to hold that baby while you talk? Welcome Jess.

**Ms STRETTON** — Thank you. My name is Jess, and this is Avilene. She was born at 36 plus three days with an emergency C-section up at Hamilton, so she is a bit premature. I am not actually local, but I have had to come down to Warrnambool a lot to access the services. We just do not have them up in Casterton. It takes me about 2 hours on a good day to get down here. If I have to stop and feed, obviously it takes a lot longer.

**Ms BRITNELL** — And the potholes.

**Ms STRETTON** — And the potholes. The roads are not good. So I have written a couple of notes.

**The CHAIR** — Did you come down here just for this today?

**Ms STRETTON** — Yes, pretty much.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you so much.

**Ms STRETTON** — That is okay. I was asked to share my story, so I hope it is of some value.

**The CHAIR** — I am sure it will be.

**Ms STRETTON** — We have had a few issues. From the beginning I have had a lack of support up near Casterton. I was originally unhappy with my level of care before she was born, and I was in the middle of transferring to Warrnambool to give birth, but unfortunately we had other ideas and we ended up with an emergency C-section up at Hamilton. We were discharged from hospital too early. She was not feeding properly. We had not established breastfeeding. She was still feeding via syringe, which was quite taxing to begin with. We had a midwife appointment the following day and then another one two days later, but we never got our third follow-up midwife appointment. She just never showed up. I contacted the hospital, and I was told, ‘She is feeding okay, so you don’t need the third midwife appointment’. So I ended up actually driving into Hamilton, which is about a 45-minute drive from home, to actually just get her weighed and make sure that she was still putting on weight.

**Ms BRITNELL** — For my colleagues who are from Melbourne, can you tell me how many kilometres?

**Ms STRETTON** — It is approximately 130 from Casterton down to here.

**Ms BRITNELL** — And it takes 45 minutes.

**Ms STRETTON** — It is 45 minutes to our nearest hospital that offers maternity.

**Ms BRITNELL** — Which is how many kilometres?

**Ms STRETTON** — About 60. We are located between Casterton and Coleraine at Muntham. So about a week after she was born, we were having a lot of issues breastfeeding, and I was referred to wonderful Barb down here at the breastfeeding centre. So at nine days old we made the trek. It took us 4 hours to get down here. So Barb had a chat to us, and we decided that she was just too little. I express at every feed, and I feed her breastmilk via a bottle.

She is eight weeks old now. We are still struggling with breastfeeding, but Barb has been an amazing support, so we keep trying and we keep trying. Every now and then we will get her to latch and we will get a breastfeed, but at the moment that is where we are at. Yes, it has been mainly the lack of support which I really struggled with — being discharged too early. The hospital actually lent me a breast pump to begin with, but the midwife contacted me about a week later and asked for it back. So I have had to hire a breast pump from the chemist, which costs: it was a \$100 bond and then it is \$25 a week to hire the breast pump. We are two months into that now; it is not cheap. With the breast pump, you also have got to buy all the attachments and all that sort of thing. We are still trying, though. At least she is getting breastmilk, which is really good.

**The CHAIR** — I can see just by the reaction of the coordinators up there that these are things that they probably hear once in a while, and they are probably going to make some phone calls a bit later to find out.

**Ms STRETTON** — I am not trying to be a negative Nellie; this is just my experience.

**The CHAIR** — Yes, absolutely.

**Ms STRETTON** — Because of the troubles we have had with her — being an emergency C-section and latching problems and that sort of thing — I have also been diagnosed with postnatal depression. I did contact my midwives to begin with about that, and I was told that it was normal and I will get over it. I had to go to my GP and ask for help. I am now on medication and they have offered me counselling as well. That is about it. Like I said, I have to come 2 hours if I need to access services. There are not a great many facilities for breastfeeding in Hamilton or places for mums to go.

**The CHAIR** — I will take her so you can talk for longer than 8 minutes.

**Ms STRETTON** — You can have her. Do you want me to come around at 2 o'clock in the morning?

**The CHAIR** — Done that, been there.

**Ms STRETTON** — We have a great lack of facilities in Hamilton. There is not really anywhere for mums to go to feed or to change. I frequent Macca's a lot because they have a change table there in the toilets, so I have been spending a lot of money on coffee there. The breastfeeding centre down here is a great relief — to come down here and know that you have got a safe space to go and that it is clean, it is tidy, there is someone to talk to and Barb is there to give me a hand with trying to get her to breastfeed properly. Yes, that is pretty much our story.

**The CHAIR** — We seem to be hitting a common theme here, Barb.

**Ms STRETTON** — I cannot sing her praises enough; she is amazing.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks for coming in, Jess, and we will give your baby back in about 60 minutes!

**Witness withdrew.**