



THE BABES PROJECT

annual report

2021



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www.thebabesproject.com.au



Chief Executive Report

I was reading an interview with Bear Grylls recently and he was asked what he would write on a huge billboard for many people to see. His response was, “storms make us stronger.”

I write this amidst flickering electricity and fallen trees in our neighbourhood at the mercy of 122 km/hr winds. Yet it feels like these brutal Melbourne storms are just a small piece of the greater storm that we have all endured over the past 12 to 18 months.

Grylls goes on to encourage readers to take the path less trodden, the path riddled with obstacles, rather than running at the first sign of battle.

Exiting two years of chaos and fear, the storm isn't over. But if we take on Grylls' encouragement to tackle hard times head on, these storms give us a chance to define ourselves and emerge stronger.

At first it may seem clichéd, but there is power in this lesson.

Over the past year The Babes Project could have operated in survival-mode, with minimal function just to get by. Or, we could have given up and closed, leaving a community of vulnerable families unsupported yet again. But we chose not to. We chose to pursue a bigger and greater future for the organisation that we know changes lives.

The key teaching in this brutal season has been the importance of sustainable funding. We cannot be left in crisis every six months. We need to establish a culture where giving is a part of life; where small sacrifices to benefit others are factored into paychecks just like a daily coffee. We need to practice looking back in a storm to see who we have left behind. So frequently it is those who can't fight through it alone. The women facing family violence, unsafe home countries, homelessness, mental illness, unsupportive families and peers.

So as we move toward clearer skies, The Babes Project will be fighting for a culture of generosity which upholds the vulnerable. And we will be here, pursuing more for our organisation and our women, always.

HELEN PARKER OAM
FOUNDER + CEO
THE BABES PROJECT

Board Chair Report

When I was nominated as The Babes Project's Board Chair, I was honoured to be given the opportunity to help lead this inspiring organisation.

The way the Babes team has cared for women in their hour of need is remarkable. Even in the face of a global pandemic, as the organisation grapples with all its implications, the work does not stop. Our perinatal programs have continued and evolved to meet the additional needs of mothers and their newborns. It has been wonderful to observe a growing excitement across our teams for a healthy future, which will allow us to continue to connect with young families and provide the support and care that The Babes Project is known for.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I thank our many supporters, donors and corporate partners for an outstanding commitment to supporting the vital work of The Babes Project. Thank you for continuing to engage with us as we work towards supporting every woman, and for being dedicated allies as we empower new mothers to face their fears and challenges, and thrive in motherhood.

We need people like you.

People who want to be a part of an organisation that is addressing the social, economic, and domestic factors that combine to render women and children vulnerable. Especially in a year in which the Covid-19 pandemic has changed so much of what we know - we need each other more than ever.


To the women and children we walk alongside... thank you for trusting The Babes Project with your journey, your experiences, and your stories. We believe in you wholeheartedly, and we count it an honour to help you achieve your parenting goals.

Whilst the pandemic may have a long lasting impact, it won't outlast The Babes Project. We will continue to be here filling vital gaps in support and education.

Because if we don't, who will?

LEIGHTON JOYCE
BOARD CHAIR
THE BABES PROJECT





because OF you

152

WOMEN ACCESSED
VITAL SUPPORT
THROUGH
TBP

40

WOMEN ENGAGED
IN THE INCENTIVE
PROGRAM

55

WOMEN
GRADUATED THE
COMPLETE
PROGRAM

IN 2020-2021



vision.

*a society in which all women have access
to perinatal support.*

mission.

*help families thrive, by creating safe
spaces and innovative avenues for
vulnerable women to access vital
perinatal support.*

strategy.

1.

REWRITING MOTHERHOOD

1.1 Creating platforms and opportunities to communicate diverse stories of motherhood.

1.2 Challenging societal perceptions around motherhood ideals.

1.3 Providing safe spaces for vulnerable women to navigate motherhood.



2.

AN EXCELLENT MODEL OF CARE

2.1 Implementing a trauma-informed and therapeutic approach to services at all times.

2.2 Ensuring the highest standard of practice in our perinatal support program responding to the evolving needs of our clients.

2.3 Maximising all assets and resources to increase our reach to support more women.



3.

LEADERSHIP IN THE PERINATAL SUPPORT SPACE

3.1 Creating benchmark standards for perinatal support services Australia-wide.

3.2 Achieving recognition Australia-wide as the leading organisation in perinatal support.

3.3 engaging with healthcare providers, social services and the community to address gaps in perinatal support.

4.

STRONG PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

4.1 Creating partnerships and collaborations with like-minded organisations, businesses and individuals to advance our mission.

4.2 Providing opportunities for community participation in social good.

4.3 Strengthening relationships with politicians, the community and supporters.



5.

A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

5.1 Planning for future scaling of operations and long-term financial stability.

5.2 Ensuring a reliable and strong team to execute strategic priorities and growth of the organisation.

5.3 Measuring impact to highlight and communicate growth priorities.

our homes.



CROYDON, VICTORIA

Our very first centre turned 9 in 2021. It also has a new look following flood repairs!

FRANKSTON, VICTORIA

The impacts of the pandemic in 2020 left the Frankston Centre financially vulnerable. From the 2nd of March to 14th of May, 'Save Babes Frankston' raised \$120k to rescue our South-Eastern Centre in Victoria.



CAIRNS, QLD

The Babes Project Cairns are our first roots planted outside of Victoria.

The Centre opened in October 2019, recently turned 2, and has operated with resilience through the pandemic whilst isolated from the rest of the operations team in Victoria.

TBP NATIONAL

Our remotely run National program ensures women nation-wide can access vital support, no matter how remote they are. It has been a hugely beneficial structure to already have in place in a time where isolation already experienced was exacerbated.



THE STORY OF Jasmine & Jaxon

When Jasmine first discovered she was pregnant, an ultimatum from her partner meant the end of her relationship.

FORCED TO MAKE A DECISION

"It was like the end of the world for me - I wasn't happy with myself, I was very sad at the start that I'd kept the baby, because he'd given me the ultimatum (to end the pregnancy or the relationship)."

The party-loving 22-year-old says the tough situation increased her anxiety about how she'd connect with the baby, and how she'd rebuild her life as a single mum.

But after recommendations from a friend and from her doctor, connecting with The Babes Project when she was 15 weeks pregnant was the start of gaining back her confidence.

THE BABES PROJECT

"I was very hesitant (at the start), I don't really like opening up to people," Jasmine says.

"But one day my mum forced me to go, and I sat down and listened, and they said, '(being a mum) is going to become natural'."

That advice helped Jasmine confront her negativity about herself, and the supportive environment made her Babes appointments feel "like a second home".

"(Babes) helped me get organised - some people just tell you what you need to do, but (Babes would) have it ready for you, or have recommendations, so you didn't have to stress about doing everything," she says.

Jasmine also credits the Babes program connecting with other pregnant women and young mums as a huge step in feeling less alone - but it wasn't easy getting started.

"I have social phobia and I didn't want to mix with other girls, but (centre manager Annie) said to me, 'you meet me across the road in our Babes building, I will walk over with you and I will walk in with you'," Jasmine explains.

"She always did something to make me feel comfortable... and that slowly brought me out of my shell."

BABY JAXON ARRIVES

Since baby Jaxon arrived in mid-2021, Jasmine says her fears about connecting have disappeared, and she's feeling confident in motherhood.

She's looking forward to getting Jaxon on the swings at the park, and getting back to work in the new year after being made redundant at the start of the pandemic.

Jasmine says her perspective on what's important has shifted, and she's focused on building a big life for her and Jaxon.



"Before I went to Babes I was stressing about what seemed like big things, they all feel like little things now."

"The Perfect Storm"

Telling her story eight weeks after the birth of her little boy, Alison starts with a warning.

"I will end up crying," she says. She does, and everyone who hears it does too.

Falling pregnant after moving from Sydney to Cairns with her husband and young daughter, the nine months waiting for her little boy were the toughest of Alison's life.

"There was a lot of anguish, and I was not coping.

The hormones had taken over my mind and my body, but I didn't know where to turn to," she explains.

Isolated and stressed, Alison calls it a "perfect storm" that also saw the family face financial hardship with lost work opportunities, and unexpected costs of the move.

Usually a confident and resilient social services professional, perinatal depression hit Alison with invasive thoughts of self-harm, and the feeling she just wanted the baby out of her.

As her husband worked a fly-in, fly-out role, Alison cared for her toddler. She

barely slept, as pregnancy made it hard even to breathe.

"I'd tried to call PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia) but their helpline closes in the evening, and it was evenings that were the worst for me," she explains.

Eventually connecting with clinical care through the Gidget Foundation, Alison says finally verbalising those alarming thoughts meant her psychiatrist wanted her to have as much support as possible.

"As well as prescribing antidepressants and therapy, they said, 'would you mind if we made a referral to The Babes Project?'"

Alison still remembers her first conversation with the team at Babes Cairns, at around 26 weeks pregnant.

"That one phone call helped immensely, just to hear them say 'we hear you, pregnancy is hard, and we are here to help you through this journey'. It's like a friend, a an instant friend."

Weekly appointments with pregnancy support workers at the Cairns centre were a lifeline for Alison, and so was the practical assistance.

"Being given things like a onesie for the baby, or a packed nappy bag, or a bundle of nappies and wipes -

that's \$10 you don't have to spend in the weekly shop, and that's big when it means money for my daughter's lunches for a week, or vitamins for my pregnant body," she says.

"When I was offered a car seat, I remember just bursting into tears... I knew that would help me save hundreds of dollars, it felt too good to be true."

Little Xavier was born in August – just as Cairns went into a three-day lockdown due to COVID-19.

"As soon as it was announced, I had a call from (Babes Cairns manager) Cristy saying, 'I'm thinking of you'. I was so stressed, everything was up in the air, and it meant so much to

be at the forefront of their thoughts," Alison says.

The determined mum is in a much better headspace since giving birth, and she recommends Babes to anyone else struggling in pregnancy.

"I didn't realise at the time, but I was actually at risk of perishing, and taking my child with me."

"I would hate, hate, hate for another mum to fall through the gaps."

"Now I can breathe, life feels good again, I love my children – and I feel really good about having the support of The Babes Project. It's such a good service, and it's really needed."



"Gave Me A Cloud to Float On"

Early in her pregnancy, Becc realised the violence she faced from her partner was no longer just a threat to her.

"It was actually **family** violence, since I was pregnant – and that was it, I literally up and left," she says.

Moving home with her mum, Becc's trauma continued, as her family and friends didn't support her plans to become a mum.

"I turned to (a family member) as a support, who's also a single mother, and she said to me 'get an abortion', she said it's too complicated," Becc explains.

Becc describes her feelings then as "complete turmoil", before an attempt at self-harm made her seek support.

"I decided enough's enough, and I had to reach out to somebody, to try and find care," she says.

Already aware of The Babes Project, the desperate young woman sent them a late-night email – and the reply came just as Becc needed it most.

"I was at a really low point, because I was exhausted and had nowhere else to go. I'd actually booked in to get an abortion... and the day I was booked I got an email from (The Babes Project centre manager) Annie saying, 'we can help you'."

Becc has tears as she recounts the story, and there were plenty of tears when she was first connecting with Babes too.

"Annie said 'let us know how we can help you and what you need from us and we'll try our best'," Becc says.

"It was those words that I suppose gave me a cloud to float on."

As her pregnancy continued, The Babes Project supported Becc to face fears about connecting with her daughter, to confidently caring and bonding.

"(As part of Babes' program) I got the cot and the car seat from Babes, and that was just like right, these people believe in me, they support me - that to me was a huge thing, you start to believe in yourself because you don't want to let them down, and you've got this little person as well to imprint for the rest of their life."

Baby N arrived between lockdowns in Melbourne in 2021, and Becc says she vividly remembers taking the tiny newborn to her first postnatal appointment at Babes in Croydon.

"When I got [Baby N] in the centre, that was actually in my mind a turning point for me - the ways that Annie helped me communicate with [Baby N], and see her little cues and connect," Becc says.

While bathtime is the current highlight of their day, the devoted mum is looking forward to watching *Gilmore Girls* with her little girl.

And she says her daughter has been her "saving grace" from a lifetime of tough mental health challenges.

"As Annie always says, it's okay to cry, and to walk away if you need to take a breather - if you leave the room for five minutes, you're stronger than what you were five minutes ago," she explains.

"Then I have my little love moments of tears with my baby, and that's okay for her to see that... because she reads off your energy. And, oh my god, how real is that! But knowing that, it's amazing how positive my environment has become since Babes."

"(In pregnancy) I was hitting the panic button because I was in a horrible situation mentally, emotionally, physically," she says.

But Becc knew getting support to make motherhood work could turn her life around.

"I was just grappling for any lifeline I could, and Babes was that lifeline."

operations report.

BEC GEBERT, COO

SERVICES TO CLIENTS

Phone appointments, video meetings, doorstep deliveries and an increase in need were all hallmarks of the 2020/2021 year. Despite ongoing Covid19 challenges causing our service to fluctuate between in-person and remote appointments, there was much to celebrate as we forged onwards, convinced that more than ever, that women need a supportive community around them as they become mothers.

As States navigated differing levels of virus transmission and response, we saw a strong distinction emerge between our Queensland centre - which was mostly untouched by interruptions - and our Victorian centres, where in-person appointments were only possible 50% of the time.

Increasing referrals led to expansion in our triage team and resulted in waitlists at both Victorian centres, from February to April.

TEAM DEVELOPMENT

Connection with our wider team looked different this year. Limited opportunity for in-person training resulted in online offerings focused on trauma aware and therapeutic practice, alongside covidsafe protocols, as we adapted to the changing government health directives. Zoom meetings and regular phone calls became the norm in an effort to stay connected as gatherings were once again delayed. This has particularly impacted the Cairns team, who we have been unable to visit since opening the centre in October 2019. However, their support for women and growth as a team have been evidenced by glowing feedback from clients and referrers alike.

As we welcomed new team members and farewelled others, we finished the year with more than a third of the team having worked with The Babes Project for three+ years. We've been grateful for the time and dedication each person has devoted to seeing women and families thrive. Particularly this year, when many Victorians juggled home schooling, lockdowns and limitations to their involvement with Babes. We've valued their commitment to their role and enthusiasm to return as soon as restrictions allowed.

CAIRNS

Cairns thrived, hosting group lunches and experienced a 222% increase in client numbers on the previous year. The number of high risk clients at Cairns also grew from 0% to 20% of active clients by the end of June.

CROYDON

Similar to Cairns, Croydon experienced an increase in the percentage of clients presenting as high risk, from 15% to 24%.

FRANKSTON

Frankston increased opening hours, adding an extra day per fortnight; initially facilitating meetings with key local and government stakeholders before allowing space to pilot the Empowered Mamas Program for women seeking help from The Babes Project for a second time. This program, generously funded by the Bank of Melbourne, follows on from the perinatal education program, going further to equip women in understanding their own personal agency, decision making, connection to community and responsibility across a wide range of areas.

WE CELEBRATED

- The first professional print run of our Perinatal Education Program.
- A new look for the Croydon Centre, after flood damage was repaired.
- Six new team members.
- Three photoshoots and documentation of real motherhood stories.

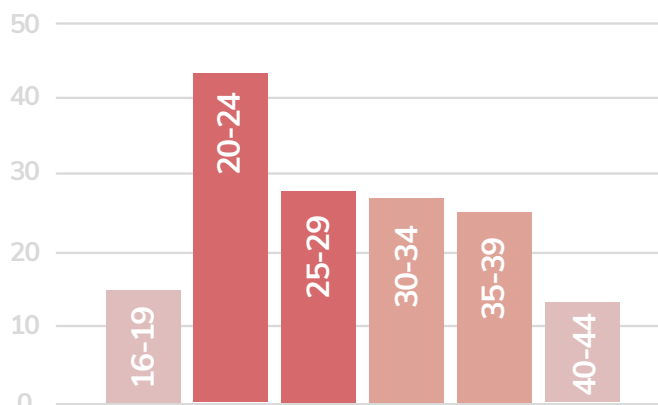
WE NAVIGATED

- A reduction in our management team resulting in an overhaul of systems and redistribution of tasks.
- As the pandemic impacted families some team members had to adjust their volunteering commitments. Unfortunately, this included the entire Marketing and Comms team.
- Significant challenges in providing social support to Victorian clients with centres only able to host group programs for three out of twelve months

sums us up.

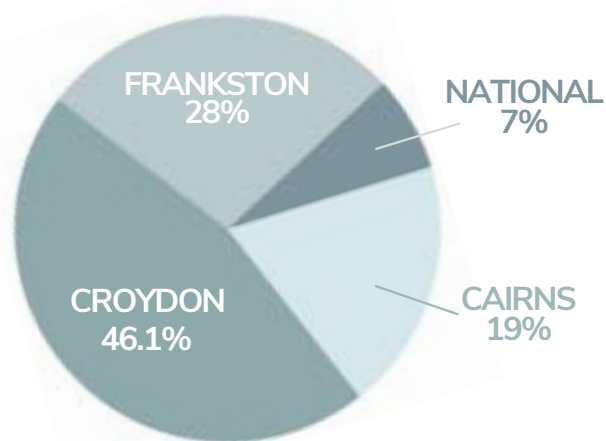
STATISTICS FROM THE 2020-2021 FINANCIAL YEAR

age of mothers in the program*



*calculated on age women turn in 2021

distribution of mothers across hubs



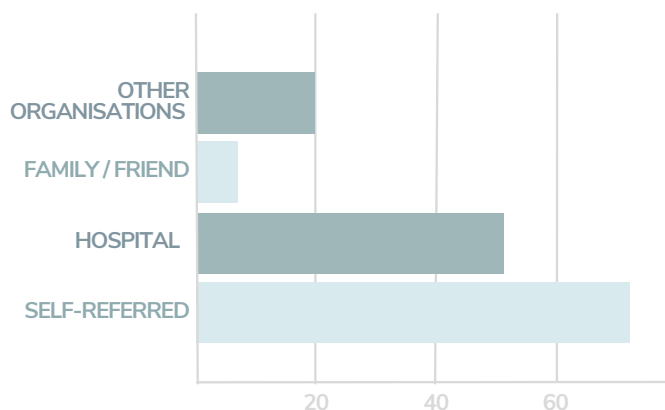
11.2%

HAVE CURRENT FAMILY
VIOLENCE CONCERNS AT THE
TIME OF INTAKE.

42.8%

OF WOMEN IN OUR PROGRAM
HAVE A HISTORY OF DRUG
AND ALCOHOL ABUSE.

where referrals to TBP come from

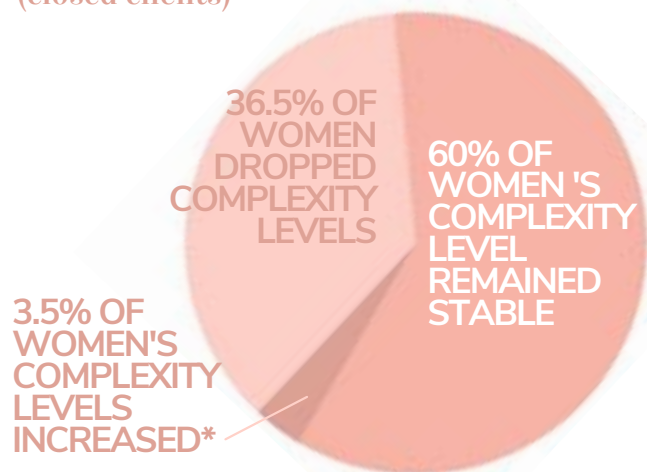


87.5%

OF WOMEN IN OUR PROGRAM
HAVE A HISTORY OF MENTAL
HEALTH ISSUES.

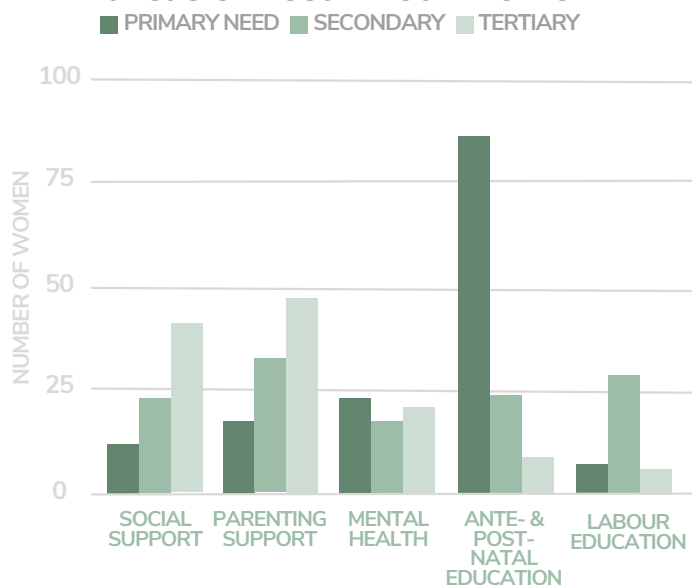
CONTINUED: STATISTICS FROM THE 2020-2021 FINANCIAL YEAR

outcomes: complexity development (closed clients)



*This will occur due to external factors such as child protection notifications and circumstances around birth and baby.

areas of need in our women



53% of TBP women have not been pregnant before.

21% have been pregnant before, but are not parenting.

25% have been pregnant before and are currently parenting.

5.3% are repeat TBP clients.

80.6%

OF WOMEN IN OUR PROGRAM WERE BORN IN AUSTRALIA.

4.3%

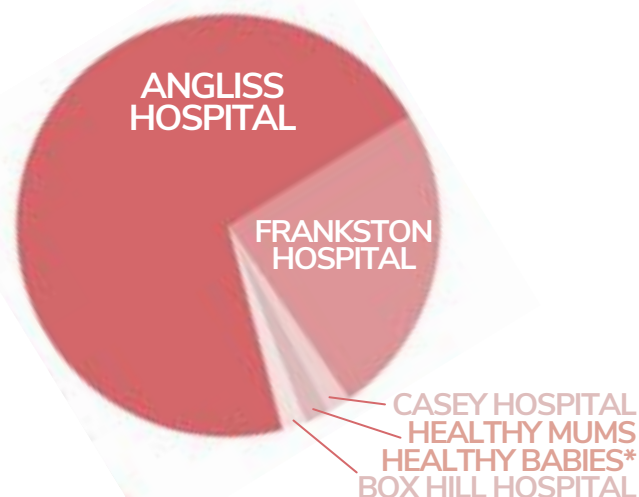
OF THESE WOMEN ARE ABORIGINAL OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS.

OTHER COUNTRIES OF BIRTH:

>1% EACH:
CHILE, COLUMBIA, IRAN, NEW ZEALAND, SOUTH AFRICA, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

<1% EACH:
CANADA, COOK ISLANDS, CZECH REPUBLIC, ENGLAND, FIJI, GERMANY, INDIA, NETHERLANDS, PAKISTAN, SINGAPORE, SRI LANKA, SOUTH KOREA, TAIWAN.

referring hospitals



*often referred alongside hospital.

our people.

VOLUNTEER JANEL ON WHY SHE VOLUNTEERS

"I am a busy person, but I still make time for The Babes Project."

Controversial as it may seem, I'm not saying this to guilt trip you into doing anything (believe me, balance and boundaries are something I've learnt the hard way, and I wouldn't subject anyone to it!). Why would someone, who is completing their Masters, working in mental health, already volunteering, and committed to making time for friends and family, willingly, enthusiastically even, carve out 6 hours - practically a full working day - every week, to volunteer somewhere else? Let me tell you; The Babes Project supports me as much as the women we support.

As an arts therapist, I'm constantly learning about how to walk alongside people, with a holistic and trauma informed approach. The more I read about how to do this well, the more I value The Babes Project, not just for what we bring to the community, but to each other as a team. I've been following The Babes Project on social media for a few years. It always looked so incredible, safe and impactful. The volunteers looked so happy to be there. But as we know, social media can act as a highlights reel. It's not always authentic.

I have witnessed many organisations and spaces who work project that they offer so much to those they support, only to hear or experience, that the way the staff and volunteers are treated is completely opposite. The difference about Babes, is that what you see is what you get. The Babes Project is authentic on and off camera. Authenticity builds trust. It is the foundation of successful relationships, of safety and in turn, growth (both in individuals, and their communities).

"It is my personal experience that The Babes Project not only empowers the mamas it walks alongside, they empower their volunteers. Just as we believe in mamas, trusting that they can and will support their babes as best as they can, as a volunteer, I am encouraged and supported to believe in myself as someone capable to make a positive difference."

I remember when I first joined The Babes Project. They delivered an envelope with sign-up documentation, a welcome note, a tote bag, tea and chocolate (to enjoy while I read through the forms). I'd never experienced a warm embrace

receiving documents to sign until joining The Babes Project. These small thoughtful considerations, curate a space that make me feel valued. When someone places value in you, it creates the capacity for you to see value in others.

"Likewise, when someone offers you tools and encouragement, with pure intentions, it sparks something in you."

I am passionate about volunteering here at The Babes Project because it is a place that cheers on the success, learning and wins of its volunteers, as much as its mamas.

Walking into those doors is an honour. The team have become my friends, mentors, and confidantes, who generously listen to what is going on in my life, and genuinely consider my perspective. In these walls, I'm not seen as the youngest, the single, or the person who has never experienced pregnancy...I am a Babes Project Pregnancy Support Worker, who has the potential to positively influence women (and their families) in my community every week.

I may be busy but volunteering at The Babes Project is a priority. My life wouldn't be the same without it.



our community.

WHY THEY CHOOSE TO BACK THE BABES PROJECT.

"Because motherhood is hard, even with an extensive support network. I couldn't imagine how much harder it would be finding out you're pregnant and feeling terrified because you feel like you're on your own, I love that Babes lets its mothers know that regardless of their situation, they're not alone".
- S.C.

"It is such a worthy cause, these new mummies need support and kindness."
- K.B.

"My wife and I were very impressed with the work done and support given... to mothers in an extremely important part of life - giving them support and valuable life lessons."
- J.L.

"Because they supported me when I needed it most. Now I'm able to give back, I will do what I can to pass on the love and generosity that they gave me."
- M.M.

our graduates.

WOMEN WHO GRADUATED TBP IN 2020-2021.

"You are never alone in your journey! Babes Project made me feel like I belong when I was going through the worst phase of my life and encouraged me how great of a job I was doing."
- SHAYAL

"They have been my life raft throughout my pregnancy, birth and the first year of my baby's life."
- CYNTHIA

"It's so amazing to have support from the Babes Project, they hold your hand on your journey to motherhood. So grateful for all of the information, advice and support I don't know what I would have done without them."
- TRACEY

"The Babes Project helped my find my confidence and realise how strong I am as a woman and as a mother."
- DANIELLE



grants.

The Babes Project believes in the power of community and thanks the following groups for their generous contribution to our Babes community in the 2020-21 financial year. Their support of our work means hundreds of women are not alone as they face the challenges of motherhood.

BANK OF MELBOURNE

The Bank of Melbourne Foundation generously donated \$50,000 in April 2021 towards the development and implementation of our new Empowered Mamas Program which aims to support women in subsequent pregnancies. This funding ensures the women we work with have the opportunity to create positive outcomes for their family.



<http://info.bankofmelbourne.com.au/foundation/>

THE DORMAN FAMILY

The Dorman Family Foundation made a wonderful contribution of \$25,000 in 2021 towards the work of our Victorian centres to ensure we can respond to the rapidly growing need for our services post-Covid. We are so thankful for their support which makes a significant impact on many young families.

<https://www.dormanfamilyfoundation.org.au/>

TOBIN BROTHERS FOUNDATION

Tobin Brothers Foundation supported The Babes Project Frankston's need for Program resources for our expectant and new mums by providing a \$5000 grant in 2020/21.

<https://tobinbrothersfoundation.com.au/>

FRANKSTON CITY

The Frankston City Council contributed a \$2000 grant towards The Babes Project Frankston's covid recovery plan which will ensure new women in our program get a nappy bag and new mums basket to ensure they're prepared for their new baby.



<https://www.frankston.vic.gov.au/Home>

THE QUEENSLAND COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

The Queensland Community Foundation, who granted The Babes Project Cairns \$3000 to equip vulnerable women in the Far North Queensland region with Birth and Baby Packs in preparation for becoming a mother. These packs are used as resources to educate and equip women for her birth experience and to encourage proactiveness in preparing for her baby.

<https://qcf.org.au/>

we're stronger when we partner with...

gadens

Understand the importance of caring for at-risk communities, Gadens Lawyers have provided us with pro-bono legal support in both Victoria and Queensland since 2016.



With a heart to empower vulnerable people to transform their lives, the Payton Foundation has partnered with us since 2017, providing regular financial and governance support and accounting expertise.



Since partnering with us in 2018, Tooshies have helped us spread our message, donated a portion of their profits to our work and provided their planet friendly nappies and wipes to our Babes mamas.



MIRANDA MAYLE PHOTOGRAPHY

For the past four years Miranda has helped in capturing the stories from women in our community that otherwise might not have been seen or heard. She has captured our biggest achievements, and helped us create impactful campaigns.



EAT FOR YOU

Eat for You generously donate their Lemme Feel Well wholefood bites to our pregnancy packs and make their bites available to our group lunches across all of our sites.



TINY HEARTS EDUCATION

Tiny Hearts partner with us to deliver essential baby and child first aid courses, so every woman in The Babes Project programs can feel empowered to care for their little one when they are sick or injured.

"It is a privilege to get a glimpse into women finding themselves as a mother, falling in love with their child, and learning how to confidently raise them in safe and happy environments."

- HELEN PARKER OAM
CEO + FOUNDER

