

A new \$4.45 million home for Karinya House -and a sanctuary for mums and bubs

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For almost 20 years, Karinya House has provided accommodation and other support for vulnerable pregnant women and mothers with newborns in two, now-increasingly cramped ACT Housing properties in the north of Canberra.

But all that will change soon with a new, \$4.45 million purpose-built complex under construction in Belconnen. It is due to be completed in June and the first mums and bubs – and staff are expected to move in before the end of the year.

The building project has been funded by the ACT government and will double Karinya House's accommodation capacity, allowing it to substantially add to the more than 5000 pregnant and parenting women it has already helped since the first home was opened in 1997.

It also means Karinya House's ongoing expenses will increase and it is calling on the community to continue supporting its fundraising and giving it "much-appreciated and vital" cash and in-kind donations.

Karinya House will lease the new complex from the government and will surrender the other two ACT Housing properties it now occupies.

The new accommodation comprises three two-bedroom cottages, a double-storey block with four units and an administration block and consulting rooms. Staff will also be accommodated to allow for overnight care.

Karinya House finance and business manager Jo Saccasan said a special mother and baby unit would also be incorporated into the complex for women with particularly complex needs whose babies might otherwise be placed into care.

Karinya House will work with Child and Youth Protection Services to support mothers in the special unit who may be struggling with issues including that they are very young or subject to violence or have mental health or drug and alcohol problems.

"We will be trying to help them remain with their babies. Unfortunately this doesn't always happen," Ms Saccasan said.

"We will work with Care and Protection to ensure the children are safe and mothers are given every opportunity. This is paramount."

The new complex would not only provide more comfortable quarters for the women and staff but also for the first time create space specifically to interview new clients, hold group meetings and organise the women's ongoing care.

Karinya House is a not-for-profit, community-based organisation started by a small group of people in the community who wanted to do something practical for women in need who were pregnant or had a newborn.

It is a 24-hour service and offers help to women in Canberra and the surrounding region including safe accommodation, transitional housing and outreach programs.

Ms Saccasan said it generally helped women anywhere from the time they became pregnant to three months after their babies were born, but this help could be extended.

It was often the first safe and secure home the women had known.

Women who might seek the help of Karinya House included those who did not have a supportive partner, those who had been in a supportive relationship but the pregnancy had triggered a negative reaction including violence, those who did not have any family support, those who had some mental or physical illness and those who needed time to determine what they wanted to do with the pregnancy in their life and how to move forward.

In 2014-15, 50 per cent of the women referred to Karinya House were homeless, 63 per cent had domestic violence issues and 55 per cent had mental health problems.

A spokeswoman for Community Services Minister Yvette Berry said the funding for Karinya House included \$736,000 through *A Step Up for Our Kids*, the government's new five-year strategy to reform out-of-home care. This would help create the special mother and baby unit. Ms Saccasan said the ACT government was also providing annual recurrent funding over five years to support the operation of the unit.

In 2015, 56 per cent of Karinya House's funding was from the ACT government, 39 per cent from donations and 5 per cent from other revenue.

Ms Saccasan said that with the new building and expanded capacity, its annual costs were likely to rise to \$1.5 million – creating a requirement to raise an additional \$300,000 a year.

It would mean Karinya House would have to add to its base of 800 supporters who made regular financial donations and continue to push its fundraising.

"Our main expense is the staffing costs of caseworkers, all of whom also provide additional voluntary hours of work. Cash donations are the most vital donation to us," Ms Saccasan said.

"There are other services that can provide material support and we work with them. We do need cash donors to continue. Put it this way, to meet our annual funding requirements we would only need 6000 supporters to donate \$20 a month. We recognise there are many great organisations that our community support. We appreciate every one that supports Karinya House."



This story was found at: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/a-new-445-million-home-for-karinya-house--and-a-sanctuary-for-mums-and-bubs-20160129-gmglo8.html>