

New Karinya House a sanctuary for vulnerable mothers, mothers-to-be and their babies

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To be pregnant and alone in a foreign country with no support is a nightmare. To be pregnant and alone in your own home town with no support can be as equally frightening.

When there is nowhere else to go, Karinya House in Canberra has for almost 20 years been a sanctuary for vulnerable mothers and their babies.

The community-based, not-for-profit organisation provides supported accommodation, transitional housing, outreach, support groups and casework services to pregnant and parenting women and their families who are in crisis.

Now, the women and their children have an even safer and more pleasant place to be.

Chief Minister Andrew Barr on Wednesday officially opened the new Karinya House, a \$4.45 million purpose-built complex in Belconnen funded by the ACT government.

Mr Barr handed over the keys to the new Karinya House to president Sarah Kelly.

"It has been a long journey to find a new home for Karinya House, but we are proud to have played a role in expanding the service," Mr Barr said.

The complex [was brought to life with a fit-out costing \\$450,000](#) and funded through private donations, contributions from community groups including Rotary and Lions clubs and philanthropic organisations such as the Snow Foundation.

It replaces two ageing and cramped Housing ACT properties that previously accommodated the women, babies and staff.

Karinya House finance and business manager Jo Saccasan said ideally the new complex would accommodate 11 women and their babies where the previous set-up accommodated only six women and their babies. The new complex also allows women who have older children to be housed and creates for the first time separate office space for staff.

The women who are using the service have no doubt what Karinya House means to them – it is home.

A 39-year-old mother who escaped from Iran to Australia via a treacherous boat trip from Indonesia is just one of the women being housed in the new complex with her daughter.

She knew no one in Canberra before she had her baby.

"I'm so happy because now I have a big family. I am so lucky. Thank you," she said, touching the arm of case worker Catherine O'Halloran.

Another new mum secured a room in Karinya House two days before her son, now three months, was born. She had been living in a one-bedroom unit with a partner and his uncle.

"I feel really safe here," she said.

The 20-year-old said she hoped to move into public housing and finish her education to help set up her son's future.

"I want to show him if I can do it, he can do it," she said.

Another 16-year-old Karinya House resident is awaiting the birth of her daughter in September. She arrived from another country with no English and was rejected by her family when she became pregnant.

When asked where she would live if not at Karinya House her simple answer was: "I don't know".

Ms Saccasan said there [was still a critical need for the public to commit](#), however big or small, to ongoing donations to Karinya House. She said the service had about 600 "friends" who made regular donations but needed about 3000.

"It's a great facility and we're very proud to have it finally opened this week, but the reality is there will still be unmet demand," she said.

"At the end of every financial year, we can still have up to 100 women who we are providing other support for, but can't provide accommodation for them at Karinya House.

"Sometimes we are providing support to women who are fleeing domestic violence situations and living in cars or garages or with friends because we can't accommodate them.

"So we'd often refer them out to other services, but I have a sinking feeling that this place will soon be full and we'll need more places."

Ms Saccasan said the Karinya House team, along with the architects of the project, had spent much time to ensure the new centre was not just a secure and safe place for women, but also a place that "feels like home".

"The women we help here are incredibly resilient, courageous and all they need is a place that's safe, that makes them feel like they are at home, so they can set about rebuilding their personal resources," she said.

Donations to Karinya House can be made at <https://karinyahouse.asn.au/donate-online/>

This story was found at: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/new-karinya-house-a-sanctuary-for-vulnerable-mothers-motherstobe-and-their-babies-20160831-gr5bdi.html>



The new Karinya House for vulnerable mothers and babies was officially opened in Belconnen on Wednesday. Case worker Catherine O'Halloran is pictured here with a 20-year-old resident and her three-month-old son. Photo: Rohan Thomson



ACT Chief Minister Andrew Barr officially opened the new Karinya House, which was funded by the ACT government at a cost of \$4.45 million. The fit-out of the complex cost a further \$450,000 and was largely funded by community and other donations. "We are proud to have played a role in expanding the service," Mr Barr said. Photo: Rohan Thomson



ACT Chief Minister Andrew Barr handed over the keys to the new Karinya House to its president Sarah Kelly. The facility is run by a community-based, not-for-profit organisation which will lease the complex from the government. Photo: Rohan Thomson