



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

CAROLINE CHISHOLM SOCIETY 50TH ANNIVERSARY RECEPTION
Tuesday 11 May 2021

Dr Michael Christie, President, Caroline Chisholm Society
Board Members,
Dr Jennifer Weber, Chief Executive Officer
Founders of the Society, and
All our Distinguished guests

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us this afternoon.

I am delighted to welcome you to Government House in celebration of the Caroline Chisholm Society's 50th Anniversary.

Of course, this celebration is a little belated. We were about to welcome you at Government House just over a year ago now. We all know what happened to 'derail' our gathering then. But the Society has been far from idle in the meantime. Let me come back to that in a moment.

This special anniversary brings home to us that, despite the massive social and technological changes that passing decades see, some things never really – or never fully – change.

Unfortunately, the vulnerability of mothers and their children is one such thing.

As you know, the young Caroline Chisholm began her tireless work and advocacy to protect homeless or unemployed women arriving in Sydney in the mid-19th century. She recognised the need to attend to the vulnerability that threatened them, and their children.

It was more than a century later, in 1969, that a group of volunteers similarly recognised the vulnerability of many pregnant women and their babies, and mobilised to offer practical support of material aid and counselling.

Caroline Chisholm was aptly chosen as the Society's namesake.

Today, another half century later, the Caroline Chisholm Society continues its work in an expanded form.

Like Caroline Chisholm, you have recognised evolving needs.

Family violence, homelessness, mental health, social isolation and financial insecurity are amongst the significant features that challenge many of the families that you assist.

I certainly do not need to be persuaded of the number of women, children and families challenged in those ways. Some 40 years in the courts have shown me that, up close, in detail.

And my experience as a magistrate in the Children's and adult courts, and as a judge in the Family Court of Australia, brought home to me not just the need for, but also the genuine protection afforded by your work.

Never has it been more important than during the depths of the global pandemic, its lockdowns, and its aftermath.

A special congratulations to everyone who ensured that the essential work of the Society continued, uninterrupted, throughout such a difficult and complex time.

I am pleased for the opportunity today to express thanks on behalf of all Victorians for your work.

I thank your President, Dr Michael Christie, Board members, CEO Jennifer Weber and the staff – past and present – for all that they have done, and continue to do for the Society.

And of course the warmest thanks to the volunteers who have contributed so many thousands of hours each year.

Without your wisdom and generosity, and the generosity of corporate sponsors, community partners, donors and the caring school communities – who each year raise funds for equipment and clothing – the Caroline Chisholm Society could not be celebrating this very special milestone.

I must say that I am delighted that some of your founding members have joined us. We welcome Philomene Joshua Tenni and Pat Coffey OAM, and the many early volunteers who have given so much of themselves to support other women and their children.

It is also a delight to acknowledge James Chisholm, a direct descendant of Caroline Chisholm herself.

I must mention the magnificent quilt that you will see here on display. Welcome to the Lions Club Quilters who realised this project, enabled by the generosity of an anonymous donor. It is indeed a beautiful way to mark this time in the Society's history.

Finally, we hope you enjoy your time here at Government House, and a belated but heartfelt *Happy 50th Birthday* to the Caroline Chisholm Society.