



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
VICTORIA

## **COUNCIL OF SINGLE MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

### **RECEPTION**

**Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019**

**Ms Barbara Schade**, Chair, Council of Single Mothers and their Children

**Ms Jenny Davidson**, CEO, Council of Single Mothers and their Children

**Ms Terese Edwards**, CEO, National Council for Single Mothers and their Children

**Ms Emma Kealey**, Shadow Minister for Mental Health, Women and the Prevention of Family Violence

#### **Distinguished guests**

#### **Ladies and gentlemen**

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 evening.

Tony and I are delighted to welcome you to Government House to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Single Mothers and their Children.

This evening we celebrate the essential support services that you have provided to over 50,000 single mother families.

There are so many ways in which things have changed since 1969, when your group of founding single mothers met to support each other.

They were courageous women.

If it weren't hard enough to be raising their children alone, they were doing so in a social milieu where many women in Australia were still being forced to marry, or to relinquish their babies to adoption, if they found themselves pregnant 'out of wedlock', as it was described then.

It was a time when there was social stigma and so many structural, social and economic disadvantages in raising a child alone.

Since 1969, society has changed a great deal.

Babies are not forcibly removed from their mothers. Indeed, in 2012, the Victorian Parliament made a formal apology to the women and children who were the victims of the forced adoption policies of the past.

The social stigma for a child outside marriage is also no longer. And there has been a significant increase in parents who choose not to marry.

And so, we see a huge increase in the number of babies born outside of marriage – from just over 8% in 1970 to around 35% today.

Of course, not all are being raised by single mothers.

But many are. And all single parent families, whether headed by mothers, fathers, or a grandparent who is raising a child on behalf of their son or daughter, require support.

The fact remains, however, that the 13% of Victorian families headed by single mothers continue to be amongst those at the highest risk of poverty in our country.

And so, whilst the context may have changed, the need to support and advocate for single mothers has not. And from that perspective, the Council's dedication and support are as relevant today as they were when it started a half century ago.

There has been much to celebrate along the way.

You helped to campaign for improved welfare payments for single mothers.

Your advocacy ultimately helped to ensure that what were then referred to as 'illegitimate children' were assured of equal legal rights to children born within a marriage.

You secured generous support and funding from the R.E. Ross Trust, directed towards emergency funding for single mothers.

And you have implemented and expanded a telephone Support Line, now staffed every day of the week, which last year responded to almost 1300 calls.

Everyone in this State can be grateful for the work that you do to support these mums who, in turn, are supporting and nurturing our future Victorians.

As a former Children's Court magistrate and Family Court judge, I can assure you that I have a very particular appreciation of your important work.

Thank you to the Chair, Barbara Schade, Board members, and CEO Jenny Davidson and the staff, for your work in building new initiatives and increasing the impact of CSMC's advocacy.

Thank you to the CSMC founding and early members, major donors and philanthropic supporters for your continuing contributions.

Finally, thank you to the volunteers who donate their time, resources and skills supporting the lives of single mother families.

That leaves me to say, 'Happy 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday' to the Council of Single Mothers and their Children.