

A photograph of a woman with long, straight, dark hair breastfeeding a young child with blonde hair. The woman is looking down at the child. The child is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt. The scene is set in a room with a white wall and a wooden chair with a pink seat. The entire image is framed by a thick, colorful border with a geometric, patterned design in shades of yellow, red, orange, purple, and blue.

Yarning about breastfeeding:

Celebrating our stories



VACCHO

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Cover: Bonnie Kairouz breastfeeding her daughter Jordie Morgan | Artwork by Shakara Montalto | Gunditjmarra

Note on terminology: VACCHO acknowledges that although the term 'Aboriginal' is used, we are referring to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria.

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#DrinkWaterUMob



Nikita Rotumah was the winner of the #DrinkWaterUMob social media competition in May 2016. For four weeks the Nutrition team at VACCHO ran a social media competition asking Community to snap a creative “water drinking” selfie and post it with #DrinkWaterUMob. This is Nikita’s

beautiful photo of her drinking water while breastfeeding her daughter Yindi, spreading a positive message to our Mob!

Nikita says “Hydrate your body so it can hydrate your baby.”

Artwork story

“The drawing represents an Aboriginal mother feeding her baby the natural way through breastfeeding. The lines that are in the breast represent the milk coming down into the baby’s mouth. And the milk drops represent the excess amount of milk some women, including myself may have in the first few weeks. After drawing the baby feeding on the mothers breast and milk drops, I looked at my drawing and straightaway I could see the shape of a love heart, which is why I drew this particular shape around the image. I think the heart shape is significant to the feelings I had when I first seen, held and breastfed my baby. I instantly fell in love with him.”

Shakara Montalto | Gunditjmara woman from the Western District

Foreword



Our people have been breastfeeding for up to 70,000 years. VACCHO is pleased to present *Yarning about breastfeeding: Celebrating our stories*, sharing Aboriginal families' breastfeeding stories. It's important to talk about the joys and importantly, the challenges of parents and Boorais when it comes to breastfeeding. It's natural and it's normal, but that doesn't make it easy in modern society.

I've got two children. I didn't breastfeed my first child as I felt it wasn't really an option back then. There was no encouragement and bottle feeding felt like the only option. Then 20 years later I decided to breastfeed my second born, society was different then. It was encouraged in the hospitals and there was a lot more assistance. The messages that came out around that time were all about how breastfeeding was the healthier option. It was a different era, I saw the change in the hospitals, and the environment was different to when I had my first boy.

My advice to all women when it comes to breastfeeding is to not be shame about it. It is all about perspective, even if you can only do it for a short period of time. It is such a beautiful and natural way to bond with your baby. I couldn't recommend it enough.

The Koori Maternity Services (KMS) program is vitally important for our families. KMS provides safe and culturally strong environments - giving clinical care and meaningful support in preparing for and looking after boorais in our families.

The support and encouragement from the whole Community matters. This book is also inclusive of the stories of fathers and grandparents because the people closest to mothers make a big difference to mum starting and continuing to breastfeed.

I would like to thank all the mums and dads, Aunties, Uncles and grandparents who have shared their personal stories with us.

It is my hope that this book will proudly sit on the kitchen benches and coffee tables of our Community, encouraging conversations about breastfeeding.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jill Gallagher". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Jill Gallagher AO
VACCHO Chief Executive Officer

About this book

Yarning About Breastfeeding: Celebrating Our Stories features stories from Aboriginal mothers, fathers, Aunties, Uncles, grandparents and health professionals about breastfeeding. These personal stories reflect the importance of kinship and culturally safe maternity services to enable success in breastfeeding.

We hope that by sharing people's experiences and advice in this book, more families will be encouraged and supported to breastfeed their boorai.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) statement on breastfeeding:

"Breastfeeding is the normal way of providing young infants with the nutrients they need for healthy growth and development. Virtually all mothers can breastfeed, provided they have accurate information, and the support of their family, the health care system and society at large.

Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended up to 6 months of age, with continued breastfeeding along with appropriate complementary foods up to two years of age or beyond."

Traditionally breastfeeding was common practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The traditional way was to breastfeed for up to four years, sometimes longer, gradually introducing nutritious bush foods.

Today the good news is that most Aboriginal women (83%) begin breastfeeding.¹ However, at around 1 month only 59% of Aboriginal women are still breastfeeding and at 6 months 7% are exclusively breastfeeding.²

There are many factors that support and encourage breastfeeding, these include role models (especially mums and Aunties), supportive environments, knowledge, self-confidence, and that breastfeeding is free and convenient.

Through beautiful stories and photographs, *Yarning About Breastfeeding: Celebrating Our Stories* celebrates breastfeeding in Aboriginal communities throughout Victoria.

Thank you to everyone who generously contributed their time, knowledge and information for this book.

Kind Regards,

Mikaela Egan, Keith Morgan, Shakara Montalto, Simone Andy, Catherine MacDonald, Robyn Delbridge, Jennifer Browne, Cassandra Fletcher and Greta Duke

VACCHO's Koori Maternity Services & Nutrition Teams

1. Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (2015), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2014 Report, retrieved 7/7/16, https://www.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/Aboriginal_and_Torres_Strait_Islander_HPF_2014%20-%20edited%2016%20June2015.pdf.
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011), 2010 Australian National Infant Feeding Survey Indicator results, retrieved 7/7/16, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=10737420925>

About breastfeeding

1

The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life

2

Breast milk has all the right nutrients and protects from infection

3

Breast milk is free and hygienic

4

Breastfeeding reduces the risk of overweight, obesity and type 2 diabetes for baby later in life

5

Infant formula doesn't contain the antibodies in breast milk that can help to fight infection

6

Women living with HIV can reduce the risk of passing the infection to baby by using antiretroviral drugs

7

Breastfeeding is promoted around the world and the marketing of infant formula is strictly regulated

8

Support for mums is essential

9

Workplaces play an important role in supporting breastfeeding mums

10

Appropriate solid foods should be introduced at around 6 months, with breastfeeding continuing for as long as mum and baby want to



“Breastfeeding gave my son the best possible start to growing up strong and healthy.”

Simone Andy

Yorta Yorta | Wiradjuri

Simone Andy is a Yorta Yorta/ Wiradjuri woman who was born on Boonwurrung land. She spent a majority of her childhood years growing up on Cummeragunja. She is the mother of a baby boy Djaru. Djaru means ‘Bee’ in Wiradjuri language. Djaru is two years old and was exclusively breastfed for 10 months. Simone is lucky to have had the encouragement of her partner Brett who was very supportive of the decision to breastfeed and encouraged the continuation of breastfeeding after Simone returned to work.

Simone

I imagined my breastfeeding journey would be easy but realised that initiating breastfeeding with my son Djaru was harder than I expected. I was very lucky to have the staff at the Royal Women’s Hospital support me by being patient, respectful, encouraging and providing me good practical advice.

Although it was challenging and my family had concerns that Djaru may not be getting enough milk, I endured as I enjoyed feeding my son and the bonding we shared through breastfeeding.

I returned to work when Djaru was six months old and was lucky to have a supportive workplace where I was encouraged to continue to breastfeed. My partner was supportive and would make the trips to work every day so I could breastfeed Djaru on my lunch breaks.

My biggest challenge was finding out I have arthritis which affected my hand coordination and walking ability. A specialist advised to me to give up breastfeeding so I could start my treatment. Despite this advice, I wanted to ensure my son could continue to be breastfed and I made a conscious decision to delay my treatment.

Despite my health getting worse and taking into consideration what the specialist had recommended, I continued to breastfeed until my son was ten months old. I am proud that I did what was right for myself and most importantly my son. He has thrived into a happy, strong and healthy boy.

Jacara Egan

Gunditjmara | Muthi Muthi

Jacara Egan is a proud Gunditjmara/Muthi Muthi woman who grew up in Mildura, Victoria. She is the mother of a baby boy, Taten who is one year old. Jacara breastfed Taten for five months. Her partner, Shaun Thomas is from Cape Barron Island in the Bass Strait and was very supportive of her decision to breastfeed their baby boy.

Jacara

My goal was to breastfeed for at least six months, as they were the recommendations I followed from the World Health Organization. It was hard because I did go back to work quite early, but you just find ways to make it work.

I was pretty lucky that Taten had a good latch and fed really well from the get go. I had two midwives in particular that were really helpful in that they didn't try to push their own views onto me, which was really encouraging. I think it's important for your confidence to have a lot of encouragement, and also use the information you get from the hospital and from your maternal child health nurse. My approach to it was that I got to give breastfeeding a go and because he was good at it I just let him have a more natural approach and it seemed to work for us. I know it's not the case for a lot of women, but it did help us have a strong relationship and allowed me to breastfeed for as long as I did.

I was supported by a lot of people like my mum, my family and my partner Shaun, he was great. My new mums group was really supportive, it was run by a nurse through the local council who was great. We were visited by the Aboriginal liaison worker in the hospital which was awesome, she helped us a lot while we were in hospital.

I think partners play an extremely important role in breastfeeding. You go through all these thoughts especially if it's your first time, like "OMG is this normal?" It can really stress you out and if you have someone who's not on board with



"I think educating fathers more is really important, I was lucky that I had a really supportive partner and he was willing to learn, read and just support whatever way we decided to bring up our little one."

breastfeeding, it can really affect everything like your supply, your health, all that kind of stuff and isn't really healthy for the relationship. It is really important just to have someone who can just get you stuff and do whatever they can do to help while baby's being breastfed.

There were never any really awkward situations but I did have a sense that my partner didn't like the idea of breastfeeding in public because it exposes you. I tried not to care about it but there is still a lot of shame around it, I think it's a lot better now. I would often try to rush around in between feeds which was annoying. The next one to come along I'm definitely not going to worry so much because I've seen lots more women breastfeed in public now.

I liked a lot of pages on Facebook, I read all the information they gave me at the hospital and I used the Australian Breastfeeding Association information which was excellent. It was interesting learning about the benefits breastfeeding can have for you and baby. If Taten was sick or had a stuffy nose or rash, breast milk was really helpful in making him better, it was like magic. I wasn't really aware of the benefits, I just did it because it was good for Taten.

I found it hard at times, it really effects your life and I was really exhausted all the time so you really need to look after yourself. My advice to other women is, you've got to remember that it's not forever. That this little section of your life has really changed, you're attached to him or her but it's only for a little period and it's great for bonding, it's great for health. It's just about accepting that and enjoying the experience and not thinking about what you might be missing out on.

Shaun Thomas

Palawa

Shaun Thomas is a Palawa man from Cape Barren Island in the Bass Strait. Shaun is a proud father, a professional boxer and a strong role model in his Community. Shaun's fiancé Jacara breastfed their first baby boy, Taten.

Shaun

When I first saw my partner (Jacara) breastfeeding it was one of the most amazing moments of my life that I will never forget. I felt proud and strong and loved in a way I couldn't really explain other than that I felt complete. I was proud of her because she could give our son the most amazing start to his life and that she could connect with him.

As a father, I was limited to helping and supporting at feeding times of course, but with communication asking my fiancé what is the best way I can help her. Getting her glasses of water at feed times to make sure she was kept hydrated during the night and helping with the nappy changes. I helped with cooking dinners and house cleaning, anything that could help my partner feel content and that she only had to focus on rest and feeding. Knowing that any stress on her, would affect or may decrease the breast milk supply. Once Jacara could express breast milk, I could then assist in helping her get some much needed sleep by taking on a night feed which I felt very proud as a father to connect with my son.

During the pregnancy Jacara read pregnancy books and at this time I took part in some of the nightly reads and found that it gave me more understanding especially in the areas of breastfeeding and the emotional disconnection fathers feel at those times.

There wasn't any information directed at fathers around breastfeeding. There was some information in the pregnancy books around what the father may experience while their partner is breastfeeding. It helped me gain insight into the father

feeling disconnected at times, which helped me prepare. There were times I felt less important or unwanted and disconnected but the books helped me prepare. It was a weird emotion because I knew it was far from the truth, I knew how important my role was in both their lives. I was lucky I could voice my feelings with my partner and by communicating how I felt it, made our relationship even stronger.

I honestly think it's limited (the information) in general and it should be more open to fathers, especially young dads as I don't think a lot of young men have any understanding around breastfeeding and definitely not knowing the importance of it.

We need more men taking a role in open discussions, like men's programs and groups that currently operate, could introduce it in to their talks. The more open about it, the less shame fathers would feel.

Dads could be included more in pregnancy sessions. Something like making a session around the importance of fathers whilst their partner is breastfeeding. That will help empower men, giving them options, education if they don't know they will feel shame, shut down and become less active in parenting roles.

My advice to young men or fathers-to-be is, during the pregnancy spend as much time with your partner in doctor appointments and any nursing appointments. Make yourself be a part of the journey and share it with your partner. The more involvement you have as a father the more knowledge and understanding you will have when it's time to become a dad.

Most importantly communication with your partner is vital. The more she understands how you feel, the stronger the relationship becomes. That makes the parenting journey and family journey special.



"Information needs to be more accessible. I think it's a topic men need to discuss openly though I don't think it's a common topic around fathers."

**ids, Our Futu
r Responsib**



“A big part of my decision [to breastfeed] was, that’s how my sister did it so you know... I’ll have a go at that.” - Suzie, Manager

Lake Tyers Health and Children’s Service

Suzie and Gail are the Maternity team at Lake Tyers Health and Children’s Service. Suzie, an Aboriginal Health Worker, is a mother of two children and breastfed both of them. Gail, a Maternal and Child Health Nurse works at both Lake Tyers and Lakes Entrance Aboriginal Health Association, as well as in mainstream services.

The team have a practical approach to their breastfeeding education, focusing on demonstrating how to breastfeed, rather than giving out written information. Their aim is to create a positive breastfeeding culture, where breastfeeding is supported and encouraged in the Community.

Mums are offered breast pumps to borrow so they can express milk and store it to feed their baby later. Sometimes this allows fathers and grandparents to help with feeding time as well.

Due to their isolated location, Lake Tyers have worked hard to have a strong team approach, and have good links with Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative and local mainstream breastfeeding specialists. The partnerships make it easier for families to get the best advice and care no matter where they live.

Keith Morgan

Gunai | Kurnai

Keith is a proud Gunai/Kurnai man from Bairnsdale, East Gippsland. Keith and his partner Bonnie Kairouz have a beautiful daughter, Jordie Morgan. Jordie is three years old and was breastfed until she was two and a half.

Keith

Before Jordie was born, Bonnie and I discussed whether to breastfeed or bottle-feed our daughter. We were first time parents-to-be and didn't know much about raising a child so we were a little bit scared at the time. I myself didn't know much about breastfeeding so Bonnie looked into it and seen how much it would benefit our baby so we both decided to go with it. I think it was really good that Bonnie made that commitment to breastfeed before Jordie was born.

All of our family and friends were very supportive of Bonnie's decision to breastfeed, which helped to make it a good experience.

When it came to breastfeeding, I wanted to support Bonnie and make her feel as comfortable as possible. This was really important during and after the pregnancy and was really helpful in keeping our relationship strong.

At first I felt a little bit shame when Bonnie would breastfeed in public but knowing that breastfeeding is natural and how much it would benefit our baby made it a lot easier to do as a family. I got used to it pretty quickly and seeing Bonnie breastfeed made me feel deadly knowing we were doing the right thing by our daughter. Despite feeling shame at times in the beginning, I knew that breastfeeding was something that our people have been doing for generations.

From watching my beautiful daughter grow, I really believe her brain development was a lot faster from being breastfed. It's also a great way to save money and time on buying formula and making bottles.



"I'm glad Bonnie breastfed our daughter, I feel proud watching her grow strong and healthy"

Before the birth, Bonnie and I had midwives from our local Aboriginal health service come to our house and teach us about pregnancy and breastfeeding. We both found this very beneficial and it made us feel a lot more confident leading up to parenthood and making the decision to breastfeed.

When Jordie was born, as a first time father I was terrified but really excited waiting at the hospital. One thing I'll never forget is watching my baby take her first few breaths and wanting breast milk. It felt so natural and didn't feel like we were doing anything unusual. It was a beautiful moment for me and my family and one I'll never forget.

I really believe that fathers should be more educated about breastfeeding and learn more about the health benefits and also the financial benefits. Don't be shame to ask any questions about breastfeeding, as we need to be more involved.

Bonnie Kairouz

Yorta Yorta | Gunditjmara

Bonnie is a 26-year-old Yorta Yorta/Gunditjmara woman born and raised in Melbourne's northern suburbs. Bonnie and her partner Keith have a daughter, Jordie Morgan, who is three years old, and another girl on the way due early October 2016. Bonnie breastfed Jordie until she was two and a half years old and also plans to breastfeed her next baby.

Bonnie

Growing up breastfeeding was quite common in my family so I never really felt unusual when I eventually breastfed my own child. I also had a lot of family that supported me whenever I needed it, which really helped. Breastfeeding is so beneficial for your child as they're getting all the right nutrients needed at an important stage of their life and it's natural and free.

Being first time parents and not knowing much about breastfeeding, my partner was supportive of my decision which really made me feel comfortable. I also had a lot of cousins that I was able to talk to and get advice from.

Seeing the benefits of breastfeeding within my family compared to formula feeding really motivated me to do the same.

The Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) Koori Maternity Services team were really supportive leading up to the birth and they provided me with information about breastfeeding. They also came to visit me after I gave birth to support me whilst breastfeeding. I was lucky that my daughter attached really well as I know that's not always the case.

I think encouragement from your partner is great and being able to comfort the mother during the nights she has to get up to feed baby can mean a lot. Even just the little things like getting a drink for her, setting up a cosy area, even cooking dinner can be really helpful.



It's important that not only your partner but also your families help to make it a positive experience and are there to offer support when needed.

I found that having a partner, family and Community that were supportive of breastfeeding really helped and made me feel good. For women that are planning to breastfeed, I really encourage them to just go ahead and do it! Or at least give it a try. I can promise you the benefits of breastfeeding are amazing. It can be hard at times but it's worth it in the end.



"As a mother breastfeeding, there's nothing better than watching my daughter thrive and grow into such a beautiful girl."



"It's encouraging our parents that do breastfeed, to continue as long as they want to and not feel like they're disturbing the service." - Stacey, CEO

Yappera Aboriginal Childcare Centre

Thornbury

Yappera is a childcare centre for children six months of age until school age. Yappera provides their families with a breastfeeding friendly environment. Mothers are encouraged to continue breastfeeding their children whilst they attend the Centre, if they wish. Each family is provided with breastfeeding information resources in their introductory packs.

Stacey is the CEO at Yappera and has breastfeeding experience with all three of her children. A lot of the staff members at Yappera also breastfed their own children, and recognize the importance of having a supportive environment at work to be able to breastfeed.

Mothers are welcome to come in over their lunch break and breastfeed, or they can express their breast milk for their child. The team at Yappera works with families to make sure they are able to continue breastfeeding, if desired. Mothers are also welcomed and encouraged to sit together and breastfeed before dropping their kids off, and when picking them up.

Robyn Bradley

Gunditjmara

Aboriginal Liaison Officer - Cancer Council Victoria

Robyn is a loving mother of three children, who are all now adults. Robyn sees breastfeeding as a great way for mothers to bond with their baby and knows how important it is for babies in their early stages in order for a good start in life. Robyn has four beautiful grandchildren (soon to be five) aged three, four, five and eight years old who have all been breastfed. Robyn is very happy that her children were able to make the decision to breastfeed.

Robyn

One of my daughters was hesitant to breastfeed at first because some of her friends had told her formula helps baby to sleep better. After I spoke with her and explained the benefits that come with breastfeeding and how important it would be for baby, she was able to make the right decision.

From my own experience I was able to support and guide my daughters in the best direction when it came to breastfeeding as they were still learning not just about breastfeeding but also about parenthood itself.

I think it's essential that fathers also understand the important role they play when supporting their partners while breastfeeding. A lot of fathers tend to take a back seat when it comes to breastfeeding and can feel useless at times when there's a lot they can actually do to help like preparing meals, washing, and cleaning and changing baby's nappies. As the father you want time to be able to bond with your baby as well. Even being able to comfort the mother is really healthy for the relationship as breastfeeding can be very new to first time mothers and the change can be overwhelming at times.

"It's perfectly natural to breastfeed, it's clean, safe and healthy and a great way for mothers to bond with their baby."



[The knitted breasts] "...show how to position your hands... and to actually pretend you're handling your breast." - Kim, Midwife

Njernda Aboriginal Corporation

Echuca

Njernda Aboriginal Corporation has a Koori Maternity Services site located in Echuca. Two midwives are employed at Njernda; Kim and Trish.

Kim, the first Aboriginal midwife to work at Njernda, grew up in the Community and provides her clients with a friendly, familiar face, which helps women to feel more comfortable. Trish is also a lactation consultant, meaning she specialises in helping women breastfeed.

The team has a good relationship with Goulburn Valley Health Lactation Services (Shepparton), which offers lactation day stays and specialise in breastfeeding. Kim and Trish offer referrals and mothers can also self-refer if they feel they are having problems breastfeeding.

Trish has made knitted breasts, which the team use to show women how to handle their breasts, including how to express breast milk. Many women are not familiar with their breasts before pregnancy and this fantastic tool helps women feel more comfortable to discuss and practice the new skills that come with breastfeeding.



Rikki Bamblett

Yorta Yorta | Gunditjmara | Walpri

Rikki Bamblett is a proud Yorta Yorta/Gunditjmara/Walpri woman and a mother of two lovely children, Lynara, three and Kaelun junior, one. Rikki is currently tandem feeding both and proud to breastfeed both children so that they can have the best start in life.

Rikki

As I was growing up breastfeeding was always normal in our family, my mum breastfed me and my sister did the same with her kids so it didn't feel unusual. Coming from a family where a lot of women breastfed really helped me make the decision to do it myself.

When I first began to breastfeed with Lynara the midwives at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) were really supportive and also the lactation consultants at the Mercy Hospital. My partner was also really supportive with the way he was able to see breastfeeding as normal. It really helped me feel more comfortable in the first stages of breastfeeding.

Before I had Lynara I was working at VAHS in the Women and Children's unit where they promote breastfeeding. It was good as I had a lot resources around breastfeeding and pregnancy available, so it was everywhere and easy for me to access.

Once I got the hang of breastfeeding I felt comfortable to do it anywhere, I never had any awkward situations and didn't care what other people thought. I never really had any bad experiences when breastfeeding but I think society could be a lot more supportive.

I think having positive support and being more educated and understanding the benefits that come with breastfeeding would help increase the number of Aboriginal women to breastfeed. Also being able to access more information because the more you know about breastfeeding the less shame you'll be to do it. I believe that if mothers and fathers knew how beneficial breastfeeding is for their baby, nobody else's opinion will matter.



It's rewarding, natural and feels good knowing you're doing the right thing by your child and also creates time for a mother to bond with their baby."



"I strongly believe that when it comes to raising your child, it's a shared loving experience where dads play a vital role in the care of their child; the more support mum has the better the upbringing of the child."

Ron Briggs

Yorta Yorta | Gunditjmara

Aboriginal Cultural Advisor - Children's Protection Society

Ron Briggs is a proud Yorta Yorta/Gunditjmara man. Ron is passionate about improving health for the Aboriginal people in his community, particularly the men. For the past 5 years Ron has been working as the Senior Aboriginal Cultural Advisor for the Children's Protection Society.

Ron uses Aboriginal culture to educate young Aboriginal fathers on the importance of their roles in their families, preparing for fatherhood, supporting their partners during pregnancy and helps to promote breastfeeding.

Ron

When I first became a father I didn't allow for my partner to breastfeed in public at all, but those days were a lot different back then. I was very young and uneducated about women, pregnancy and breastfeeding because men weren't taught about it in those days.

Times have really changed over the last 10 years. I've learnt so much about women and pregnancy. If I could go back in time I'd be happy for my partner to breastfeed whenever baby needed to be fed and that's just from the education I've received over the last 10 years.


There will be times when a woman will have hospital appointments that only she can attend but supporting her and going with her to hospital appointments is showing her you care, she'll let you know what appointments are just for her. It's a really big step when becoming a parent and can be very daunting but it's good to remember that you're never alone and there's so much support out there. Don't be afraid to ask for advice and not to be shame to ask any questions, as first time parenting is new to everyone and can be overwhelming, the more knowledge you have the better!

The last thing you want is for young fathers to feel left out from lack of involvement when it comes to pregnancy and breastfeeding and feeling like they're not valued or needed, which can really disconnect a couple's relationship.

I believe that in order to keep a healthy relationship during pregnancy just support your partner in any way possible. Whether it's attending breastfeeding classes, birthing classes or hospital appointments, even talking to other parents and getting their advice and tips. It's not just physically helpful for your relationship but also mentally helpful. You learn a lot more about pregnancy and how a female's body is changing which is very beneficial when preparing for fatherhood.

Being a good dad is number 1 and being able to change for the better of your family and willingness to learn more. Breastfeeding is a topic that a lot of young fathers don't think about when coming into fatherhood.

Being able to make young dads feel comfortable in asking questions about breastfeeding is very important because some will feel too shame to ask questions at times so they don't ask at all. It's good to ask men questions to see what they know and don't know in order to help educate them about breastfeeding and how vital a father's role is.



"We encourage families to spend the time required to breastfeed, and bond with their baby." - Sharon and Lyn

Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-operative Limited

Bunurong Health Service - Dandenong

The Koori Maternity Services team at Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-operative Limited is made up of Sharon (an Aboriginal Health Worker) and Lyn (formerly the Midwife). Sharon and Lyn work with families in the Community and help parents make the best decisions about breastfeeding.

For mothers who decide to breastfeed, Sharon and Lyn offer support and advice, as well as access to breast pumps and a lactation consultant.

The team would love to expand their services to better support their families, including Maternal and Child Health Nurse and onsite child care.



Brodie Cook

Yorta Yorta

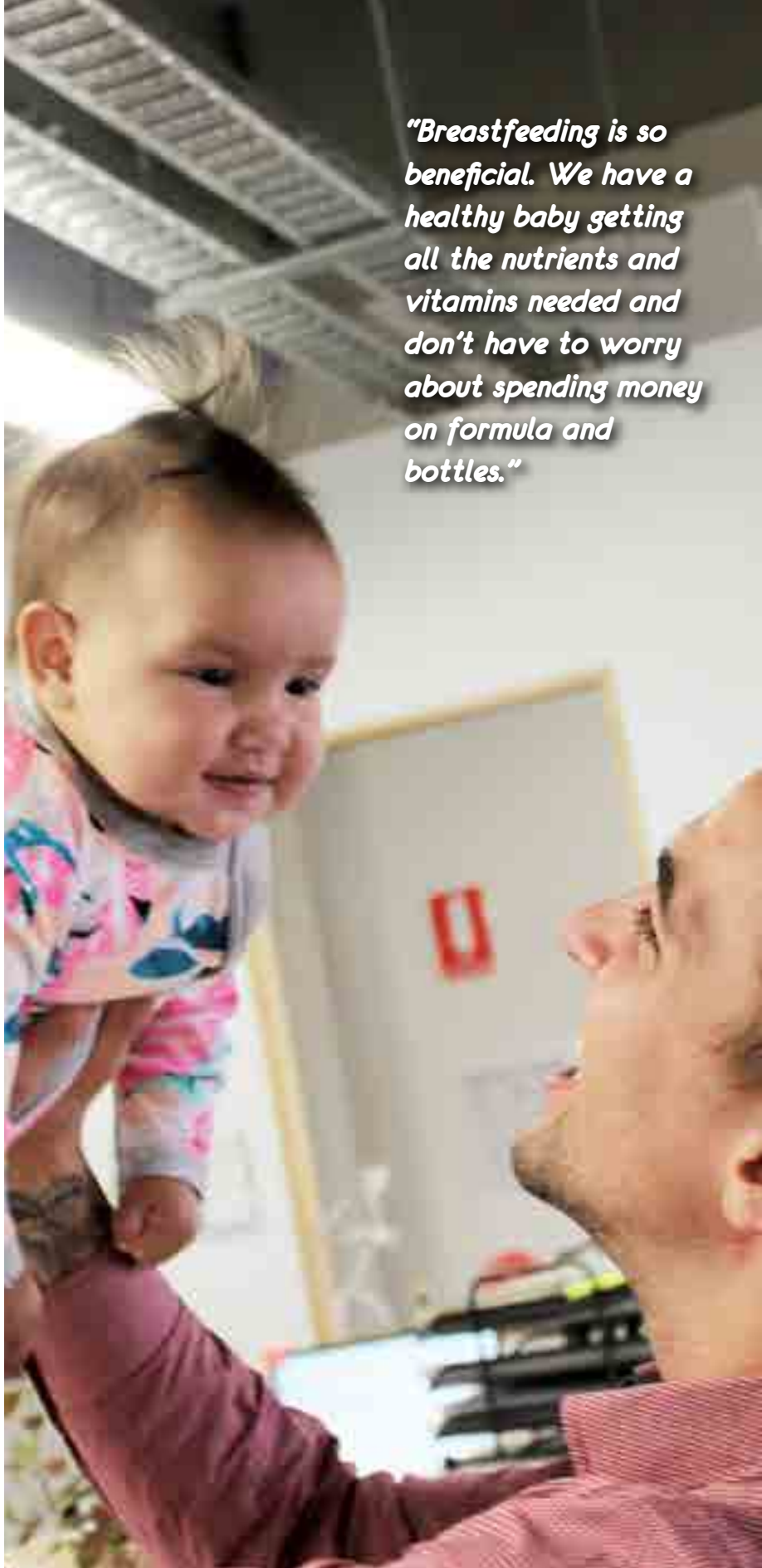
Brodie Cook is a proud Yorta Yorta man living in Melbourne. Partner to Merindah Brown and stepdad to Tjaegan, he's now dad to new born daughter Yilkari who's currently being breastfed. Brodie is very excited about being a father and looks forward to all the fun and happiness it will bring. He is also prepared for the struggles he may face coming into parenthood.

Brodie

I'm happy that Merindah has decided to breastfeed Yilkari and will support her for as long as she needs. She breastfed Tjaegan for two years and we believe it's played a major part in keeping him in such good health. Merindah and I never really spoke about whether or not to breastfeed Yilkari, as we already knew how beneficial breastfeeding was for Tjaegan. We knew our family would support whatever decision we made, especially as it benefits Yilkari greatly. Most of my friends either have kids or have been around breastfeeding mothers enough to understand the benefits of breastfeeding so they also supported our decision.

Before becoming a father I was a little nervous around people who breastfed in public as I didn't want to be that person who looked at them in a weird way. Apart from that, I didn't have any problem with mothers breastfeeding in public. Since becoming a father, the thought of my partner breastfeeding in public doesn't bother me at all.

At times, some mothers won't feel very confident and it can be hard to attach the baby - but there are services out there that provide support if required. It's important that when you become a father you support your partner so that she can have the confidence to breastfeed anywhere and anytime. If you're unsure about breastfeeding, go to a class with your partner and ask questions. It may seem difficult at times but just remember that breastfeeding is the best option for a healthy baby, it's not forever and it sets your baby up for the best start in life.

A photograph of a man in a maroon shirt holding a baby in a colorful patterned onesie. The man is looking at the baby with a smile. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a kitchen or a similar indoor setting.

"Breastfeeding is so beneficial. We have a healthy baby getting all the nutrients and vitamins needed and don't have to worry about spending money on formula and bottles."

I'm always there to support Merindah when breastfeeding as it can be hard at times. I help reassure her and make sure she has everything she needs. I also make sure that they're comfortable by setting up a relaxed environment. I help with preparing meals, setting up the bed, cleaning and making sure Merindah has water at arm's reach as she tends to get quite thirsty when breastfeeding. Doing the little things has really helped make our relationship stronger, as breastfeeding can be a tough job at times so verbal and physical support is very important.



Merindah Brown

Gunditjmara | Menang

Merindah Brown is a proud Gunditjmara/Menang woman who lives in the northern suburbs of Melbourne and has two beautiful children, Tjaegan who is seven years old and a baby girl Yilkari who's now seven months old. Merindah is the Human Resource Officer at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service.

Minna

When I had Tjaegan I breastfed him for nearly two years. I used to see my mother and sisters making bottles with formula and I really didn't want to waste time and money on buying formula and washing and sterilising bottles. I thought to myself, "I don't want to do that", and wasn't sure how to do it anyways.

I'm happy with the decision to breastfeed and Tjaegan never got sick much when he was little. I don't know if breastfeeding was the only factor but I think it played a big part. I had a caesarean with both my babies so I didn't get skin to skin contact at first. That's where breastfeeding really helped with the bonding side of it.

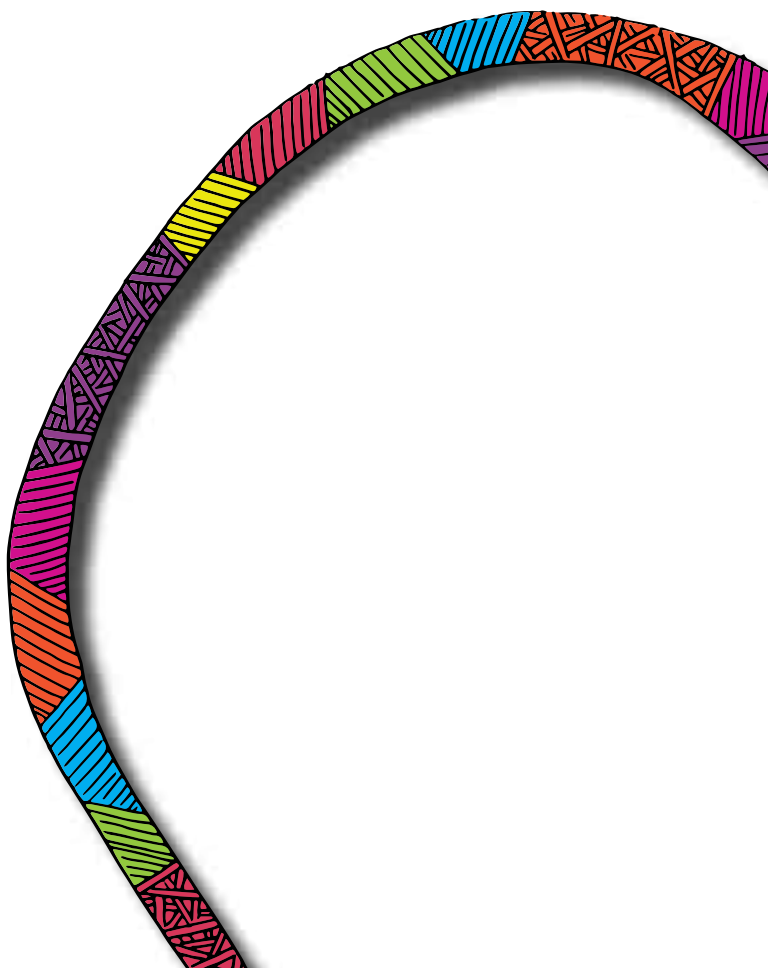
My mum and my sister didn't breastfeed, they bottle fed, and they still supported me. I also went back to the Mercy Hospital to a breastfeeding class that was really helpful. The staff there recommended two years of breastfeeding but my son wouldn't have formula anyway. Once I got the hang of breastfeeding and I knew how to do it, I thought, "Why would I change it?" He's with me all the time anyway, it would be more of an effort to change it and I was already doing so much as a new mum.

When I first began to breastfeed, everyone was supportive and no one gave me a hard time about it. There weren't any awkward situations at the start when I was learning. If I went to the doctor when Tjaegan was first born I wouldn't feed in the waiting area. Not because I felt uncomfortable about breastfeeding but because I wasn't sure how to do it properly.

It was about learning. But once I got the hang of it I didn't care where I fed him.

I think that having a partner that supports you when breastfeeding is really important. It's always good to have someone around that can help you when breastfeeding. Even just helping with the little things can mean a lot, such as getting you a glass of water, helping to clean and even cooking dinner.

Advice I would give to other couples about breastfeeding would be that you get way more sleep. You also save around \$3,000 a year on formula. Breastfeeding can be hard at times but just make sure you support each other and don't be shame to ask any questions if you're not sure about something.



"Breastfeeding's definitely worth it. It can be hard at the start but just persevere and it gets easier. I think just trying to breastfeed is better than none, even if you can only do it for a few weeks."



Victorian Aboriginal Health Service

Fitzroy

The Koori Maternity Service (KMS) team at Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) is made up of two midwives, a team leader and an Aboriginal Health Worker. There is also a variety of staff on-site including a Maternal Child Health Nurse (MCHN), GPs, dental, physiotherapy, dietitian and health promotion. VAHS is currently the only ACCHO who has a Maternal Child Health Nurse (MCHN) on staff. Margret is the KMS team leader and Cindy is a midwife and lactation consultant. Margret is also an Aboriginal Health Worker who is currently completing her Division. 1 nursing. Cindy and Margaret both work together in promoting breastfeeding in the Aboriginal community. Having such a wide variety of services available means the team can be flexible in their approach and the health professionals can work closely together to ensure a continuity of care.

Breastfeeding is promoted from the very first one-on-one appointment and is also covered in group sessions before and after babies are born. Breast pumps are available for mothers to borrow so they can express milk to feed their baby later.

Partners and family members are welcome to accompany mothers to appointments and group sessions. The KMS team really value and encourage the involvement of fathers and other family members, as breastfeeding is a learned skill where mothers need the support.

Antenatal classes run over three weeks covering the process of birth, early parenting and what to expect after your baby is just born and then breastfeeding.

Boorai (postnatal) classes cover a range of topics, depending on what the group is interested in. Guest speakers have included midwives, MCHNs, hospitals, psychiatrists and personal stories from mothers and their experiences.

"We're so flexible in our approach we don't have set appointments for anything." - Toni, Midwife

"We work closely with families in the community to ensure a continuity of care and have a flexible approach." - KMS Team

Andrew Hood

Yorta Yorta | Kurnai

Andrew is a proud Yorta Yorta/Kurnai man and busy father of three; 12-year-old Tahlisha, 6-year-old Jarrah and 4-year-old Ella. All of Andrew's children were breastfed. Andrew has been actively involved in his children's lives right from birth and was supportive of his partners' decision to breastfeed. Andrew believes that breastfeeding is really important for babies, as it provides vital nutrition during the first stages of life.

Andrew Hood

During my partner's pregnancy I helped to support her by attending medical appointments and I watched and listened to how the nurses and midwives helped my partner to breastfeed. With their assistance I was able to provide support at home.

My oldest daughter, Tahlisha, was only breastfed for about 2 to 3 months then put on bottles due to cracked nipples, which made it difficult to breastfeed. Breastfeeding the second time around went a lot better, with my son, Jarrah, being breastfed for about 11 months. I thought this was deadly! My youngest daughter, Ella, was breastfed for about 7 to 8 months. It wasn't as long as we wanted but we were still happy.

Even though I was supportive of breastfeeding, growing up in my generation I felt that breastfeeding wasn't as visible compared to my parents' generation.

I guess you can feel shame at times but there's nothing bad about breastfeeding. I don't see the shame in breastfeeding, as it's healthy for your kid and its normal.

I feel that women breastfeeding in public should not feel shame. I also made sure my partner felt comfortable to breastfeed anywhere she needed. I really believe that it's a father's role to support their partner during the breastfeeding stages. I encourage other dads to do the same. It's an experience you want to be a part of.



"Try and be supportive of your partner breastfeeding as it's probably the most important part of your kid's life."


Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative Shepparton

The Koori Maternity Services (KMS) team at Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative consists of Kathy, an Aboriginal Health Worker, Colleen, (formerly the midwife), and Chrissy (formerly an Aboriginal Health Worker). Chrissy is working towards one day having her midwifery qualification and the team look forward to having their own Aboriginal midwife.

Breastfeeding is a really important and openly discussed topic in the Rumbalara community. Mum's first appointment with the KMS team is usually twelve weeks into pregnancy. Breastfeeding is one of the first things discussed with mothers and fathers. With lots of women who have breastfed in the community, there are women with a range of experiences whom parents-to-be can hear stories and learn from.

The team runs a number of group programs for women including social groups, cooking classes, and a gym program, where women can do aqua aerobics tailored to pregnancy. Throughout these programs information about breastfeeding is provided to the women. The car rides when women are picked up and taken to these programs, as well as appointments, are also used as an opportunity to have a yarn about breastfeeding. Lactation Consultants specialise in breastfeeding, including techniques and problem solving. The Rumbalara KMS team have a strong relationship with the local Lactation Consultant who runs a Lactation Day Stay Unit in Shepparton. She is really well known and connected in the local Community and often comes to the group sessions to talk to the mothers.

The KMS team have frequent meetings with hospital staff where they are able to provide feedback and evaluate the staff's approaches. This helps to ensure that the mothers are receiving the best possible culturally appropriate care when they are in the hospital giving birth.



"I think the mums that have already had babies are very open and get a little bit excited talking about their previous experiences, and I think that new mums like sitting there listening to it as well...they like talking about it [breastfeeding]." - Kathy, Aboriginal Health Worker

The Northern Hospital

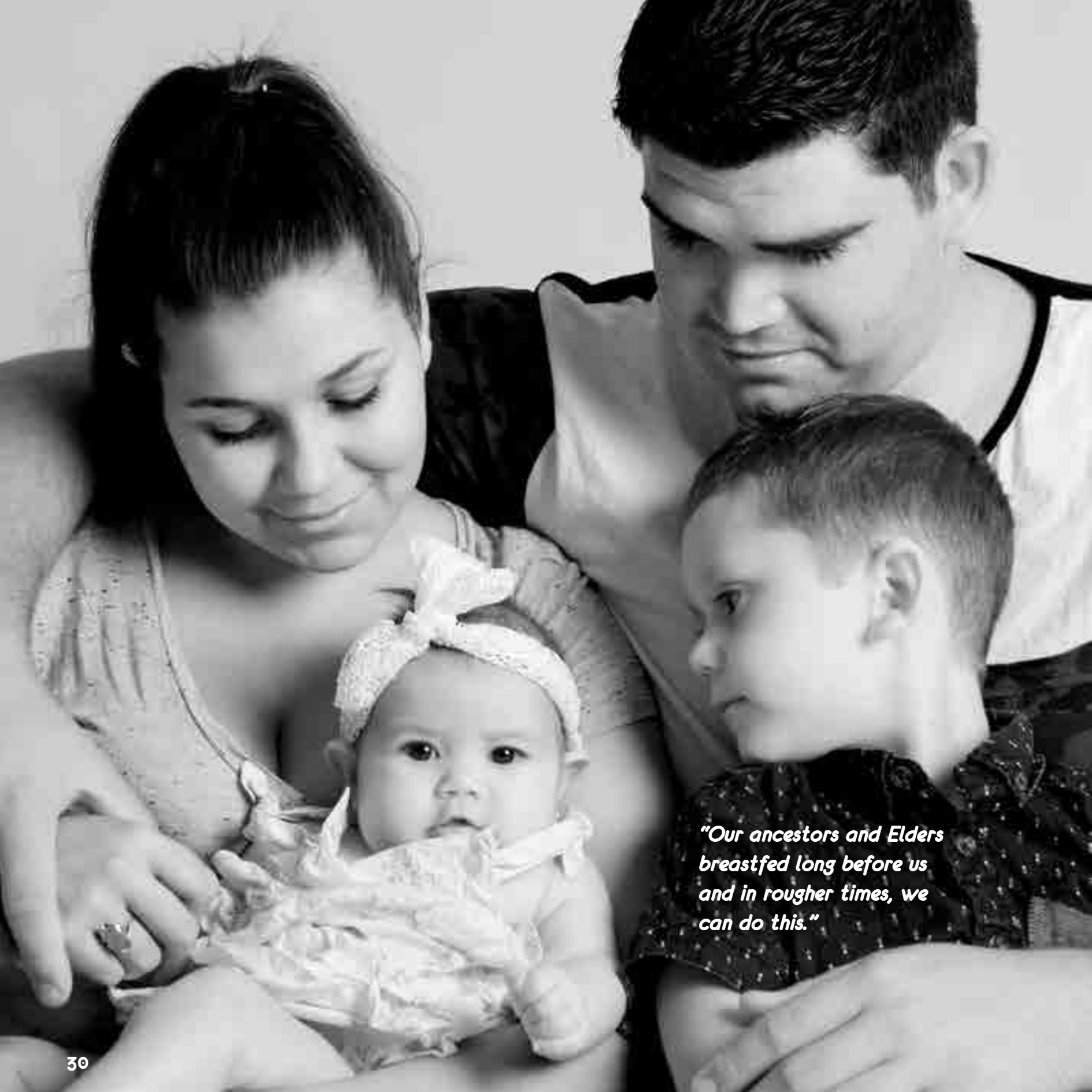
Epping

Northern Health introduced Victoria's first hospital based Koori Maternity Service in 2012. The team, consisting of a dedicated Midwife and an Aboriginal Health Worker, provide specialised support to expectant mums, their families and the newest members of our local Aboriginal community.

Mothers have access to informative and culturally sensitive childbirth education and are given the opportunity to discuss breastfeeding at each visit with their midwife. The team provides mothers with the information and support they need to ensure their family has the optimal start on their breastfeeding journey. They also receive the guidance of an Aboriginal Health Worker, who is able to provide linkages into social and community support services.

Northern Health has a number of breastfeeding support services, including a lactation consultant, free antenatal breastfeeding classes and a supportive maternity team that encourage a supportive environment for mums and their babies. The Koori Maternity Service Midwife is also able to provide ongoing breastfeeding support to families for up six weeks following the birth of their baby.





*"Our ancestors and Elders
breastfed long before us
and in rougher times, we
can do this."*

Sonniya Barney

Gunditjmara | Bunjalung | Lardil

Sonniya is a proud Gunditjmara/Bunjalung/Lardil woman living in Melbourne. A mother of two, three year old son Jarran and five month old daughter Naira, Sonniya breastfed Jarran until he was two years old and plans to do the same with Naira.

Sonniya chose to breastfeed because of the health benefits for babies and also the bonding and nurturing that comes with breastfeeding.

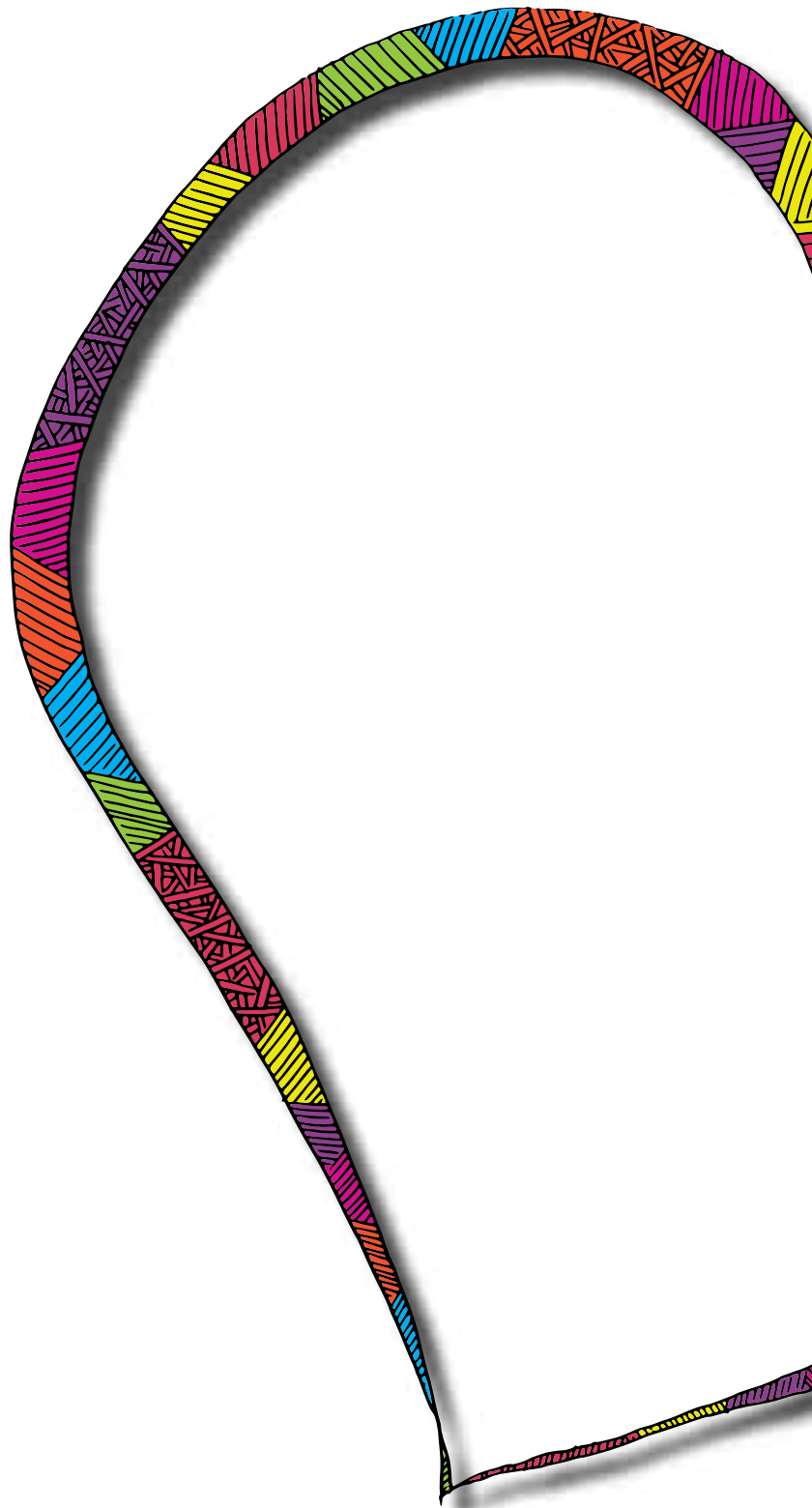
Sonniya

As I was growing up I seen a lot of parents who formula fed and breastfed their babies. I can remember watching my Aunties and older cousins openly breastfeed their babies. I also seen how breastfeeding can become normal when watching others around you do it and believe it's quite normal in my family and Community. I remember being little and me and my cousins would pretend to breastfeed our baby dolls, as it was normal to us at a young age.

I really think that being able to have the people that were close to me breastfeeding their own babies motivated me to do the same. I have loads of support from my family when it comes to breastfeeding. They are always there to offer me advice whenever I need it.

My partner, Eli, is also very supportive and has a positive attitude towards breastfeeding that helps me feel more confident. It's important to have a partner that makes you feel good about breastfeeding and doesn't make you feel shame.

I found that the midwives at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) were very helpful and supportive. They were able to provide me with resources and advice about breastfeeding, which was and still is very useful. I did find some breastfeeding information on the internet but I mainly spoke with the midwives at VAHS as I found the service more useful.



*"This [breastfeeding] is
nurturing your baby... it's
as normal as cleaning your
teeth or washing your face." -
Margaret, Midwife*



Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative

The Koori Maternity Services team at Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC) includes Stephanie, an Aboriginal Health Worker, and Margaret, a midwife. The first thing that they talk to expectant mothers about is breastfeeding, which helps to normalise it well before baby is born. They use a practical approach, avoiding medical terms often used by other health professionals.

Stephanie and Margaret understand that breastfeeding can be challenging and an important part of their approach is being flexible. They provide alternatives to breastfeeding and never push mothers to breastfeed. They also encourage women to bring support people, like their partner, mother or aunty.

The team use a doll so that mothers can practise getting comfortable positioning baby on the breast and show how to attach baby. A knitted breast is also used to explain mastitis (a common condition causing breast pain and swelling) and the team discuss ways to prevent it.

Whitney Solomon

Gerang Gerang | Ngarigo Monero

Whitney is a strong Gerang Gerang/Ngarigo Monero woman. Born in Melbourne, Whitney spent most of her time growing up in East Gippsland, Victoria. Now living in Melbourne, Whitney is 29 years old and is the proud mother of son Jakarri who is one year old.

Whitney

During my pregnancy I always said I was going to breastfeed so I could give my son the best start to life. I also came from a family where breastfeeding was normal and was able to see how beneficial it was. I too understand that not all women are able to breastfeed for whatever reason and think it's important to have positive people around you supporting whatever decision you make.

When I was in labour the hospital was really supportive of my decision to breastfeed, they did everything to make sure I was comfortable and had everything I needed. The midwives at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) Women's and Children's Unit were always there for me which was deadly.

When breastfeeding I think it's important to have people that help with the little things, like making sure you have a drink of water or a cup of tea in arms reach and cooking healthy meals. Allowing you to spend time with your baby to feed them in a comfortable stress free environment.

At the end of the day it's about what works best for you, whether you choose to feed your child on a schedule, it's your decision. Everyone is different so just do what works for you and your baby and don't feel shame to breastfeed in public as it's perfectly natural.

After sending my son to Yappera I began to lose my milk and was only able to breastfeed for about 10 months. I was disappointed at the time but it was something I had no control over. Even though I didn't breastfeed for as long as I wanted to, I was still glad I was able to have that experience with my son.

"I breastfed my son anywhere he needed to be fed, I really didn't care what other people thought."





Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service

The maternity services team at Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS) (comprising of a Maternal and Child Health Nurse, Midwife and Aboriginal Health Worker) work closely together.

AWAHS offers a full clinical team, making it easier for expectant mothers to attend appointments in the one place. As well as providing antenatal education, which includes breastfeeding, the team also offers family support, one-on-one education sessions and assistance in attending appointments.

The team takes a relaxed approach to infant feeding and discusses all feeding options with families.

Posters on the walls show beautiful photos of breastfeeding, helping families feel good about breastfeeding their children.

Mothers can visit the midwife from the beginning of their pregnancy. Once baby is born, the team visits families at hospital and at home to help support breastfeeding in a culturally appropriate way. Families who need the extra support during pregnancy and breastfeeding are visited more frequently.

The Maternal and Child Health room is a colorful and welcoming space for mothers to breastfeed and also provides a weigh/change station. Families from Victoria and New South Wales visit AWAHS and resources developed in both states are available at the service. The team has found that the locally developed resources are the best, as they are colorful and easier for young mothers to use when learning about pregnancy and breastfeeding.



Breastfeeding is encouraged and support is offered to families. The team aims to normalise and promote breastfeeding as much as possible.

Wathaurong Aboriginal Health Service

Geelong

The KMS team at Wathaurong consists of the full-time midwife Mandy, an Aboriginal Health Support Worker and the part-time midwife Larissa.

The team support women throughout the antenatal period until six weeks post-delivery. After which they help link the women in with other services, including Maternal and Child Health.

The team believe that educating women about breastfeeding is very important as it helps the mother to consider the decision to breastfeed but also to understand the benefits of breastfeeding.

They also focus on working with the women to help ease any fears they may have about breastfeeding, as breastfeeding is a learned skill which takes hard work and commitment. Their main aim is to provide women with enough accurate information so they can make their own decision about whether or not they want to breastfeed. It can be quite difficult and scary for some first-time mothers when adjusting to the change.



“When breastfeeding there is no wrong and right way, it’s a matter of finding out what works best for you.” - Naomi, Aboriginal Health Worker



The Mercy Hospital for Women Heidelberg

The Mercy Hospital in Heidelberg (The Mercy) has a number of programs to support Aboriginal families. Aboriginal Programs provide culturally appropriate support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and families across all Mercy Hospital for Women patient services including pregnancy, early parenting and Women's Business. (All Aboriginal Programs are available to non-Aboriginal women with Aboriginal partners)

Aboriginal Programs Unit

The team at The Mercy provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families with culturally appropriate support around pregnancy and breastfeeding. The team is made up of Marika, who manages the unit, Jo and Jodie who are the Aboriginal Liaison Officers (ALOs) at the hospital.

The unit offers programs to support mothers both during pregnancy and after birth:

Nangnak Wan Myeek: a support service for mothers following the baby's birth. The service helps to promote breastfeeding in the Aboriginal community. It offers a more holistic approach from the Nangnak Baban Murrup Clinic (NBM) team having ALOs attending the first DOM (domiciliary care) appointment, and returning to The Mercy for 6 weeks post-natal checks, within the NBM clinic are.

Nangnak Baban Murrup Clinic: The clinic is available to all pregnant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Doctors, midwives, Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers, social workers and psychiatrists are available. It is now available every Monday to Friday and all women can choose the day and time they would like to attend with the support of ALO, midwives, doctors, social workers and psychiatrists etc.

I'm An Aboriginal Dad

Previously an individualised program called 'I'm an Aboriginal Dad' was run by Ron Briggs at The Mercy. The program was developed following consultation with Community Elders to establish how to best support fathers. See Ron's story on page 20 for more details.

Unfortunately the *I'm an Aboriginal Dad* program is no longer running due to funding - but we still offer Ron's assistance to our fathers and utilise Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and Banyule Aboriginal Dads programs. We are hoping that it may return in the future as this was a very important part of connecting Dads.

Mercy Health Breastmilk Bank

The Breastmilk Bank at The Mercy pasteurises and stores donated breastmilk for sick and premature babies whose mothers cannot supply enough milk for their baby.

The Breastmilk Bank has been operating for three years. They were the third breastmilk bank to open in Australia, and the first in Victoria. The milk from the Breastmilk Bank is only provided to babies who are born prematurely (before 32 weeks gestation), and weigh less than 1500g. The stomach and intestines of babies who are born this early are not fully developed. This means that if a premature baby is fed with infant formula, they are at risk of developing a severe illness which causes holes in the lining of the intestines called necrotising enterocolitis. Sometimes mothers don't produce enough breastmilk, or are unable to breastfeed. The Breastmilk Bank can provide breastmilk donations to feed their babies.

Mothers who have plenty of breastmilk can donate milk, either from home, or while in the hospital. There is a screening process that must be completed before donation, including a blood test and a lifestyle questionnaire.



Karen Boon

Kurnai

Karen is a proud Kurnai woman from Gippsland. She has a three year old daughter who she breastfed for a short period of time, before becoming too sick to continue.

Karen

Having grown up hearing my mother and Aunties talking about the importance of breastfeeding, I had planned to do it myself. Through the support of the team at the Health Service, as well as the midwives at the hospital, I was able to initiate breastfeeding with little trouble.

After having baby I began to breastfeed within that first night which felt really good, but because I was getting really weak from an infection that wasn't good for the baby I really struggled for the next couple of days. I was only able to breastfeed for about 4-5 days after baby was born but still really valued that time with my baby. I would have continued if I didn't get sick and have to take time away from her.

The nurses were really helpful in not forcing it and made sure I was coping okay with everything. I was a bit shattered that I stopped breastfeeding but I wanted to get my health back on track so I could be more hands on with my daughter. I was still so grateful for that experience I got to have with her.

“There are many benefits of breastfeeding but there’s nothing more important than knowing that you are giving your baby the best start to life as well as strengthening the bond between you and baby.”

Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation


Morwell

KMS team

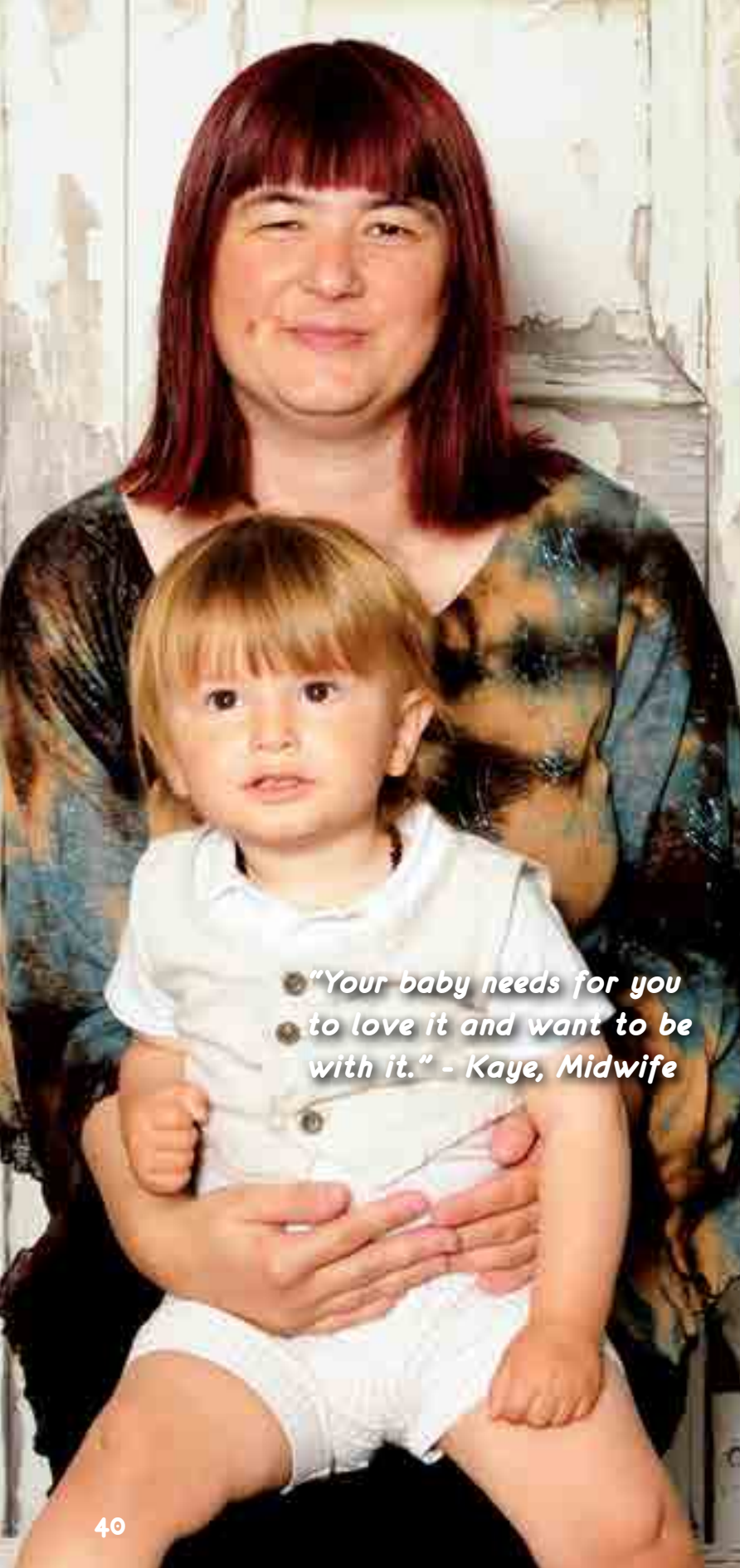
The KMS team at Ramahyuck have a good working relationship with the local hospital and have a lactation consultant readily available that the women know they can call upon if they are interested in breastfeeding. The team have a respectful approach when educating women on how to breastfeed, promoting the value of breastmilk without forcing it upon them.

The ladies found a creative way to reach a large number of clients, which was to start a Facebook page called *Ramahyuck Koori Maternity Services*. This page is used to share information with the Community, including photos of breastfeeding, as a way to both normalise and promote breastfeeding in the Aboriginal community.

Mothers are given a bounty bag post-birth, which has pamphlets about breastfeeding, as well as an album of photos taken by the midwife while at the birth to save the memories of such a wonderful time.



"The best way I can advise them is by promoting the value of breast milk" - Sue O'Shannesy - Midwife



*"Your baby needs for you
to love it and want to be
with it." - Kaye, Midwife*

Gunditjmara Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd Warrnambool

The KMS team at Gunditjmara includes a midwife and an Aboriginal Health Worker. They work together to provide services to women across five different sites within a 100km radius, including Warrnambool and Portland. The team is flexible, visiting women while at hospital, at their health service and at home, depending on what is most convenient for the mother. The team works to promote breastfeeding in the Aboriginal community and positively support women in their choice. KMS also help link women in with local services including maternal child health nurses and lactation consultants.

The ladies work to make sure breastfeeding education begins early on in pregnancy. They teach mothers that breastfeeding can be done anywhere and is cost effective (free), as well as the personal benefits for the baby and the mother; including helping return her body to normal. The most important education they provide to mothers is that breastfeeding is a learned behaviour. It might not be easy and takes time and hard work to get it right.

Pictured is Tanya Geier, the Koori Maternity Aboriginal Health Worker at Gunditjmara. Tanya is a Gunditjmara woman and has two Koori children who she breastfed.

Ballarat & District Aboriginal Co-operative

Ballarat & District Aboriginal Co-operative has two Maternal Child Health Nurses, Elspeth and Fiona, who work together to deliver care and support to the Community.

There is a strong partnership with the local hospital, where a midwife is employed to work specifically with Aboriginal families. Elspeth and Fiona have a good relationship with the hospital, and are able to utilize this partnership to help their clients to access antenatal services at the hospital.

Elspeth and Fiona

A lot of young women don't always know how to breastfeed before they go into hospital. We know how important it is to support women and work to make them feel more comfortable with the thought of breastfeeding. We understand that each family and pregnancy will be different and it's important that they are supported. The KMS and the hospital's Midwives for Aboriginal families also recognise how important family support is, especially from partners, mothers and Aunties and understand the influential role they play.

We use resources with mothers to discuss breastfeeding topics to get them more familiar with what the breast looks like, how baby latches on and right techniques. We use information provided from the Australian Breastfeeding Association and the VACCHO KMS Boorai resources and we're committed to making sure it's all culturally appropriate for our Aboriginal families.

There's also postnatal support offered at the Ballarat & District Aboriginal Co-operative with a full outreach services. Home visits are also available to all mothers and their babies until the child reaches primary school.



*"I certainly support
mothers in their
endeavors to breastfeed."
- Elspeth, Maternal Child
Health Nurse*



Colin Mitchell

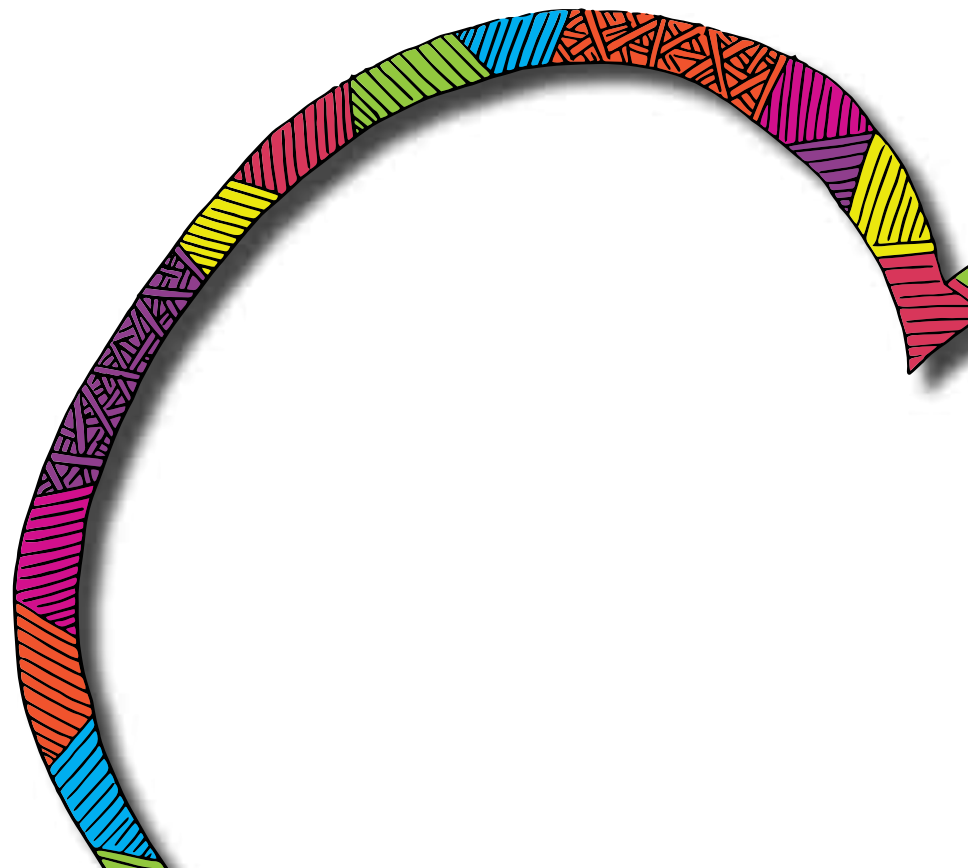
Wemba Wemba | Gureng Gureng

Colin Mitchell is a Wemba Wemba/Gureng Gureng man and the father of six kids. Pictured are his two younger kids Giann who is four and Yolanda who is seven years old. Colin was supportive of his partner's decision to breastfeed.

Colin has worked in Aboriginal health going on 29 years and currently works for Diabetes Victoria.

He believes his background in the health industry has given him a better understanding and acceptance of breastfeeding for his children.

Colin believes that more health promotion focused on breastfeeding is needed to ensure fathers and the wider Community accept it as a mother and baby's right for a healthier future.



"Breastfeeding is more appropriate for babies to help their nurturing and development health-wise and is far easier for the mother because it's readymade."

Justine Rigby

Ngemba

Justine is from the Ngemba tribe in Bourke, New South Wales. She is an Aboriginal Health Worker at Mallee District Aboriginal Services in Mildura and has four children. Her first child was born prematurely and she could not breastfeed. However, Justine went on to successfully breastfeed her following three children, even though she experienced difficulties with mastitis (a common condition causing breast pain and swelling) and attachment. She is also breastfeeding new born baby number four. It was the support of her midwife and Maternal and Child Health Nurse that helped Justine to overcome these difficulties.

Justine credits the close bond she and her siblings have with their mother to being breastfed as children, and wanted to share the same close bond with her own children. Working as an Aboriginal Health Worker means Justine is in close contact with her local Community. She talks to other mothers and mothers-to-be about their choices in regards to breastfeeding and shares her personal stories about breastfeeding.

"I think I just done it [breastfed] because my mother did it... the best thing was to breastfeed."





Swan Hill Aboriginal Health Service

The KMS team at Swan Hill consisted of Nicky, the Aboriginal Health Worker and Anne, the midwife. Nicky and Anne worked together for over three years to create a warm and inviting space in their consultation room at Swan Hill. Many women say they love being able to come to a trusted place that's culturally appropriate, where they feel comfortable to sit down and breastfeed. They often had Aboriginal music playing softly in the background in order to create a nice, relaxed atmosphere.

Nicky and Anne talked with women about breastfeeding from the start of their pregnancy and also with couples who are planning for a pregnancy. They teach that breastfeeding is not just cheap and convenient, but also the health benefits and how it creates a wonderful bond between mother and child. Partners are included in the breastfeeding discussion, and the staff suggest ways that mothers can be supported, such as attending hospital appointments before and after birth, helping around the house to allow time for mothers to breastfeed and also how to make "couple time". Nicky and Anne supported fathers that were feeling left out during the breastfeeding stages and discussed ways they can be more involved with their partner and baby. They also discussed skin-to-skin contact as not only being for the mother and child, but another way fathers can also bond with their baby.

The team also held an art and craft session every fortnight with a different health topic assigned to each session. In the past they have held breastfeeding-themed sessions helping to promote breastfeeding in their Community. The Elders who have breastfed would come in and talk about their experiences. Younger Community members have really valued this opportunity to learn from the experience and wisdom of their Elders.

Nicki

The photo in this story was taken at one of our monthly Maternal Child Health Nurse (MCHN) health checks. The KMS would invite our new mums and families along to a cultural photo day. Each month we would choose a topic eg: February - Valentines Day, December - Christmas.

During the photo shoot the MCHN would do a quick weight and height check and book the babies/children and any siblings in the family in for their Health Assessments. Then the photos would be printed for the family and it was organised that they could have 2-3 photos for free when they brought their child in for their Health Assessment with either myself or the MCHN. We found this worked really well and kept the families happy and coming back.





"I would recommend that anyone persevere with breastfeeding as it does get easier and the benefits for mum and bubs outweigh a couple weeks of being uncomfortable."

Shakara Montalto

Gunditjmara

In April 2016 Shakara gave birth to her second son River. With lots of knowledge this time round she was determined to be able to breastfeed longer than the first time. She had no problems with getting baby to latch and has been exclusively breastfeeding River. Shakara plans to breastfeeding her baby until he's one year old.

She spoke of the first two weeks being the hardest as River would often cluster feed which was due to him trying to bring her milk. When her milk finally came in she became engorged which was quite uncomfortable. The first two weeks was the hardest but she pushed through the feeling of being tired and exhausted, as well as having hormones all over the place. After around two weeks, everything settled and her milk supply started to regulate to meet her baby's needs and the feeling of engorgment is now gone.

Shakara absolutely loves breastfeeding now, with so many positives which she speaks about. She initially wanted to breastfeed as it is good for baby's immune system and the bonding experience. River has been around family members who have been sick and he has remained in good health. Shakara believes that breastfeeding helped her lose the 10kgs that she lost two weeks after giving birth. River has been putting on good amounts of weight since birth due to the nutritious breastmilk.

Shakara feels breastfeeding is very convenient compared to bottle feeding the first time round. With Isiah she would have to bring bottles, boil kettles, cool down bottles, buy tins of formula and sterilise bottles everywhere she went. She loves that breastmilk is always the perfect temperature, it's always ready available, and she also loves the fact that breastmilk is free compared to how much she spent on tins of formula with her first baby. Shakara breastfeeds her son

now wherever and whenever he is hungry. She is not shame to feed in public as she sees it as a normal thing; her son is hungry and she is just feeding him. She has only had positive experiences breastfeeding in public.



Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative

Horsham

At Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative, Deanne has been providing maternity services as the Antenatal Worker for the past seven years. Deanne is well-known in her Community and highly trusted by her clients.

Deanne offers antenatal and postnatal support to Aboriginal mothers and mothers of Aboriginal children and works to promote breastfeeding in her Community. She assists her clients with booking into the hospital, as well as providing transport to and from hospital appointments. Deanne has recently started a parents group, which while still in its early days, provides mothers and fathers with the opportunity to socialize and share advice and support around pregnancy and breastfeeding. To create a supportive breastfeeding environment there are images of Aboriginal mothers breastfeeding (pictured) displayed at the Co-op. These help mothers in the Community feel more comfortable breastfeeding.

There is a strong partnership between the local hospital and the Co-op, supporting families throughout pregnancy. The Co-op rents breast pumps from the hospital to loan to mothers wishing to express breastmilk. There is also a good relationship between Deanne and the local Maternal and Child Health Nurse, offering home visits to clients to give that extra support during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Having five kids of her own, all of whom were breastfed, Deanne shares her personal story and experience about breastfeeding with mothers. Deanne provides families with information about breastfeeding and its benefits, and encourages mothers to give it a go. Deanne refers mothers to local breastfeeding facilitators, Nola and Keiwa, if they need that extra support.



*"When it's your own
Community you love
them as much as they
love you, so you...
give that extra care."
- Deanne, Antenatal
Worker*

Victorian Koori Maternity Services

Victorian Aboriginal Health Service

186 Nicholson St, Fitzroy VIC 3065
Phone: 03 9419 3000

Western Health (Sunshine Hospital)

176 Furlong Rd, St Albans Vic 3021
Phone: 03 8345 1333
AMS Phone: 03 8345 0949

Northern Health (The Northern Hospital)

185 Copper St, Epping VIC 3076
Phone: 03 8405 8000
Direct: 03 8405 8773

Dandenong and District Aboriginal Co-operative

3 Carroll Ave, Dandenong VIC 3175
Phone: 03 9794 5933

Peninsula Health (Frankston Hospital)

Women's Services, Outpatient Department 1, Frankston
Hospital - Hastings Rd, Frankston VIC 3199
Phone: 03 9784 2600 (general reception)

Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative

Lot 62 Morgan St, Geelong Vic 3215
Phone: 03 5277 2038

Gunditjmara Aboriginal Co-operative

265 Koroit St, Warrnambool Vic 3280
135 Kepler St, Warrnambool Vic 3280
Phone: 03 5564 3344
KMS Phone: 03 5559 1234 - (Kepler St)

Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative

20 Rumbalara Rd, Mooroopna VIC 3629
Phone: 03 5820 0035
KMS Phone: 03 5820 0046

Mungabareena Aboriginal Co-operative

21 Hovell Street, Wodonga VIC 3690
Phone: 02 6024 7599

Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative

35 - 37 Dalmahoy St, Bairnsdale VIC 3875
Phone: 03 5152 1922
Medical: 03 5150 0760

Central Gippsland Aboriginal Health Services (Ramahyuck)

7-9 Buckley St, Morwell, VIC 3840
164 Mary Street, Morwell, VIC 3840 (KMS House)
Phone: 03 5136 5100
KMS Phone: 03 5133 8273

Mallee District Aboriginal Service - Mildura

120 Madden Ave, Mildura, VIC 3505
Phone: 03 5018 4102

Mallee District Aboriginal Service - Swan Hill

70 Nyah St, Swan Hill, VIC 3585
Phone: 03 5032 8600

Njernda Aboriginal Corporation

84 Hare St, Echuca VIC 3564
Phone: 03 5480 6252

Updated contacts list

[www.vaccho.org.au/wd/koori-maternity-early-years/
local-koori-maternity-services/](http://www.vaccho.org.au/wd/koori-maternity-early-years/local-koori-maternity-services/)

Further information and support

VACCHO Koori Maternity and Early Years

www.vaccho.org.au/wd/koori-maternity-early-years/

VACCHO nutrition resources

www.vaccho.org.au/nutrition

Aboriginal Fathers: Stayin' on Track

www.stayinontrack.com

Australian Breastfeeding Association

www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Breastfeeding Helpline: P 1800 686 268

Get Up & Grow

[www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-early-childhood-nutrition-resources#indig)

[Content/phd-early-childhood-nutrition-resources#indig](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-early-childhood-nutrition-resources#indig)

Growing healthy

www.growinghealthy.org.au

Growing Strong: Feeding You and Your Baby

[www.health.qld.gov.au/ph/documents/hpu/growing_](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/ph/documents/hpu/growing_strong.asp#breastfeeding)

[strong.asp#breastfeeding](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/ph/documents/hpu/growing_strong.asp#breastfeeding)

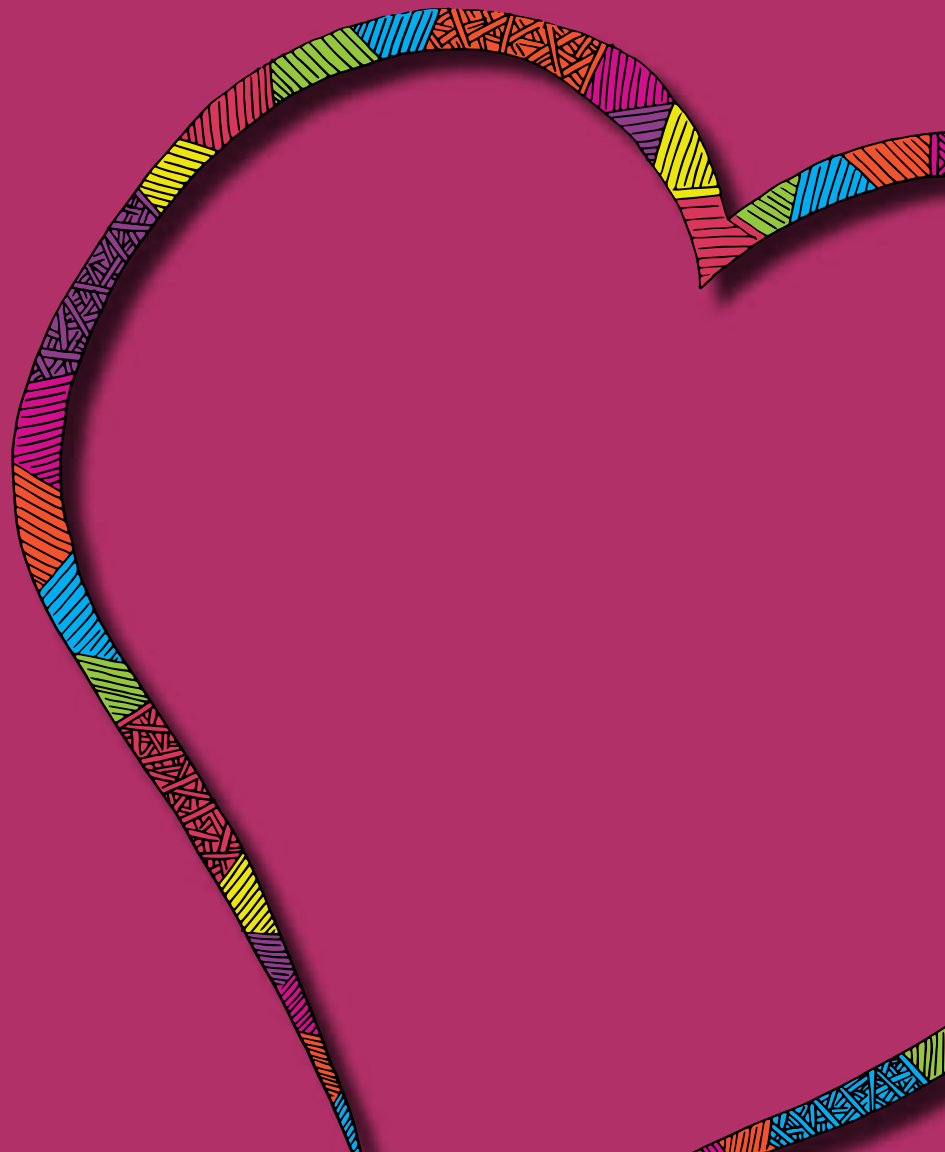
Royal Women's Hospital

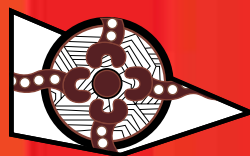
[www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/](http://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/breastfeeding)

[breastfeeding](http://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/breastfeeding)

There are a number of videos promoting breastfeeding available on YouTube. Visit www.youtube.com and search for:

- 🐾 RAP! Just Let Them Feed, Breastfeeding is Best, The Importance of breastfeeding for women
- 🐾 Just Let Them Feed, Breastfeeding is Best, A DVD Health Resource on the importance of breastfeeding
- 🐾 Stayin' on Track young Aboriginal fathers





VACCHO

Yarning about
breastfeeding:

Celebrating our stories