

# *Celebrating the journey*

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ANNUAL REPORT  
2016 to 2017

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We pay our deepest respects to the traditional owners of the land on which we provide our services. We also acknowledge the courage and resilience of Aboriginal women who have birthed on these lands for thousands of years.



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Client's names have been changed throughout the report to honour their privacy.



# CONTENTS

Chairperson’s Report	1
Founder’s Report	2
CEO’s Report	3
How we began	4
Why we exist	5
Who we are	6
What we do	7
Who we support	8
Meet our clients	9
Our highlights & impact in 2016-2017	11
Our programs: Doula Support Program	13
When magic happens	19
Education Program	22
Meet Anahita	27
Research Program	30
Our people	31
Our doulas	32
Our finances	35
Our supporters	37
Our future	38
Get involved	39



## CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

### **I WRITE THIS WITH MUCH ENTHUSIASM AND CELEBRATION FOR THE SUPPORT WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PROVIDE FOR WOMEN AND FAMILIES IN OUR COMMUNITY OVER THIS PAST YEAR.**

I am heartened by the many benefits being demonstrated by our Doula Support Program, Education Program and advocacy work and, I hope that by reading this report, you are too.

In 2016 and 2017, we had a strong focus on building on the foundations we have been laying since inception in 2014. We have been able to grow as an organisation, while still continuing to offer professional and much-needed services and maintaining the heart of why we exist.

Diversifying and increasing our funding sources

became more of a priority this year, which is crucial if we are to keep up with growing demand for our services. We need to continue to increase our capacity and capture the positive impact of our work on birth experiences and outcomes so we can best meet the needs of mothers and babies.

Our team has continued to expand, with more volunteers than ever before. We have also commenced our first formal research project to provide evidence-based findings into the efficacy and efficiency of our Doula Support Program. It has definitely been exciting times!

I would like to thank our outgoing CEO, Mei Lai Swan, for her heart and passion in making this work possible. I would also like to welcome our new CEO, Olivia Myeza,

who brings such energy and excitement to lead us into the future. I would also like to acknowledge my fellow Board Directors who generously give their time, guidance and expertise to help Birth for Humankind achieve its strategic goals and ensure its sustainability.

Lastly, I want to reiterate that the work we do every day would not be possible without the support of our community, our partners, our supporters, our team and our dedicated volunteers. Thank you so much for being involved! I know that together we can ensure continuous, kind and holistic care, education and support is a reality for every mother.

**Kirstan Flannery**  
Chair & Co-Founder

## FOUNDER'S REPORT



When I conceived of the idea behind Birth for Humankind, it was always my intention to seed the project, see it set up, and then make space for new and wonderful people to take it to the next level.

### **DOING THIS WORK IS SO MUCH ABOUT COMMUNITY AND TEAM WORK AND I HAVE BEEN BLESSED TO HAVE THE INCREDIBLE DEDICATION AND CO-PARENTING OF KIRSTAN FLANNERY AND A PASSIONATE TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS SINCE THE BEGINNING.**

It is with a lot of parental pride that I have seen Birth for Humankind become a thriving organisation in just a few years, with almost 50 staff and volunteers, a strong reputation within the maternal health and community sectors, and a

growing family of clients and supporters.

When I stepped aside as CEO, I was delighted to welcome Olivia Myeza to the helm. It has been a great joy to see the organisation flourish under this new leadership. During this time, we were also thrilled to welcome new staff to our growing team, and consolidate the brilliant teamwork that enables us to thrive and grow our important work in the community.

I would like to extend my most heartfelt gratitude to our Chair, Co-Founder and my dear friend Kirstan Flannery, to our Chief Operating Officer and interim CEO Annabel Davies, and to our board and team for their dedication and support during this time of transition.

Birth for Humankind would not exist without our incredible volunteer doulas and I truly believe that it wouldn't be what it is without you, our supporters. What we have created together is valuable beyond words – changing the lives of women, children and families in our community, and contributing to a better maternal health system for all.

I am happy to say that, continuing in my role as a Founding Director of the board, that I am fully committed to Birth for Humankind and very excited to be part of what lies ahead.

**Mei Lai Swan**  
Founding Director



## CEO'S REPORT

Having spent the past decade living in a poverty-stricken region of South Africa, I saw firsthand the ways in which socioeconomic factors impacted birthing experiences and outcomes. This injustice is happening the world over, not just in developing countries. Fuelled by a passion for creating a world in which every mother has the care and support she needs to have the best birth and early parenting experience possible, it was with great honour and excitement that I joined the Birth for Humankind team in April 2017.

Our dream of a more equitable, accessible and mother-centred maternal health system for will require long-term advocacy and resulting change. In the meantime, our role is to respond to the gaps that currently exist, and to

support the women who are the most likely to fall through them.

With that in mind, I would like to pay tribute to our amazing volunteer doulas for the critical role they are playing both in the lives of the individual clients they support, but also as part of the change we want to be part of creating.

I'd also like to thank our Chair and Co-Founder, Kirstan Flannery, and the Board of Directors for entrusting me with this role. Mei Lai left huge shoes to fill, having been such an inspiring CEO and Founder who led the team to achieve so much in a short time. Our incredible team has been so strong and committed through what has been a season of significant change and, for that, I am deeply grateful.

The stage is now set. We have: a passionate and

gifted group of staff, volunteers and board members, an ambitious fundraising strategy as we work towards sustainability. We are also tapping into a deeper sense of who we are as an organisation and what we are uniquely placed to offer, and we are working with increasing agility and focus towards achieving our vision.

**TO ALL OUR SUPPORTERS: THANK YOU FOR MAKING THIS POSSIBLE. WITH MUCH STILL TO BE DONE, WE LOOK FORWARD TO CONTINUING THE JOURNEY TOGETHER AND CELEBRATING THE WINS ALONG THE WAY.**

**Olivia Myeza**  
CEO

## HOW WE BEGAN

Our story began with a strong, intelligent and brave young woman named Carly. At 19, she fell pregnant. Her mother had just passed away, she had only recently moved to Victoria and she was in a new relationship.

Her life, as she describes it, was 'going down a dark path.' Little did she know she was about to become the inspiration behind Birth for Humankind.

When her social worker at the Royal Women's Hospital suggested she might benefit from the support of a doula, her first questions were: "What is a doula and how can a doula help me?"

In late 2012, having completed her doula training, our Founder Mei Lai Swan had offered to volunteer at the Royal Women's Hospital for any young woman who might be in need of that extra support a doula can provide. One of the hospital's social workers

connected Mei Lai and Carly and, a few months later with Mei Lai by her side, Carly gave birth to a beautiful baby boy.

It was such a mutually enriching experience that it seemed obvious to both of them that a service like this needed to be available on a broader scale; and so Birth for Humankind was founded.

In just a few years, we have become a fully-fledged charity with a dedicated

team of staff members, 40 volunteer doulas, a committed and 'hands-on' Board of Directors that includes Carly herself, as well as a growing community of donors and supporters.

**"Built on professionalism, trust, and respect, we have been referring young pregnant women to Birth for Humankind since 2014. My experience of the organisation has been one of hope, empowerment, growth, and gratitude. If I could tell the world one thing about Birth for Humankind it would be that this organisation truly wants to make the world a better place. Their support comes from a foundation of generosity, understanding and kindness and they always go above and beyond."**

Amanda Styles, Social Worker at Royal Women's Hospital who connected Mei Lai and Carly



# WHY WE EXIST



What we know is that Carly's experience is not an anomaly. The reality here in Melbourne is that young pregnant women face complex barriers in seeking the support they need as they enter motherhood. But it is not only young women that fall through the cracks.

Women from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, women experiencing homelessness, and with a history of trauma and abuse also face significant disparities in birth outcomes as compared with the rest of the Victorian population.



Barriers to accessing information, interpreters and programs that provide continuity of care as well as a lack of familial/emotional support are just some of the factors that contribute to disparities in birth outcomes for women in the Australian maternal health system.

As a provider of non-clinical support and education, we can address these issues where and when they happen in the birthing journey.

For all women, and especially for women experiencing socio-economic



disadvantage, the face of maternity care has also been changing over the past few decades. We have seen a move away from mother-centred and continuity of care models and towards an increasing medicalisation and intervention-based management of birth. This had led to greater fear, distress and trauma amongst many birthing women.

We think that, as a maternal health system and as a society, we can do better. We need to go back to basics and get birth right for every mother.

HEALTHIER MUMS = HEALTHIER FAMILIES = THRIVING COMMUNITIES

# WHO WE ARE

We are a non-profit organisation powered by people who are passionate about promoting better birth outcomes for women experiencing disadvantage. We aspire to bring a culture of celebration, inclusion, equity and kindness to birth culture and work to fill the current gaps in the Australian maternal health system.

THERE IS NO ONE DOING WHAT WE ARE DOING IN THE WAY WE ARE DOING IT.

Guided by our values and by observing the highest standards of integrity and professionalism, we are committed to providing wholehearted support, education and care for free to the women in our community who need it the most.

Together we can ensure that every mother in our community, regardless of the colour of her skin, her age or her bank balance, has access to the support she needs during pregnancy, birth and early parenting.

## OUR VISION

Every mother has the care and support she needs to make empowered choices and to have the best birth and early parenting experience possible for herself, her baby and her growing family.

## OUR MISSION

To foster healthy families and communities by providing mother centred support, education and holistic care throughout pregnancy, birth and after the baby comes.

## OUR VALUES



TRUST



RESPECT



EQUITY



CONNECTION



CELEBRATION

## WHAT WE DO



We take what we know about the gaps in the Australian maternal health system and the positive impacts of quality education, support and care during pregnancy, birth and early parenting and we put it into action by delivering programs targeted at women experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. Our programs include:

**Doula Support Program:** mobilising and supervising a team of volunteer doulas who provide one-to-one support for women experiencing socio-economic disadvantage before, during and after birth.

**Education Programs:** delivering tailored and accessible programs and workshops for key client groups. We currently offer 'Mothering 101: A Crash Course for Young Pregnant Women', and 'Navigating the Maternal Health System in Australia' for

women from newly arrived, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds.

In addition to filling the gaps that currently exist for women experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, we also advocate for systemic change in the maternal health system, with the aim that every mother will receive the support she needs as she enters motherhood. To that end, we run:

**Research Program:** engaging in and commissioning research to underpin our programs and to inform our advocacy efforts for more mother-centred and continuity of care models.

**Advocacy:** we aim to raise awareness of the gaps in the maternal health system and the need for more mother-centered and continuous care through social and traditional media and campaigns such as World Doula Week and World Refugee Week.

Birth for Humankind would like to acknowledge the many community organisations that we have had the privilege of working alongside over the past year. These organisations, and the services they provide, are integral to the work of improving maternal and child health outcomes.

## WHO WE SUPPORT



We provide free services to pregnant women who are experiencing economic disadvantage and who meet at least one of the following criteria:

- At risk of perinatal depression and/or anxiety
- Under 25 years of age
- Experiencing homelessness
- Newly arrived in Australia (within five years) or from a refugee/asylum seeker background
- History of mental illness, drug and/or alcohol misuse, trauma and abuse issues
- Of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- Lacking a birth support person

The women we work with come from a range of backgrounds and circumstances but the thing they all have in common is that they are facing a number of barriers to accessing the quality support, education and care they deserve during pregnancy, birth and early parenting.

This year we have supported

83♀ in our Doula Support Program + 46♀ in our Education Programs = 129♀ and their families directly impacted by our work

### OF THE WOMEN WE HAVE SUPPORTED IN OUR DOULA SUPPORT PROGRAM THIS YEAR

60% are journeying through their first pregnancy

40% are newly arrived migrants or from refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds

66% are lacking a support person

36% are 15-24 years old

55% are experiencing or are at-risk of experiencing perinatal anxiety and depression

16% are experiencing homelessness during their pregnancy

42% are experiencing issues related to mental health, drug or alcohol misuse

## MEET OUR CLIENTS

While names and identifying details have been changed to honour confidentiality, these profiles are based on actual clients that Birth for Humankind has supported in the past year.



### AZAR, 33

Azar arrived in Australia from Iran in 2013 with her husband and their three-year-old son. They were detained on Christmas Island for three years before resettling in Melbourne. She was referred by a refugee and settlement service who had been supporting her and her family to deal with the trauma they experienced during their journey to Australia and their time in detention.

At five months pregnant, Azar was matched with a volunteer doula who has extensive experience working with women from refugee backgrounds. As a native Farsi speaker, Azar and her doula worked with an interpreter at each antenatal appointment to ensure that she had all of the information she needed

In March, she gave birth to a baby girl with her husband and her doula by her side. She told us that she feels more confident after this birth, in large part, because of her doula's encouragement. She has been recommending Birth for Humankind to other expectant mothers in her community and would love to have a doula again if she falls pregnant in the future.



### FADUMO, 28

When she connected with Birth for Humankind, Fadumo was pregnant with her fifth child – having birthed three children in her native Somalia and her fourth in Melbourne in 2015. She had many fears about her upcoming labour and the birth of her fifth child, as she felt she wasn't treated with respect during her last labour and birth experience.

Through her African Women's Learning Group, Fadumo had built strong friendships with other women who were also trying to improve their English skills and create a life in Australia. She participated in our Navigating the Maternal Health System in Australia workshop during one of her Group's sessions.

During the workshop, she was able to have many of

the questions answered that she felt unable to ask during her last pregnancy. She particularly enjoyed learning about her rights and the emphasis on respectful maternity care. Fadumo has already mentioned the program to two of her friends and will ask her case worker to refer her to our Doula Support Program.



### SOPHIE, 19

Sophie was referred to our Mothering 101 program by her youth worker. By the seven month mark, Sophie and her partner had nothing ready for their baby's impending arrival. Both Sophie and her partner have mild learning disabilities and her youth worker was concerned that they didn't have realistic expectations about parenthood.

After learning about doulas

in Mothering 101, Sophie decided that she could benefit from some extra support for the remainder of her pregnancy, during labour and the first few weeks with a newborn. Their doula supported them to create a birth plan and prepare their nursery.

Her labour was long and she was thankful to have her partner and her doula by her side the entire time.

In their first few weeks as new parents, their doula visited twice at home to answer questions about breastfeeding and seeing the maternal child health nurse. At our Mothering 101 Reunion in February, Sophie was excited to reconnect with her classmates and to meet their new babies. They made plans to stay in touch and to form their own mothers' group.



# OUR HIGHLIGHTS & IMPACT IN 2016-2017



Provided 83 women and their families with dedicated 1:1 doula support, making it 159 since 2014

Celebrated supporting our 100th Doula Support Program client - a Syrian-born refugee named Hana



Received referrals from over 24 different agencies throughout greater Melbourne

Grew our team of volunteer doulas to 40



Ran four Mothering 101 programs across three different suburbs to a total of 27 women

Piloted our Navigating the Maternal Health System in Australia workshops for 19 women from migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds



Commenced a four-year PhD research project with La Trobe University on the impact and scalability of our Doula Support Program



Made our first submission to a Parliamentary Inquiry as part of the Victorian Inquiry into Perinatal Services

Brought new funding partners on board including Flemington Rotary Club and Darebin City Council's Community Grants Program



Grew our online community by 70% to over 2,600

Raised \$9000 from 100 individual donors during our World Doula Week campaign



Were interviewed on ABC774 and recorded for ABC's Baby Talk during World Doula Week

Raised our profile through extensive media coverage during World Doula Week resulting in a significant spike in referrals in the following months



# OUR PROGRAMS

Our programs continue to demonstrate significant improvements in birth experiences and overall maternal health and wellbeing outcomes for women who typically experience poor outcomes. In addition to increasing confidence, knowledge and support during pregnancy and birth, our programs are designed to enable women to overcome language and cultural barriers that can cause difficulty navigating the maternal health system.

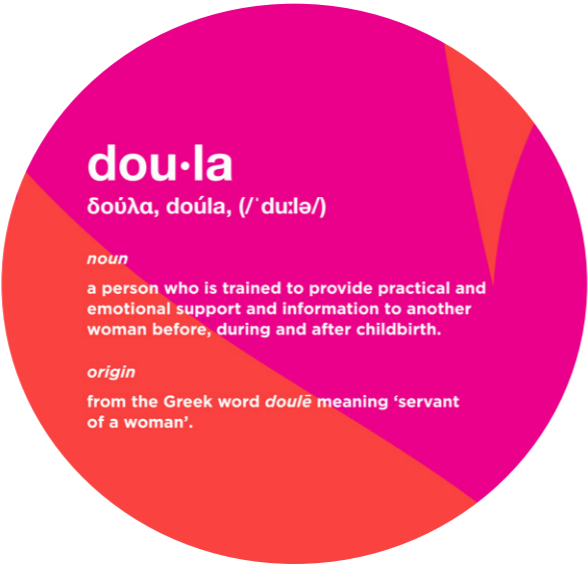
## DOULA SUPPORT PROGRAM

Our Doula Support Program fills key gaps within the existing maternal health system by providing free, mother-centred, one-to-one care to pregnant women experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

We deliver this program by mobilising and supervising a team of incredibly generous volunteer doulas and student midwives who give of their time and skills. We receive referrals from hospitals, community service providers and from women themselves. We match each woman with a doula who journeys with her through pregnancy, birth and the new period.

This year we provided support before, during and after birth to

83 ♀



During the past year, the majority of women we supported were aged 20-34, experiencing their first pregnancy, at risk of perinatal anxiety and depression and lacking a support person for pregnancy and birth. While almost half of the women we supported were from new migrant, refugee or asylum seeker

backgrounds, our program also supported young women under the age of 25, Indigenous women, women experiencing homelessness, and women experiencing, or with a history of, trauma, abuse and/or mental illness.

## THIS YEAR WE SAW:

- **Increasing demand for our services**  
 We were able to match 83 women with doulas or student midwives in our volunteer doula team. A further 16 women were connected with student midwives and

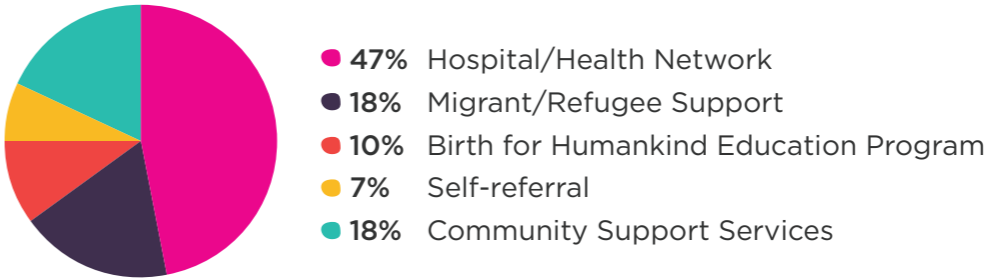
student doulas in our wider networks in cases where we were unable to match them or they didn't meet our eligibility criteria.

- **Growth in our volunteer doula team**  
 To keep up with increasing demand, we recruited and inducted 19 new doulas into the Birth for Humankind family - 10 in September 2016 and 9 in June 2017 - who bring with them an incredible wealth of experience. These women all have in common a generosity of spirit, a love of birth work and a desire to see birthing women equipped to make empowered choices. This takes our total number of doula volunteers up to 40!
- **Changes to the Health Complaints Act**  
 Important changes to the Health Complaints Act saw all of our doulas participate in an information, discussion and practice forum to

better understand the implications of these changes on their practice. Our team also participated in professional development sessions on Trauma and Pregnancy with Northern Centre Against Sexual Assault (NCASA), Childbirth Education Training with the Royal Women's Hospital and Postnatal Doula Training with Dial a Doula.

- **More referrers than ever**  
 Our team of staff and trained volunteer doulas work collaboratively with health professionals and community services across Melbourne. We received a total of 109 referrals from 24 different service providers across greater Melbourne, seven of whom were referring their first clients to our program. We've also been delighted to see a growing number of health professionals become champions of our work this year.

## REFERRALS BY AGENCY



“We were so grateful to have both S and K present during G’s induction and birth. Respectful, compassionate and above and beyond our expectations. I hope I have the honour and pleasure to work alongside you in the future.”  
 Midwife at hospital in Melbourne’s west

“Birth for Humankind is the most amazing organisation and K was such a wonderful representative of it. I cannot believe how graciously and humbly she served this woman and her family.”  
 Midwife at hospital in Melbourne’s west



### LIGHTING THE PATH THROUGH LABOUR

When we receive news that one of our clients has gone into labour – we light a candle at Birth for Humankind HQ! Lighting candles has many spiritual meanings in cultures around the world. For us it serves as a visual reminder that we are thinking of the woman as she births and that both her and her doula are being held and supported by our wider Birth for Humankind family. We strike that match and send all our love, energy and solidarity to that birthing mama.

### THE POWER OF RITUAL

Each time one of our volunteer doulas supports a woman through pregnancy and birth, we tie a bead onto a branch in honour of her and her new baby. The more women we support, the more beautiful the branch becomes!

The beads have been chosen by our team and our doulas and each has a special meaning. Doulas are invited to select a bead that they feel best represents each woman at our regular Birth Support Circles and to write a word or two in honour of the family – such as the names of the mother and her new baby.



● **DID YOU KNOW?** ALMOST HALF OF OUR CLIENTS HAVE BIRTHED AT THE ROYAL WOMEN'S HOSPITAL AND ONE QUARTER OF OUR REFERRALS COME FROM THIS SAME HOSPITAL.





## PARTNER SUPPORT

Witnessing a woman giving birth is a profoundly moving experience and what partners can bring to the birth space is special. Supporting the non-birthing partner is a key part of a doula’s role and something many of our volunteer doulas are passionate about.

Doulas can assist non-birthing partners to feel at ease with their role in the birth journey and support them in the way they wish to contribute during pregnancy, birth and into parenting.

After his partner Elene was matched with a volunteer doula, we sat down with new father, Aman, to hear about the difference having a doula made to his transition to fatherhood.

“[In Australia] it’s just the two of us and we don’t have someone to ask for help. I think it would have been very hard for us without [our doula]. She supported us with everything - I don’t know what we would do if we didn’t meet her. We didn’t know the procedure for having a baby here in Australia. It’s also hard to know what’s expected of you [as a father] because most of the time they are talking to the mother.”

Aman, new father and partner of Birth for Humankind client

● **DID YOU KNOW? TWO OUT OF EVERY THREE WOMEN REFERRED TO US ARE LACKING A SUPPORT PERSON.**

## BILINGUAL DOULA SCHOLARSHIPS

**Imagine, even just for a moment, what it would be like to try and speak another language during labour.**

We want to provide women from migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds with the opportunity to receive support in their own language, which helps to overcome some of the language and cultural barriers they face in navigating the Australian maternal health system. Amongst our team of volunteer doulas, we have doulas who speak Spanish, Arabic, Dari, Somali, Italian and Portuguese.

Over the past few years we have been fortunate to partner with Dial a Doula, who have provided two fully-funded scholarships for a bilingual community

member to undertake their 20-week foundation doula training. Each scholarship recipient then becomes part of our volunteer doula team, providing bilingual doula support to women from her community.

Next year, we will be recruiting a further 10 women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to undertake their doula training and join our team because we want to create a team of volunteer doulas as diverse as the women we support.

## WHEN MAGIC HAPPENS

From the beginning of time, women have been cared for and nurtured by other women as they become mothers. Typically, women from the community including family, friends and neighbours, would rally around the new mum to help guide her through labour, birth and those early weeks and months with a newborn. Many of our clients, particularly those who are newly arrived or from a refugee background, don't have those support networks around them during this critical time. The continuous and loving relationship between a doula and her client can play an instrumental role in creating safe and supported birth experiences. So we sat down with one of our volunteer doulas and her client to hear about that magical bond between doula and mother.



Nafisa started having contractions not long after the new year arrived - five weeks before her expected due date. She wasn't surprised - she'd been told by her doctor to expect her baby to come early following a difficult pregnancy.

Nafisa had arrived in Australia in 2010 on a sponsored humanitarian visa at age 15 from the Horn of Africa. At 21, she fell pregnant and found her way to Birth for Humankind where she was enrolled in our Mothering 101 program and also matched with a doula.



*"I was in this program [Mothering 101] to meet other young mums and I also need for more support. This word called 'doula', I thought it was a person's name, but when they explained it to me, I understood! I know they help mums, be there for them, until they give birth, visit after to see how they are going."*

That doula was Elizabeth. Born in Uruguay and migrating to Australia in the 1970s, Elizabeth knew what it was like to have a baby in a country where you can't speak the language. Having birthed her baby girl one year after arriving here, Elizabeth also knew how difficult it was to understand how the maternal health system worked.

*"I became a doula because if I can make a difference in a woman's life, she can actually deal better with the whole situation and make informed choices. Information is power. It's very important for a mum to understand what's going on, particularly women who are coming from different countries. So that's what we're actually doing as doulas: we're supporting the mum emotionally, in every way, particularly if they're a new mum, or a refugee. We're helping them to navigate through the system and we are supporting the women if there's any problem or any trouble, like in some cases there's an emergency caesarean, you cannot go with the mum to the theatre, but actually you have a big role to support the family members and try to explain the situation."*



As Nafisa's doula, this is exactly what Elizabeth was doing on the morning of January 5th 2017. Nafisa remembers having strong contractions at the hospital and feeling the urge to push but that she wouldn't - "not until Elizabeth is coming."

When Elizabeth arrived, they held hands and breathed together, however the staff were concerned that the baby's heart rate had dropped to a dangerously low level and Nafisa was taken into surgery for an emergency C-section.

When asked if she was scared she replied:

*"No, not scared. My brother, sister-in-law and my doula Elizabeth were there at the hospital with me."*

How does she think she would have gone without Elizabeth's support?

*"I'd be scared, nervous you know. The way [she] show me how to be strong and do for everything for my son and the way she keep pushing me during my pregnancy."*

*"Encouraging you, encouraging you...!"* Elizabeth said as they both laughed.



*"I really appreciate that. Thank you Elizabeth. Being a mum is amazing. It's a big experience - my first child - big change. It's not just hanging out like it used to be before. When I held him for the first time I thought 'don't drop him, be so careful'. I would like to tell other mums, just be there [for] your kids, no matter what happens, just always be there for them and show them how much you love them. It's really good to be a mum, it will change your life. [Our relationship] is very good, we're friends, so if I need another for the future, if I [have] kids again, I will want her. I wish if she be my doula again."*

The feeling is mutual.

*"Thank you Nafisa, I really have to thank you and all the mums too. I think women, they can have many beautiful things in life*

*but nothing is to compare like the moment when this mum gives birth to a baby, you know, so I just have a privilege as a doula to be in that particular moment. You create a special bond with that person in that particular time in life.*

*What I learnt from Nafisa, even though she's a young woman, I learnt she was very strong inside. She's a woman with so many dreams. She said 'I'll be a mum and I will do everything possible for my child' and this is actually what I can learn from a young woman. This is something that I'm doing with all my heart. I really love Birth for Humankind and it's so beautiful to see this organisation growing the way they're growing. Don't ever lose this!"*

Photography & interview by Krystal Siegerman for MAPgroup

## EDUCATION PROGRAMS



Our two education programs, Mothering 101 & Navigating the Maternal Health System in Australia, are designed to provide tailored, accessible and relevant pregnancy and birth support, information and resources for specific client groups.

### MOTHERING 101

*Mothering 101: A Crash Course for Young Pregnant Women* is an eight-week program for pregnant women aged under 25 to come together and build social networks, ask questions in a safe space, and learn about pregnancy care, preparing for birth, becoming a mum and taking care of themselves.

Although the birth rate for young mums in Victoria is decreasing, pregnancy



rates are still higher for young women who are experiencing a range of complex social and environmental factors such as family violence, homelessness or unstable housing arrangements, mental health issues, and low levels of maternal health education.

Many of the young women referred to Mothering 101 feel isolated in their experience of pregnancy and don't see more traditional childbirth education classes delivered in hospitals as the right fit for them. Mothering 101 is co-facilitated by an experienced doula and young mum facilitator, and supported by a young mum mentor and social worker. Our program aims to deliver important information in



a relaxed, interactive and accessible way, to give these young women the opportunity to recognise their own strengths and resourcefulness as they are becoming mothers.

Following last year's pilot, we ran four Mothering 101 programs in 2016-17 across three suburbs: Sunshine, Fitzroy and Flemington supported by Frontyard Youth Service (Melbourne City Mission). We also organised a reunion picnic for the young women who had been part of our programs in 2016 with eight new mums bringing along their babies. It was heart-warming to see how capable and natural they were in their new roles and how much they enjoyed spending time together.



WOMEN WHO HAVE ATTENDED  
MOTHERING 101 REPORT:

- Feeling less isolated
- Excited to meet other women going through similar experiences
- Becoming more aware of their strengths, knowledge and capabilities as they grow into their new role as a mother
- Feeling safe to be who they are, to ask any questions and raise any concerns
- Learning how to better care for themselves and their baby
- Learning about their choices for labour and birth
- Feeling more confident and less fearful and anxious
- Feeling inspired to take more of an active role in their health during pregnancy and after birth

● **DID YOU KNOW?** 36% OF OUR CLIENTS ARE CONSIDERED TO BE 'YOUNG MUMS' AGED 15-24.

“My favourite parts were learning about labour and meeting the other young mums. Learning the anatomy of the reproductive area and all the different names was a great way to meet the other mums, we laughed a lot.”  
- Participant, 19

“Mothering 101 was amazing, such a great program. The facilitators always had an answer for our questions, and having other young mums talk about their experience and having gone through the same thing was really good”  
- Participant, 21

“The group was so funny, we all laughed together a lot and all the girls were really nice and funny. It was so good to know other young mums, because I don’t have many friends who have babies so I want to know more people with babies.”  
- Participant, 17



**15** ♀ Referred on for  
doula support

“Statistics and media representations can paint a pretty grim picture of young mums. This has absolutely been the opposite of my experience. I was lucky enough to connect with a group of young mums who have been an invaluable source of support and reassurance for me, and they can relate to the challenges of being a young mum.”  
- Carly Lord, young mum and Mothering 101 facilitator

Referrals received **52** ♀

**27** ♀ Attended at  
least one session



## NAVIGATING THE MATERNAL HEALTH SYSTEM IN AUSTRALIA

The Australian maternal health system can be inaccessible and confusing for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or who are newly arrived. In addition, many women from refugee, new migrant and asylum seeker backgrounds report experiencing social isolation, lack of social networks, lack of awareness of available support services, and issues related to physical and emotional wellbeing and trauma that puts them at risk of poor maternal health outcomes.

This year we created and piloted Navigating the Maternal Health System in Australia to give women from newly arrived, refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds the basic information they need about pregnancy, birth and the maternal health and wellbeing support available in Victoria.

Delivered as a three-hour session in both English and community languages with the support of interpreters, this year we focused on developing, testing and refining the program content in partnership with English language and adult education providers, migrant and refugee support agencies, and community groups.

**“Thank you so much for such a wonderfully engaging and informative session. It was really valuable for all the participants. I’ll continue to be an advocate for Birth for Humankind and refer women to your Doula Support Program!”**

– Adult Education Service Provider

Delivered three pilot sessions in Melbourne’s north to

**19** ♀

**Language groups represented in the sessions:** Arabic, Assyrian, Burmese, Chin, Dinka, Farsi, Karenni, Mandarin, Marathi, Oromo, Vietnamese and Urdu

One of the aims of the program is to start conversations and answer any questions about what to expect from pregnancy and birthing here in Victoria, so that women are in a position to make empowered choices as mothers, sisters, grandmothers, friends and leaders in their new communities. Many of the women who participated in the sessions have birthed in their home countries before arriving in Australia, but are overwhelmed with the thought of facing an incredibly complex system with little support if they become pregnant here.

**“Your presentation was comprehensive and delivered in a way that our students could really understand. The multilingual support meant that everyone could participate, share experiences and take home some really useful information.”**

– Refugee Service Provider

**“I learned so many things I didn’t even know that I needed to know!”**

– Participant, 33



## MEET ANAHITA

Every woman deserves the support she needs as she brings her baby into the world and it is a privilege to be able to provide that support to women like Anahita through our doula support and education programs. These women are the reason we do this work - to see what an impact information, care and support like this can make to the childbearing journey.

Born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in the early 1990s, Anahita's 'great ambition' was to study, to work and to have a job that would help people. So, she became a midwife.

*"In Afghanistan women need a lot of help and a lot of support. One day my Auntie said if you want to help - you should be a midwife. You can help and support women in Afghanistan and everywhere you want to go in the world, you can help."*

Anahita and her husband, Rahim, arrived in Australia in 2016 and not long afterwards, she fell pregnant. Through her local community health service, she was referred to our Mothering 101 program in October 2016.

*"Always early and very keen, Anahita did so well in the program. She even taught the other young women things she'd learned from being a midwife in Afghanistan such as how to check the positioning of their baby."*

– Trixie Pavey, Education Program Coordinator

During the course of Mothering 101, Anahita was also referred to our Doula Support Program so that she could benefit from the dedicated support of a doula. Visiting her several times before the birth, her Birth for Humankind volunteer doula quickly became part of the family.

*"I can't remember my labour much [but] I know I held Phoebe's hands and she said 'well done, you can, you are strong' and it helped me. She massaged my back, my shoulders. She is like my family member. After this, I don't forget her, her help, her support. [Having a doula] is so useful - for me, and for other women, this is the time that we need all the support, partner support, friends, so good for a mum - especially for the first baby. If it was by money or cost, I can't have. If it's free, then I can."*

● **DID YOU KNOW?** MORE THAN HALF THE WOMEN WE SUPPORTED THIS YEAR FROM NEWLY ARRIVED, REFUGEE OR ASYLUM SEEKER BACKGROUNDS, REQUIRED AN INTERPRETER DURING ANTENATAL APPOINTMENTS AND LABOUR.





“It was an absolute honour to be with her through her pregnancy and birth. Both Anahita and Rahim are incredibly welcoming and grateful people - it was a privilege to be invited into their home where I learnt about their culture and family. She was able to teach me so much about midwifery and birth in Afghanistan, being a midwife herself, so it was a wonderful experience of sharing and learning for all of us, as it should be. There is so much love in their new family it brings a smile to my face just thinking about it!”

- Phoebe, Birth for Humankind volunteer doula

#### WHAT DOES SHE WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT OUR DOULA SUPPORT PROGRAM?

*“I can advise other mums - especially if they are having [their] first baby - you should have a doula! I wish they have a doula like Phoebe. It’s so good because the family may become worried, like a partner, a sister, a mother - and a doula is a strong person and her support is useful and helpful.”*

Women like Anahita are amazing and they have incredible stories to share. We hope they inspire you to be part of the change we are trying to create.

● **DID YOU KNOW?** ARABIC AND PERSIAN (FARSI AND DARI) ARE THE TWO BIGGEST LANGUAGE GROUPS REPRESENTED AMONGST OUR CLIENTS AFTER ENGLISH.

## RESEARCH PROGRAM

The aim of our research program is to develop a body of evidence to underpin the work that we do. Existing research provides strong grounding on the social determinants of health for women experiencing economic disadvantage and other complex social factors throughout the birthing journey, as well as the benefits of doula support and continuity of care models for our clients. As such, our research program focuses both on synthesising existing research and contributing new evidence.

#### THIS YEAR WE;

- Funded a literature review on the impact of doula support for women experiencing socio-economic disadvantage
- Convened a research committee to seek advice on the priorities for our research program going forward
- Funded a PhD scholarship through La Trobe University, looking at birthing women’s and professional stakeholders’ experiences of the volunteer doula support provided by Birth for Humankind

#### We would like to thank the following people involved in our research committee:

Kerryn O’Rourke, PhD student  
 Dr Monica Campo, Senior Research Officer, Australian Institute of Family Studies  
 Dr Kerreen Reiger, Honorary Associate at La Trobe University, member of the Australian Institute of Family Studies Ethics Committee, Founding Member of the Maternity Coalition  
 Associate Professor Rhonda Small, Acting Director, Mother & Child Research Centre, La Trobe University  
 Carolina Valencia Coleman, cohealth  
 Anna Wark, Practice Leader at Launch Housing




# OUR PEOPLE


Without quality, skilled and passionate people we cannot create the impact we want to have on the birthing experiences of women and their families.

We are incredibly fortunate to have a talented and caring team, board and volunteers who are committed to our vision and passionate about our work.


## BOARD




**Kirstan Flannery**  
Chair & Co-Founder




**Rebecca Quinn**  
Secretary  
(until February)




**Kirsty Burke**  
Secretary  
(since July)




**Raj Gopiraj**  
Treasurer




**Carly Lord**  
General Director  
& Mothering 101  
facilitator



**Kerryn O'Rourke**  
General Director  
(until May)



**Mei Lai Swan**  
Founding  
Director & CEO  
(until February)



**Olivia Mason**  
General Director  
(since July)

## TEAM



**Olivia Myeza**  
CEO  
(since April)



**Annabel Davies**  
Chief Operating Officer



**Stamatia Venetis**  
Chief Finance Officer



**Jen Branscombe**  
Programs Manager  
(since April)



**Carmen Hawker**  
Communications  
Manager



**Glenys Janssen Frank**  
Doula Coordinator &  
Supervisor  
(until April)



**Rebecca Bartlett**  
Doula Coordinator  
& Supervisor  
(since April)



**Trixie Pavey**  
Education Programs  
Coordinator  
(until June)



**Kester Naismith**  
Administration  
Officer

## VOLUNTEERS

Alex Van Essen  
Amona Hassab

Amy Lilino  
Calandra Gilligan

Candice Chauncy  
Chipo Baka

Ella D'Aloia  
Sue Croke

Zoe Christensen

# OUR DOULAS

To be present with a woman as she becomes a mother is a privilege. To be trusted in that space to hold her gaze, to breathe deeply with her, to advocate for her, to connect with her across language and cultural divides in one of the most life-altering moments of her life is an honour and it is one that our doulas do with such grace.

Our volunteer doulas play an instrumental role in creating safe and supportive pregnancy, birth and early parenting experiences for the women we work with. They provide the emotional support and practical care that enables our clients to embrace this new stage of life and feel confident in themselves and their ability to birth and care for their baby.

Our doulas undergo a comprehensive recruitment process and, once selected, complete an intensive induction training to equip them to work with women from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Throughout the year we provide regular professional development opportunities for the doulas to share emerging research or further build their confidence in working with our client groups.

Our doulas are a mix of experienced doulas, midwives, student midwives and childbirth educators. We are so grateful to have such a skilled and compassionate group of women who dedicate their time and energy to supporting women most in need of the compassionate, holistic and continuous support they offer.



## How many doulas does it take to change a light bulb?

*None! We don't actually change the lightbulb. We encourage you to change your own lightbulb in the manner that you feel is most appropriate for you. We can discuss with you different lightbulb changing methods and help you to develop a lightbulb-changing plan. We offer emotional and physical support and encouragement through the entire lightbulb-changing process, from climbing the ladder to turning on the lightswitch to make sure that the bulb works. It's your lightbulb, your way.*

THANK YOU TO OUR AMAZING VOLUNTEER DOULAS - YOU MAKE OUR WORK POSSIBLE

Alex Harrison	Fernanda Perez	Liz Varney
Amy Volich	Fiona Harrison	Madeleine Murray
Anna O'Brien	Glenys Janssen Frank	Mariko Meagher
Barbara Ferguson	Indrani Parker	Maymun Ahmed
Bec Wisby	Irena Sergeeva Pashchuk	Nicole Tupek
Bethany Meakin	Jaclyn Molloy	Phoebe Ely
Bridget Loats	Jae Stewart	Sarah Robson
Bubbles Segall	Kiersten Quinn	Shougoufa Hydari
Celeste Pinney	Kirstan Flannery	Stephanie Norquay
Charlotte O'Donnell-Young	Kristine Balfour	Summer Phillips
Claire Wyborn	Laura Seymour	Susan Mitchell
Dionne Fraser	Laura Lee Berlingieri	Tanya Strusberg
Elizabeth Mazeyko	Leigh Sussman	Wafa Ibrahim
Erika Munton		

*She waits*

*She waits with me, Patiently,  
In a world that doesn't wait.  
Willingly, in a time that doesn't give.  
With Kindness, in a place that is frightening.  
With Laughter, that melts away my fear.  
With Strength, that reminds me I am strong.  
With Song, to welcome my baby today.*

This beautiful reflection on the role of the doula and the support she can provide was penned by our former Doula Coordinator & Supervisor, Glenys Janssen-Frank, while one of our doulas was supporting a woman through a labour that lasted four days.



# OUR FINANCES

## SUMMARY INCOME STATEMENT

	\$	\$
	2017	2016
Donations - Philanthropists	390,000	168,404
Fundraising Revenue	18,472	18,194
Bank Interest	5,263	2,696
<b>Income - Donations</b>	<b>413,735</b>	<b>189,294</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Doula Support Program	99,763	46,003
Education Program	31,192	5,128
Research Program	41,451	-
Operations & Sustainability	145,093	99,426
Advocacy & Fundraising	65,491	4,060
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>382,990</b>	<b>154,617</b>
<b>SURPLUS (DEFICIT) FOR YEAR</b>	<b>30,745</b>	<b>34,677</b>

## SUMMARY BALANCE SHEET

	\$	\$
	2017	2016
Cash	480,316	352,406
Receivables	8,551	5,243
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>488,867</b>	<b>357,649</b>
Payables	56,820	19,134
Provisions	16,626	3,838
Deferred Income	350,000	300,000
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>423,446</b>	<b>322,972</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>65,421</b>	<b>34,677</b>
Current Year Earnings	30,745	34,677
Retained Earnings	34,677	-
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>65,422</b>	<b>34,677</b>

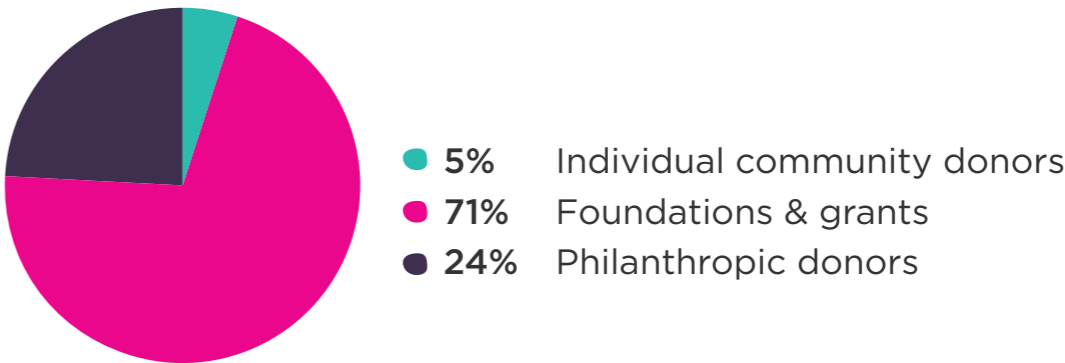
## A NOTE FROM OUR TREASURER

With sustainability and impact as a priority, the board has agreed to put appropriate funds aside annually to ensure that we can continue to deliver programs for women in the short-term and meet our longer-term ambitions to create a more equitable, accessible and mother-centred maternal health system for every mother.

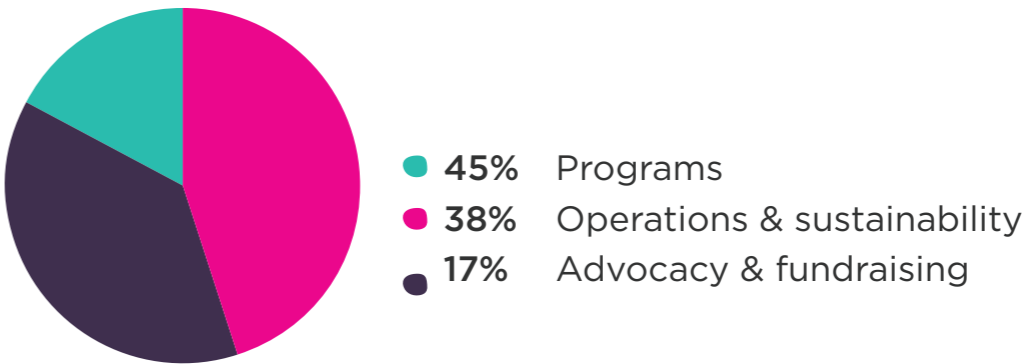
## A NOTE FROM OUR CFO

We were delighted to receive a grant from the Flemington Rotary Club to implement Mothering 101 in Flemington this year. Excitingly we are also due to receive confirmation of successful grants from Darebin City Council's Community Support Program and Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust for our Doula Support Program.

## WHERE OUR MONEY COMES FROM



## WHERE THE MONEY GOES



● DID YOU KNOW? OUR INDIVIDUAL DONORS INCREASED BY 227% THIS YEAR.

## OUR SUPPORTERS

As a non-profit organisation, we rely on philanthropic generosity and community donations to exist. To all those who have

contributed in any way, large or small, this year: **thank you!** Our work would not be possible without you.

### OUR CORPORATE PARTNERS AND GRANTMAKERS

We are extremely grateful to the following funders for their ongoing and significant support of our organisation.



### OUR PRO-BONO SUPPORTERS

We are also indebted to the following individuals and organisations who have contributed their time and expertise to us in a pro-bono or voluntary capacity.



### OUR INDIVIDUAL DONORS

Throughout the year, we were so thankful to receive donations from over 100 individual donors, many of which were received in response to our World Doula Week fundraising campaign in March. Thank you for standing

beside us in our mission to ensure that all women have the care, education and support they need as they become mothers or grow their families.

## OUR FUTURE

The year ahead is an important one as the dust settles on our recent growth and team changes, and we come together to deliver on the work currently required and dream about the road ahead.

These are some of the things we're excited about for the next year:

- Supporting even more women and their families through our Doula Support Program and responding to the ever-growing demand for our services;
- The launch of our Navigating the Maternal Health System in Australia workshops following a successful pilot of the program;
- Taking our Mothering 101 education and peer support program for young mums to new locations;
- Growing our relationships with key agencies and stakeholders in the maternal health and community sector; and
- Continuing to evaluate the impact and scalability of our Doula Support Program through the research project at La Trobe University.

With a newly appointed Programs Manager, we will be refining the development, delivery and impact of our programs including a focus on monitoring and evaluation. We want to ensure they are efficient and effective and that they are having the best, long-term impact possible.

Underpinning all of our plans and dreams is a focus on diversifying funding streams to work towards greater sustainability. To this end we are implementing an ambitious fundraising strategy that aims to bring on board new supporters and partners as well as increase our public profile. We'll also be exploring the possibility of a social enterprise or income generation arm as a longer-term route to sustainability.

Sound operational management and good governance are the glue that hold any organisation together, so we will also continue to build on these, ensuring capacity to respond to the growing need for our services.

Above all, we will continue approaching everything we do through heart-felt application of our values: trust, equity, celebration, respect and connection.



# GET INVOLVED

We want to live in a world where every mother has the care and support she needs to make empowered choices and have the best birth and early parenting experience possible. We can't do it without the support of a family of people who share this vision with us. There are so many ways that you can get involved in the change we are trying to create, here are just a few:

## **VOLUNTEER AS A DOULA**

Are you a doula, midwife or student midwife who would like to offer your skills and expertise to support, educate and care for women experiencing disadvantage? Visit [birthforhumankind.org/volunteer/](https://birthforhumankind.org/volunteer/) to find out more.

## **BECOME A PRO-BONO OR IN-KIND SUPPORTER**

We are always looking for talented people or businesses to offer their services in-kind or pro-bono. If you or your organisation wants to help, please get in touch.

## **BECOME A REGULAR DONOR**

The best way for you to secure the future of our work is by becoming a regular donor. To make a tax deductible monthly donation, visit [birthforhumankind.org/donate](https://birthforhumankind.org/donate)

## **FUNDRAISE FOR US**




Raise money for us and have fun at the same time by hosting an event or pledging a special occasion – it could be your birthday, a baby shower, an afternoon tea, whatever you choose! Simply register your event at [mycause.com.au](https://mycause.com.au).

## **SUBSCRIBE TO NEWSLETTER**

Join our growing community of subscribers and each month we'll send you the latest news about our programs, our impact and our upcoming events. Subscribe at [birthforhumankind.org](https://birthforhumankind.org).

## **FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

Join in the conversation by being part of our online community! Follow us

-  [/birthforhumankind](https://www.facebook.com/birthforhumankind)
-  [@birthforhumankind](https://www.instagram.com/birthforhumankind)
-  [Birth for Humankind](https://www.linkedin.com/company/birthforhumankind)

Together we can make the world of difference to the pregnancy, birth and early parenthood experiences of women and families experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

Birth for Humankind has Deductible Gift Recipient and Charitable Tax Concession status. ABN: 75 605 254 340



**Thank you for supporting  
Birth for Humankind.**



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