



Children by Choice
Association Incorporated

About Children by Choice

Children by Choice has supported women experiencing unplanned pregnancy since 1971, when the Association started the first dedicated counselling service available in Queensland. Children by Choice is a not-for-profit organisation, committed to providing unbiased information on all unplanned pregnancy options – abortion, adoption and parenting. We operate from a pro-choice, woman-centred approach.

While it is preferable to prevent unplanned pregnancies from occurring, unplanned pregnancy is a reality of women's lives. No contraceptive method is 100% effective and many issues impact upon the reproductive health choices available to women. Children by Choice seeks to address underlying issues contributing to unplanned pregnancy, such as policy, education and contraceptive access, and to provide support for individual women who are experiencing unplanned pregnancy.

Our Services - Counselling

Children by Choice offers Queensland-wide telephone counselling, information and referral services on issues relating to an unplanned pregnancy. Telephone counselling is confidential, anonymous and free to access. Face-to-face counselling is also available in Brisbane. Our counsellors are all trained professional psychologists or social workers. We provide a supportive pro-choice service which provides an opportunity for women to explore issues and express their feelings in a non-judgemental atmosphere.

We offer:

- Evidence-based information about all pregnancy options – abortion, parenting and adoption
- Referrals to other relevant services - such as termination clinics, ante-natal classes, parenting groups or adoption agencies
- Decision-making counselling for women, their partners and families
- Translating and interpreting services if required
- Support or counselling after an abortion

Our services – Women's Access Fund

The Women's Access Fund is a project of Children by Choice, a fund run entirely on donations which exists to help financially-disadvantaged women pay for abortion procedures. Without this

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money and assistance, many of these women would be unable to afford the procedure.

Our Services - Community Education and Training

Children by Choice offer a range of education and training services. We deliver school-based education, training courses for health professionals, guest seminars and lectures.

The Sexual and Reproductive Health School Education Programme is a series of interactive education modules addressing issues of sexuality, sexual decision-making, contraception and unplanned pregnancy. Research indicates that comprehensive and accurate sexuality education can significantly delay the beginning of sexual activity and intercourse and better prepares young people to make safe and responsible decisions when they do engage in sexual activity.

Unplanned Pregnancy Counsellor Training Workshops provide up-to-date and accurate information on all unplanned pregnancy options and enable participants to further develop their information giving and counselling skills to assist women's decision-making around unplanned pregnancy. Participants include tertiary students, allied health and welfare professionals.

A variety of seminars and presentations are delivered to different audiences including tertiary students, doctors and individual organisations. These can be arranged where requested. Limited opportunities exist for student placements.

Our Services - Information

Children by Choice regularly responds to information requests from the community. We distribute resources to students and service agencies. We attend expos and community events around south-east Queensland. Information is also available through our web site www.childrenbychoice.org.au.

Our Services - Political and Policy Advocacy

Children by Choice actively works towards:

- ensuring that all women, regardless of where they live, their age, financial status, cultural and religious background, are able to freely choose the size and spacing of their families
- removing abortion laws from the Queensland Criminal Code
- the provision of abortion services within the public health

Our Vision ...

All women have the knowledge and power to take control of their sexual health and reproductive choices.

Our Services ...

Providing pro-choice counselling, information and education services on all unplanned pregnancy options – abortion, adoption and parenting

system

- the provision of government-funded paid maternity leave
- improvement in reproductive health education in schools, the youth sector and for all women.

Children by Choice provides a high volume of comment and information to the media, journalism students, organisations and politicians. Children by Choice is a leading member of Reproductive Choice Australia, a coalition of organisations and individuals who are interested in ensuring that women's reproductive freedoms are protected and enhanced in Australia, as well as a founding member of Pro Choice Qld, a coalition of organisations committed to achieving the decriminalisation of abortion in Queensland.

Our History

Since its early days in 1972, Children by Choice has worked in three arenas:

- Providing counselling and information for Queensland women experiencing unplanned pregnancy;
- Promoting and providing sexual and reproductive health information in schools; and
- Working for abortion law reform and political action to enable a woman's right to choose from all unplanned pregnancy options.

Counselling – Then and Now

In 1973-74, volunteer counsellors met with 1069 women. The association operated in a hostile environment where women feared reprisals, gave false names and travelled to Sydney to obtain an abortion. Children by Choice ran a large airline account with Ansett and kept a detailed register of pro-choice doctors. The organisation also assisted "single mothers" to find non-judgemental maternity care. A 1979 newsletter contained a plea for counselling volunteers - "January is our busiest time."

By 1982, the service had assisted 33514 women. Gradually, termination clinics opened in Tweed Heads, Brisbane and larger regional centres. Whilst the geographic barriers to accessing abortion were reduced, societal stigma persisted against both abortion and family units different than a father (the breadwinner), mother (the housewife) and two children. In the 1990s, during a period when the service had no funding, volunteers would find 64 phone calls on the answering machine from a single day, waiting for a return call.

Today, Children by Choice receives over 2500 telephone calls per year, as well as almost 20,000 website hits (views over two minutes). The service receives Queensland Health funding, enabling us to

provide professional degree qualified staff to respond to our clients. January is still our busiest time. The issues clients want to discuss are strikingly familiar, including relationship issues, financial stress and concerns about coping with their decision.

APPENDIX :
Frequently Asked Questions about our position on abortion.

What are Children by Choice's views on abortion?

Children by Choice believes that every woman has the right to make her own decision about an unplanned pregnancy and should be able to access an abortion if that is her choice. Children by Choice believe that abortion laws should be removed from the criminal code and the provision of abortion services within the public health system.

Does Children by Choice think that abortion is immoral or unethical?

Children by Choice do not regard abortion as inherently immoral or unethical. One of our guiding principles is self-determination, that it is inappropriate for health professionals and others to impose their own moral and religious views on women who are facing an unplanned pregnancy. Women have the right to make decisions about their own body, health and life using their own moral and ethical compass.

Are there any circumstances where Children by Choice do not think a woman should have an abortion?

All women should have to right to access an abortion if this is their choice regardless of the circumstances of the pregnancy. It is essential that the decision to have an abortion is made solely by the woman and she not be forced into this through coercion or pressure from other parties such as the man involved in the pregnancy or other family members.

What are Children by Choice's views on "right to life" organisations?

Children by Choice respects the right of other organisations to hold their own views in regards to abortion, however these views should not be imposed on individual women considering or accessing an abortion. We believe that anti-choice organisations' tactics of intimidating women and their families attempting to enter medical clinics for pregnancy termination services are cruel and inappropriate. The decision regarding an unplanned pregnancy is a private health matter for a woman.

Support us ...

Make a donation today and ensure that we can continue to make a positive difference for women.

Membership of the association is open to all who agree with our aims.

Call us to explore opportunities to volunteer.

We also believe that women accessing health information about abortion are entitled to know the moral position of their health provider. In many cases, anti-choice organisations operate help lines and information services about pregnancy, without declaring that they are against a woman's right to choose abortion. We would prefer that all services clearly state their values and affiliations publicly, rather than deceive and mislead clients about the nature of their service.

Children by Choice condemns the use of bullying and violence against health staff involved in the provision of abortion services. Such tactics do not support a belief that these organisations have a respect for life.

Do women accessing abortion need counselling?

Based on the principle of self-determination, we believe that women are able to decide for themselves whether to access an abortion. Women have the right to decide whether to access counselling or not, and should not be compelled to have counselling.

Some women who are considering abortion as an option don't find the decision to be straight forward. We believe they have the right to access independent and non-judgemental counselling and information to support them with their decision.

Sometimes women have mixed feelings following an abortion. These can relate to many factors and events surrounding the pregnancy, including relationship breakdown, feeling pressured to choose abortion and the actual medical experience. Where women need support following an abortion, they should be able to access professional, non-judgemental counselling.

Isn't abortion risky?

As in any other medical procedure, some risks exist. Disclosure of medical risks is required during the process of a patient signing their "informed consent" to a procedure. Abortion, in legal circumstances and in countries with a good health care system, performed by well-trained and skilled people, is a very safe procedure. After the thirteenth week of pregnancy the procedure is more complicated and there is more risk involved, but again when performed by competent people, the risk is still relatively low.

Research studies about the health risks of abortion are sometimes funded and undertaken by "right to life" organisations. When studying abortion risk factors, it is important to carefully check the authors' affiliations and research record.

Our Vision ...

All women have the knowledge and power to take control of their sexual health and reproductive choices.

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Disclaimer:
This information is intended as a general guide only. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, we accept no responsibility for errors or omissions. This information is no substitute for independent professional advice.