

Support for all new mothers – Otago Daily Times, 13 May 2009

Wakatipu parents are more at risk of postnatal depression, according to a mother and her support group.

The Queenstown woman, who declined to be named, said Queenstown was an isolating place to have a baby.

"It's definitely hard in Queenstown without having family around. It's hard to get through," she said.

Queenstown had a "like it or leave" mentality, which was not easy when raising children.

The cost of living in Queenstown and the cost and availability of child care were contributing factors, she said.

Money pressures and the instability of renting in Queenstown were stressful for her, she said.

Queenstown's transient population meant it was very hard to find friends who would not be moving on. Cold winters also played a part.

"Living on the side of the hill in the shade when you are at home all day with a baby is not a good thing to have to do," she said.

She said a mothers' support group workshop she attended when her daughter was 6 months old helped her turn the corner and realise help was out there.

After attending the workshop, she recognised she needed help. She was later diagnosed with postnatal depression and was still being treated. She had met the group every fortnight at the Arrowtown Plunket rooms for the past year.

"It was good to go where there are other mums on the same level, without having to put on a brave face. Where we can share experiences and to know we were all in the same boat," she said.

The chat sessions were a welcome outlet where she could talk to other mothers and where their children could mix too. As she began to recover, it was also good to help other sufferers.

Mothers' support group leader Krista Baker said there was a plethora of reasons why Wakatipu mothers were more at risk than in other areas.

A Plunket community survey of Wakatipu mothers showed well over 80% did not have their parents living nearby.

"We also have a lot of immigrants in Queenstown who are away from home and having a baby. That's isolating."

A lack of child care facilities and the financial burdens associated with living in Queenstown, especially when couples were adjusting from two incomes to one, also contributed to parents' stress.

Higher mortgages and rental prices of often poorly insulated houses added to the burden.

"I had a ring around and only about 30% of mothers who attended last year's workshop are still here," she said.

The transient population meant new mothers found it difficult to find friends who were permanent residents.

The mothers' support group started a year ago when Plunket and Supporting Families saw the need for a peer support group for mothers suffering from mild to moderate postnatal depression.

Those with more severe symptoms are referred to the Wakatipu Community Mental Health Team.

The group meets fortnightly in the Arrowtown Plunket rooms for a "get-together" to discuss issues concerning the mothers, Ms Baker said.

The Salvation Army visited the group to talk about family budgeting and a nutritionist advised on how to stay healthy.

The group was holding a postnatal depression, sleep deprivation and mental wellbeing seminar for new mothers on May 25.

The workshop would focus on prevention and early detection of postnatal depression including early warning signs, mood-enhancing foods and simple ways to keep feeling cheerful in winter.

It would help mothers be mentally prepared for winter and tell them what help was available, Ms Baker said.