

# Our volunteers are our foundation

Simone Short talks about helping mums and dads suffering perinatal depression and anxiety and the special people who share her mission

The Gidget Foundation Australia has seen an overwhelming increase in calls through the course of the pandemic. It's tougher than ever on expectant and new parents.

While sadly there are roughly one in five mums and one in 10 dads suffering in silence, there are also a lot of very generous people donating their time and resources to help foundations like ours.

Over the past 20 years, I've had the honour of wearing many voluntary hats at Gidget Foundation Australia – board director, committee member, event manager and volunteer manager. This has enabled me to support our mission of raising awareness of and supporting men and women through perinatal depression and anxiety (PNDA).

Our mission was born in 2001 when my sister Louise ('Gidget' to her friends) took her own life when suffering silently from PNDA.

My sister's closest friends invited my other sister Jacqui and I to do something to get people talking in order to stop another woman suffering in silence as Gidget had done.

For us, starting a conversation amongst ourselves and our circle of friends was the first step to helping others who may have been suffering from this phenomenon we had just discovered – PNDA.

PNDA wasn't something anyone spoke about 20 years ago. I'm very proud of what we have been able to achieve from those initial conversations.

I know Gidget would be so proud of how it has grown and the support services we have been able to create in her memory to help other families through the tough times.

Losing a sister so tragically is not something you overcome as such, especially for our tight-knit, loving family.

So it feels good, albeit overwhelming, to not only see what we have created in her memory but to see how it is valued by the community.

When I received the news from The Centre for Volunteering that I was the recipient of the North Shore Adult Volunteer of the Year as well as the North Shore Overall Volunteer of the Year, it was such a lovely recognition of our journey and the conversation we've been nurturing all these years.

I was delighted to accept the award on behalf of my sister, Gidget, and all the amazing volunteers who are always there, willing to help.

The volunteers are the backbone of Gidget Foundation Australia. Through their generosity, they enable us to make a difference.

It takes a special kind of person to give their time and energy again and again and ask for nothing in return.

Volunteers have always played a very important role in our organisation.

I also enjoy recruiting and working with new volunteers because everyone has a story and a reason behind why they choose to volunteer for us.

I think it's crucial to have kind and caring people involved in helping you to make a difference and I have been fortunate to have fostered deep and genuine relationships with the Gidget team and volunteers.

While I cherish the Gidget Foundation Australia family dearly, I'm also a mum to four, so life can get very busy. Finding a balance between the two loves was essential but not always easy.

We traditionally host events to raise funds to support our programs. Unfortunately, we have had to cancel many during the past two years as the Covid restrictions have left us with no other option.

Our inaugural Ladies Lunch 20 years ago was attended by 200 supporters – mostly friends, family and colleagues of Gidget.

Our last event in 2019 was attended by 1500 women and was a sellout. It's incredible when you give people the opportunity to come together to support your cause how willing they are to stand by your side if it is something they believe in too.

We also host a Rugby Lunch; it's not just for the blokes, but it gives them a good chance to understand PNDA and support dads who do it tough too.

What motivates me is seeing how the foundation is helping. Volunteering for the Gidget Foundation started out as a way to grieve and help other women suffering in silence.

The flagship North Sydney Gidget House was where the foundation started. This location is especially close to my heart as it is where my sister and I are from. It has undergone a refurbishment and expansion and we are relaunching it to widen our services and provide muchneeded care for those who need our help during their parenting journey.

We now have 22 Gidget House locations across Australia providing face-to-face psychological counselling as well as telehealth services.

None of us anticipated the growth and expansion that our team has delivered – it is phenomenal. It's an incredible feeling to be supporting so many parents across the country so rapidly and I could not be prouder of what we've accomplished.

As we grew, we took on varying roles and contributed as best we could with the time we had. It has always been cathartic and rewarding to see how many new parents we have helped along the way.

Gidget Foundation Australia came into being because of my sister. The foundation is now about the other mothers and fathers and their extended families suffering from PNDA. It's about doing whatever we can to get them the support they need and that starts – as it did for us – when you “start talking”. [gidgetfoundation.org.au](http://gidgetfoundation.org.au) 1300 851 758