

**Submission
No 38**

SUPPORT FOR NEW PARENTS AND BABIES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Submission to
The Committee on Community Services
Inquiry into support for new parents and babies in New South Wales
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By

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Volunteer home visiting has been offered within the not-for-profit sector over many years (Byrne et al. 2016) and is known to be an effective and low cost means of supporting the transition to parenthood and preventing postnatal mental health problems (The Benevolent Society, 2015). Parents who need support find that a relationship with a volunteer complements those with professional service providers. Qualitative research results show a high level of parental satisfaction with this type of program (Byrne et al., 2016).

There are, however, few such programs to be found in Australia. Those found in an online search on 31 Oct, 2017 are:

- Home-Start Family Services Australia
- The Benevolent Society
- Karitane, and
- Helping Children and Families Association, Inc.

This submission is written on behalf of Helping Children and Families Association Inc. (HCFA), a local Armidale NSW volunteer home visiting program. This charity was established in 2005 to continue the work started by the Armidale Network of Hope for the Children Foundation about five years earlier.

The mission of HCFA is “to connect families of young children with our community” (HCFA, 2017) through providing the support previously available from extended family and neighbours. This is achieved through the “Loving Care” of volunteers to any family with a child under six, publication of the ‘Armidale Families Guide’ in 2014, and continual review of what support the organization is able to provide for local families.

A snapshot of the families HCFA shows that those supported by volunteer home visitors lack the social support structures of extended family or a known community. In 2014-2015, over half of the families supported by HCFA had no family nearby. For those who did, one half stated that their family was not supportive. Those assisted by HCFA volunteers were evenly divided between: 1. Single parent families; 2. Families with one parent studying; and 3. Families with one bread-winner. One third of the families struggled with health issues; one third needed opportunities to practise English conversation (HCFA, 2015).

With Armidale NSW nominated as a location where 200 Yazidi families will be settled in 2018 (Doherty, 2017), some of whom have no experience of living in cities, there will be additional need in the community for support to families with young children (R. Nicholls, personal communication, 13-11-2017). Already, HCFA has received a referral to match a volunteer to a Yazidi family (A. Vlasoff, personal communication, 14-11-2017) with many more expected over the coming months. This will require additional training for volunteers to prepare them to support individuals who have been through traumatic experiences such as these refugees have.

The families supported by HCFA to date are very satisfied with the support they receive from volunteers (I. Van Mensel, personal communication, 15-11-2017). The Management Committee and members of HCFA would like to see financial support available for organisations such as ours to provide this valuable service to our local community and many others around the state. This would relieve the pressure to divert time and energy from supporting families to finding funding to pay for our administration, coordination and volunteer training costs.

References

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HCFA (2015). Helping Children and Families Association Inc 2014/2015 Snapshot. Unpublished report.

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