



Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
**Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes**

**Community Hubs Australia**  
January 2017

## CONTENTS

Definitions, abbreviations & names	2
Contact details	2
Executive summary	3
Introduction	6
Response to Terms of Reference	9
ToR 1	9
ToR 2	15
ToR 3	21
ToR 4	27
Additional comments: Social engagement of youth migrants	28
Conclusion	29
Recommendations	30
Attachments	31
A: The Community Hubs Model requirements	31
B: NCHP service and program partners	33
C: Link to video testimonials from school principals	34

## CONTACT DETAILS

### Dr Sonja Hood

Chief Executive Officer, Community Hubs Australia

Level 31, 367 Collins Street, Melbourne 3000

Tel: 03 8614 3418 Email: [sonjahood@communityhubs.org.au](mailto:sonjahood@communityhubs.org.au)

Website: <http://www.communityhubs.org.au/>

## DEFINITIONS, ABBREVIATIONS & NAMES

*Unless otherwise specified, these definitions apply for the purposes of this submission:*

**Migrants:** all temporary and permanent migrants, regardless of their circumstances of arrival in Australia.

**Community hubs/hubs:** the place-based community hubs operated in primary schools and community centres in culturally diverse Australian communities under the National Community Hubs Program.

*Key abbreviations:*

**AMEP:** Adult Migrant English Program

**CHA:** Community Hubs Australia Incorporated

**NCHP:** National Community Hubs Program

*Personal names:* In some instances, the names of individual migrants mentioned in this submission have been changed to protect personal privacy.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### The national community hubs network

Community Hubs Australia (CHA) delivers the National Community Hubs Program (NCHP), encompassing 70 community hubs throughout Australia, 31 of which will become operational during 2017.

Our community hubs are predominantly located in primary schools in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. They are scaffolded onto the existing service system and school infrastructure and are located in communities with high migrant and refugee populations and high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Community hubs work with permanent and temporary migrants and humanitarian entrants, whether they arrived in Australia last month or last decade. The hubs focus on engaging with and supporting migrant and refugee women with pre-school children. These are among Australia's most vulnerable and isolated residents. In many cases, they are the forgotten faces of Australia's settlement services system.

Hubs bridge the gap between migrant women and the wider community, giving them the best chance of achieving positive settlement outcomes. Independent evaluations indicate that community hubs significantly increase the uptake of services among migrant families. They serve as the vital 'missing link' in the service delivery chain, providing family-friendly gateways linking migrants with their school, local services and each other. Hubs have opened up access pathways that are changing the way service providers do business.

The NCHP is resourced through one of Australia's biggest partnerships between the philanthropic sector and federal, state and local governments. The Australian Government, through the Department of Social Services, is the primary funder of the NCHP. Each hub costs about \$60,000 per annum to operate. For a relatively small investment, community hubs deliver a big social return.

During 2016, our hubs engaged with almost 13,000 migrant families from 101 different countries and partnered with almost 300 organisations. Hubs recorded over 300,000 attendances at activities and programs (including more than 15,000 attendances at English classes), made more than 8,000 service referrals, and generated almost 8,000 volunteering opportunities. Close to 400 hub participants – more than 90% of them women – gained employment.

### Response to Terms of Reference

#### ToR 1 – key points

- In our view, the main problems with Australia's existing settlement services involve eligibility, access, how effectively services connect with and complement each other, and recognising that the needs of migrant women extend well beyond what funded settlement services can provide.
- Women and children are being overlooked by the existing system, regardless of their arrival classification. Many women are either missing out on receiving settlement services or the services provided do not fully address their needs. The most vulnerable cohort is mothers caring for very young children. Imposing a 5-year time limit on the availability of settlement services disadvantages women who need to spend several years caring for young children before they can prioritise their own needs.

- The needs of women extend well beyond traditional settlement services to include mainstream services such as maternal child health, early childhood development, family support, and health and wellbeing programs. They also face multiple barriers to accessing services. This makes them vulnerable to social isolation and experiencing poor settlement outcomes.
- School readiness for young children in migrant families is another significant gap. Without access to early childhood learning and development experiences these children are at risk of starting school developmentally behind their peers, with potential lifelong consequences.

### **ToR 2 – key points**

- Australia’s NCHP is a home-grown example of national and international best practice for improving the settlement outcomes and future prospects of migrant families. Our hubs network is one of the largest and most successful examples of the school-based hubs approach in the world.
- NCHP hubs are unique in that they focus on reaching and helping migrant women and their young children. The hubs are enabling services to connect with hard-to-reach women where previous attempts have failed.
- The NCHP’s Community Hub Model is evidence-based, proven and cost-effective. It has been tested and refined by successive independent evaluations. It represents a paradigm shift in the way services are planned, coordinated and accessed by migrants.

### **ToR 3 – key points**

- Learning to speak English enables migrants to fully participate in the wider Australian community and way of life. Without English, they will be less likely to make connections outside their cultural group, learn new skills or find employment.
- Many migrant women have little or no English skills and minimal educational on arrival. Lack of English makes them particularly vulnerable to becoming socially isolated. If they are also the primary carers for young children, they will face barriers to accessing English tuition and practice, and their children may be missing out on essential preparation before starting school.
- English tuition that is largely geared towards language use required for work does not satisfy the needs of stay-at-home mothers with young children. These women need to learn English that helps them run a household, engage with their children, speak with teachers and have social conversations.

### **ToR 4 – key points**

- Australia’s current migration assessment processes focus on the primary applicant, who is usually the main breadwinner within a family and, most often, male. The needs of women are usually after-thoughts in these processes and in how settlement services are designed and targeted.
- It is important to recognise that women are a significant component of our migration program and that many are arriving in capacities that place them outside the existing settlement services sector. Arrival support services and strategies for women need to be planned accordingly.

- Inadequacies in existing migration processes can be remedied by putting new arrivals into a local community context that is welcoming and giving them a ready-made support network that helps them help themselves. Everybody who comes to Australia wants to, and is able to, make a contribution if we give them the opportunity to learn, connect and better themselves.

### Additional comments: Social engagement of youth migrants

- Strengthening social cohesion in local communities with high migrant populations helps reduce the potential for social disengagement and increases the positive sense of belonging and participation across all age groups.
- Building parenting skills and resilience within families contributes to happier and better-connected migrant communities. Providing opportunities for informal cross-cultural interactions contributes to greater mutual awareness, respect and tolerance.
- Our society has the opportunity to begin shaping the next generations of migrant youth now. We can do this by intervening early, using mechanisms such as community hubs to ensure migrant children arrive at school ready to learn and that their mothers and fathers are connected into schools and local communities.

### Recommendations

That the Australian Government:

1. Recognises that the settlement needs of many migrant women and young children extend well beyond what existing settlement services can provide and works with CHA to review and improve access for all migrant women and their young children to all relevant services.
2. Provides ongoing (not project based) funding for school-based community hubs under the NCHP over the longer term, recognising that place-based hubs are a proven, cost-effective means of achieving positive settlement outcomes for individual migrants and their families.
3. Supports the continued expansion of the NCHP by establishing and maintaining school-based community hubs in all eligible schools in major Australian cities and regional centres that have high migrant populations and high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage.
4. Reviews how English language support (tuition and practice) is currently being provided to migrant women, with a view to significantly improving access to English language support for women across all entry categories, and the quality and relevance of course content being provided, particularly in relation to the needs of women caring for young children.

“If the philanthropic, government and corporate sectors can combine to deliver services to the community, it’s far more effective than taking an individual silo approach.

And in the end, you get a very high social payback and a very high economic payback.”

– **Peter Scanlon**, Chairman, Community Hubs Australia

## INTRODUCTION

### Community Hubs Australia

Community Hubs Australia Incorporated (CHA) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to improving social cohesion by achieving positive settlement outcomes for Australia's newest residents. CHA helps culturally diverse people, whether they came here as refugees, permanent migrants, or on temporary visas, to overcome isolation and successfully integrate into Australian communities.

### The National Community Hubs Program

CHA delivers the National Community Hubs Program (NCHP), established in 2013, which focuses on engaging with and supporting migrant women with pre-school children.

We partner with specialist support agencies to operate community hubs in local government areas (LGAs) in Victoria, New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland. Our existing network of 39 hubs is set to almost double in size in 2017, with funding from the federal and state governments.

Our hubs operate under the evidence-based Community Hub Model (the requirements of which are outlined in Attachment A). They are located in communities with high migrant and refugee populations and high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage. The hubs leverage existing, family friendly community facilities, with the vast majority located in state and Catholic primary schools. Hubs welcome all migrants, including fathers, however women with young children are their primary client group.

The NCHP is resourced through one of Australia's biggest partnerships between the philanthropic sector and federal, state and local governments.

### The community hubs network

The NCHP is funded to operate almost 70 community hubs throughout Australia, 31 of which will become operational during 2017. Thirty-nine existing hubs are located in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

#### 2016 hub locations

Our existing hubs are based in 37 state and Catholic primary schools and two community centres, spread across seven LGAs in three states.

In Victoria, the cities of Brimbank and Greater Dandenong each have five hubs, and the City of Hume has 12. In NSW, the City of Bankstown has five hubs, Blacktown has four and Parramatta has three hubs. There are five hubs located in Logan City, south of Brisbane.

CHA contracts support agencies with extensive experience in providing settlement services and/or early childhood education for migrant families to train and support our hub leaders and manage relationships with host organisations at the state and LGA level. These agencies are: Hume City Council and The Smith Family in Victoria; Settlement Services International in NSW; and Access Community Services Limited in Queensland.

## Funding partners and costs

The Australian Government, through the Department of Social Services (DSS), is the primary funder of the NCHP. Since 2012, the Government has committed more than \$8 million to the hubs program nationally. In addition, \$1.86 million has been contributed from participating schools; \$1 million has come from other funders, including state and local governments and philanthropy; and more than \$5 million has been provided by the Scanlon Foundation.

In the 2016 Federal Budget, the Government committed \$4.85 million to expand the hubs program over the next three years. The NSW Government also announced \$720,000 in complementary funding.

The program's founding partner, the Scanlon Foundation (<http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/>) has contributed in excess of \$1 million per year to the hubs program to support research and evaluation, national administration and program development.

Each hub costs about \$60,000 per annum to operate and works with, on average, 330 families. Hub leaders and schools actively build on the core funding by obtaining additional financial and in-kind support from other sources to enrich what their hubs can offer local communities.

## Supporting women and children

Migrant and refugee women (migrant women) are among Australia's most vulnerable residents. In many cases, they are the forgotten faces of Australia's settlement services system.

Migrant women often live in communities already experiencing severe socioeconomic disadvantage. Many are the primary carers for pre-school children while their husbands look for or attend work. They may have little or no English, lack the confidence and flexibility to participate in classes and local community activities, and are often unaware of the range of government and community services available to them.

These women can quickly become house bound and isolated from the rest of the community. This makes them vulnerable and difficult for traditional service delivery models to reach.

Their young children are also vulnerable, at a time when they are undergoing a critical stage of human development. Without access to early childhood learning and development experiences, these children are at risk of starting school developmentally behind their peers. Apart from placing extra pressure on schools and teachers, this can have lifelong consequences for each child, including:

- ongoing learning difficulties while at school
- poor academic achievement
- disengagement and behavioural problems
- leaving school early
- unemployment or low income earning potential
- mental health problems and drug abuse
- anti-social and criminal behaviour

Early intervention to support migrant women and their young children is a preventative investment that lays the foundations for the future wellbeing and social cohesion of communities with high populations of new migrants.

Similarly, supporting migrant families to connect into and contribute to their local community, and achieve their individual aspirations, is the most effective approach to ensuring they achieve successful settlement outcomes.

The NCHP's community hubs facilitate this intervention and empowerment at the local community level. For a remarkably small investment, hubs are delivering outcomes that are changing individual lives – and our society – for the better.

“In the beginning, we were blinded not knowing where to go and what to do. But with the hub and its activities, now we are aware of what services are available, which are relevant to us and our children. We are getting different kinds of help.”

– **Maha**, hub parent of Middle Eastern background, NSW

“When I first came to Australia I was at home feeling frustrated and useless and I didn't know anyone. I was introduced to the hub and it became my 'window of hope'.

In the Hub we are not alone. It's a place that connects people. The Hub is like a second home and we get inspired by each other.”

– **Hub parent** of Egyptian background, Victoria



## RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE

CHA's community hub teams work directly with migrants and service providers on a daily basis. During 2016, our hubs engaged with almost 13,000 migrant families and partnered with almost 300 organisations.

Many hub participants are newly arrived migrants, while others have been in Australia for some years. Hubs work with permanent and temporary migrants and humanitarian entrants.

This daily contact gives CHA and its frontline delivery team an in-depth understanding of the holistic needs of migrant families in local communities and whether these needs are being met by existing services. We have a particularly strong insight into the needs of migrant women.

### **ToR 1: The mix, coordination and extent of settlement services available and the effectiveness of these services in promoting better settlement outcomes for migrants**

In CHA's experience, Australia's existing mix of settlement services is reasonably good and comprehensive. The quality of these services is not the main problem. The most concerning issues relate to:

- who settlement services are made available to and for how long after arrival
- how people access settlement services
- recognising that the needs of migrant families with young children extend well beyond what government funded settlement services can provide, and
- how effectively services connect with and complement each other.

Funded settlement services, including English language tuition, are only available to a proportion of the migrants who attend our community hubs. The present settlement services system endeavours to channel those eligible migrants into the existing service structure, rather than following a ground-up approach that identifies and responds to their actual needs.

Migrants who fit neatly within the existing system, for example, working fathers and children attending school, generally do well in terms of their settlement outcomes. However, many migrants, non-working mothers for example, have different needs. These women cannot be easily shoehorned into the existing system and as a result, they are falling through the gaps.

#### **The system is failing women**

Many migrant women are either missing out on receiving settlement services or the services provided do not fully address their specific needs.

The most vulnerable cohort is women who migrate to Australia with very young children, or those who start a family soon after arriving. These women have a different rhythm to their lives and different settlement needs from those of their working spouses. They also tend to place the settlement needs of their husbands and children ahead of their own. Imposing a 5-year time limit on the availability of settlement services from the date one enters Australia can therefore disadvantage women who need to spend several years providing primary care

for young children before being in a position to prioritise their own needs. For example, many wait until their last child is at school before beginning to learn English.

The needs of these women also extend well beyond the bounds of traditional settlement services. Mainstream services such as maternal child health, playgroups, kindergarten and health and wellbeing programs are vitally important for this group, and yet they can be difficult for a woman with primary carer responsibilities and little or no English to access.

As a result, women are being overlooked by the existing system, regardless of their arrival classification (family/partner, skilled, humanitarian). This makes them vulnerable to experiencing social isolation and having poor settlement outcomes.

Some of the most challenging examples at present are Syrian refugees who have lost their husbands and are raising children on their own. These single-parent families have immediate needs that cannot be met through traditional settlement support services.

Conversely, service organisations we partner with report that stay-at-home mums who don't speak English can be extremely difficult for service providers to reach and successfully engage.

### **Multiple barriers to accessing services**

Even when eligible for support, women with pre-school children face multiple barriers to accessing settlement and mainstream services, including:

*Lack of awareness/knowledge* – unaware services are available and not interacting with people who can provide information about services and how to access them.

*Limited or no exposure to education in country of origin* – many migrant women from non-Western countries are more likely to be less educated than their spouses. Even migrant women who are well educated and have existing vocational skills or professional qualifications struggle to access services when they don't speak English and their primary role is caring for young children. Uneducated women are even more vulnerable.

*Little or no English proficiency* – can be exacerbated by poor education levels, and not having the money and/or flexibility to attend classes.

*Lack of childcare or child-minding support* – limits the mother's ability to attend classes or visit services, especially if she has no extended family or friends living locally.

*Reluctance to separate from her child* – in many cases, a migrant mother and her young child have never spent time apart, particularly if conditions in their home country were unsafe.

*Distrust in government/authorities* – particularly if the woman's home country was war-torn and/or rife with corruption.

*Lack of transport* – no car or driver's licence and constraints on using public transport, especially if she has a number of young children in tow.

*Financial hardship or constraints* – exacerbated by the likelihood that women with young children are most likely fully reliant on their husbands as the income earners.

*Family priorities* – putting the needs of her husband and children ahead of her own.

**Cultural values** – the wife may be expected to focus on home duties while the husband goes out to work, or she may only be permitted to interact with people from the same cultural background.

**Mental health issues** – trauma, anxiety, depression, feelings of overwhelm and displacement, post-natal depression.

**General lack of confidence** – due to all or some of the barriers above, a woman may not feel confident about venturing beyond the ‘safe zone’ of home or her cultural community.

**Hub story 1: *Phuong, country of origin: Vietnam***

Phuong moved to Australia under the partner migration program 10 years ago to marry a Vietnamese man who grew up in Australia. Her husband has strong connections into the local Vietnamese community.

Phuong came from a small village in Vietnam and spoke no English on arrival. She was welcomed into the Melbourne Vietnamese community and was able to continue speaking her native language. Phuong and her husband quickly started a family and she spent several years as a stay-at-home mum.

Ten years later, Phuong’s youngest child has just started school. Phuong still speaks no English and is very dependent on her husband and the Vietnamese community. She has had no experience of work in this culture or of life outside her cultural group. She wants to learn English and participate in the wider community, however the prospect is daunting and she doesn’t know where or how to begin.

**Migrant children need to be school ready**

School readiness for young children in migrant families is another significant gap in current migrant services. Many migrant families are not accessing mainstream early childhood services and, in some cases, are not aware that early learning and development experiences and regular health checks are vitally important for their children.

There is already a disparity in the way Australian families access pre-school services within the wider community. Migrant families who arrive from countries that don’t provide comprehensive early years services have no concept of their importance or how to access them. Children who miss out on attending a playgroup or kindergarten, and have not learned English, will start school well behind their peers. Attending to the immediate needs of children who are not school-ready also places pressure on schools and teachers.

**Temporary visa holders need services**

Many families arriving in Australia on temporary visas are not eligible for settlement services until they eventually become classified as permanent migrants. This is despite the trend in permanent migrants increasingly originating from the ranks of our temporary visa holders.

Even though there is a high probability that a family will end up transitioning from temporary to permanent status, they are forgotten about from a settlement support perspective until classified as permanent – which can take several years. As a result, even educated, professional women (see Hub story 2) can fall through the gaps and be isolated from the rest of the community.

Temporary visa holders warrant support on arrival to connect into the community and services that will help them settle into the Australian way of life. Waiting until they are categorised as permanent to provide that support is waiting too long.

### **Hub story 2: Mahesh and Shivani, Indian**

Mahesh, a qualified doctor, relocated his young family to Australia on a temporary skilled 457 visa after accepting a placement in a Sydney hospital. They had no family or friends in Australia and their only connections into the community were through Mahesh's workplace and their eldest child's primary school.

Shivani was a radiographer in India before leaving work to start a family. In Australia, she spends most of her time at home caring for their two pre-school children. Despite being well educated in her homeland, Shivani spoke very little English on arrival. She was feeling cut-off from the community and didn't know where to go to learn English or establish new friendships. She heard about the community hub at her son's school and started bringing her younger children to weekly playgroup sessions.

Shivani is now learning English through the hub and has developed firm friendships with several other women, some from different cultural backgrounds to her own. Her pre-schoolers are now helping her practice English and are happily mixing with other children in the hub.

### **English tuition needs to be tailored**

English tuition funded under settlement services and provided through the Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) is largely geared towards language use required for vocational and workplace purposes. This does not satisfy the English usage needs of mothers with young children.

We refer to this issue in more detail in our response to ToR 3.

### **Hubs are 'gateways' to existing services**

Addressing the broader settlement needs of migrant women and children, as outlined above, does not always require significant changes to existing settlement services, nor does it require major investment in new services or infrastructure.

Instead, Australia already has a proven mechanism for improving how existing services fit together and how migrant women access them. These improvements are being achieved in almost 40 culturally diverse neighbourhoods in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane that have community hubs operated by the NCHP. In these communities, our hubs serve as family-friendly gateways linking migrant women with each other, with their school, and with existing government and community services.

Hubs are scaffolded onto the existing service system and school infrastructure. This enables them to act as the vital 'missing link' in the service delivery chain at a minimal cost.

### **A modern version of the 'school gate'**

"Our community hubs are building on the age-old model of the 'school gate'.

Schools are safe, trusted places in the hearts of their communities. By embedding hubs in schools we're scaffolding a services and support gateway onto existing community infrastructure. We're providing places where women from different cultures can meet and form friendships in a safe, welcoming, family-friendly environment.

Once a woman feels comfortable in the hub and has formed a trusting relationship with the hub leader, she can begin to share her concerns and aspirations. That's when she can be linked into services, English language support and training opportunities and start to feel more confident about 'fitting in' to the Australian way of life."

– **Dr Sonja Hood**, CEO, Community Hubs Australia

"Our (hub) partners understand that many families feel safe and secure in a school environment and that, for some families, school might be the only place that families can come to access some of those services."

– **Debbie Cottier**, Principal, Springvale Rise Primary School

### **Improving service delivery and connectivity**

Our community hubs have been well received by settlement support and mainstream service providers. Being mostly located in schools, hubs have the advantage of direct access to families from many different cultural groups. Without a school-based hub to work through, service providers can find it difficult to reach isolated women from some cultural groups. Our hubs have opened up access pathways that are changing the way these organisations do business.

Hub leaders identify local needs and endeavour to address those needs through the available service offering. They alert service providers about gaps and work with them to design programs that meet local needs.

Because of the hubs' inclusive nature and the facilitative role of each hub leader within their local community, hubs are also improving connectivity between schools and local service providers. Schools and health, education and community services can no longer afford to work in parallel with one another. Hubs help them to work collaboratively, serving as the pivot points that enable connections.

Attachment B provides a list of organisations our hubs network currently partners with.

### **Building connection and belonging**

Hubs not only link people into services, they also provide a sense of community and belonging for many migrant women and their families.

Building community connections is the less tangible and equally vital component of achieving successful settlement outcomes for migrants. This is something women in primary carer roles need in particular because they may not have the outlets and connections afforded by being in the workforce.

“We’ve been delivering settlement support for over 20 years and hubs have helped us rethink and redesign how we deliver services within the community.

You just don’t get successful settlement outcomes standing in line for a service. Most of our services are now provided to families who come to us through the hubs. The hubs enable us to achieve an integrated service delivery model, with multiple services offered in the one welcoming space that’s non-intrusive, place-based and planned around the specific needs of local families.

We’re now engaging with members of the community who are isolated and would otherwise not connect with traditional support services. Without having a safe and welcoming environment, I don’t think we can have successful settlement outcomes for those who are isolated.

Hubs also provide a platform where services look beyond their immediate organisational interests and objectives and focus on achieving shared outcomes for the community. Through our five hubs in Logan, we’ve formed over 38 partnerships with other service providers.”

– **Etienne Roux**, General Manager Service Development, Access Community Services Limited

“The community hubs platform has created more than networking opportunities; it’s become a space for genuine collaboration ... Having the hubs has helped us reach even more families than we did before. The hubs also provide an important space for social connection and social capital development. It’s rare in our sector to have structures like these that are ongoing and create the infrastructure needed to bring families together and shift them to the next point in their settlement journey.”

– **Margaret Rutherford**, Community Development Manager Victoria, The Smith Family

## A cost-effective means of improving settlement outcomes

Community hubs are an effective and low-cost way of bridging the gap between migrant women and the wider community, giving them the best chance to achieve positive settlement outcomes.

Independent evaluations indicate that community hubs significantly increase the uptake of services among migrant families for a relatively small operational cost (evidence of this is provided in the *National Community Hubs Program Outcomes and Delivery Report, December 2015*, which is available on our website: <http://www.communityhubs.org.au/>).

“The best thing about having a hub is that we have an opportunity to bring our community together to improve their opportunities in life.

Our families coming from other cultural backgrounds don’t necessarily have the same educational experiences that we have in Australia, or the same educational expectations. The classes that we have for parents range from beginning English; we also have a child and mother playgroup; then we have certificate courses.

We ask the community what they want to learn about and then we try and provide those classes for them. But we’re also working with other organisations in the area, so the hub becomes the centre of our partnerships.”

– **Alan Smith**, Principal, Holy Child Primary School, Dallas, Victoria

## ToR 2: National and international best practice strategies for improving migrant settlement outcomes and prospects

The NCHP is a home-grown example of national and international best practice for improving the settlement outcomes and future prospects of migrant families.

The practice of embedding community hubs in schools is not new in Australia or overseas. However, our hubs network and proven Community Hub Model represent a paradigm shift in the way services are planned, coordinated and accessed by migrants.

Community Hubs Australia's network of 39 (and soon to be 70) hubs is one of the largest and most successful examples of the school-based hubs approach in the world. Basing hubs in schools leverages these safe, family friendly environments, which provide ready access to target cultural groups.

Our hubs are unique in that they focus on reaching and helping migrant women, connecting them with each other, their school communities, and a wide range of local services and learning opportunities, depending on their needs.

Around two thirds of the people accessing our community hubs meet DSS's eligibility criteria for settlement services. However, hubs work with all migrant women regardless of how long ago they arrived, whether they are temporary or permanent residents, and whether they came via humanitarian, family or skilled migration programs. A significant proportion of the remaining third of our hub participants are now outside the 5-year eligibility period for receiving settlement support. Those remaining are a mix of permanent and temporary migrants across a range of visa categories.

The specialist settlement support organisations we work with report that hubs are changing the way they access and engage with migrant women and their families. The hubs are enabling them to connect with cultural groups where previous attempts have failed. In this respect, hubs are the 'missing link' between services and hard-to-reach migrant families.

"The [National] Community Hubs Program is one of the most effective grassroots settlement support initiatives our organisation has experienced.

It is succeeding where previous programs have failed to successfully reach and engage with target audiences, particularly potentially isolated migrant woman and their young children."

– **Gail Ker** OAM, CEO, Access Community Services Limited

### **An evidence-based model**

The Community Hub Model (see Attachment A) is evidence-based, proven and cost-effective.

The model was developed from lessons learned during a trial of nine school-based early years hubs in the City of Hume in outer Melbourne between 2011–13. This 3-year *Supporting Parents–Developing Children Project* won the Strength in Diversity category of the Australian Government's 2013 National Awards for Local Government. The City of Hume now has 12 hubs operating within the national program.

Our model has been tested and refined by successive delivery and outcome evaluations. These evaluations confirm that the NCHP is improving settlement outcomes and social cohesion, building the cultural competence of host schools, and making local services more responsive to the needs of migrant women and their families.

## People-focused and place-based

Evidence indicates that the best way to engage hard-to-reach migrant women and connect them into their local community is to work at the local level to establish one-to-one trust-based relationships.

Our hubs are ‘people-focused’ and ‘place-based’, rather than being service-centric. This is one of the keys to their success. They help migrant women feel welcomed into the local community. Once trusting relationships have been established, the hub leader can begin linking them into support services.

Each hub looks and feels different and is planned around the needs of its local community. Hub leaders engage directly with families, school staff, government agencies and community services to understand their needs and aspirations. Hubs offer programs that respond to those needs and help women establish support networks and pathways into volunteering and employment. Hub programs include ‘soft entry’ playgroup sessions, exercise classes, and cooking, sewing and art sessions, which help to attract women into the hubs and encourage social interactions; formal and informal English lessons; vocational and skills training; health and wellbeing programs; family and domestic violence support; and financial counselling.

Hubs quickly and effectively link women into the host school. Many migrant women who begin attending a hub go on to make valuable contributions to their school community. Each hub also:

- actively supports smooth transitions to school for young migrant children
- fosters a sense of connection and belonging for new migrants
- supports inter-racial understanding and the formation of cross-cultural friendships, and
- actively facilitates volunteering and employment opportunities within the hub, the school and the surrounding community.

“Many parents don’t have extended family here, so the friendships they’re forming are really important. Early on, the Burmese mums, the Tamil mums, the African mums would sit apart in their own cultural groups and not mingle. But those barriers have come down and now they enjoy lots of social interaction across these groups.”

– **Michelle Sorohan**, Hub Leader, St Paul’s Primary School Hub, Logan, Queensland

“Hubs are a place where we can connect with women who are isolated. This was a huge gap before. We tried to engage women from the Burmese community before the hubs and that didn’t work. That community likes an informal environment that’s welcoming and comfortable.

These women don’t have confidence to go to offices. The fact that hubs are so accessible has been key to getting them involved.”

– **Blaise Itabelo**, Community Development Coordinator, Access Community Services Limited



## **Better outcomes for migrants and communities**

Hubs respond to the unique needs of their local communities while always planning to achieve positive outcomes for children, families, schools and the wider community.

The NCHP's objectives are to:

- Improve access and engagement with existing services, such as language, employment, skills development and health, for migrant families and individuals.
- Increase learning outcomes for children.
- Bolster social cohesion by enhancing the capacity of community organisations and service providers to reach out to migrant communities.
- Improve language, literacy and learning outcomes for migrants, including for isolated migrant mothers and provide early learning activities for their children.
- Improve the pathways to employment for migrants through educational and social programs.

Those objectives and the following overarching outcomes guide everything we do across the national program. Planning at the national, state and individual hub level is based around achieving these core outcomes:

**Child outcomes** – Migrant children enjoy and succeed in school and achieve optimal health, development and wellbeing.

**Family outcomes** – Migrant families function well, have the capacity, confidence and skills to nurture child learning, and are connected, active participants in the community and workforce.

**School outcomes** – Schools respond to the needs and aspirations of migrant children and families.

**Community outcomes** – Community services respond early and effectively to migrant child and family needs.

## **2016 hubs program activity**

During 2016, the NCHP's 39 community hubs directly engaged with almost 13,000 families from 101 different countries. Over 90% of hub participants were migrant women and their young children.

There were 306,713 individual attendances at community hub programs and activities, including:

- 61,523 attendances at playgroups and early years sessions
- 15,667 attendances at English classes and conversation programs
- 25,552 attendances at children's language and literacy programs
- 96,052 attendances at healthy lifestyle programs, and
- almost 10,000 attendances at formal or informal vocational training.

Almost 8,000 volunteering opportunities were taken up through hubs during the year, and 390 hub participants – more than 90% of them women – gained employment.

Almost 300 organisations partnered with hubs to support the delivery of programs and services such as playgroups, English lessons, computer classes, education sessions, school

readiness programs, health and fitness programs, homework clubs, financial literacy and vocational pathway programs.

Over 8,000 service referrals were made on behalf of community hub families, including:

- 1,822 to family support services
- 1,063 to pre-schools
- 762 to education and training providers
- 708 to community health services
- 658 to early intervention services
- 516 to migrant resource or settlement services
- 426 to material and child health services
- 320 to emergency aid
- 313 to a GP/doctor
- 289 to domestic/family violence support, and
- 110 to accommodation support.

### **Measuring program outcomes**

CHA is committed to continually assessing and improving the effectiveness of our hubs. We regularly measure the impact they are having on:

- migrant and refugee families in the communities where hubs are based
- individual parents, particularly mothers, and their pre-school children
- host organisations, and
- government agencies and community service providers.

A research study by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, due to be published in February (2017), indicates that hubs have had a strong positive impact on school readiness among migrant children and the engagement of isolated mothers.

Independent evaluations by Charles Sturt University (CSU) researchers in 2014 and 2015 found that our community hubs are:

- successfully reaching and engaging migrants, particularly women
- making a difference in young children's development and engagement with early learning services and supporting smoother transitions into school
- making a difference for families by improving English language and literacy, improving parenting capability, connecting them with schools, services and their local community; and instilling a sense of empowerment
- improving the cultural competence of schools and increasing their capacity to respond to and connect with migrant communities
- making community services more effective in their work with migrant families
- stimulating increased connections and collaboration between services, and
- increasing the availability and accessibility of services to migrant and refugee families.

Highlights of CSU's 2015 outcomes evaluation included:

- 100% of school principals agreed that hubs have enhanced their school's ability to collaborate with families.
- 100% of respondents agreed that community services are working more effectively with migrant families, and are more connected, available and accessible.
- 99% of respondents agreed that hubs make schools more culturally inclusive.
- 99% of families said they felt listened to, able to contribute to the school and more connected to the school.
- 97% of respondents agreed that hubs improve children's literacy and transitions into school.
- 97% of families reported that they know more about community services and where to find them.
- 96% of families feel more connected to their community.

A detailed summary of the 2015 evaluation findings is provided in the *National Community Hubs Program Outcomes and Delivery Report, December 2015*, which is available on our website: <http://www.communityhubs.org.au/>.

"Our research team has never encountered such an overwhelmingly positive response from such a large and diverse number of respondents. It's quite an amazing result and clearly points to the high level of satisfaction and effectiveness of the six hubs in our study."

– **Dr Sandie Wong**, Charles Sturt University, referring to the 2015 outcomes evaluation

"The hubs aim to build the long-term aspirations of migrant and refugee children, and improve their families' capacity to support their learning. Having programs that build the skills of parents helps adults recognise the value of learning, so they will encourage it in their children. Research clearly shows that if parents are educated this raises the aspirations of the children.

Ultimately, that's what we all want: for schools to provide learning and wellbeing outcomes where children are better off, prepared to face the real world, and able to lead a better life."

– **John Keyser**, Senior Adviser, Victorian Department of Education and Training

## Why community hubs are so effective

- Our hubs are based on a proven, evidence-based model.
- Community hubs provide a holistic approach that supports the whole family, offering early learning programs; building social networks; providing access to services; and creating pathways to education, training and employment.
- The NCHP has robust national governance and effective local delivery methods.
- Specialist support agencies provide ongoing training and guidance for hub leaders and manage relationships with host organisations.
- Our program maintains strong partnerships with host schools and their leaders. We currently have hubs embedded in 37 diverse schools, ranging in size from less than 100 to more than 1000 students. Our hubs network operates within three separate state education systems as well as the Catholic education system. There is strong support from principals across the board, which translates into schools contributing funding from each hub's third year of operation. (Attachment C links to a video featuring statements from principals of four host schools.)
- Hubs use a place-based approach to engage families and children in a safe, accessible and welcoming environment in their own neighbourhood.
- Hub leaders focus on getting to know their local community and establishing strategic partnerships with local agencies to maximise the use of existing resources, services and assets.
- Each community hub plans and develops around the needs of local families and children.
- We regularly assess, record and review our results, to support continuous improvement.
- Hubs break down barriers between services and people in a coordinated and collaborative way.
- For a small operational cost, hubs deliver a big social return.

"I come to Australia in 2014 and I started out coming to coffee n chat, since then I have attended the playgroup with my daughter and I did a computer class, I have completed a certificate 3 in childcare. I have taken advice and a lot of encouragement from the hub. I have now nearly finished my diploma in childcare. I have very good friendships from at the hub and I feel connected to my community."

– **Zarina**, hub participant

### **ToR 3: The importance of English language on a migrant's, or prospective migrant's, settlement outcome**

Learning to speak functional English enables migrants from non-English speaking countries to fully participate in the wider Australian community and way of life.

Without English proficiency, migrants are restricted to communicating with their own families and other people who speak the same language, unless they use an interpreter. Without English, they will be less likely to make connections outside their cultural group, learn new skills or find employment.

According to a 2015 analysis of Census data published by the Migration Council Australia: 'English language proficiency is the primary determinant for migrants in the labour market, more important than both work experience and formal qualifications'.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Lack of English isolates women**

Many migrant women coming into our community hubs have little or no English skills and experience low levels of confidence as a result. Lack of English makes migrant women particularly vulnerable as it limits their ability to confidently communicate their needs, access services, build community connections, find work or just speak with their children's school teachers.

If they are also the primary carers for pre-school children, they will face barriers to accessing English tuition and their children may be missing out on essential preparation ahead of starting school.

#### **English supports workforce participation**

It can be difficult for Australian-born women with English as a first language to re-enter the workforce after several years spent at home raising children. For a migrant woman who has no English and limited experience of our culture, it is almost impossible.

Our hub leaders report that migrant women are eager to find work as soon as their child-raising responsibilities permit. Given our society needs a strong bilingual workforce, particularly in areas such as aged care and childcare, these women represent a potentially valuable labour market resource. There is also a huge missed opportunity in skilled spouses arriving under the partner/family migration program who are not working or are under-employed. For them, the main barriers to workforce participation are language and culture.

The Migration Council's analysis of Census data indicates that employment outcomes for migrant women are worse than for men, across all visa categories. As Table 1 shows, the gap in labour market participation between migrant men and women is widest when there is no English language proficiency. The Council's report states that: 'While female participation rates in the labour market as a whole lag behind male rates, there is a clear link: improving English language proficiency correlates with shrinking the participation gap between migrant males and females. This is critical when considering how to better raise participation rates of female migrants'.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1: Labour market participation rate by English language**

	Speaks English only	Proficient in spoken English	Not proficient in spoken English
Male	88%	83%	55%
Female	74%	56%	29%
Difference (M-F)	14%	18%	26%

Source: Adapted from Migration Council Australia, *Migration in Focus: An Analysis of Recent Permanent Migration Census Data*, Occasional Paper 1 (2015), p17.

### **Too easy to ‘opt out’**

It can be too easy for a non-working migrant woman to put off learning English, sometimes indefinitely.

For migrants sponsored by family already living in Australia, or for women arriving on spousal visas, the advantage of having a ready-made community on arrival makes it relatively easy to ‘opt out’ of learning English, as there is usually someone on hand to translate.

Most of us know an Italian or Greek family with an elderly grandmother who arrived in Australia over 40 years ago and still hardly speaks a word of English. These women get by with their original language and only socialise within the confines of their family and cultural group. They can be connected by the internet to family and friends in their homeland, and access radio and television in their birth language. There is no apparent need or incentive for these women to learn English under these circumstances.

While the settlement outcomes for these women may be satisfactory on one level because they are living comfortably within the bounds of their specific cultural community, they are heavily reliant on their husbands and extended families. This makes them vulnerable and restricts their participation in the wider community.

### **Barriers to women learning English**

As explained earlier, many migrant women are being overlooked by the current system and are missing out on accessing funded settlement services, including the AMEP.

Even when women are eligible for free English tuition, there are a number of reasons why the AMEP is not meeting their needs. Lack of flexibility in how classes are delivered is one. Expecting women with very young children to regularly attend a formal classroom setting without adequate childcare being provided is unrealistic. Setting a 5-year limit on the availability of free tuition post-entry also disadvantages women who arrive here with a primary focus on raising a young family.

Some migrant women have never been to school and therefore have no basic literacy in their own language. The prospect of studying English in a formal classroom situation, and with other students who may be better educated, can be extremely intimidating. Even those who qualify for and complete their 510 hours of free English classes are likely to require additional help.

An evaluation of the AMEP in 2015 reported that the AMEP Services Contract (2011–17) acknowledges that the expectation of equipping migrants with functional English after 510 hours of tuition is ‘unattainable and unrealistic’ considering the low level of English language skills many people are arriving with.<sup>3</sup>

The evaluation report stated that: ‘A common concern raised by stakeholders was that the AMEP had difficulty in meeting the diverse needs of its clients, particularly due to its reliance on classroom-based delivery, multi-cohort classes, and emphasis on ensuring attendance, as opposed to seeking innovative delivery models and partnerships.’<sup>4</sup> The report recommended the Government commission further research into alternative cost-effective models of delivery that could benefit the program and its diverse clients. These findings are particularly relevant to the circumstances of women migrants arriving through the humanitarian and family migration programs, as many have no English and limited exposure to educational settings.

The priorities for most migrants when they arrive under the humanitarian and family programs are finding work for the main breadwinner, finding somewhere to live and getting their children into a school. Learning English can therefore be a low priority for the wife and mother. Women often arrive in our hubs eager to learn English after having lived in Australia for over a decade, well after the 5-year timeframe for accessing funded tuition has elapsed.

The content of English tuition provided under AMEP has a focus on vocational preparation and workplace English and therefore may be less relevant to newly arrived women for whom entering the workforce is not a priority. These women need to learn English to support them in running a household, engaging with their children, speaking with school teachers and having social conversations. Teaching women English that supports early childhood development and mother-child interactions is particularly important.

Women who spend most of their time at home caring for young children also lack opportunities to be exposed to and practice conversational English. The Migration Council Australia reports that ‘an important part of learning English is simply being increasingly exposed to English’.<sup>5</sup>

### **Hubs are helping women learn English**

Community hubs work hard to help migrant women access appropriate tuition to improve their English language skills, no matter what their life stage or residency status. This is a major priority across our hubs network and an area in which our hubs are having a significant impact.

Community hubs provide the motivation for women to break out of cultural cocoons by connecting them into a community of other women who are also learning English. Being part of a hub community creates an environment where there is a compelling desire among participants to learn English together.

Across our network, hubs have been linking women into existing English classes, such as those run by neighbourhood houses, the AMEP and TAFE colleges. When existing programs are inadequate or unavailable, hub leaders are establishing partnerships with AMEP service providers and other registered training organisations to design and deliver innovative English programs that better address the needs of migrant women. We endeavour to remove potential barriers by providing childcare during classes and integrating English lessons and practice into other group activities such as playgroups, cooking and sewing classes.

The uptake of English tuition through our community hubs has been hugely popular, with many women learning English as a precursor to undertaking vocational training. The most popular training courses include aged care, childcare, educational support and beauty services.

Nationally, during 2016 there were over 15,000 attendances at English conversation classes in our community hubs and 762 referrals to ongoing education and training. Funding from NAB’s Sharegift scheme in 2016 is helping us develop a sustainable English language program that will be applied across our hubs network (subject to CHA obtaining ongoing funding). Unfortunately, some of our hubs cannot access appropriate or sufficient English language support to meet the current needs of migrant women in their communities.

English language programs that address local needs vary widely between hubs, as these three examples demonstrate:

Informal English language support	Volunteer led English activities	Formal learning
<p>In the City of Logan in Brisbane a group of 13 Burmese women needed support to improve their English, however they didn’t want to do any more formal learning.</p> <p>Most of the women had children and felt comfortable in the school-based hub environment. They told the hub leader they wanted to learn practical sewing skills.</p> <p>Once they were sewing, the hub leader, who was also a trained English teacher, started an informal language group.</p> <p>The women began to enjoy this and found that their confidence with English was improving. They were happy to come in early and extend the time they had to learn English.</p> <p>They started the day with informal English practice and then continued practicing their new language skills during sewing class.</p> <p>The classes were not funded. The hub leader facilitated the English classes, and students and volunteers provided free childcare.</p>	<p>At Westmead Public School Hub in the City of Parramatta, NSW, English classes are organised for about 12–16 parents and grandparents of children attending the school.</p> <p>The classes are led by volunteers and include practical small group and one-on-one activities. They give participants time to practice their English, seek clarification and increase their confidence to speak to and in front of other people. People are helped with their pronunciation and understanding Australian accents.</p> <p>The volunteers are self-sufficient and highly organised. They run the activities with support from the hub leader, who books rooms and organises equipment.</p> <p>The classes are not funded and there is no childcare provided.</p> <p>A similar model runs in a Victorian hub, with the local AMEP provider (AMES) supplying a volunteer tutor, and the hub leader and parents sharing child-minding duties.</p>	<p>A number of hubs in the City of Hume in Melbourne run a 20-week Mother-Child English Program in partnership with a registered training provider (RTO).</p> <p>The program allows mothers to come in and settle their children into childcare in a nearby room, while they have formal English classes that focus on practical, everyday English about child development, pre-school learning, raising healthy children and raising children in a multicultural society.</p> <p>After the formal session, the children and parents come together in a playgroup, which has activities themed to the classes, giving parents the chance to practice what they have learned.</p> <p>The model requires a partnership with an RTO and is suitable for people with various levels of English proficiency. It is funded with AMEP funds as well as funds from the Foundation Skills stream. Funding to cover childcare has been sourced from the philanthropic sector.</p>



**Hub story 3: Samira, country of origin: Afghanistan**

Samira was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress after arriving in Australia and didn't leave her house for six years. She raised three children, two of whom started school having spent no time away from their mother and having learned no English.

Samira heard about the community hub through her children's school. She started bringing her third child to attend intensive pre-school activities and then began learning adult English on a Monday afternoon. Improving her English is helping Samira integrate into our broader society and reducing her dependence on her husband. Her child is becoming school ready, and the hub is also enabling Samira to establish friendships with other women outside of her own culture.

**Hub story 4: Indian family on a 457 visa, Westmead, NSW**

Our Westmead hub leader received the following email from a skilled migrant who moved to Australia on a temporary visa with his wife and children. They were not eligible for settlement services. While the man and his children were able to settle into the Australian way of life through work and school, respectively, his wife had no English and felt isolated from the surrounding community.

Hi,

We haven't met before. I am [wife's name]'s (one of your Community Hub volunteer's) husband.

I am writing this email to say a big thank you to you for bringing about a big change in [my wife]. She had very limited command on the English language and she always felt embarrassing to be part of a group that was speaking in English. Whether it was simply paying at the Coles counter or buying a train ticket, she would always avoid all situations where she had to speak in English.

I've seen so many instances where she would have an emotional breakdown when she had to speak in English. I've often seen her very depressed and we often contemplated returning back to India. But since May, she has been regularly visiting the Westmead Public School and working on designated tasks by you and your team. I have seen her transforming from a very low confidence housewife to becoming an independent woman who is not uncomfortable about herself.

This change also means that she is more happier at home and with friends. She keeps telling me how she enjoys being at the school and helping the team. The big day was when one of the teachers Mrs Robyn left a thank you note for her effort in covering the books.

Thanks to you, the 2 trainees – and the other teachers for all the help and support.

What I couldn't do in 6 years, you have done it for [my wife] in just a few months.

It means a lot to me.

Thank you!

Regards,

[husband's name removed]

**Hub story 5: Linh, country of origin: Vietnam**

Linh regularly attends one of our hubs in Brimbank, Victoria. She has been in Australia for 11 years but only started learning English recently, after she started coming to the hub.

When Linh came to Australia from Vietnam, she didn't know how to start classes, and ever since has required an interpreter to interact. Now, thanks to the volunteer English teachers in her hub, Linh's confidence is growing and she is participating more in school activities and taking an active role in her children's education.

**Hub story 6: Asylum seeker family, Brimbank, Victoria**

A family who are asylum seekers on community-based detention orders enrolled at St Albans Heights Primary School. The mother was described by her caseworker as extremely depressed and with poor English.

The school's community hub leader engaged informally with her for a couple of months, encouraging her to attempt English and providing positive feedback. After three months, the mother agreed to attend the parents group meeting in the hub and began attending weekly.

The group supported and encouraged her English language use. During a discussion about individual strengths and skills, she revealed that she had been a personal trainer in her country of origin. This led to the woman facilitating a weekly parents exercise group, with demand for a second class.

<sup>1</sup> Migration Council Australia, *Migration in Focus: An Analysis of Recent Permanent Migration Census Data*, Occasional Paper 1 (2015), p8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p17.

<sup>3</sup> Acil Allen Consulting 2015. 'AMEP Evaluation', For the Department of Education and Training, Melbourne, p6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.xiii.

<sup>5</sup> Migration Council Australia, *Migration in Focus: An Analysis of Recent Permanent Migration Census Data*, Occasional Paper 1 (2015), p8.

#### **ToR 4: Whether current migration processes adequately assess a prospective migrant's settlement prospects**

Australia's current migration assessment processes focus on the primary applicant, who is usually the main breadwinner within a family and, most often, male. The needs of women are usually after-thoughts in these processes and also after-thoughts in how settlement services are designed and targeted.

It is important to recognise that women are a significant component of our migration program and that many are arriving in capacities that place them outside the existing settlement services sector. Arrival support services and strategies for women need to be planned accordingly.

There is also a tendency to assume that new arrivals have ways and places to interact with each other, and yet until you give them a physical place to go to – a welcoming meeting place – they can be at a loss to know how to connect with other people.

In our view, poor settlement outcomes are not the result of accepting unskilled or uneducated migrants, who don't yet speak English, into our country. Poor outcomes arise from how our society responds to their need for connection, support, education and gainful employment once they get here.

Some of the inadequacies in existing migration processes can be remedied by putting new arrivals into a local community context that is welcoming and giving them a ready-made support network that helps them help themselves. This is particularly important for migrant women who are not working. The focus needs to be on fostering connectivity, local support networks and a sense of belonging.

CHA supports the continuation of migration programs that bring a diversity of migrants into Australia. Our vibrant multicultural society has been forged by generations of new arrivals from every corner of the globe. Our diversity and tolerance has been enriched by welcoming both skilled and unskilled migrants to this country.

As the day-to-day experiences in our community hubs indicate, unskilled – and even uneducated – migrants who arrive in Australia have aspirations to learn, work, belong and contribute to their new community. Migrants are often willing (and aspire) to work in jobs that most Australians would not consider doing.

Community hubs focus on providing opportunities, not welfare services. In our experience, everybody who comes to Australia wants to, and is able to, make a contribution if we give them the opportunity to learn, connect and better themselves.

The continual flow of success stories from our hubs bears testament to the resilience and resourcefulness of migrants from all cultural, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, once given the right opportunities. Almost 400 people gained employment during 2016 as a direct result of attending a community hub. More than 90% of these were migrant women, and many had arrived here with no English and having had minimal education in their homelands. They are now employed as full-time and part-time childcare workers, education support officers and aides, playgroup leaders, translators, aged care workers and beauty therapists, among other vocations.

Every migrant who arrives in Australia has something to contribute to our society.

**Hub story 7: Bushra, country of origin: Iraq**

Bushra began attending the Holy Child Primary School Community Hub when her young son started school in 2011. She had received no education in her homeland, Iraq, and was keen to pursue study through the hub.

Bushra attended beginner's English classes and when she had sufficient English, she successfully applied for a position as a playgroup leader with the City of Hume. Over three years, Bushra continued to improve her English and employability, and eventually secured a position as a translator and multi-cultural aide at the school. She has become an integral member of the school community.

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

### Social engagement of youth migrants

The NCHP does not directly target youth migrants, although some hub participants have teenage children and young adults in their extended families.

This submission does not offer suggestions about how to address current issues involving disengagement and anti-social behaviour among youth migrants. Our focus is on long-term prevention, rather than a short-term cure.

Social research indicates that human beings are hardwired for connection – emotionally, physically and spiritually. Strengthening social cohesion in local communities with high migrant populations therefore helps reduce the potential for social disengagement and increases the positive sense of belonging and participation across all age groups.

The optimum time to begin cultivating connections and introducing positive role models is during the pre-school years. Achieving successful transitions into schooling sets children up for positive experiences at school and improves educational outcomes and lifetime prospects for productive employment. This, in turn, reduces the risk of disengagement and criminal behaviour later in life.

Building parenting skills and resilience within families contributes to happier and better-connected migrant communities. Providing opportunities for informal cross-cultural interactions contributes to greater mutual awareness, respect and tolerance.

Community hubs foster strong connections between families of different cultural backgrounds, between migrant families and schools, and between migrants and local community services. This contributes to better social cohesion, which can positively impact present-day migrant youth, as well as the generations to come.

Our society has the opportunity to begin shaping the next generations of migrant youth now. We can do this by intervening early, using mechanisms such as community hubs to ensure migrant children arrive at school ready to learn. We can enable their mothers and fathers to connect into the school community and give new arrivals an appreciation of the multicultural tolerance that signifies Australian society. By doing this, community hubs can help to prevent issues with youth disengagement and anti-social behaviour that may otherwise arise in years to come.

“When I started at St Paul’s five years ago, I spoke to the prep teacher who’s been working in this area for 20 years. She said that if we can reach the children before they start school, it makes all the difference.

After two years of having the community hub based in our school, I can say we have achieved this – the difference is amazing. While it hasn’t happened overnight, having the hub at our school has been transformational, that’s exactly the word.

– **Celestine Boudy**, Principal, St Paul’s Catholic Primary School, Woodridge

“We have one family whose eldest child came through the school before the hub was established, while the youngest was involved with a number of our playgroups and other sessions once the hub was set up.

“The different ways those siblings dealt with angst, making friends, and learning as they went through school indicated to us that our hub program was making a genuine difference.”

– **Debbie Cottier**, Principal, Springvale Rise Primary School

## CONCLUSION

School-based community hubs operated under the NCHP represent a paradigm shift in the coordination and delivery of services to migrant women and their families.

In the absence of community hubs in local communities, migrant women are largely being missed by the settlement services system. They can find it difficult to learn English, connect into the wider community, and access vital mainstream services such as early childhood, maternal health, and family support. For a minimal establishment and ongoing operating cost, hubs can be easily scaffolded onto existing services and community infrastructure to serve as gateways linking migrant women with each other, their schools, local services and communities.

Hubs create the motivation and opportunities for women and their pre-school children to learn and practice English, undertake vocational training, volunteer, and pursue employment opportunities. They work with parents to help prepare their young children for starting school.

By the end of 2017, there will be 70 hubs operating across Australian communities with high migrant populations. Continuing to fund the existing national hubs network, and expanding hubs into other major cities and regional centres, will help to maximise the uptake to settlement and mainstream services by migrants and support them to achieve the best possible settlement outcomes.

Community hubs provide Australia with the opportunity to change thousands of lives for the better, while knitting together our social fabric – one family at a time.

“The outputs and outcomes of hubs far exceed the financial input that goes into them. For us, the greatest value is the linkages between services and the increased capacity of the community.

Hubs help our newest citizens to be productive individuals by providing pathways to volunteering and employment. Within each hub community, we’re seeing an increasing level of confidence, where individuals start to attend a hub then they volunteer and eventually end up finding work.

The story that remains with me the most strongly is about a group of women who participated in a mother-child English program. These nine mothers came from very different cultural backgrounds, including Middle Eastern and South East Asian. They all had limited English and started to form friendships while attending the program. Over time, they created their own strong support network.

This illustrates the basic humanity at work when women come together and share common experiences. This is what contributes to social cohesion and cultural harmony. It works to counter fears and cultural misconceptions in the community. Finding that common humanity is a key to reducing racial tensions.”

– **Margarita Caddick**, Director City Communities, Hume City Council

## RECOMMENDATIONS

CHA recommends that the Australian Government:

1. Recognises that the settlement needs of many migrant women and young children extend well beyond what existing settlement services can provide and works with CHA to review and improve access for all migrant women and their young children to all relevant services.
2. Provides ongoing (not project based) funding for school-based community hubs under the NCHP over the longer term, recognising that place-based hubs are a proven, cost-effective means of achieving positive settlement outcomes for individual migrants and their families.
3. Supports the continued expansion of the NCHP by establishing and maintaining school-based community hubs in all eligible schools in major Australian cities and regional centres that have high migrant populations and high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage.
4. Reviews how English language support (tuition and practice) is currently being provided to migrant women, with a view to significantly improving:
  - access to English language support for women across all entry categories, and
  - the quality and relevance of course content being provided, particularly in relation to the needs of women caring for young children.

More information about the National Community Hubs Program is available at:  
<http://www.communityhubs.org.au/>.

## ATTACHMENTS

### Attachment A: Community Hub Model requirements

#### 1. Commitment from primary school/community centre leadership team:

A primary school principal or community centre head who is committed to embedding the community hub as a way of working and growing their community within their primary school or community centre as an outreach to their school and local community through:

- Whole of school/community approach with community hub included in their strategic plan and supported by the school council.
- Integration of hub leader role with school/centre staff team and in kind time allocation provided, such as supervision support and other support staff involvement.
- Contribution of resources and/or funding from primary school/community centre budget.
- Additional funding proactively sought for hub program development (auspicing available).
- Consideration towards the development of a sustainability plan.

#### 2. Demonstration of parent engagement and capacity building:

The school/community centre works to create a culture of parent engagement in recognition that parents are the first and most significant educators, and works with them as partners in their children's learning through:

- Family engagement valued and wellbeing programs pursued.
- Demonstration of family participation in decision making within the primary school/community centre, and community hub program directions.
- Community hub programs engaging with families within the primary school/community centre.
- Community Hub programs engaging with migrant/refugee families not represented in the hub but who live in the local community.

#### 3. Designated Community Hub Space:

Appropriate designated space, badged and labelled, comprising at least a classroom size, available area properly fitted out to create a family friendly environment for migrant families and their children, with relevant amenities (including a fridge, tea and coffee facilities and toilets). It needs to be:

- A welcoming space/accessible to families and wider community. (Note: not all hub activities will be provided out of this space. Other spaces in the school might also be utilised. e.g. computer classes for training and kitchen for cooking classes).
- An appropriate workspace for the hub leader with computer/laptop, phone, internet and email access.

#### 4. Designated community development worker (hub leader) engagement:

A hub leader engaged at award wages for at least three days (20-25 hours) per week with the following responsibilities:

- Create a welcoming family friendly environment within the school/community centre.
- Work with and be part of the primary school/community centre's staffing team and encourage their support and involvement.
- Contribute to the achievement of all of the above-mentioned requirements for the successful development and operation of the community hub.
- Meet all required data collection and quarterly reporting obligations.
- Contribute regularly to the community hubs website with learned experiences.

### **5. Outcomes based action planning/reporting:**

An agreed Outcomes Based Action Plan established for the community hub, which has been endorsed by the primary school principal or community centre head and their governing body, and

- demonstrated progress with the achievement of the community hubs program outcomes and objectives, with specific reference to community hub activities and other associated actions relating to the four areas of focus listed at the bottom of the table.

### **6. Established Partnerships and Networks:**

The community hub has in place a range of established purposeful strategic partnerships and relationships with key local community service providers, settlement services agencies, health, early years, employment and training providers, and

- the creation of volunteer pathways through outward thinking to draw resources/partnerships for the benefit of families.



## Attachment B: NCHP service and program partners

Access	Diabetes Victoria
ADRA	Dianella Health
AFL Victoria	Domestic Violence Referral Service
AMES	Eagle Wings
Anglicare	Early childhood networks (multiple locations)
Asthma Australia	Edmond Rice Refugee Services
Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights	Ermha
Australian Taxation Office	Family Child Connect
Australian Vietnamese Women's Association	Foodbank
Benevolent Society	Girl Guides
Berry Street	Good Money Microfinancing
Beyond Blue	Good Shepherd
Blacktown Women's and Girls' Health Centre	Goodstart
Boys Town	Halal Foodbank
Brimbank Hunt Club Art Centre	Harvest
Brimbank Library	Health West
Brimbank Sports Club	Hepatitis Victoria
Brimbank Westvale Community Centre	Hills Community Aid
Bunnings	Hope Centre
Burmese Chin Community	Housing NSW
Cairnlea Community Hub	Hunt Club Community Arts Centre
Career Keys	IPC Health
CatholicCare Services	Islamic Womens Association of Queensland
Centerlink	Jesuit Social Services
CFA Dandenong	Job Co
Chobani Yoghurt	Josephite Community Aid
Chunky Yoga	Keysborough Learning Centre
City of Brimbank	Kingston East Neighbourhood Centre
City of Greater Dandenong	KS Environmental
City of Hume	Legal Aid services (multiple locations)
City of Logan	LifeLine
Community Qld	Little Leagies
Dandenong Neighbourhood House	Logan City Library
Dandenong West Kindergarten	Logan District Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Aboriginal Corporation for Elders
Dean Academic Beauty Training	Logan East Community Centre
Dental Health Services Victoria	Logan TAFE
Department of Health and Human Services Victoria	Mackillop Family Services
Department of Housing and Public Works QLD	Maori Wardens

Medicare Local	St Paul's Catholic Parish, Woodridge
Melbourne University	St Vincent de Paul
Men's Shed	Sunshine Short Film Festival
Menslink (men's health service)	Sydwest
Metro Trains	The Smith Family
Migrant Resource Centres (multiple locations)	The Song Room
Mission Australia	The Water Well Project
Monash University	THE-HE Vietnamese Language Centre
Multilink Community Services	Training Unlimited
New Hope Foundation	Translating and Interpreting Service National and TIS Online
Noble Park Football Social Club	Travellers Aid Australia
North Melbourne Language and Learning	Triple P Positive Parenting Program
NSW Health	VicRoads
Parentzone	VICSEG New Futures
Playgroup Qld	Victoria Police Multicultural Liaison Unit
Police-Citizens Youth Clubs	Victoria University
Queensland Health	Victorian Afghan Association Network
Queensland University of Technology	Westgate Community Initiatives Group
Reading Out of Poverty	White Star Soccer Club
Red Cross	Woodridge Police
Refugee Association Logan	Wurundjeri Tribe Land Compensation and Cultural Heritage Council
Relationships Victoria	YFS Logan
Rent Connect	YMCA
RMIT	
Salvation Army	
Sathya Sai Organisation	
Sisterworks	
Small Talk	
South East Community Links	
South East Legal Centre	
Southbank TAFE	
Springvale Learning and Activities Centre	
St Albans Secondary College	

## Attachment C: Video testimonials from school principals

A video featuring statements from principals of schools hosting community hubs can be viewed via this link: <http://www.communityhubsaustralia.org.au/index.php/videos/>.