

Chatterbox

Newsletter of The Helping Children and Families Association (HCFA) www.hcfa.org.au

P.O.Box 1328 Armidale ph. 6776 6209 email coordinator@hcfa.org.au

HCFA provides a home visiting program for families with young children in the Armidale area where a trained volunteer visits and provides support for up to 2 hours a week. Enquiries welcome.

From the Editor

We have the usual regular items such as news from the Coordinator; a family recipe; and also one with helpful suggestions from Grandma, a play idea for young children, and a household hint. The Health and Hygiene item confronts an important issue, asking when, if at all, we should allow our toddlers and young children to interact with our Smart Phones and Tablets. It would be good to get feedback from readers on this question, so please don't hesitate to send us your opinion. In fact, we would like readers to respond to any newsletter item, send us recipes and household hints, and relevant inspirational quotes. Maybe tell us about a book you recommend for other families of young children.

I can be easily contacted by email on rahandc@bigpond.com

Help us make *Chatterbox* become, as its name suggests, an opportunity to chatter together and share ideas. Thank you Ruth Nicholls for your Volunteer Profile. I'm hoping there will be another of our volunteers willing to contribute to our next *Chatterbox*. Contributions for the next edition should be sent by July 17, 2015.

Coordinator's News

This year promises to be both an exciting and challenging one as we respond to the changing needs of local families with young children. Earlier this month, we had a special volunteers meeting with a lawyer, various migrant/CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) services and a representative from the Arabic community with the aim to develop a resource kit for the increasing numbers of families from other cultures and the volunteers who visit them.

We continue to investigate having a space with a baby change table for parents to drop in, have a cuppa if they wish, and to use as a meeting place for get togethers.

We plan to have a stall at the farmer's markets in May to test out this idea.

At the same time, it's business as usual, which means our volunteers have yet again reminded me what a special organisation HCFA is. We were recently asked to help a family with a very ill family member, and not one, but four of our volunteers put up their hands to visit. The volunteer who offered to fill in for two weeks formed such a close bond with the family that she agreed to continue visiting, and was one of a very small group of people invited to a special celebration after the family member's passing. Time and again I find that our volunteer is the one "worker" who is most trusted by parents. Our organisation offers just what our community's most vulnerable members need, the support of a village through visits from friendly people who help out and care as do good neighbours.

It's a privilege to work with you. Keep up the good work. Cathie Lamont.

Puzzle

Q. What kind of room has no doors or windows? (Answer provided later)



Simple Family Recipe-tuna fish cakes with spinach salad

Fish Cake Ingredients

2 cups of mashed potato; 425 g can of tuna in oil, drained;
2 tablespoons of chopped parsley (optional); 1 small onion, grated;
1 tablespoon of grated lemon rind OR juice of half a lemon;
2 cups of dried breadcrumbs; 3 eggs (2 are for crumbing the cakes).



Spinach Salad Ingredients (A different salad might be preferred)

1 pkt baby spinach leaves; 1/2 cup of sour cream or yoghurt; 1 tab mayonnaise.

Method

1. Combine in a bowl and mix well the mash, tuna, onion, lemon rind, parsley and 1 egg.
2. Divide the mixture into separate portions and shape each portion into a patty.
3. Place the 2 eggs in a dish and beat with a fork.
4. Place the breadcrumbs on a plate. Dip patties in egg, then in the breadcrumbs, pressing firmly to coat. Place in the fridge to chill. If you don't have time for this, you need not do it.
5. Add enough oil to a frying pan. Place over medium heat. Add the patties when oil is hot and cook for 3-5 minutes each side or until golden. Transfer to a plate lined with kitchen paper.
6. Combine and mix the spinach, sour cream/yoghurt and mayonnaise in a small bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Serves 4. Enjoy! (Some like tomato sauce with this.)

Play Idea- a temporary fairy and elf garden

This is not a garden with growing plants, but a creative expression of what a child imagines fairies and elves would like as a place to live and play. It can be constantly changed. All you need to start is a container like a takeaway meal plastic box that you and the child fill with soil or sand.



Next you collect with the child interesting features for your garden. The picture provided shows you a decorative idea, but it is not very colourful. It is easy to add colour with little flowers, e.g. dandelions from the grass; flower petals; berries; and even something like a simple bead necklace might appeal, or bits of cooking foil or wrapping paper. You might find some of the child's ideas strange, like wanting to include an over large building block as a "fairy house", but just be happy that the imagination is active, and the garden will become truly the child's own creation; something to be proud of.

Have fun and be amazed at some of the ideas your child offers.

Ask Grandma

Dear Grandma,

I see my friends' children naming colours and counting numbers as they run around and play. I've tried to tell our Liam about colours, and I ask him questions like, "What number comes after 6", but he just doesn't seem to 'get it'. He's 2 years old now. I want him to do well when he goes to pre-school. What should I do? Troubled Trudy.

Dear Trudy,

Do stop worrying and enjoy your little boy while he's still home with you most of the time. All you need do is talk with him as you do things together, all the everyday activities as well as when playing with him. As you do so, just casually mention the colours of objects, like his clothes, and count things when appropriate, and he will absorb this like a little sponge. You can make a game of counting by, for example counting his toes when you put his socks on. There is no need to 'test' or constantly check his grasp of these skills which he will come to use naturally. You'll probably find he'll start to count along with you before long, and eventually volunteer a colour name. Just continue in this way and all should be well. I do hope this helps. Grandma.



Volunteer Profile (Ruth Nicholls)

What prompted you to volunteer for HCFA?

In early 2014, I'd been retired for about a year, and was still unwinding and sorting out papers and books from work, but vaguely wondering where I could use my newly-available time. Cathie, the HCFA co-ordinator, rang me out of the blue (we knew each other from UNE some years before) to ask if I might be interested in joining HCFA and visiting/working with a young mother (the wife of a postgraduate student from overseas), who was a bit isolated in the community as she did not speak much English, did not drive and had a six-month-old baby girl. I hadn't previously been aware of HCFA and its work, but its goals and way of working appealed immediately, so I started attending the orientation sessions and was introduced to the family – and we were off!

What is your workforce background?

In earlier years I was a teacher of French and sometimes German; then for three years a teacher of English in France, at a high school as well as in evening classes for folk planning to migrate to Australia. Back in Armidale, I worked at the Armidale College of Advanced Education, later merged with UNE, educating language teachers (English as a second language [ESL], and other languages) for secondary and adult classrooms. I've learnt (bits of) a few languages over the years, and have always enjoyed talking with people from other countries and language backgrounds, so am delighted to have a reason to do this with HCFA at this time – and who knows what other families I may meet in future!

What are the encouraging and enjoyable things about working with HCFA?

It's been a great joy to get to know the family to whom I was allocated, to be accepted by them, and hence to be able to assist in small ways (look after the toddler while Mum is cooking, talk with her five-year-old brother about what's happening in school, explain a few notes sent home from his school. . . It's been especially rewarding to see the young mother, who at first felt she 'had no English', begin to relax and rediscover (and expand) her store of English (from school and from our meetings), and to converse more and more confidently with me and with other folk in the community: English teachers and fellow students, swimming instructor, health professionals . . . It's also inspiring to hear from other volunteers about the roles and relationships they've developed with their families, and even more broadly to become aware of the many contributions made by volunteers throughout our community.

What advice have you for prospective volunteers?

It was daunting to go into an unknown person's house to 'help' in (initially) undefined ways, and especially someone whose English might not allow them easily to explain their needs or make their feelings clear. However, the fact that the family had requested a 'visitor' helped a little, as did the assurance from Cathie and other volunteers that the main thing at first was just to be friendly and interested in the person and their family. And indeed, this is just how visits have evolved in this case: taking the lead from the family has meant playing with the baby, sharing common interests (our families, past studies and jobs), as well as discussing different experiences (travel, cooking, religious celebrations), sharing food, and so on. So far, it's developed fairly naturally – with Cathie always available to advise on queries and quandaries!

Household Hint-making stainless steel sinks, appliances and cutlery gleam

There is a simple solution to wiping stainless steel clean and achieving a wonderful shine. The trick is baby wipes. Yes truly!



Rejoice with your family in the beautiful land of life. Albert Einstein

Health and Hygiene- Is it unwise to let our young children play with our mobile phones ?

The questions whether we should let our children play with technological devices, and if so, how much time should be allowed, have become important issues.

There is much discussion about the effect on young, growing brains from use of these devices, and there is little doubt that there are effects.

However, looking at picture story books, and following along with the illustrations and the words as an adult reads the story, also affects the developing brain. This is why we do this with our children.

The situation is that we are surrounded by technology which is almost impossible to avoid, and it appears that taking a balanced attitude towards children using these devices is the best option.

After all, we all know that in later life they are going to need to be technologically literate.

One of the greatest dangers is children missing out on going outside in the fresh air, running around getting exercise, and experiencing social interaction with others. All of these activities are important in a young child's health and development, so it is best to limit your child's engagement with technological devices, and organise alternative activities for much of the day.

So, the answer to the question posed above is, "Not if it is sensibly monitored."



The Magic of Books for Young Children

We are inundated by electronic communications and social media, but it seems that books still retain their fascination. Recent research shows that books, far from losing their appeal, are once again growing in attraction. This despite the emergence of such devices as Kindle, onto which one can download a whole stack of books, and carry them around easily.

Being able to read is still a vital skill for social and economic survival in modern society.

The percentage of a country's population that is literate is still a crucial measure of that country's advancement.

An adult reading a book to a child is still a wonderful experience for both parties.

It is a most personal relationship between the reader and the listener.

Early introduction of children to books has a positive outcome for the development of the imagination and the ability to keep attention. It illustrates the relationship of the written word to the spoken, and introduces the child to the wonderful world of learning.

The moral here? Read to your child(ren).

Borrow books from friends, family and a library. Primary school teachers usually send a new book home with the child each week, but this needs to be supplemented.

Develop a regular pattern of sharing a book with your child(ren). Perhaps make it the last activity at bedtime.

When you do this is not as important as making sure to do it regularly.

HAPPY READING!



Puzzle Answer.

A mushroom. (Isn't this a shocking puzzle! Please give us a better one for our next newsletter.)



Practise having empathy, not sympathy. Anon