

# Chatterbox

Newsletter of The Helping Children and Families Association (HCFA), Armidale

[www.hcfa.org.au](http://www.hcfa.org.au) P.O. Box 1328 Armidale ph. 6776 6209

email:[coordinator@hcfa.org.au](mailto:coordinator@hcfa.org.au)

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

## From the Editor

Hello readers. Welcome to my first edition as both a volunteer and editor of Chatterbox! I really appreciate the opportunity to become part of such an influential and positive team of individuals.

There will be the usual items, including a household hint contributed to us by one of our newest volunteers, Ivy Johnson. Instead of the regular volunteer/family profile, Cathie has asked me to write a special article about some induction training I attended that was also attended by one of our member parents and her baby. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed attending the training.

A big thankyou to all the contributors for this edition, it is wonderful to have a range of opinions and expertise at our disposal.

I would also like to acknowledge the previous editor for her time and effort in establishing this newsletter. I will definitely have some big shoes to fill and some experience to benefit from.

The aim of this Newsletter is to share new ideas, information and keep our members in touch with each other. Please feel free to contact us with fun new ideas for topics, and any feedback on how to make this newsletter more relevant to you. My E-mail address is: [sarah13995@gmail.com](mailto:sarah13995@gmail.com) Sarah Stuart

## Coordinator's News

Firstly, many many thanks to Sarah for jumping in to help with the newsletter ... and for being so patient in waiting for my contributions! Sarah, who is also the part-time receptionist at the Armidale Business Centre where we have our office, has had a wealth of experience working with children of different ages, as well as voluntary work in editing and publishing. She is preparing to do postgrad study in Social Work next year. We are very lucky that she has offered to take on the newsletter as well as visit families.



*Right: Sarah, our new editor, with three of the children at the Multicultural Women's Group we support*

There is so much news I am not sure where to start. We now have more members, more families, more volunteers (and more fundraising barbecues) than we have had for some time. There is a waiting list, we've changed our policy relating to non-permanent residents, and we've launched a new initiative to support international families. We now provide playgroup-like support to the Multicultural Women's Group (pictured) that meets on Fridays at *One of a Kind (OAK)* at 115 Butler St. This not only gives more opportunities for families to connect with others; it gives our volunteers more flexible opportunities for meeting families! The women would love to meet Australians, so if you're interested in learning more about other cultures, do come along. Contact Ruth Nicholls, who is the HCFA coordinator for this activity, for more details on how to be involved.



*A family is a unit composed not only of children but of men, women, an occasional animal, and the common cold.*

*Happy families and volunteers at OAK*

As for the future, do note the “Dates for your Diary” on page 4. There are lots of opportunities to meet the 26 members who have joined since the last edition and re-connect with old friends. Thanks to all of you for making this such a thriving community organisation. *Cathie Lamont*

**Ask Gran**

*I am worried about my two-year-old watching TV at a friend's house. We have this great arrangement: Emma looks after my son while I'm at work three days a week, and I look after her kids when she and her husband go out on Friday nights. But recently, I've noticed that whenever I collect Marco, he's been watching TV. It's usually something harmless, like Sesame Street, but I've heard that kids shouldn't have any screen time before the age of 2, and I don't like it. I don't want to change the arrangement with Emma. I'm a single mum and I don't know what I'd do with Marco on the days he now visits her. I'd like to talk to Emma, but I don't know where to start.*



*Dear Sally,*

*It's a tricky situation. You're clearly concerned about Marco watching the TV, and you don't want to upset the arrangement which otherwise works so well for you. At the same time, we can't offer our children a perfect world. Sometimes we have to compromise. Is this one of those times? Talking to your friend sounds like a great way to help you find that out.*

*I suggest you start by saying something positive about how much you appreciate the arrangement. Maybe comment positively on the non-TV activities. You could lead the conversation around to what you each think of TV watching. Alternatively, you could try the direct approach. Just say how you feel. “I'm really worried about Marco watching TV. Could you give him something else to do when the older kids are watching?” (And maybe have a suggestion/an activity of your own to offer.)*

*To give you more confidence, it can be helpful to have some information to back you up (“I've read that it can be harmful for children under two to have any exposure to TV”). But don't rush in with “science” at the beginning - only pull out the “heavy guns” if you need to. After all, the relationship is also important to you. Express your request as a preference, rather than a demand, and it's more likely to be “heard”. And don't be too hard on your friend, either. Sometimes, having the TV on is the only way a frazzled mum can get the dinner cooked safely.*

*Good luck,  
Gran*

**Family health and hygiene**

To help families who would like to reduce their electricity bill (as mentioned in a previous health tip), we are delighted to announce that Sustainable Living Armidale is offering each of our families a **free package of energy-saving devices for use around the home**. It includes draft-stoppers, a shower timer, a water-saving shower head, a thermometer, and some tips cards on various strategies to use around the home to reduce your power bill. Even though winter is almost over, some of the devices and tips apply in summer. Contact Cathie or your volunteer if you would like any of these items.

**Handy household hints-Courtesy of Ivy Johnson**

Summer means Icy-poles and Icy-poles and kids equals sticky fingers. Place a cupcake wrapper under the icy-pole to catch all those unwanted drips. It will cut down on mess and minimise sticky fingers.



*“Govern a family as you would cook a small fish – very gently.”*

## A Special Induction Experience – conversations with a volunteer and new mum

PlayPower™ was a workshop facilitated by Neroli O'Brien (from Safer Options for Armidale) for both volunteers and families. We believe that this is the first time HCFA has had a parent (with a very small baby) attend training, even though we've offered training to parents before. It seemed to work very well for both volunteers and parent ... and I suspect that the focused attention of six adults made an impact on the development of baby Taavi's neural pathways, too!

*Cathie, Stacey, Emily (holding Taavi), Neroli and Ivy at the recent training*



### Sarah, what was it like having a real parent and baby in the same room?

“Having a real family in the same room was a great introduction to HCFA's work, especially as I haven't been a mum myself yet. We had the opportunity to see and listen to Stacey and how she interacts with her little one, and because she let us all hold and interact with Taavi, I saw other ways of interacting with the baby. This all changed my ideas about how to interact with young children. It also gave me some insight into just what a special organisation HCFA is.

### What were the most surprising things you learned?

“I mean, of course play is good for children, but what I didn't realise was the role that it played in brain development. Neroli demonstrated this wonderfully by using images to represent the pathways of brain function. It was amazing to discover how simple games held so many skills and obstacles for children to grow and gain from.

### Anything else you'd like to say?

“Neroli used a great variety of techniques to explain the impact of interactions between carer and baby. She had these great images to explain the neural pathways, some handouts, some stories, and a whole kit of resources including two spill-proof PlayPower™ booklets that have just one simple play idea on each page.

I still have my poster of child development on the fridge as a reminder that play is important!”

### What was it like for new Mum, Stacey?

“I am a first time mum, and I attended the PlayPower™ training in July. My son Taavi was just four weeks old. It was our first solo outing, and I was terrified! Upon our arrival I felt very welcomed and supported. During the training I learned about the importance of viewing the play environment from the perspective (height) of my child and that simple play items are often the best. I had the opportunity to meet a number of the wonderful HCFA volunteers, and we came home with a really useful package of information. All in all, I found the training was a positive, useful experience which helped me to build my confidence at home and also when out and about with my son.”

### And experienced volunteer, Sue?

“I've attended the training before, but because I'd been away for a while, I thought it would be a good opportunity to catch up. And it was lovely to meet not only some new volunteers but a family I later started visiting.”

### As for Baby Taavi?

Lots of gurgles and smiles.

*“At the end of the day, a loving family should find everything forgivable.” – Mark V. Olsen*

## Play idea for toddlers

### Helping with the Laundry!

Yes, it is not the most glamorous play idea, but in practice it is just a wonderful exercise to keep the kids entertained and stimulate their development and practical skills!

What will you need?

- A long piece of string
- A small basket
- Some small clothes/dolls clothes



**So let's play Pretend!** Children love pretending, and often they will be observing and learning without you even realising it. By tying the string to two ends (chairs or trees are often a good height), you have made the clothes line. By involving them in your daily duties you are stimulating their minds, making your time more enjoyable and improving their level of independence, you can never start too soon. By pinching and manoeuvring the clothing and pegs, they are improving their fine motor skills and having fun all at the same time. You may be surprised how quickly they will ask to help you with your own washing!



### Recipe Zucchini Muffins/Slice

This easy recipe is a great one for families on a budget, particularly when zucchinis are in season!

Ingredients

- 2 full cups grated zucchinis
- 1 onion finely chopped
- 1 cup grated cheese (whatever you like or a combination of cheeses)
- 3 rashers bacon finely chopped
- 1 cup Self Raising Flour
- ½ cup olive oil
- 5 eggs beaten together
- Salt and pepper

Method

1. Preheat oven 200 C
2. Grease 2 trays of muffin pans (mini muffins or ordinary muffins) or a slice tin
3. Mix all ingredients together till just combined.
4. Spoon into muffin tins until just full (or slice tray).
5. Bake 15-18 mins (mini muffins) or until golden and spring back when lightly touched with finger.

### Dates for Your Diary

- 5pm 8 Oct** Annual General Meeting – all welcome  
**6pm 8 Oct** Annual Dinner – all welcome  
**9 Oct** Morning Tea for Mental Health Month at *One of a Kind* at 115 Butler St  
**18 Oct** Bunnings Barbecue Please contact Judy if you can help  
**Nov** All-member Families-meet-families-meet-volunteers Social Gathering Details tba.

#### Regular Activities for Members

Every 2<sup>nd</sup> fortnight, HCFA volunteers provide about an hour's playgroup-like support to the Multicultural Women's Group meeting 10-12 on Fridays at the One of a Kind (OAK) building at 115 Butler St. From November, we plan to offer a weekly drop-in session for parents to change or feed babies, have a cuppa while a volunteer reads to or plays with older children ... watch out for announcements soon.