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**Media Release**

Wednesday, 22 February 2017

**Local community hubs seek volunteers to engage migrant and refugee women in Dandenong**

Many migrant and refugee women struggle to develop English skills when they arrive in Australia, and Community Hubs Australia (CHA) is teaming up with AMES Australia to address this issue through new Volunteer English Tutor placements at hubs in Dandenong.

A lack of childcare, no previous experience in formal education, not understanding what’s available, or being ineligible for funded classes are all contributing factors to migrant and refugee women not being able to develop English skills after arriving in Australia.

CHA and AMES Australia are seeking to recruit and train volunteer English tutors in the communities where these women live.

Community hubs in Dandenong allow mothers to co-locate with their children while they learn English. This program will also be open to women who are not eligible to access other English programs.

Volunteer English tutors will receive training from AMES Australia and will then engage directly with migrant women through hubs in Dandenong to help develop English conversation skills and ease the transition to life in Australia.

**Previous teaching experience or a second language is not required. You just need to be able to speak, read and write English confidently and enjoy meeting people from other cultures.**

Interested volunteers should register soon for training that starts on 1 March 2017 at AMES Australia’s Noble Park office.

This is a great opportunity to connect with and learn about other cultures living in your community.

Community Hubs Australia CEO Dr Sonja Hood is excited to see this program begin recruiting volunteers: “Many women miss out on opportunities to learn or practice English, and this makes them very vulnerable.  I’m delighted to be working with AMES Australia and with our broader community to address this serious social problem.”

Volunteers with an interest in the local community do more than just teach English, they become a connection to broader Australia – a friendly face in the community – and foster a sense of welcome and belonging as women transition to their lives in Australia.

AMES Australia’s Volunteer Tutor Program will provide training to new volunteers, giving them the skills and resources to help migrant women to develop their English skills.

AMES Australia CEO Cath Scarth said: “volunteer tutors provide valuable assistance to people who are new to Australia and are learning or improving their English. The one-on-one conversational opportunities they provide and the support they give in helping people navigate a new and often unfamiliar society can be crucial in helping people settle successfully in Australia.”

“It is our experience that tutors find volunteering extremely rewarding and get a lot out of helping people build new lives here while gaining insights into different cultures,” Ms Scarth said.

Mary Moldrich, an AMES Australia Volunteer tutor said: “as a single mother of five children, I enjoy helping recently arrived migrants and refugees women learning Basic English at Dandenong West Community Hub”

AMES Australia Volunteer Tutor Program Co-ordinator, Nada Railic said: “I am humbled to be asked to be part of the growth between AMES Australia and Community Hubs Australia. As someone who has the privilege to be surrounded by talented people (volunteer tutors) I see the association of AMES Australia and Community Hubs as one which will benefit many.”

There are three community hubs in Dandenong that are looking for volunteer tutors: Dandenong Primary School; Dandenong West Primary School; and Springvale Rise Primary School.

Principal of Dandenong Primary School, Daniel Riley can see how important English is to parents’ participation in the school community: “The community hub enables our school to play a greater role in engaging the diverse families in our community. Helping parents to develop confidence in speaking English makes a huge difference for us, and for those we serve. Our English conversation program has supported parents to feel more confident to have chat to their child’s teacher and to begin to make the community connections that will ultimately see their own children reach their potential.”

“A volunteer English tutor will mean we are able to grow this program, and keep building our communication with newly-arrived migrant families,” adds Daniel.

Alison Rogers is the Community Hub Leader at Dandenong Primary School: “The women who come to the English Conversation sessions are looking for a place where they can practice and improve their English, assisting in future employment and supporting them to be able to engage in the wider community.  By volunteering you can also be a part of these sessions, enjoying spending time getting to know the women and helping in the process of understanding the complexities of the English language."

Volunteers will attend training once a week for five weeks:

**Noble Park Training**

60 Douglas St, Noble Park VIC 3174

Starts: Wednesday, 1 March 2017 (for five weeks) – runs from 6 – 8.30 pm.

**Dandenong Training**

280 Thomas St, Dandenong VIC 3175

Starts: Tuesday, 7 March 2017 (for five weeks) – runs from 1pm – 3.30pm.

Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer can go to [www.communityhubsaustralia.org.au](http://www.communityhubsaustralia.org.au) for more information.

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**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.

**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. 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 (two are based in community centres). 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 local, state and federal governments.