

The Weekly Review – Moonee Valley

Handy helpers prove that charity begins at home

January 17.2014 5:32 am
BY Melissa Cunningham

A charity has established a program to assist the western suburbs' most vulnerable families. The Caroline Chisholm Foundation in Moonee Ponds has launched a Handy Home Helpers program, which will recruit men to be home-maintenance volunteers, assisting single mothers with work in their homes.

Volunteer co-ordinator Glenda Rumble says the men will accompany social workers during their visits, undertaking tasks such as installing smoke alarms, setting up play equipment for children, fixing furniture and supporting the women in the safety and maintenance of their homes.

Almost 2000 women seek help from the society every year.

More than 75 per cent of these families are in Melbourne's western suburbs, including in Moonee Valley, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Brimbank and Wyndham.

"We have three purposes in this program: to make houses safe for the women and children, engage men back into the community, and reduce friction between landlords and our clients by keeping the homes up to standard," Ms Rumble said.

She said another benefit of the program was that it helped women restore their trust in men.

"Many of these women may have fled situations of family violence and may not have good experiences with men, so it's about building up that confidence again," she said.

"It also improves the women's self-esteem by giving them a sense of pride in their home and allowing them to feel listened to and understood." Ms Rumble added many of the women were also refugees and migrants with no family to rely on for support.

Essendon resident Michael Lynch, 69, began volunteering with Caroline Chisholm more than five years ago and has since been recruited as the home-maintenance program's first volunteer.

The father of two said he was inspired to volunteer with the organisation after the births of his five grandchildren.

"I thought to myself that if one of my daughters was in this situation I would hope that somebody would do the same for them," Mr Lynch said.

"Most of the jobs I undertake are those simple, little things that men do around the house like assembling a cubby house or fixing prams that have been donated to the charity."

Caroline Chisholm chief executive officer Helen Cooney says the organisation will be working with Men's Sheds and Lions Clubs to recruit men.

"We encourage all men to apply," Ms Cooney said.

"There are specific skills required, but we would love to recruit more tradesmen who can assist the women in more specialised work."

The program is being funded by a \$45,000 Moonee Valley council partnership grant, which will be allocated over three years, and by a \$30,000 grant from the Lord Mayor's charitable fund.

» **Details, 9361 7064 or email grumble@carolinechisholm.society.com.au**