

# CARING MUMS EVALUATION REPORT

Executive Summary &  
Recommendations 2017

For —  
National Council of Jewish  
Women of Australia (Vic) Inc  
With the support of the  
Fouress Foundation

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“I have been so well supported by my volunteer, who has been consistently caring, empathetic, nurturing and non-judgmental. She has listened, provided encouragement, and given me a safe space to explore my feelings and experiences. No one else has been able to provide this for me...” — Mum

## ACKNOWLEDGE —MENTS

The evaluators would like to acknowledge a number of people who facilitated the planning and conduct of the Caring Mums evaluation.

First, acknowledgement and thanks are extended to the mothers who participated in this evaluation. The experiences they shared in interviews and through the survey provided a rich story of the program.

Second, we express our thanks to the evaluation Advisory Group, which included Lee Ann Basser (CEO) and Annette Sweet (Programs and Events Manager) from NCJWA (Vic) Inc, along with Caring Mums Program Coordinator Michelle Kornberg and particularly Gail Bousi (a volunteer ‘caring mum’) and Amber Wright (a mum and previous participant in the program).

They provided support and guidance to the evaluation, access to the required program documents and data and a willingness to share their experiences and views of the program.

Third, the volunteers and the key informants (who primarily included referring and funding organisations), made themselves accessible for a focus group and interviews, and also were open in sharing their views and experiences of the program with evaluators.

Finally, NCJWA (Vic) Inc would like to acknowledge that this evaluation was made possible through the support of the Fouress Foundation.

## GLOSSARY

### Caring Mums

Caring Mums is a community program of the NCJWA (Victoria) Inc. Caring Mums is the subject of the current evaluation.

### NCJWA (Vic) Inc

National Council of Jewish Women of Australia (Victoria) Inc

### Mums/ mothers

Mums and mothers refer to mothers who have received support through Caring Mums.

### Volunteer

Volunteers are mothers or grandmothers themselves, and provide regular support to mothers within Caring Mums.



“At the beginning they had no idea what to do, it was usually their first child, they had no support, no caring mothers around and by end of it they felt very comfortable with what they were doing with their babies, just the confidence.” — Volunteer

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Caring Mums is a Melbourne based community program established in 2011. It is a confidential, home-based, free-of-charge and non-denominational service that provides emotional support to mums of newborn babies and women during pregnancy from a wide range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

Caring Mums developed in response to the inadequate social and community supports in place for new mothers, as an innovative program that engages community volunteers to provide much needed support to new mothers in their own homes and communities.

This report describes an independent evaluation of Caring Mums, a community program of the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia (Victoria) (NCJWA Vic).

### EVALUATION AIM

The primary aim of the evaluation was to identify the short-term and intermediate outcomes of Caring Mums, particularly in relation to mother's health and wellbeing (mental health and sense of empowerment, as well as awareness and use of local support and services). It was also expected that the evaluation would provide insights about the value of the program and how it could be improved. Ultimately it was expected that by providing evidence of the program's outcomes to date via an independent evaluation, NCJWA (Vic) will be in a better position to secure the ongoing sustainability of the program.

### EVALUATION APPROACH

A program logic was developed to guide the evaluation, and a review of published and grey literature was conducted to identify what other programs exist to support mothers and the indicators used to measure their success. An online survey with mums, interviews with mums and key informants, and a focus group with volunteers complemented an analysis of existing program data. The evaluation was overseen by an advisory committee.

### PROGRAM IMPACT AND VALUE

The vast majority of people involved in the evaluation (mums, volunteers, staff, and other stakeholders such as referral agencies) perceived the program extremely positively. The program has a high profile in the community and broader service sector



## OVERVIEW OF DATA COLLECTION AND PARTICIPANTS

A range of qualitative and quantitative measures were used in order to address the key evaluation questions, these involved a range of stakeholders including:

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8 interviews with key informants

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1 focus group with 7 volunteers

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51 mums who responded to a survey (48% response rate and 21% of the total participants over the life of the program; 25-49 yrs old; 41% Australian born:

— Of these 6 mums were interviewed over the phone

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Existing Caring Mums data records since 2011:

— 235 mums (19-46 yrs old, 43% Australian born)

— 88 volunteers (48 currently volunteering, 19 of whom have volunteered for over 4 yrs; 32-73 yrs old; 70% Australian born)



and is considered an important service to support women in their transition to being a mother.

The key value of the program for mums is the emotional support provided at a time of immense change often when mothers are isolated and/or have little other support.

The evaluation has highlighted a parallel journey for the volunteers in the program, in relation to the positive outcomes they experienced themselves. As mothers and grandmothers, themselves, the role of a 'Caring Mum' enabled them to share their experiences of mothering, to give back to their community and in turn this valued them as mothers (and mothering more generally).

The high retention rates of staff and volunteers, as well as the high response rate to the online survey with mums, are further indicators of the program value.

Participation in the program results in better mental health and sense of empowerment for mums, as well as greater awareness and use of services. It also serves as a protective mechanism against future mental health issues. Specifically, for the mothers involved, the program resulted in:

### — Increased self-confidence

Through a trusting relationship with a trained volunteer mothers learned to trust themselves, their abilities as a mother and in turn felt more competent in their ability to meet their babies' needs and make their own decisions about parenting.

### — Reduced isolation, loneliness, and feelings of depression and anxiety

Mums felt that contact with their volunteer had provided social and psychological support, through regular home visits, that were directed by their needs and experiences. Mothers felt they were able to open up about their experiences of new motherhood and were appreciative of the regular social support and contact they received.

### — A sense of empowerment

As a mother and improved transition into motherhood –Caring Mums (via the volunteers) provided the conditions and beliefs that make it possible for mothers to be empowered - whether through role-modelling, practical information and support, imparting of information or reassurance. This empowerment was experienced as two-way; having mutual benefits for both volunteers and mothers (a form of relational empowerment).

Numerous stakeholders pointed to the preventative nature of the program. Volunteers, in particular, felt that supporting mothers prevented many of them from developing mental health issues or avoiding escalation of existing conditions. The potential of the program to work with mothers to provide a caring, supportive, trusting relationship was identified as particularly beneficial for vulnerable or at risk mothers (those who might otherwise fall through the cracks). For example, volunteers discussed mothers who had multiple births, those that did not have their family around, women experiencing domestic violence and those whose babies may be unwell, have a disability or in some cases have died.

One of the goals of Caring Mums is to empower mothers to be resourceful and assist them to find their own information and support.

“Fifty-three per cent of survey participants agreed that Caring Mums increased their use of local services and support.”

These services and resources included psychologists, maternal, child and health services, doctors, child care, playgroups, material aid and emergency relief services, mother-baby units, lactation services, early childhood providers and retail outlets that

may provide products essential for caring for a baby or toddler.

Caring Mums is further valued as an innovative, unique program that is meeting unmet needs and filling a service/support gap, in a way that complements existing services. This uniqueness was discussed in terms of the personalised support provided, the non-clinical nature of the program, providing home-based support, and by being inclusive in accepting all mothers into the program, including those who will have a baby older than one year at program completion.

Caring Mums was found to excel across a range of key indicators identified in the evidence base which include:

- Broad inclusion criteria
- Personal, responsive and timely intake process
- A considered matching process resulting in strong mother-volunteer relationships
- Comprehensive volunteer training, support and supervision
- Solid program infrastructure

This evaluation has generated evidence to indicate that the objectives of Caring Mums are not only being met, but are being exceeded. Lessons learned, including implications for the future are discussed in the report.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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Use evaluation findings to consolidate, strengthen and extend the program reach

1.1 Disseminate outcomes of the evaluation

1.2 Identify and action suggested improvements to the program

1.3 Strengthen program communication strategy

1.4 Advocate for mums and for mothering to be more highly valued

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Explore initiatives to promote program sustainability and expansion

2.1 Secure core funding to maintain existing program

2.2 Identify avenues for gaining additional funding

2.3 Make the program scalable

2.4 Support professional development of staff

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Improve documentation, monitoring and evaluation of Caring Mums

3.1 Improve evaluation capacity

3.2 Consider conducting a cost analysis of the program

3.3 Identify additional research and evaluation opportunities



**PERCEIVED VALUE OF THE PROGRAM**

Overall, mums (survey participants) agreed that the program was valuable:

- 92% very satisfied with volunteer mum overall
- 69% very satisfied with support provided by Caring Mums staff
- 80% extremely likely (10/10) to recommend program to others.

This level of satisfaction concurs with responses from mothers at their program follow-up interview, all of whom (n=40) said they would recommend the program to other mothers.

On average, volunteers rated their satisfaction with volunteer training.

**MUM'S PERCEIVED IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM**

Overall, survey participants agreed that Caring Mums had a positive impact:

- 92% strongly agreed that the program had been a positive experience
- 65% strongly agreed that the program reduced their levels of isolation
- 53% agreed that the program increased their use of local services and supports.

These findings were consistent with existing program data collected during closure and follow-up:

- When mothers completed the program, concerns for their own health and wellbeing were statistically reduced as compared to when they started.
- Of 75 responses recorded at closure, all but one indicated that their goals for the program were met, and often exceeded.



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