

Now once upon a time

Parenting | Shaun Turton

THE axeing of Doncare's Hands on Parenting program has left a gaping hole in the lives of many families.

A lack of funding has forced the welfare organisation to shelve the program, which deploys volunteers to help parents who are having difficulty coping.

When *Leader* met the program's 20 volunteers, each had an abundance of stories about making a difference in the life of a local family – many times a life-saving difference.

But without the \$65,000 a year needed to co-ordinate the program, volunteers say they are worried many parents dealing with issues such as post-natal depression, social isolation and children with disabilities, will lose out.

Iranian migrant Shiva Sabegh was once such a parent.

Mrs Sabegh said she was often reduced to tears by cultural and language barriers she faced upon moving from Tehran to Melbourne.

On top of parenting, the mother of two had to contend with knowing little English, having little knowledge of Australian society and being thousands of kilometres from her parents and close friends.

And as a medical researcher who had spent eight years working at Tehran's top university, Mrs Sabegh's thirst for knowledge about her new home was almost unbearable without the communication skills necessary to ask questions.

"It is so frustrating when you have something in your brain and you



Doncare parenting mentor Elenor Davis (right) helped migrant Shiva Sabegh, and her children Ghazal and Benjamin, adjust to life in Australia. Picture: STEVE TANNER N05DT200

can't express it," she said. "I used to say I have no brain and mouth coordination."

Fast-forward four years and Mrs Sabegh sits happily in her Doncaster living room, while her youngest – one-year-old Benjamin – runs circles around the room.

With the support of Doncare volunteer Elenor Davis, Mrs Sabegh was able to complete English classes and obtain an Australian drivers'

licence. But, most importantly, she was able to ask questions and get answers.

"She opened my eyes and gave me lots of information about what's going on here," Mrs Sabegh said.

"You can have food, money, a place to stay and a good husband who works night shifts to spend time at home, but you can still be isolated."

► **To help the Hands on Parenting Support, phone Doncare on 9841 4215.**



Our July 7 report.