

# COMPANIONS

## UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE'S NEEDS



*It is essential that our encounters during home visits—or any setting where we support others—are truly centred on the person or family in need. Our focus must be on them, not ourselves. We should always ask: Are we responding to what they actually need, or are we acting on our assumptions about what they need?*

(Inspired by Reimagining Home Visitation, Robert Fitzgerald, The Record 2012)

Understanding what people need begins with listening closely and recognising that needs are layered. If someone is struggling to find stable housing or access enough food, they may not be ready to take steps toward employment or education. In our role as Vincentians, we have the opportunity to meet both practical and emotional needs—like friendship, support, and understanding. Over time, this can build trust, which is the foundation for more lasting change. With trust comes the opportunity to encourage, guide, and advocate.

### The Role of the Conference

When we offer 'a hand up,' we can help transform someone's life. That might mean supporting access to medical care, helping them stay in school, or encouraging job-seeking efforts. These decisions about how we provide assistance should be regularly discussed during Conference meetings.

Sometimes lasting change isn't possible right away but even short-term help like food or utility assistance, combined with a kind and respectful relationship, can make a big difference in someone's life.

### Practical Steps for Support

- Take time to understand the deeper challenges a person is facing.
- Use and maintain your Visitation Toolkit with up-to-date contacts for both internal and external support services.
- Ask Special Works staff or Regional Support Officers for guidance on referrals if needed.
- Build relationships with local organisations and community groups—this strengthens our ability to advocate and provide support.
- Whenever appropriate, encourage people to make contact with services themselves. This helps build their confidence and independence.
- Always protect the privacy of the individuals and families we assist.

### Encouraging Growth and Confidence

Look for ways to support skill-building, independence, and well-being. For example:

- One Conference accompanied people on shopping trips to build budgeting and planning skills.
- Another ran cooking sessions to build confidence in preparing healthy meals.
- Others have helped adults return to education or training.



### Supporting Children and Families

Recognise the importance of rest, play, and recreation:

- Support access to school holiday programs or leisure activities.
- Refer families to the Youth Team for assistance or involvement in Youth Days and Camps.
- Refer new arrivals to the Youth Migrant and Refugee Team for additional support.

### Long-Term Commitment and Knowing When to Refer

Be ready to walk alongside someone over the long term. What doesn't work at first may succeed later, sometimes after multiple attempts. But also know your limits. If a situation is too complex, seek help from Conference Support or refer the person to another service, with their consent.

— TRY THIS

## Activity

When we say we are offering people "a hand up," are we really doing that in a way that puts them in the centre?  
Think about how your Conference offers support.  
What are we doing well—and where could we do better?  
Discuss your thoughts with one another.

A HAND UP  
A HAND UP  
**A HAND UP**  
A HAND UP  
A HAND UP

