

Community stories

By Five Paediatric Project

Carly Nevill, Primary School Educator, Horsham

Carly Nevill is a Grade 1 Teacher in the Wimmera Southern Mallee (WSM) region of Victoria.

Carly has been teaching children for 12 years, nine of which have been in the WSM. She is passionate about advancing children's learning and helping them reach their full potential.

Carly describes her involvement in the Paediatric Project in the Wimmera Southern Mallee as a being part of a multi-layered approach to supporting children and leveraging the skills of educators – "it's been fantastic".

About the community

Horsham is a regional city in the Wimmera Southern Mallee (WSM) in western Victoria, Australia.

The WSM is a diverse, vibrant region with strong social capital and families that are engaged, inclusive, flexible and connected to place. It is also a region with inequitable access to paediatric specialist services.

Families are challenged by limited specialist healthcare services in the area and, where they are available, there are long wait lists. There are limited paediatricians, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educational therapists and mental health specialists. Problems with access to high quality specialist care in the WSM can have adverse short and long-term impacts on children's health, development and wellbeing.

Advancing change through the Paediatric Project

Carly is a primary school educator, teaching in the Wimmera Southern Mallee for the past nine years. Currently teaching Grade 1 children, a main focus of her work this year has been building the skills of children whose learning has been interrupted with the COVID-19 lockdowns and remote learning. Part of her work as an educator also involves identifying and working with children with additional needs.

There is a range of common health and development conditions children in the classroom may experience. It is important to identify these conditions early, understand how to support families to manage these at home, and when and how to seek professional help.

Carly became involved in the Paediatric Project in 2021. She has taken part in the initiative's *Case-based Collaborations*, where she is part of a multi-disciplinary group that meets regularly with a paediatrician from The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne to discuss and learn about supporting children with health and behavioural issues such as sleep difficulties, speech problems, anxiety and trauma.

Carly has also been involved in the *Co-consultations*, a model of care facilitated by local professionals which involves real-time collaboration between local trusted professionals, a paediatrician from The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne and families.

One example of a co-consultation involved herself (the educator), a student, a parent and two clinicians. She described the consultation as **"very informative"** and the **"highlight of the whole process"**. Following the consultation, Carly explained, that after this experience, she became more aware of the impact of asthma on sleep.

"The process helped me to build confidence in knowing how to identify students with other similar needs".

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Benefits to children and families

The Paediatric Project offers a new, innovative model of care for families in the WSM. When health, education and social care professionals collaborate and develop strong working relationships with each other and families, they can have the greatest impact on the child's health and wellbeing.

Educators have important and established relationships with families. By taking part in the project educators can connect families with local, trusted professionals so children can access the support they need to thrive.

Carly explained that this model of care removed barriers and improved access to equitable healthcare for regional families. The support provided through the Paediatric Project was particularly beneficial for families who were struggling to navigate a complex healthcare system. She described The Royal Children's Hospital paediatricians as being very prompt with providing adequate support and ***"got the ball rolling very quickly"*** – cutting wait times significantly for families waiting to access care and additional services.

Carly also noted a key to the success of the project is the professionalism, encouragement and respect provided to families and educators by The Royal Children's Hospital paediatricians.

"It has been nothing short of inspirational".

"The doctors put the parents at ease and we saw a change in the family's mindset".

Professional capacity building

Educators are a critical part of children's multidisciplinary care team. Educators spend up to 20 hours a week with children and building their professional knowledge around common childhood health conditions allows them to identify children requiring health intervention and care more effectively and proactively be involved in implementing strategies and interventions day to day.

Carly noted that participating in the *Case-based Collaborations* and the *Co-consultations* was beneficial to her work with children and families. She felt supported, more knowledgeable about children's health conditions and their effect on learning and more empowered to assist children and families to seek referral for intervention and care.

"It's really upskilled me as an educator".

Carly explained that when presented with a child with behavioural issues, it can be tempting for an educator to try to diagnose or label the child, without being aware of other possible contributing factors. By attending the professional development program as part of the Paediatric Project's *Case-based Collaborations*, she learnt to take a step back and understand how some child behaviours can be masking more complex problems.

"A student was terribly unfocused – presenting like a child with ADHD. When I went to one of the fortnightly PD sessions and it was mentioned how trauma can present similarly to a child with ADHD I realised I had probably misunderstood the cause of this behaviour".

Carly also reflected on how participating in the project has helped her connect other professionals with The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne paediatricians and hopes to help bridge more links between local professionals going forward.

"If there's a need, I can say who you can go to for support".

Looking ahead

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Carly is excited about the potential of the Paediatric Project and its ability to improve outcomes for children in the WSM.

“This is just the beginning”.

Carly sees the initiative as having many benefits for professionals, children and families and hopes to see it go from strength to strength. Addressing the barriers faced by families in the WSM through equitable, innovative, place-based interventions gives children and young people the best possible chance to thrive.

“From little things, big things grow”.

About SC4C@WSM

The Paediatric Project is an initiative of the By Five Innovation and Equity Hub.

The project establishes partnerships between paediatric specialists, local professionals and families to deliver high quality local care and improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

The project uses telehealth and digital solutions to enhance local primary care to better meet the immediate needs of families in the community, so children and young people get timely access to the care they need to thrive and meet their potential.

The initiative is based on a tiered model of support for children and young people, families and professionals and builds on the services and systems that already exist.

By Five Innovation and Equity Hub

The By Five Innovation and Equity Hub is a partnership between the Wimmera Development Association, the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership, and the Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children’s Hospital and the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute. The Hub is proudly supported by the Victorian Government and involves education, health and social care organisations across the region.