

# Community stories

By Five Paediatric Project

**Melanie Wade** Maternal and Child Health Team Leader and Immunisation Coordinator, Horsham Rural City Council

*Melanie Wade is a Maternal and Child Health Team Leader and Immunisation Coordinator for the Horsham Rural City Council.*

*As a MCH nurse, Melanie's role is centred around embracing and supporting the whole family unit and helping parents be the best they can be.*

*She describes her involvement in the Paediatric Project in the Wimmera Southern Mallee initiative as providing support to rural and regional families in the best way we can – "it's been a win for everybody".*

## 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

In Victoria, Maternal and Child Health Nurses are registered general nurses and midwives with specialised training in maternal and child health. Melanie Wade previously worked as a nurse, a midwife, a general practice/community health nurse and immunisation coordinator.

Melanie's current role as Maternal and Child Health Team Leader involves promoting the health and wellbeing of children and families and providing evidence-based information and support through a series of regular key ages and stages visits. She also works with families requiring additional support, through the enhanced maternal and child health service.

Melanie practices from an integrated child and family hub in Horsham - a one-stop-shop for children and families, providing co-located maternal and child health services, kindergarten, playgroup, a toy library, a psychologist for children affected by family violence and the primary health network.

Melanie's involvement in this work began with her participation in the *Case-based Collaboration* seminars, where twice a month nurses were invited to join together, along with a paediatrician from the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, to share their knowledge on a variety of topics determined by the group including case management, supports and referral processes. The aim of the seminar series was to share expertise and knowledge in order to build skills and capacity amongst local professionals. The seminar series has since been expanded to include family services, allied health, and education professionals.

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Melanie has also been involved in the *Co-consultations*, a model of care initiated by local professionals, involving real-time collaboration between local trusted professionals, a paediatrician from The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne and families. Some examples of co-consultations Melanie has been involved in include addressing poorly controlled eczema and supporting unsettled twins.

## Benefits to children and families

This 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.

Melanie explained that this model of care removed barriers and improved access to equitable healthcare for regional families. Co-consultations benefit both families and professionals by providing quality multidisciplinary and timely care, increased capacity for identification, intervention and follow-up, and shorter wait times as well as reduced travel, disruption and costs.

***"Families are amazed that it's a free service, can be seen so quickly and that there is follow up support. No travelling to Melbourne, no restrictions with cost, no accommodation, no COVID-barriers."***

She also noted the advantage of building on the existing, trusted relationship between Maternal and Child Health nurses and families, making it much easier to get families to access additional services or engage in the co-consult model.

***"They trust us and they are in an environment they are familiar with"***

## Professional capacity building

Melanie reflected on the co-consultations as an excellent professional learning opportunity, noting the ability to refer, get a second opinion and supporting professional advice being particularly beneficial to her work.

***"Having support as a health professional whether you have been in the role for 5 minutes or 50 years ... we can all learn from the project."***

She has built strong relationships with the RCH paediatricians and feels like the extra layer of support provided by the paediatricians has benefited her work with children and families.

***"It's good to have that extra layer of support. It just makes it easier for us to have access to the paediatrician and organise a co-consult in an environment the family is familiar with."***

Participating in the Co-consultations and Case-based Collaborations has helped Melanie keep her skills current, allowed access to additional professional resources and helped her stay in the know with what is going on outside of her practice.

## Looking ahead

Melanie sees the initiative as adding value to her work and that of her MCH team— strengthening existing knowledge and enhancing the service they provide for children and families. She hopes to see it grow from strength to strength and continue to increase involvement with a wider range of professionals including GPs, schools and early childhood education and care and facilitate access to every child and family.

***"This project actually DOES benefit us as professionals and DOES benefit our community"***

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### About the By Five Paediatric Project

The By Five 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.