

Community stories

By Five Paediatric Project

Dr Kate Graham, General Practitioner, Horsham

Dr Kate Graham is a General Practitioner in the Wimmera Southern Mallee (WSM) region of Victoria.

Kate has been practicing general practice for around 13 years and has seen the challenges faced by families with barriers to accessing equitable healthcare.

She describes her involvement in the Paediatric Project in the Wimmera Southern Mallee as a being part of something very different with multiple benefits for children, families and professionals in the WSM – “It’s not like anything else”.

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

General practitioners play an integral role in building trusting relationships with their community, providing primary care and linking families with high quality paediatric services and support.

Dr Kate Graham, a General Practitioner in Horsham, has been practicing in the Wimmera Southern Mallee for the past 13 years and has recently become involved in the Paediatric Project.

Kate has taken part in *Co-consultations*, a model of care initiated by local professionals and involves real-time collaboration between local trusted professionals, a paediatrician from The Royal Children’s Hospital Melbourne and families.

In one example, Kate was involved in a co-consultation for a child with untreated eczema. The child was referred via the maternal and child health (MCH) nurse. Kate spoke about the extra layer of support provided to families with the co-consultation model by having both the GP and the MCH nurse in the consultation with the family.

“Having everyone in the same room – the patient, the MCH nurse and me (the GP) – ensured we had a clear plan going forward”.

Kate was also involved into the *Case-based Collaborations*, where local professionals including clinicians, educators, and social care come together to learn and share their expertise with support from a paediatrician from The Royal Children’s Hospital Melbourne. This tier helps to build professional relationships, capability, confidence, relational practice and effective models of family-centred care.

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Kate co-presented and participated in a case-based seminar for educators, alongside The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne Paediatrician, about common developmental-behavioural issues in the classroom. Kate explained how participating in this professional development opportunity helped provide shared expertise, education, mentoring and direct support to local professionals to encourage integrated multi-disciplinary care for children.

Benefits to children and families

This initiative 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.

General practitioners are often the anchors in their patient's care journey. By participating in the Paediatric Project, GPs leverage their established relationships with families by taking part in real-time telehealth consultations with a team of professionals working together for the child.

"Parents are very happy. It's not the typical telehealth appointment. The longer appointment gives more time to parents".

Kate explained the benefits of the style the co-consultation whereby ***"parents are empowered to take part in the healthcare process"***.

"The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne Paediatricians always make the parents feel like they are in charge of the consult, they are the ones determining the direction".

She noted the Paediatric Project model helps to improve access to healthcare for families in the WSM region including shortening wait times for care, and reducing travel, disruption and costs.

Kate also explained that using telehealth for paediatric consultations can help show the child in a familiar and comfortable environment. This is particularly helpful for children with developmental-behavioural issues.

"It helps get the best out of the child on the day".

Professional capacity building

The Paediatric Project provides healthcare professionals a unique opportunity to learn together with families.

Kate reflected that participating in this initiative helped her build new relationships with specialists. Because of these new relationships, Kate felt more empowered to ask specialists follow-up questions and felt confident her questions would be answered. She also felt like she was more aware of local services.

Kate also noted the huge potential of collaborating and sharing knowledge with educators as part of this initiative going forward.

"Teachers offer something different – they see such a diverse spectrum of kids all of the same age. They are the ones that notice differences between children".

Looking ahead

Kate sees the Paediatric Project as a unique initiative with the potential to improve the lives of children in the WSM. She hopes to see more local professionals get involved in the initiative and, ultimately, the model become part of the regular care provided to children.

"The more you are involved ... the more benefits will come".

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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.