

Little steps ...big impact

When you have concerns about your child's development or worry they're not keeping up with their peers, it can be a stressful and isolating time. In the lead up to Children's Week, an annual, national event that recognises the talents, skills, achievements and rights of children, we're introducing more of the services and support available for children and families at Castlemaine Health. Helping children reach their potential is central to everything the team at Castlemaine Health does, in particular supporting children's rights to education, learning and development.

"All kids go through the same stages, some just go at a different pace," says speech pathologist and coordinator of children's services at Castlemaine Health, Deanna Blakeley.

"Our services help find and address the little steps that might be missing in their development.

"Sometimes it's just about being ready. Other times it can be a seemingly little thing that's holding them back. Perhaps they're having trouble sitting still and concentrating or it could be their vision is poor. These are all things we can help with."

The team members are specialists in working with babies and children under school age with a developmental delay or disability. They also work with older children.

Services include speech pathology, physiotherapy, podiatry, occupational therapy and dietetics. There's also a continence nurse and an attending paediatrician. The multidisciplinary team visits children and families at home, at playgroup, childcare centres, kindergartens and schools. They can offer support during key transitions like the move from kindergarten to school.

"One of the big differences between therapy for kids and adults is that ours is play-based," says dietitian Hayley Carr who works with children and families dealing with everything from food allergies to introducing solids, fussy eating and disordered eating.

"In dietetics for example our focus is on getting children to experiment with food... touch, smell, taste and even cook it," she says.

"We still provide resources for parents but our work with the children is much more interactive."

Offering support to families is also very important.

"Parents often come in really stressed and concerned, especially if their child has faltering growth or isn't developing," says Hayley.

"You can see the relief they feel after an appointment. Knowing they're not alone and that their child is going to develop."

Whether your child is experiencing difficulty with speech and language, interacting or playing with others, has a condition such as autism or cerebral palsy, or issues with feet and walking, there's help available. The team can even help children keep up with their peers by improving or developing basic life skills like handwriting and bike riding.

"If we see children earlier it's possible to prevent a lot of things from occurring," says podiatrist Jessica Southon.

"So we'd really say, if in doubt, check it out."



Castlemaine Health speech pathologist Erica Watson, dietitian Hayley Carr, podiatrist Jessica Southon and speech pathologist/children's services coordinator Deanna Blakeley.



If you think your child or someone you know could benefit from accessing these services contact:

Intake Office Community Rehabilitation Centre
Castlemaine Health
(P) 5471 3555
(E) intake@castlemainehealth.org.au

Children's Week is a national celebration of children's rights, talents and citizenship, celebrated around Universal Children's Day, which is held on the fourth Wednesday of October in Australia. For more information visit www.childrensweek.org.au

Q&A

- Q: Who can access the services for children at Castlemaine Health?**
A: Anyone in the Mount Alexander Shire can access the services. Although some services require a referral from a GP or other allied health practitioner, many do not.
- Q: My child needs to access multiple services. Is that possible?**
A: Yes. Castlemaine Health can sometimes offer joint appointments or book several appointments on the same day to make it easier for families to keep up with medical appointments and manage everyday life.