



Summer Newsletter

Mercy Health Foundation



Mercy Health
Foundation
Care first

December 2023

In this edition

- Jack's Birthday Gift to Mercy Health
- 2023 Christmas Appeal
- Lillian's legacy
- Mercy Palliative Care Helping Clients to Live Their Best Lives



Welcome from the **Mercy Health** **Foundation CEO**



As we approach the end of the year, there is a feeling in the air that feels distinct to Melbourne. It may be the emergence from another cold and dark winter, or the scent of pine needles and sunscreen wafting through the warm air, but it feels like we're turning a page on what has been an extremely difficult year for many.

I have also been reflecting on my first five months at Mercy Health Foundation, and I am filled with a sense of awe and gratitude for all that we have been able to accomplish together.

Despite the year's challenges, you have stepped up in extraordinary and unique ways to ensure Mercy Health continues to provide the highest quality care to those most in need. Thank you for your generosity and commitment.

As we prepare to welcome 2024, Mercy Health Foundation is positioned for real transformation. With your support, we will continue to invest in innovative projects, state-of-the-art technology, and life-saving research and care.

In the last few months alone, we have seen the impact of your generosity, with the newly developed Family Hub at Mercy Hospital for Women (MHW) that has been generously funded by Stephen Mitchell and his team at

Oak Capital. This revamped hub will provide a refuge for families with babies in the Special Care Nursery and Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

We have also seen the launch of the refurbished café, 'Biik-jorning, A Pleasant Place', on Level 4 at MHW. This new space is not just a physical space; it is a sanctuary for staff, patients, and their families to recharge, find solace, and regain the strength to continue with their days. Thank you to Chris and Viv at Café Adamo, and our many generous donors who made the opening of this space possible.

Speaking of extraordinary, I must mention Diana Nicholls, who recently ran not one but seven marathons in seven days to raise funds for Mercy Perinatal. Diana took on the challenge because of the care and support she received from the team at Mercy Perinatal when she experienced complications in her pregnancy with her twin girls, Adrian and Evie, who are now happy and healthy 6-year-olds!

It's incredibly moving to see someone channel their own experience into such a powerful act of gratitude. Thank you to Diana, who has raised over \$15,000 for Mercy Perinatal!

As Christmas approaches, it's a

time to celebrate compassion, kindness, and the joy of giving. Despite the unprecedented challenges we have seen this year, it's heartwarming to watch our community come together to support those who need it most. This festive season, we invite you to support our Christmas Appeal, echoing the Christmas spirit of hope and renewal for all sick babies and children in Mercy Health's care.

So, here's to the joy and the challenges, the achievements and the lessons of the past year. May your holidays be filled with peace and your New Year be transformative.

Thank you from all of us at Mercy Health Foundation and Mercy Health for your support.

Warmest wishes for a Merry Christmas and a safe and happy New Year.

Rebecca MacFarling

A handwritten signature of Rebecca MacFarling in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chief Executive Officer
Mercy Health Foundation

P.S. Every end-of-year contribution is a step toward making 2024 a landmark year for better health and well-being. I can't wait to see what we'll achieve together!

Jack's Birthday Gift to Mercy Health

In 2021, Sarah and Peter Handscomb were excited parents-to-be, with Sarah pregnant with her first child, Jack.

Sarah, a neuro-physiotherapist and equestrian, had experienced a normal pregnancy and was doing everything she enjoyed, including riding horses.

"We had a straightforward pregnancy up until the 20-week scan when they found that my cervix might have been a little bit short. At this point, I was still riding three horses a day, so obviously I had to stop that," Sarah says.

Along with treating her cervix, Sarah was also diagnosed with gestational diabetes.

Despite these hiccups, Sarah described her pregnancy as 'trotting along' until she was eight-months pregnant.

"At 31 weeks and five days, I was sitting on the couch and Jack gave me a massive kick and my waters broke," Sarah says.

Peter, a professional cricket player, was in Sri Lanka for work, so Sarah was home alone, driving herself to the Emergency Department (ED).

"I had a beautiful registrar in the ED, Ignatius. He was wonderful and I'd actually had him a couple of times previously in clinic. We did a few tests, and they confirmed my

waters had broken. So that meant that we did steroids immediately and got sent up to the ward and stayed there until Jack was born," Sarah says.

Peter was able to jump on a flight back home to be by Sarah's side in preparation for the birth of their child. Sarah went into spontaneous labour six days later and Jack was born prematurely. He then spent four-weeks in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and Special Care Nursery (SCN) at Mercy Hospital for Women (MHW).

Sarah and Peter never anticipated that Jack would be born prematurely, but they are so grateful for the care they received.

"We just want to pass on our huge thanks for the care Jack received. People were so loving towards him and so compassionate towards us. The level of care was fabulous."

"Now our little boy is thriving. He rides his bike for an hour at a time. We are so grateful for the staff at the Mercy and we hope that they're able to keep providing that care to other families in need," Sarah says.

In lieu of gifts for Jack's first birthday, the Handscomb's asked for donations to support the NICU and SCN.

"Given our experience, it was nice to be able to raise a bit of money to help with the Mercy because it



was a tough time for us. Anything we can do that helps other families during that time is amazing. And for Jack's first birthday, it was a pretty good present for him," Peter says.

Every year, Mercy Health provides care for 2,400 premature babies, like Jack.

This wonderful donation from the Handscomb family and their friends will help fund vital care and equipment needed to support tiny babies so they can grow, thrive and develop healthily.

If you would like to host your own fundraising event to support Mercy Health, please scan the QR code for more information.





Luniva, happy and thriving at home

2023 **Christmas** Appeal

Melbourne's western suburbs are experiencing rapid growth, especially among young families.

For many years, Werribee Mercy Hospital has been on the front lines, providing essential healthcare services to this booming community. But even as the community grows, the hospital faces significant challenges in paediatric care that require your support.

Associate Professor Kathy McMahon, Clinical Director Paediatrics at Werribee Mercy Hospital, shares the joy and rewards of working in this critical field.



A/Prof Kathy McMahon

"I really enjoy being a paediatrician because kids are great fun. They get better quickly. They're very

innocent, and they tell you things that they probably shouldn't tell you," A/Prof McMahon says.

This sentiment rings especially true when considering stories like that of baby Luniva.

Last December, Luniva was born eight weeks premature. Her initial weeks were spent in Werribee Mercy Hospital's Special Care Nursery.

After almost three weeks, her parents Supriya and Biplov were thrilled to bring their little girl home. However, their joy was short-lived.

Luniva woke up with irregular breathing and pale skin just a few weeks later and had to be rushed to Werribee Mercy Hospital's busy Emergency Department.

Thankfully, due to the immediate actions of a dedicated team of paediatric doctors and nurses, Luniva received life-saving resuscitation and was stabilised in time for further treatment. This dramatic episode highlights the life-or-death importance of quality paediatric care and its direct impact on families in our community.

The paediatric department in Werribee is live-saving for the local community, with its specialised paediatric emergency department and special care nursery.

"We've developed a fantastic paediatric unit and special care nursery in a huge multicultural area," A/Prof McMahon says.

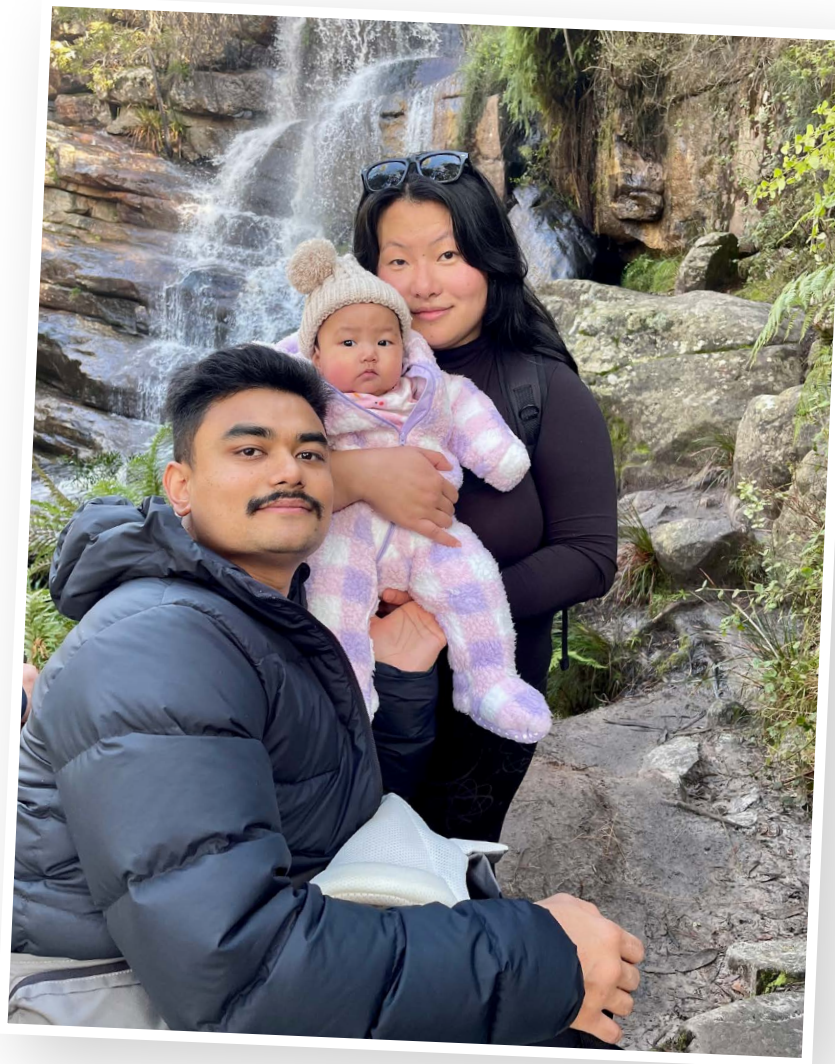
"We have a fantastic paediatric emergency department, which is a real game changer for local families."

With over 1,500 babies and children admitted to the paediatric wards and close to 10,000 young patients cared for in emergency situations, the department's work is crucial.

However, the department needs more than dedication and expertise; it requires financial support to meet the community's growing needs.

"We're going to be the size of Tasmania in the next ten years, yet we still have a developing unit here," A/Prof McMahon explains.

This need is all the more acute due to challenges with low health literacy and advocacy in the local community, making external support vital for continued development.



Luniva with her parents, Supriya and Biplov

This Christmas season presents a special opportunity to contribute. Your gift to Mercy Health Foundation will be instrumental in funding the most urgent priorities in paediatric care.

Your support could mean the world of difference for children like Luniva, and her mother Supriya, who is also a nurse at Werribee Mercy Hospital.

"That was our lucky day. We are so grateful to the incredible team of doctors and nurses at Mercy who saved Luniva's life," Supriya says.

Your generous support will help ensure that paediatric healthcare continues to meet the challenges faced by those in Melbourne's western suburbs.

Together, we can make a profound and lasting difference in the lives of families, ensuring that more children, like Luniva, get the life-saving care they need.

Please consider donating to Mercy Health Foundation this Christmas to bring joy to the lives of all sick and injured kids, and help fund the most urgent priorities in paediatric healthcare.



Scan the QR code to donate.



Peter, outside his family home, in his beloved Collingwood jersey.

Lillian's legacy

When Peter's beloved mother, Lillian (Lil) was diagnosed with advanced stage bowel cancer, it was a difficult time for the family. Lil required end-of-life care and her preference was to stay at home. During this time, Lil and her family experienced first-hand Mercy Health's *care first* approach.

"The care mum received from the Mercy Palliative Care nurses was phenomenal – these nurses went above and beyond what we ever expected. I remember one time when mum needed assistance during the middle of the night for pain management. The nurses came straight away and stayed with mum throughout the night, making her feel as comfortable as possible. They really were amazing," Peter says.

When Lil passed away, Peter and his father, Robert, found it difficult to cope with the loss.

The Mercy Health Palliative Care team offered grief counselling to



A photo of Peter's mum, Lil, that hangs in the kitchen of his home.

Peter and Robert, who took up the service.

"The Mercy grief counsellors were wonderful. They helped dad and I open up about our feelings of grief and loss. Their compassion, care and understanding really enabled us to get on with life. I will never forget it," Peter says.

After the extraordinary care Lil received, Peter was motivated to give back to the Mercy Health services that meant so much to him and his father.

Peter included a gift to Mercy Health Foundation in his Will to support others experiencing Mercy Health's compassionate end-of-life care.

"Leaving a gift in my Will to Mercy Health Foundation is my way of saying thank you to the Mercy Palliative Care staff who went above and beyond in the care they showed mum, and later dad, during the most challenging time in their lives," Peter says.

Peter's special acknowledgement will help many others facing a similar situation. It will allow Mercy Palliative Care to continue their care and service, ensuring each person can experience the best quality of life possible for them — physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.

How Donor Support Helps Palliative Care Clients to Live Their **Best Lives**

Every year, around 2,000 people are referred to Mercy Health's Palliative Care program, one of the largest in-community palliative care programs in Australia. At any time, this dedicated and passionate team are providing life-changing care to 500-600 people in the West, supporting them to live comfortably, even in the most difficult moments.

Matthew was referred into the Mercy Palliative Care (MPC) program in 2019, after 22-years battling a debilitating tumour.

Diagnosed at 15-years-old, Matthew was given six months to live, but his fighting spirit, and the support of his family and friends, allowed Matthew to live his life until he was 37 – a true testament to his fierce sense of independence and fighting spirit.

Kirsten, a physiotherapist at MPC, and a key member of Matthew's care team, worked with him and his family to access the services, equipment and support needed to ensure he could live his best life while he could.

"When I first started working with Matthew, he had no NDIS coverage and wasn't eligible under My Aged Care. He was one of those tricky ones where we had no other options for funding, so we needed to access funds from the Mercy Health Foundation's urgent need fund," Kirsten says.

Mercy Health Foundation's urgent need fund is supported by a donor community, committed to enabling the best care for people in palliative care. Donor funds support

equipment, education, care and new programs. Donors can have a huge impact on the way people live well during their final days.

Funding equipment for palliative care clients, like Matthew, has an enormous impact on quality of life, and when the financial burden is removed it helps people to accept the need for further support.

"A lot of the time people are very reluctant because they're not wanting to accept change in declining function. So, they're putting it off and saying 'no, we don't really need that', whereas when they get it, it's actually really helpful," Kirsten says.

"Matthew was on board by the end and his mum and dad were extremely grateful for the support, the patience, the guidance and the education that they received, because it allowed them to keep Matthew at home longer, which was his wish," Kirsten says.

Matthew's parents, Sue and Peter, cannot speak highly enough of the care that Matthew, and their family, received.

"Matthew's internal struggle was difficult... to give up and allow someone else to care for him, for him to trust the palliative care team, it was a huge step, and I cannot speak highly enough of the team and all they did," Sue says.

"To go through an experience like that, a parent shouldn't have to lose a child, but to know we were supported 24/7 was amazing. They are very special people – they are angels."



Because of the support of the MPC team, Matthew was able to live out his wish of dying at home, surrounded by his family in his own bed.

"Matthew wanted to be at home and to be with the family. He had so much spirit and he fought the demon inside him for as long as he could.

"We feel at peace knowing that Matthew was able to achieve his wishes... he has inspired us to keep going," Sue says.

By supporting Mercy Palliative Care, you are joining a special donor community and enabling more people like Matthew to live their best lives while they can. Your donation will go towards funding vital equipment, services and support, and will alleviate undue pressure on already struggling families during very difficult times.



Scan the QR to donate today.



Mercy Health
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Join us for the

2024 Mercy Health Foundation Golf Day

Tuesday 28 May 2024 | Kingston Heath Golf Club

To register your interest please contact the team at Mercy Health Foundation
03 8416 7766 | foundation@mercy.com.au | mercyhealthfoundation.org.au



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to get started

Mercy Health Foundation, Level 2, 12 Shelley Street, Richmond Vic 3121
Phone: 03 8416 7766 | Email: foundation@mercy.com.au | Web: mercyhealthfoundation.org.au