

September 29, 2014

Child and Family Health Centres Celebrate 90 years in the District

Child and Family Health Centres across South Western Sydney Local Health District are celebrating 90 years of care with a series of local events.

The celebrations are part of a state-wide recognition of the services provided by child and family health nurses over the past century, who have cared in some capacity for almost all of the 7.4 million babies born in the state over the past 100 years.

The first service in NSW was opened in Alexandria on 24th August, 1914. By the early 1980s, there were about 500 Early Childhood Health Centres in the state.

These included the opening of a clinic in Bankstown in 1924, Bowral in 1932, Camden in 1938, Campbelltown in 1939, and Fairfield in 1946.

Today, child and family health nurses in Centres across the South Western Sydney Local Health District are registered nurses with specialist qualifications in child and family health nursing as well as midwifery.

They work in 44 dedicated centres and clinics run in local schools in the District, providing a free service for new parents; health, development and wellbeing checks for children aged from birth to five; and home visiting services.

Director of Child and Family Clinical Services for Community Health in the District, Wendy Geddes, said child and family health nursing has come a long way since the District's first centre in 1924.

"Records from 100 years ago show there was a real focus on reducing infant mortality – as more than 100 out of every 1,000 children born alive died before they turned one," Ms Geddes said.

"Now, those figures have significantly improved, thanks to a combination of factors including better education about health and development and improved antenatal support."

In 2014, Child and Family Health Nurses still provide enormous support for new parents, including breastfeeding, infant nutrition, education on the importance of hygiene in the first year and monitoring baby's growth and development.

"When a Child and Family Health nurse meets with a family, they are not just thinking about health as an absence of disease, but as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being," Ms Geddes said.

Ambarvale mother Monique Mei attends the Macarthur Square Early Childhood Clinic with her 11-month-old baby Zuri and said the support she receives is extremely helpful.

“It’s an exciting time being a new mum: every day I learn something new about Zuri and the nurses have really helped guide me,” Mrs Mei said.

“I have been taking Zuri to the Clinic since her birth for all of her checks: they weigh her; check her height and head circumference; check that she’s eating and sleeping properly; and check that all her reflexes are good.

“I’m learning so much as a first-time mum so I always look forward to learning new things and getting extremely helpful advice from the nurses when we visit.”

Mrs Mei said she is grateful for the personable service.

“It would definitely be harder without the centre and the wonderful resources.”

Local Events:

An historical display will be visiting the following places throughout the coming weeks, with items including old photographs, nursing equipment, uniforms, and reference and advice books from Child and Family Health centres across the past 90 years in the District.

Narellan Library: August 28th

Liverpool Library: September 3rd

Cambramatta Library: September 10th

Bankstown Library and Knowledge Centre: September 18th

For more details or to arrange interviews, please contact the South Western Sydney Local Health District’s Media and Communications Unit on 9828-6848.