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Study identifies developmental delays early

A South Western Sydney Local Health District researcher is helping change the narrative for children who start primary school with developmental vulnerabilities without any intervention.

Picking up developmental delays early is Professor Valsamma Eapen's key focus for the Watch Me Grow study. Research like Professor Eapen's study is a focal point for the District; there are only weeks until the annual Health Beyond Research & Innovation Showcase puts an even bigger spotlight on achievements.

Leading the South Western Sydney Local Health District Academic Unit of Child Psychiatry, based at Liverpool Hospital, Professor Eapen said the study aimed to engage parents to monitor and promote child development through exploring motor, emotional, social, language and other milestones.

"In Australia, nearly a quarter of children who start primary school will have developmental vulnerabilities - most of them will have had no intervention," she said.

Professor Eapen said her research has shown children from disadvantaged backgrounds were at a higher developmental risk, falling through the cracks and missing out on early identification.

To address this, her program uses the regular contact parents make with their GPs for their preschool children to check development.

Parents are asked to fill out a questionnaire about their child's development while they wait for their GP check-up, and the results along with further guidance on how to best support them, is transmitted by email to the parent.

The results and recommendations are also provided to the GP so the consultation can address any concerns.

Candice Thomas, from Currans Hill, said as a result, she had been able to compare her daughter's milestones with those recommended.

"It's great having that sort of tool at your disposal," Ms Thomas said.

Initial research provided evidence that led to the world-first program of the development and utilisation of the Watch Me Grow web app.

"By using it in primary care and community settings and by going to "wherever the children go", it is hoped no child will be left behind," Professor Eapen said.

The Health Beyond Research & Innovation Showcase, held on June 5 and 6, will be held at the William Inglis – Mgallery by Sofitel, Warwick Farm. The two-day event highlights the amazing medical research and innovation underway in southwestern Sydney.