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Royal Far West
supports children's
health, country-wide



A dedicated research unit with a focus on collaborative research projects is playing an important role in propelling 94 year old charity Royal Far West (RFW) into the forefront of digital health and telecare.

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RFW's long history belies a modern, evidence-based approach to service delivery, capacity building and advocacy. An organisational reform and refresh in 2012, led by CEO Lindsay Cane, made the commitment to demonstrating efficiency and effectiveness of all services. RFW began piloting its Telecare (aka telehealth) program in 2013 to expand its reach, with evaluation in partnership with University of Sydney. Since then RFW specialist paediatric developmental, behavioural and mental health services have been provided via telecare in over 120 rural and remote schools.

Research initiatives are now a strategic priority at RFW, with the internal team working closely with funding, academic and other research partners. This includes partnership on a five-year NHMRC funded research project led by Professor Mark Dadds through the Child Behaviour Research Clinic at the University of Sydney. This research focused on a randomised control trial of Access EI, an early intervention program for Conduct Disorders adapted for on-line delivery, compared to in-person delivery, which has shown positive results.

More recently RFW has partnered on a mixed methods evaluation of RFW Telecare (Telehanced) under a two-year NHMRC funded Translating Research into Practice (TRIP) fellowship. Led by Associate Professor Alexandra Martiniuk from the University of Sydney, embedded at RFW for the duration of this fellowship, Alexandra says 'I cannot overstate the value of having research so closely tied with real life, especially in the digital health space, where things are changing so rapidly' Kim Casburn, RFW's Head of Research and Service Innovation explains 'The RFW Research team is constantly improving the way that we translate new knowledge into practice. Our diverse partnerships play an important role in this process'.

RESEARCH INFORMING PRACTICE AND POLICY

In 2016, recognising a gap in child development indicators for rural and remote areas beyond the Australian Early Childhood Development Census (AEDC), RFW commissioned the Murdoch Children's Research Institute's The Centre for Community Child Health to research the state of country children's health and

development in Australia. This resulted in the Invisible Children Report which has led to a series of town hall style meetings in regional communities to discuss the findings. Buoyed by the impact this research has had on decision makers, policymakers and funders, RFW has strengthened its research program and links to industry, population and clinical research and evaluation. Research-informed service design and delivery, as well as policy and advocacy priorities for system-wide change, are now fundamental to how RFW conducts business.

This body of work has led to a 2017 partnership with Charles Sturt University (CSU), commencing with a 12-month research and development project to build a business case for a National Paediatric Telecare Service. A separate partnership led by Southern NSW Local Health District (LHD) has been funded by the NSW Health Translational Research Grants Scheme, to be implemented in partnership with Murrumbidgee LHD and RFW. The Telehealth Approach to Getting on Track in Time (Got It!) aims to understand the feasibility of adapting an early intervention program for behaviour challenges for delivery via telehealth for rural and remote schools who may otherwise not receive this intervention.

KEY RESEARCH THEMES

RFW's current research priorities focus on improved outcomes for children:

- Ensuring that existing RFW services are evidence based;
 - Creating new evidence demonstrating outcomes of RFW Telecare;
 - Early intervention for childhood mental health concerns;
 - Strategies to increase parental capability; and
 - Exploring the impact of early childhood trauma experiences.
- Underpinning research at RFW is the importance of an evidence base to support solutions for isolated communities which currently have little or no access to services. RFW's CEO, Lindsay Cane is determined to 'continue to explore, ask the hard questions and go to hard places in order to create solutions for children and communities that deserve the same service access as other Australians.'

More details on RFW's Research and Advocacy platform are available at [Royal Far West](#).

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