

SUMMARY REPORT

2017-2018



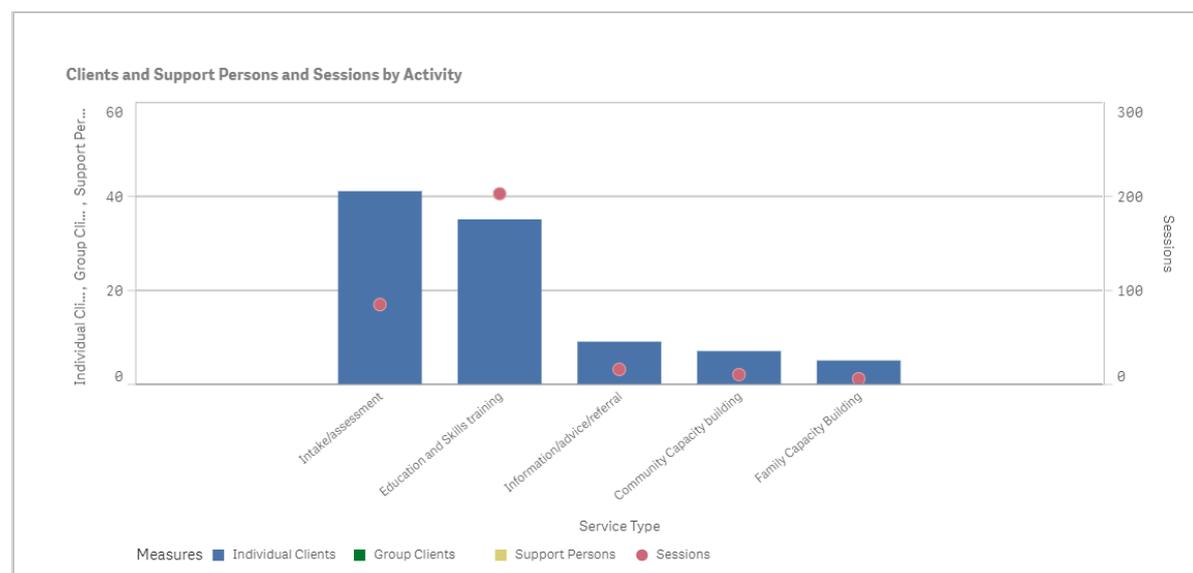
**THERAPY
CONNECT ALLIANCE**

Speech Pathology | Psychology | Occupational Therapy

Therapy Connect Alliance has provided a multidisciplinary team service to disadvantaged and vulnerable children (aged from birth to the end of Grade 2) in the 2484 postcode (and the Burringbar community) since September, 2015. The following summary evaluation report outlines our services, activities, reviews and outcomes of evaluations over the 2017-2018 Financial Year.

1. Service Activities

The Therapy Connect team have engaged in a variety of activities to meet the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable children and their families. The table below outlines the number of sessions dedicated to the service categories on the Data Exchange system (e.g. intake/assessment, education & skills training, info/advice/referral and capacity building (families, community and advocacy/support) over the 12-month recording period.

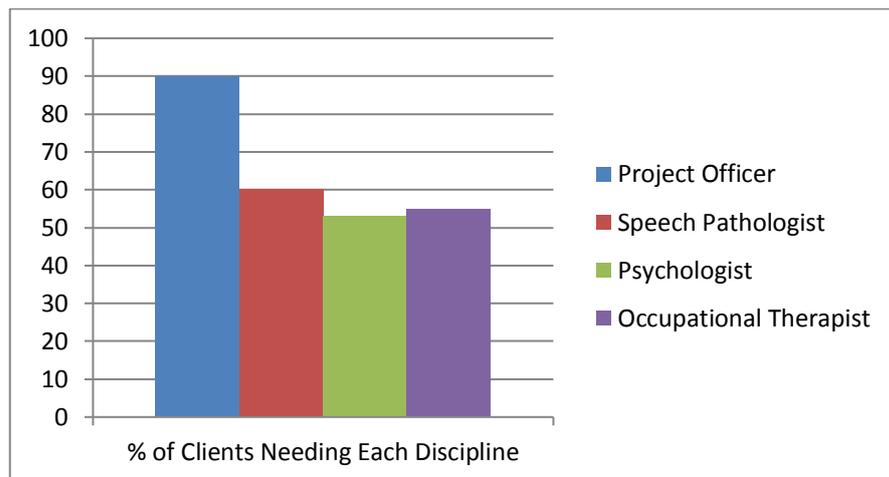


In addition to these service activities, the team has provided additional services that are essential in meeting the needs of clients and the Murwillumbah community which are not captured on the data exchange system. Many of these services are indirect clinical services and involve collaborating, liaising, supporting and consulting with families, referral agents, other allied health professionals, educators, funding bodies and medical specialists. These services include:

- phone calls and email correspondence (parents, early childhood staff, school teaching staff, other specialists)
- report writing
- diagnostic reports and letters for funding bodies,
- resource preparation for teacher aides, teachers and parents
- goal setting
- training educators in strategies to assist
- training student mentors to implement intervention
- liaising and meeting with other health professionals, educators and community agencies within the child's team
- attending networking meetings with fellow CfC projects, referral agencies and community agencies

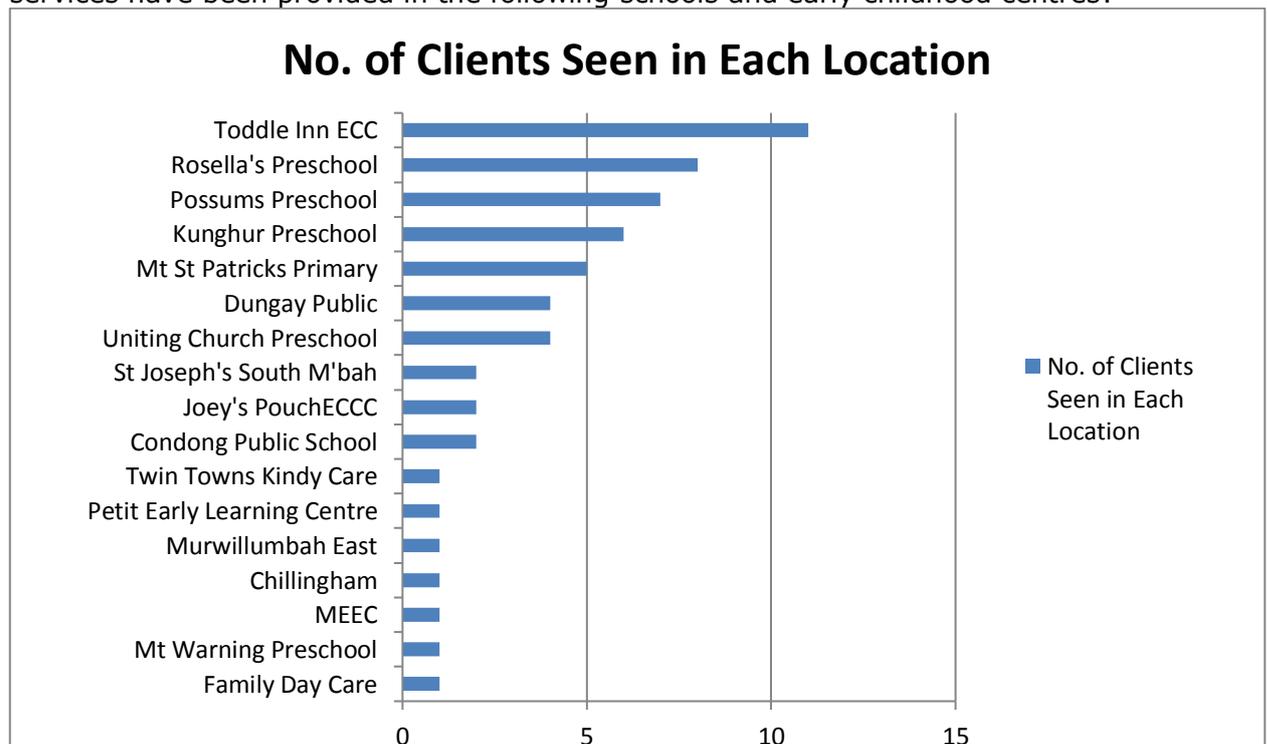
Service Disciplines

Therapy Connect provides a multidisciplinary team that comprises a project officer, speech pathologist, occupational therapist and psychologist. 40% of clients required only an isolated therapy discipline (e.g. speech pathology only), 39% of clients required two therapy disciplines (e.g. occupational therapy and speech pathology) and 21% of clients required all three therapy disciplines. Almost all clients had an intake meeting with the project officer with the exception of clients requiring a diagnostic psychology assessment only, parents with challenging behaviours or parents with significant mental health difficulties who had their intake meeting with the psychologist on the team. The following reflects the relative percentage of clients requiring each of the service disciplines:



Service Centres

Therapy Connect team members have travelled far and wide across the 2484 postcode in order to flexibly meet the needs of children and their families. Our services have been provided in the following schools and early childhood centres:



Service Capacity

The Therapy Connect team are a hard-working, dedicated team of professionals who are committed to achieving positive outcomes for children, families and the community. The following table outlines their individual service capacity and time management within their allocated hours each week as well as their typical donation of unpaid work to the project (tabulated in June, 2018).

Average Stats (each week)	Project Officer	Speech Pathologist	Psychologist	Occupational Therapist
Allocated hours/week	7.5hrs	8.5	6.5	6.5
No.clients/week (term time)	1	5	2.5	3
Average session length	2 hrs	.75min	1 hours	1.25hrs
Direct clinical client time	2.5 hours	3.75 hours	2 hours	3 hours
Indirect clinical client time	3 hours	3 hours	2 hours	2 hours
Travel time	1.0 hours	1.5 hours	1.5 hours	1.5 hours
Non-clinical admin time	1 hours	1 hour	1 hour	1 hours
Unpaid hours donated	0 hours	1 hour	0 hours	1 hours
TOTAL HOURS (Paid and Unpaid)	7.5 hours	11 hours	6.5 hours	7.5 hours

Service Intensity and Longevity

Therapy Connect was designed as a time-limited service to meet the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable children with developmental delays. Children have typically received weekly, fortnightly, monthly or termly session frequencies. Typical speech pathology, occupational therapy and psychology treatment blocks have included 5-6 sessions in a six month period. Where an evidence base existed and the need was established, children with severe speech and language disorders or children with complex developmental profiles or complex family factors were additionally offered up to 15 sessions over a 6 month period. Children were only typically treated during term times.

In 2017, the Therapy Connect team established a guide for treatment intensity and longevity with children to be restricted to an initial block of therapy for two terms. At the cessation of this initial treatment block the team decide whether a continuation of this treatment block is recommended or whether capacity building within the educational setting should be prioritised as a better direction for the child to support sustainability in the long term. In the 2017/2018 financial year, 4 clients were offered continuing regular weekly or fortnightly therapy services past the two term recommended treatment block and all of these clients required speech pathology intervention.

Service Flexibility

Our Therapy Connect team has demonstrated service flexibility over the past 12 months in order to meet the needs of families and educational settings. Our services have been provided in homes, early childhood settings, schools, the Murwillumbah Community Centre, our private allied health clinics and also at local cafes. Although all of our team only work 1 day each week, they have been able to juggle their Therapy Connect commitments amongst their other work activities to ensure that they can see children on the days that they attend their educational settings or on the days that families are available. Our team has also been responsive to needs by immediately being able to allocate our flexible

funding provision to those services that have periods of high demand (e.g. speech pathology services or diagnostic psychology assessment services). Our team has also been innovative in doing joint assessment sessions (e.g. speech pathologist and occupational therapist assess in the same session) as well as joint therapy sessions in order to best support children and enable efficiency of services. The inherent flexibility in our team leads to a responsive service that can meet the unique needs of the families within the 2484 postcode.

2. Client Profile

Of the children referred to Therapy Connect from July, 2017 to June, 2018, 54 were deemed eligible and 3 were deemed ineligible. The reasons for ineligibility included:

- Child already has existing speech pathology or occupational therapy services in place at Murwillumbah Community Health Centre
- Family receiving another private therapy service

The demographics of the 54 children who went on to receive services from Therapy Connect over the past 12 months were:

- 30% girls and 70% boys
- 48% 0-4 years Age and 52% 5-8 years Age
- 10% of children are identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Children with speech and language delays, fine motor delays, attentional difficulties, behavioural difficulties and social emotional difficulties.
- Children with disabilities such as: autism spectrum disorder, global developmental delay, hearing impairment, cerebral palsy and other rarer syndromes

As of the 30th June, 2018 the Therapy Connect caseload includes 23 children ready to continue active intervention services in the new financial year.

2. Client Outcomes and Service Satisfaction

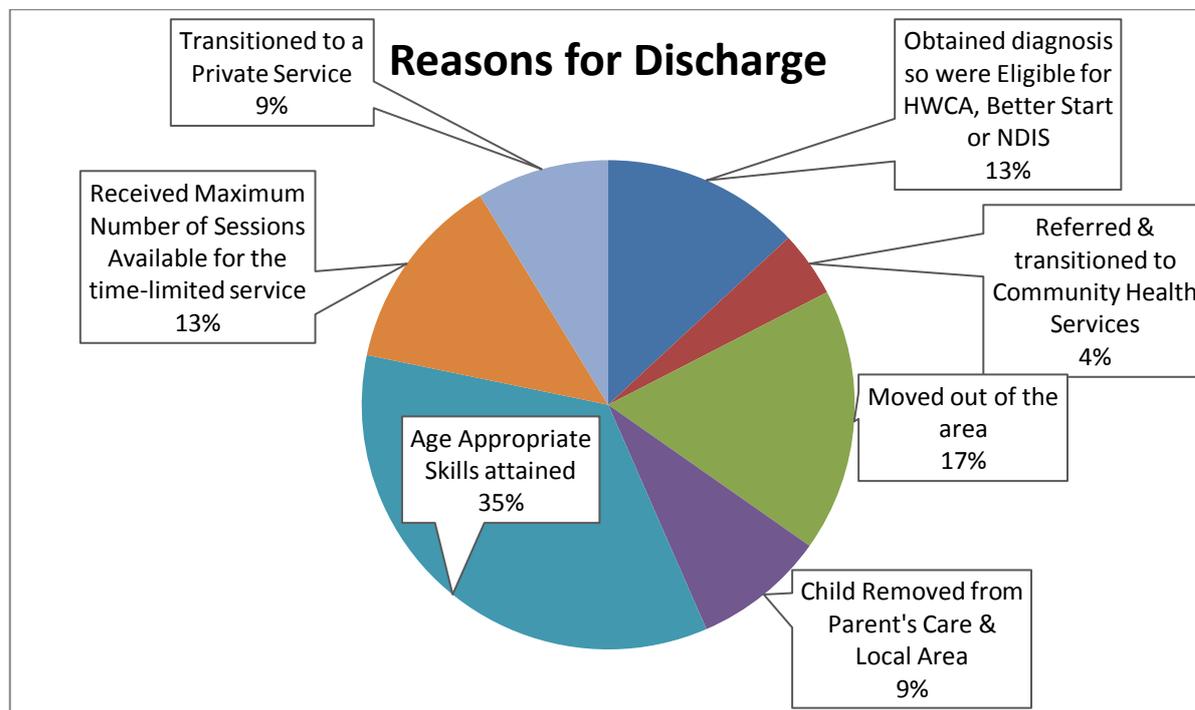
Client Outcomes – Progress against GAS goals

Every client that receives an assessment and/or therapy service through Therapy Connect has specific, measurable goals set by the Therapy Connect team for their period of intervention, under the protocol set by the Goal Attainment Scale (GAS). Goals are measured on a 5 point scale with -2 reflecting the child's starting point against the goal, -1 reflecting progress towards the set goal, 0 reflecting the measurable, set goal and +1 and +2 reflecting abilities that exceed the set goal. This protocol was chosen for Therapy Connect in order to measure the effectiveness of change against goals, across different therapy disciplines.

On 30th June, 2018, data was collated for 53 children who have progressed from intake to discharge with Therapy Connect, had goals set at the commencement of their service and who had completed a block of an assessment and/or treatment service. Aggregate pre-intervention and post-intervention scores were computed for each child using the Goal Attainment Scaling formula. This included examining clinical significance of change (>30%) for pre- and post-GAS scores. Of the sample of 53 children, **clinically significant change and/or attainment of goals was identified for all children in the sample.**

Discharge Pathways

Twenty three (23) children were discharged from the Therapy Connect service over the past 12 months. The attached chart reflects the reasons for discharge:



Parent Satisfaction

Parent Satisfaction Questionnaire (n=9). Regrettably, as of 30th June 2018, Therapy Connect has had a very low return rate for the post intervention parent satisfaction questionnaires. Our team are attempting alternate protocols and procedures (e.g. improved communication by therapy team regarding expectations at discharge, therapy team rather than project officer to facilitate completion of forms at last session, project officer to schedule a face-to-face meeting with parents to facilitate completion of forms) to attempt to ensure a higher return rate for these post intervention evaluation measures to enable the collation of more meaningful, substantial evaluation data from parents. Nonetheless the outcome data from the parent questionnaires completed at discharge from our service has been extremely positive with all respondents reporting high ratings (ratings of 5,6,7 on a 7-point likert scale) for all questions on the topic themes of: quality of input, type of intervention and support, child's needs met, teacher needs met, amount of support, satisfaction with the input, likely to refer again, generalisation of skills, useful and practical strategies provided, ease of implementation for teachers, knowledge and skills of Therapy Connect staff and communication with Therapy Connect staff.

Teacher Satisfaction

Teacher Satisfaction Questionnaire (n=17). The outcome data has been extremely positive with all respondents reporting high ratings (ratings of 5,6,7 on a 7-point likert scale) for all questions on the topic themes of – quality of input, type of intervention and support, child's needs met, teacher needs met, amount of support, satisfaction with the input, likely to refer again, generalisation of skills, useful and practical strategies provided, ease of implementation for

teachers, knowledge and skills of Therapy Connect staff, communication with Therapy Connect staff.

Teachers reported that they were highly satisfied with the quality and amount of intervention and support provided, and that they would approach the service for support in the future. They felt that the therapists had met their and the child's needs, and that they were now able to support the referred children more effectively. They felt that strategies were useful and practical, and readily able to be implemented by staff. There was high level of satisfaction with the service reported by early childhood staff, and they felt that project staff were knowledgeable and skilful; and interacted with staff in a professional manner.

Referral Agent Satisfaction

Therapy Connect has made contact with the parents and early childhood workers that have referred into our service and sought feedback on our service overall in terms of: ease of referral, timely responses to referrals, professional follow-up communication and satisfaction with the program. All referral agents indicated a high to very high degree of satisfaction with Therapy Connect's referral process, responses, communication and professionalism.

Complaints

Therapy Connect has received no formal complaints about its service during the past 12 months.

3. Staff Capacity and Retention

Therapy Connect has been able to provide a stable, high quality, experienced and collaborative team of therapists who are dedicated to the long term provision of services. Our team has between 5 and 32 years of experience in their respective fields and they are the same team that commenced the project 3 years ago. The following measures have contributed to the retention of such a skilled workforce and their long term commitment to Therapy Connect:

- Appropriate remuneration to attract and retain experienced staff (ie. On the HPSS award – Level 2 for Project Officer and Level 4 for therapists)
- Provision for admin expenses to the psychologist and occupational therapist which appropriately compensate these business owners for their expenses in delivering the project
- Flexible work practices in terms of days, times and places of work
- The longevity of the working clinical relationship of the team (12 years)
- Regular team meeting opportunities
- Appropriate use of technology to connect the team and records despite different base clinic locations
- Commitment to staff training and professional development opportunities (e.g. We Thinkers Social Skills program)

4. Collaboration with Other Agencies

The Therapy Connect team regularly meet, liaise, consult and collaborate with allied health, medical and educational staff across a wide diversity of organisations in order to meet the needs of our clients who have team services spread across a range of organisations. The organisations we have collaborated with to integrate services for families include:

- Local State, Independent and Catholic Schools
- Early Childhood Settings
- Family Day Care

- Local Paediatricians and other Medical Specialists (e.g. Ear, Nose and Throat Specialists, Audiologists or Neurologists)
- Allied health and speech pathology colleagues in Community Health
- Family and Community Services (FACS)
- The Family Centre
- Brighter Futures
- Shaping Outcomes Early Intervention Service
- Inclusion Support Agency
- Other private allied health providers
- YWCA Australia
- Other community organisations in the 2484 postcode (include fellow CfC programs)

5. Our Good News Stories

STORY 1 – Hearing Impairment Identified

A 5 year old child was referred by his early childhood teacher due to concerns about his speech clarity as he was to transition to school in three months. The Therapy Connect speech pathologist assessed the child and identified the presence of a severe speech sound disorder and a mild-moderate expressive language disorder which placed him at significant risk for later learning difficulties. The speech pathologist recommended a hearing test due to the severity of the child's difficulties as this had not been covered in the child's previous service with a community agency. Therapy Connect supported the family to find an agency in the community to conduct the hearing assessment and the child was subsequently identified as having a significant bilateral, sensorineural hearing loss necessitating the use of bilateral hearing aides. The speech pathologist also identified that the child had additional difficulties with his body awareness which impacted his attention and focus. He was then assessed by the occupational therapist in the Therapy Connect Team who provided several sessions of therapy which has had a positive impact on his attention and progress in his overall intervention and learning. Therapy Connect's diligence, perseverance and advocacy ensured that a young boy had his hearing impairment identified which enabled hearing aides to be fitted. The young boy was then able to make more substantial progress and gains in his speech, language and learning in his first year of school. The team is continuing to advocate for this child by liaising with the school principal and parent regarding engaging the Itinerant Support Teacher for Hearing through the Education Department.





STORY 2 – A Team Effort in Diagnosis and Facilitating Community Supports
Therapy Connect were instrumental in diagnosing, treating and advocating for ongoing sustainable services through the NDIS and the Educational system for an 8 year old girl with a history of significant communication, learning, fine motor and attention issues who comes from a vulnerable and disadvantaged single parent family with older siblings also presenting with learning difficulties. Therapy Connect had been engaged with the child since she was in kindergarten. Therapy Connect provided weekly speech therapy and occupational therapy, as well as capacity building for her teaching team and School Principal. Therapy Connect aided early referral to a Paediatrician which resulted in the child being medicated to aid her attention. Therapy Connect also worked with NSW Education Department to obtain results of her cognitive assessment which were crucial for a referral into NDIS. The child's parent was supported to apply for NDIS Access and at the time of writing, the child's parent had attended a NDIS planning meeting and was awaiting receipt of a package to support the child's ongoing needs.

Quote from class teacher during the course of intervention... *"That is fantastic news that you will be able to continue the speech program. I can see the difference that the regular input you have had such a positive effect on the student."*

STORY 3 – Connecting and Supporting a Challenging Family
Therapy Connect worked tirelessly to support two boys from a complex and vulnerable family located in a very remote, rural setting who had disconnected from almost all other community services in their community except their community preschool and our Therapy Connect service.

Quote from the boy's preschool teacher: *I just wanted to take the opportunity to say how grateful we are for your services as it allows children in our area to have*

access to the professional staff that works within Therapy Connect. We have had a close working relationship with both the speech pathologist and occupational therapist over the past 2 years as they worked with 2 young boys that attended our Pre-School. The positive changes in these young boys in all areas of their development was because the therapists went above and beyond to build a relationship with them both that showed them trust and acceptance that then allowed them to open up and accept their guidance. Although the boys are no longer here they have now got much needed skills that will take them further in their Early Childhood Journey.

STORY 4 – Age Appropriate Skills Attained

Therapy Connect worked with a student for 12 months through their Kindergarten and Grade 1 years. While the student had been identified as having communication difficulties prior to school entry, these difficulties had not been assessed or treated until the Therapy Connect team became involved. The student was from a low socio-economic background and her family had experience of mental health difficulties and family trauma (which included personal loss, eviction from home and home relocation as a result of 2017 flooding event). The student was given 5 terms of individual direct therapy, on a weekly basis at school to remediate her significant speech difficulties and enhance her literacy skills. Her mother attended approximately 60% of sessions and participated in activities to enhance her child's speech. Her mother was given home practice resources and how to use these at home with her child. The mother's confidence to help her child increased significantly over time and she developed skills in how to become a good model of correct speech production for her child. Two student buddies (year 6 students) were trained by the Speech Pathologist to deliver practice sessions to the child before school each day. These student peers and the child all reported enjoying the experience. The student was discharged from our Therapy Connect service with age appropriate speech development.

Quote from teacher..."This has been an unbelievably generous opportunity of an extra semester from Therapy Connect to continue with the student's speech development from Kindergarten into Yr1 and to build on the skills and to consistently practise them with the therapist each week which is the key to consolidating and maintaining her development in this area. Also the buddy system that was implemented was extremely beneficial. Everything about this program has been extremely professional."

The Principal reported being *"thrilled to have this wonderful service"* at school. The therapists' *"knowledge, professionalism, flexibility and commitment have been nothing short of brilliant and we are truly grateful."*

The Parent reported ... *"thank you for everything you've done"*



The Therapy Connect Team thanks YWCA Australia and the Department of Social Services (DSS) for the opportunity to provide such an innovative, high quality and invaluable service to the disadvantaged and vulnerable children and their families within the 2484 postcode.