



**BALLARAT**  
FOUNDATION

# IMPACT IN ACTION



## Mental Health: Healing through play



29.3% of people feel lonely, 25.8% higher than the Victorian average



Ballarat citizens are 34% more likely to seek help for mental health



Suicide rate in Ballarat is 40.7% higher than the Victorian average



Long term mental health conditions in youth is 55% higher in Ballarat compared to Victorian average

Children experiencing family violence often carry the impacts of trauma long after the violence itself has ended. Many experience anxiety, emotional dysregulation, disrupted schooling, social isolation, and difficulty trusting adults or feeling safe in community settings. For parents and carers, recovery can involve trying to support children through complex emotions while also rebuilding safety and stability within their own lives.

For families supported through WRISC's programs opportunities for positive family connection and safe social participation can be limited. Financial pressures, transport barriers, and the emotional impacts of trauma can make school holiday activities inaccessible, while traditional feedback processes often struggle to capture children's experiences in ways that feel safe and developmentally appropriate.

With support from the Ballarat Foundation community impact grant, WRISC delivered a Family Fun Day designed to reduce these barriers while creating a welcoming and trauma-informed space for children and carers to connect, play, and be heard.

### Program response

The Family Fun Day was intentionally designed to be accessible, child-led, and relationship-focused. Attendance was free, lunch was provided, and transport support was available for families who needed assistance to attend. Rather than relying solely on written surveys, WRISC created creative feedback stations where children could express themselves through art, movement, games, and conversation.

## **Finding voice through play**

The day included activities such as painting, gymnastics, outdoor play, creative stations, and quiet sensory spaces, including a Chill Room and time with Spot, the therapy dog. A sticker reward system encouraged children and carers to participate together across multiple activities, helping families engage in a low-pressure and positive environment.

Importantly, the event was not simply about entertainment. It was designed to help children recovering from violence feel safe enough to participate, express emotions, connect with others, and contribute their voices to shaping future services.

Children reported strong feelings of safety and emotional regulation throughout the program:

- 100% of children reported feeling safe
- 100% reported feeling calmer
- 86% reported feeling more confident or able to be themselves

For many families, these outcomes represented more than enjoyment on the day. They reflected opportunities for children to experience emotional safety, positive social participation, and moments of normality during recovery from trauma.

One parent reflected on the impact of the service by saying, “Seeing her express herself and having that understood and seeing her empowered.” Another said “after the fun day, P feels comfortable enough to always express her feelings. Good or bad.”

## **Outcomes**

### ***Foundation Outcome 1 - Reduce disadvantage in the Ballarat region***

Many children and families attending the Family Fun Day were experiencing the overlapping impacts of family violence, trauma, financial stress, and social isolation. The project reduced

practical barriers to participation by making the event free, providing food, and offering transport assistance for families who may otherwise have been unable to attend.

### ***Foundation Outcome 2 - Increased community connection and cohesion***

The Family Fun Day created a safe and welcoming environment where children, carers, and staff could connect through shared experiences rather than crisis response alone. Activities encouraged participation, movement, creativity, and relationship-building, while carers were able to engage alongside their children in a supportive setting.

Children consistently identified play, creativity, movement, and time with Spot the therapy dog as some of the most valued parts of the day. Comments such as “Playing with the toys!”, “I liked painting”, and “Going on the trampoline!” reflected the importance of joyful and low-pressure experiences in helping children reconnect socially and emotionally.

Staff also observed high engagement across the creative feedback stations, with the sticker reward system increasing participation and encouraging families to move through activities together. The Chill Room and therapy dog space provided important regulation and sensory support, helping children participate safely and confidently.

The day created opportunities for families to come together in positive interactions with a focus on “You told us, we heard you” feedback loop for families. This gave guardians tools to help improve communication in the family and where to seek services and pathways when things weren’t going well.

## **Why this matters**

The WRISC Family Fun Day demonstrates that recovery from family violence is not only about crisis intervention. It is also about rebuilding

confidence, trust, safety, belonging, and opportunities for positive connection.

For children who have experienced trauma, feeling safe enough to play, express emotions, and participate socially can represent an important step toward healing. The project also demonstrated that children's voices are more likely to emerge when feedback is creative, relational, and grounded in trust rather than formal or adult-led processes.

The Ballarat Foundation's support helped create an accessible and affirming environment where children and their guardians could connect, participate, and contribute to shaping future services. At the same time, the project strengthened WRISC's ability to use lived experience and child-led feedback to improve how support is delivered for families recovering from violence.

*Photos front and back cover: Stock images*



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