

## END RHD Communities (SP Plus) A rheumatic heart prevention project

### Welcome to our May 2020 Update

Well, times have changed with the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the sensible travel restrictions, the community-based project staff, Anne-Marie and Valerina, have not been able to visit Darwin, and project manager, Angela, has been unable to visit communities.

There has been a lot of communication via phone and fax while our community-based researchers continue visiting their participants!



Angela, Vicki, Valerina + the rarely seen Horses of Milikapiti

In early March, Anna Ralph, Chief Investigator, Vicki Kerrigan, Qualitative Researcher, and Angela, flew over to magical Mili for a two day visit. Vicki was able to chat with participants in the project, and Anna presented the clinic staff with an update on the project, and how it fits in with national and global strategies to reduce acute rheumatic fever.



Milikapiti departure lounge

## Barunga and Manyalluluk



*Reggie manages a team of locals to run the laundry*

The Barunga Community Laundry, funded by the Aboriginal Investment Group, opened in February 2019.

Anne-Marie, and the laundry's manager, Reggie, report that washing large bedding items is very popular - and there is even a pick-up and drop-off service! People are coming from nearby Wugularr to launder their sheets, blankets and doonas too.

A yarning circle meeting was held at Barunga in late November 2019. Three carers of children who have had acute rheumatic fever came along to talk about rheumatic heart issues and chat about the project.



*Tanya and Khalia*



*The laundry is situated next to the community shop*



*Tracey and Anne-Marie*



## Project Staff News



Valerina Mungatopi enjoyed a microscopy session with Dr. Robyn Marsh at Menzies in Darwin. Valerina was amazed at what she saw in the slides - particularly slides of stuff on teeth! This microscope will travel out to communities with slides of the Strep A germ that causes acute rheumatic fever.

Early this year, Anne Marie Lee and other health workers completed a two-week course on using hand-held echo machines, run by Dr. Josh Francis. Anne-Marie assisted in screening at Wadeye after completing the training.

**"I have a much better understanding of how the heart valves are affected by the Strep germ and can explain better to my patients and their families".**



## Other News

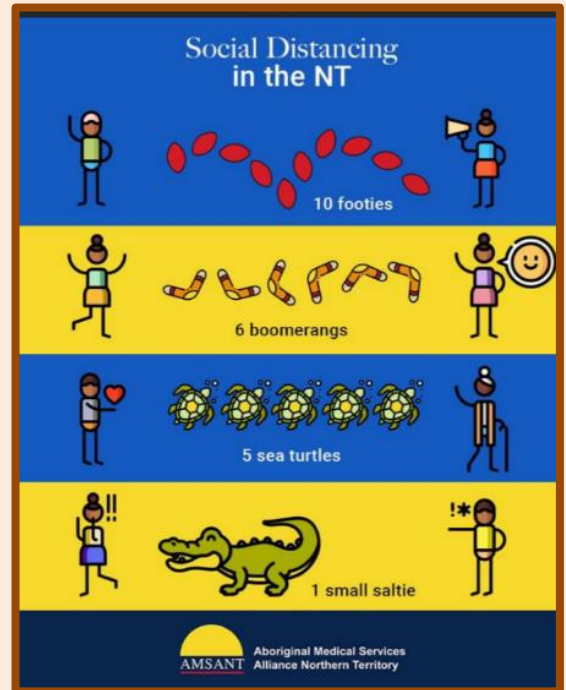
- Welcome to Vicki Kerrigan, who will conduct the qualitative research analysis component of the project.
- Anna Ralph has been extremely busy with the COVID-19 response - working on the isolation ward as a member of the infectious diseases team, and helping advise on Menzies policies in response to the virus.
- Congratulations Rosemary Wyber on the arrival of baby Florence. Rosemary is helping to analyse the data collected as part of our project.

## COVID-19 Response

Our Aboriginal Community Workers, Anne-Marie and Valerina, are in a perfect position to be upskilled as COVID-19 knowledge-brokers in their communities.

Stopping the spread of COVID-19 will not only be relevant for many months, but the practices used can also prevent the transmission of other microbes that cause illnesses that affect Aboriginal people living in close contact.

This is a great opportunity to learn more about the spread of germs. Tablets are being prepared to assist with teaching, using the many resources that have been produced by Menzies, AMSANT, NLC, One Disease and others.



Anne-Marie made a video in response to the COVID-19 situation tailored for Aboriginal people in her region. The video is particularly aimed at people with existing chronic illnesses such as RHD and kidney disease and was shared widely with stakeholders. [https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Resources/Stay\\_strong\\_on\\_country\\_-\\_a\\_message\\_about\\_coronavirus\\_from\\_Barunga\\_NT/](https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Resources/Stay_strong_on_country_-_a_message_about_coronavirus_from_Barunga_NT/)

Kerrigan V, Lee A-M, Ralph A, Lawton P. Stay Strong: Aboriginal Leaders Deliver COVID-19 Health Messages. Health Promot J Austr 2020 May 19. doi: 10.1002/hpja.364.

These extra COVID-19 related activities are possible due to generous new funding from Bupa Health Foundation. Thank you Bupa!

Many thanks to our partners and funders



CONTACT: Angela Kelly, Project Manager [Angela.Kelly@menzies.edu.au](mailto:Angela.Kelly@menzies.edu.au)