

# Media Release

## Fetal Futures Program Offers Support and Reassurance for Mums

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It is hard to imagine the worry and anxiety a pregnant mother would feel when given a medical diagnosis for her unborn child.

Chantel Woodard, of Perth, has had first-hand experience of this after enduring a challenging pregnancy in 2009 with her son Kai who was diagnosed with Congenital Chylothorax and Hydrops Fetalis in utero.

“Kai had five surgical procedures in utero to try and clear the large amount of fluid that built up around his lungs and in his stomach, from his conditions” said Chantel. “But thanks to the amazing work of King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH) and the Women and Infants Research Foundation (WIRF), Kai is now a healthy, happy four year old”.

Inspired by her experience, Chantel, in association with WIRF, KEMH and WA Charity Direct, has helped to establish the Fetal Futures Support Network (FFSN), an online support group which provides support to women experiencing a fetal syndrome diagnosis.

Chantel said “learning of Kai’s condition before I had reached the half way mark in my pregnancy, and not knowing until after he was born if he would survive, was such a frightening journey. At the time, I had never heard of these conditions and I wasn’t able to find anyone else that had faced them – it was such an isolating feeling. I really wanted to help other women facing a prenatal diagnosis to feel supported, and connected to others who had a similar experience, to know that they are not alone”.

As a forum for women to share their prenatal diagnosis experience and connect to other women experiencing high-risk pregnancies, Chantel and the Support Network have now helped over 1000 members from 15 different countries around the world.

The FFSN works alongside WIRF’s Fetal Futures Program, a research initiative that began in 2007 to assess the long term outcomes of children born at KEMH with recognised problems in fetal life. Maternal fetal specialist and obstetrician, Professor Jan Dickinson who leads the Fetal Futures research, said, “the Fetal Futures Program aims to provide evidence, and subsequently reassurance, for improved ways of dealing with prenatal conditions, and the long term impact they may have on a child’s life”.

Supported by the Channel Seven Telethon Trust, the Fetal Futures Program has successfully completed two long-term follow up studies; into children requiring blood transfusions in utero, and also into the long term physical and neurodevelopmental outcomes of children born with an abdominal wall birth defect, gastroschisis. Further information on the studies can be found on WIRF’s website, <http://wirf.com.au/research-studies>

Chantel encourages parents who have been given a prenatal diagnosis to visit the FFSN website or Facebook page ([www.fetalfuturesupport.com.au](http://www.fetalfuturesupport.com.au) or <https://www.facebook.com/fetalfutures>). “A listening ear from someone who has also experienced a prenatal diagnosis can really help”, said Chantel.

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