

# When life is impacted by a child's cancer diagnosis, trauma may come years later



By [Jodie Bruton](#) June 2 2024 - 4:00am. [0 Comments](#)

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Albury's Celeste Walsh and her daughter Etienne, 9, are still navigating a world post-cancer treatment. Picture by Craig Quilliam

Celeste Walsh's world turned upside down eight years ago when her baby girl was diagnosed with a rare type of cancer.

The Albury born-and-bred woman was living in Melbourne when she was told Etienne, then 12 months, had neuroblastoma, a cancer that develops in nerve tissue.

Etienne underwent chemotherapy and surgery.

She had her final MRI last year after months of follow-up.

Having moved back to Albury five years ago for family support, Ms Walsh said her daughter had come through her treatment but the impact of the diagnosis was ongoing on myriad levels.

She said Etienne would need fertility and dental services into adulthood while learning challenges had arisen recently.

"On top of the difficulties of trying to parent independently, life is circumscribed by the big C word, cancer," she said.

"You're always thinking in terms of how to help your little one."

Ms Walsh reached out to Country Hope, a Riverina family-centred support service to country children diagnosed with cancer and life-threatening illnesses.

She said the Albury-based service was a godsend.

It arranged weekly art therapy classes for Etienne at Country Hope House and other learning support off-site.



Albury resident Celeste Walsh, with her daughter Etienne, 9, values the important work Country Hope does in the community.

Picture by Jodie Bruton

Ms Walsh said trauma was an inevitable part of the cancer experience.

"Even though I have a remarkably spirited human being after her treatment, then we've got to start healing from the trauma," Ms Walsh said.

"You've got to go through the process to heal and put in place the right support.

"What Country Hope does is innovative and world-first.

"I suffered with a lot of anxiety and panic attacks and Country Hope is helping people to problem solve their way out of it."





Country Hope's North East and Border co-ordinator Kristy McMahon and Rotary Club of Albury North past president Anne Hayward support mental health initiatives on the Border. Picture by Jodie Bruton

## Country Hope prioritises mental health

This year Country Hope has teamed up with Rotary Club of Albury North to prioritise mental health for its families.

Country Hope's North East and Border co-ordinator Kristy McMahon said parents of children battling life-threatening illnesses often did not process their own trauma until years after the end of treatment.

"Every family referred to County Hope is in crisis," she said.

"They are all on the spectrum for mental ill health all the way through to at-risk of suicide.

"Mum, dad and the siblings are somewhere along the spectrum.

"Most of the time parents don't look after themselves; they wait until their child is healthy.

"Two or three years down the track there is a problem."

Ms McMahon said Country Hope wanted to step into that breach earlier.

Knowing the process all too well when her [own daughter, Ella](#), went through bone cancer treatment in Melbourne eight years ago aged eight, Ms McMahon said it was imperative to act earlier.

She said a mental health plan would now be introduced when families accessed Country Hope.

"In Melbourne for your child's treatment you might meet a social worker only once if you're lucky," Ms McMahon said.

"We're trying to plug that gap in services."



Rotary Club of Albury North past president Anne Hayward says the club is committed to supporting mental health initiatives on the Border. Picture supplied

## Albury North Rotary Club on board

During the past two years Rotary Club of Albury North has committed to supporting mental health initiatives on the Border and further afield.

It got the ball rolling on the development and delivery of a mental health first aid and resilience training course for community volunteers in Albury.

It also instigated the development of youth suicide prevention resource materials for teachers throughout Australia.

Rotary Club of Albury North past president Anne Hayward said families could not always afford to access mental health services and therapies.

She said they planned to continue working with Country Hope to offer counselling and psychology sessions for families of children facing life-threatening illnesses.

"It's so expensive to book a counselling session; there can be an \$80 or \$100 gap," she said.

"It's too much for a lot of people.

"Psychologists are in demand as much as counsellors too."

RCAN would also provide scholarships to psychology students at La Trobe University in Wodonga, support Carevan through the Kids Cooking and Care program and continue its mental health first aid and resilience training for volunteers and community members requiring mental health support.

## **Travel Escape Club**

The Rotary club recently launched Travel Escape Club (TEC 2024-2025), a progressive, 12-month raffle [now in its third year](#).

Limited to 800 tickets, they are only sold until the first monthly draw in July 2024.

Thereafter monthly draws continue until June 2025.

Every month one travel voucher worth \$4000 and five \$150 vouchers from local businesses are won by ticket holders totalling \$61,750 in prizes.

If all 800 tickets are sold at \$150 each, the project is expected to generate a gross income of \$120,000. With gaming regulations mandating 50 per cent to be allocated for prizes, the raffle could yield a net profit exceeding \$60,000.

For more information visit [travelescapeclub.com.au](https://travelescapeclub.com.au).