

The Raelene Boyle Outreach Program

Impact Report

July 2024



**The difference
every kid deserves**

PO Box 8009
Woolloongabba QLD 4102
ABN 11 607 902 687



1300 742 554



info@childrens.org.au



childrens.org.au

Abbreviations

CHF	Children's Hospital Foundation
CHQ	Children's Health Queensland
HITH	Hospital in The Home
QCH	Queensland Children's Hospital

Contents

Abbreviations	2
Executive Summary	4
The Raelene Boyle Outreach Program	5
Program Changes and Updates	6
Introducing Nikki Ritchie.....	6
Update regarding 2023 goals.....	6
Program Overview for 2024	6
Introduction	6
Key activities	7
Significant achievements	8
Impact on families	9
Patient stories.....	10
Thank you for your investment	11
Patient photos	12

Executive Summary

The Children’s Hospital Foundation (CHF) and Queensland Children’s Hospital (QCH) are deeply grateful to Sporting Chance Cancer Foundation for the ongoing partnership and commitment to deliver the Raelene Boyle Outreach Program.

Since 2017, this critical service has supported over 1,100 children with cancer. Operating out of the Queensland Children's Hospital in Brisbane, the program helps to keep our children and their families at home, reduce hospital admissions and lengths of stay, and support local health services. This is achieved through initiatives including referral to the Hospital in the Home Program (HITH), education for families to perform tasks at home (dressings, medications, etc.), working directly with rural and remote centres to provide education and support, home hydration, and supporting schools when the children are planning to return. Thanks to the Sporting Chance Cancer Foundation, our oncology children and their families can receive the best possible cancer treatment and go home knowing that the Outreach Clinical Nurse is just a phone call away.

This report has been prepared by Dr Ish Lockwood (Grants & Relationship Specialist, CHF) in collaboration with Nikki Ritchi (Clinical Nurse – Oncology Services, Children’s Health Queensland). The purpose of this report is to outline the impact and outcomes of the Raelene Boyle Outreach Program, delivered at QCH and to children with cancer throughout Queensland and Northern New South Wales between May 2023 and June 2024.



The Raelene Boyle Outreach Program

In Australia, more than 1000 children and adolescents are diagnosed with cancer annually. Tragically, cancer claims more young lives than any other illness in the country, resulting in approximately three deaths per week among children and adolescents. Each child lost to cancer forfeits an average of 70 potential years of life, while survivors often endure severe long-term health challenges. Despite these hardships, advancements in medical research have significantly raised survival rates to over 80% ([Childhood Cancer Association Australia, 2024](#)).

The CHQ Queensland Paediatric Palliative Care Haematology Oncology Network oversees a vast region stretching from Northern New South Wales (Grafton) up to the Torres Strait, covering over 3000 kilometres of coastline. Most newly diagnosed children with cancer receive treatment at the QCH in Brisbane, where many will remain for the entirety of their care. However, patients with leukaemia, low-risk brain tumours, or tumours under surveillance can return home for the maintenance phase of their treatment (typically 2 years), depending on proximity to appropriate health services.

For families residing in regional and remote areas, the journey to Brisbane for treatments, check-ups, and consultations imposes significant emotional and financial burdens. Adapting to a new routine centred around medical appointments often means prolonged separation from loved ones. Many families recount the challenges of balancing employment or managing family businesses while needing to be present at the hospital to support their child. Relocating to Brisbane for treatment can adversely affect finances, strain relationships, and impact emotional well-being.

The Raelene Boyle Outreach Program has funded a Clinical Nurse at QCH, South Brisbane, for many years. This support has played a critical role in easing the enormous burden for Queensland families supporting a child with cancer and working to keep kids at home while undergoing cancer treatment. The Raelene Boyle Oncology Outreach clinical nurse works to identify and transition eligible families to HITH program. This program allows children and young people to continue their treatment from their local hospital and health service while maintaining quality of care. The outreach nurse provides direct care and support for regional and remote families through:

- Meeting with and guiding families to help transition them into HITH program and assisting both the family and the community to ensure children are comfortably receiving treatment at home for as long as possible.
- Providing education and awareness to families on:
 - Administering medication, line and dressing management.
 - Providing discharge education to families so they feel safe when leaving the hospital and know who to contact if there are any issues.
 - Teaching skills to parents and carers to avoid emergency and outpatient admissions.
- Working directly with regional hospitals to ensure they have the supplies and expertise to support the patient in the community.
- Visiting schools and childcare centres to provide kids with simple ways they can care for and look out for their friends.
- Conducting home visits to children in palliative care, providing the care required to maintain their comfort.

Thanks to the Sporting Chance Cancer Foundation, Queensland children are receiving the best possible cancer treatment even after they return home and with the support of the Outreach Clinical Nurse.

Program Changes and Updates

Introducing Nikki Ritchie

We are delighted to have Nikki Ritchie in the role, having commenced in May 2023. Nikki is a skilled nurse with 16 years of experience, including eight years in oncology. She holds academic qualifications including a Practical Nursing Program, a Bachelor of Nursing, and Graduate Certificates in Nursing (Cancer Nursing) and Adolescent Health and Wellbeing (Oncology), demonstrating her commitment to ongoing professional development.

Nikki began her nursing career in the United States, completing her initial nursing qualification and gaining practical experience over a year. After returning to Australia, she dedicated three and a half years to adult oncology before joining QCH in 2016. At QCH, Nikki has served in various roles, including as a ward nurse and Clinical Practice Facilitator in the Oncology Inpatient Ward from 2016 to 2020, and later in the 11a Medical Specialties Ward from 2021 to 2023. Since May 2023, she has excelled in her current role as the Raelene Boyle Oncology Outreach Nurse.

Nikki's decision to pursue a nursing career was influenced by her extensive hospital stays during her youth, where the care provided by nursing teams had a profound impact and set her on her career path. Specialising in oncology, Nikki finds fulfillment in supporting patients and their families through challenging circumstances. Her current role, funded by Sporting Chance Cancer Foundation, allows her to combine her dedication to patient care with teaching, making a significant impact in both areas. Nikki is an outstanding healthcare professional who has dedicated her career to compassionate care and professional excellence; we are delighted to have Nikki in this role.

Update regarding 2023 goals

One of the primary goals of the 2023-2025 program was to restore the clinical nurse role to full-time equivalence (1.0FTE) to provide enhanced support for oncology patients and their families. Initially, the role was intended to operate at full capacity; however, due to challenges in recruitment exacerbated by the ongoing effects of COVID-19 on travel and access to healthcare and educational facilities, the position was temporarily shared between Oncology and Palliative Care on a part-time basis during 2021-2022. This arrangement unfortunately led to reduced accessibility for oncology patients to the outreach nurse and diminished the overall benefits, outcomes, and impact of the role. We are delighted to announce that the position has now been reintroduced at full-time capacity (1.0FTE), exclusively within the oncology department.

Program Overview for 2024

Introduction

Since May 2023, Nikki, in her capacity as an Oncology Outreach Nurse, has provided extensive support to **over 200 oncology patients and their families**. Her efforts have significantly contributed to minimising the need for families to travel to regional hospitals by supporting rural and remote centres.



Key activities

Over the past year, Nikki has conducted a large number of parent education sessions covering crucial aspects of home care, including medication administration, discharge procedures, and the management of devices such as nasogastric tubes and central lines. Additionally, she has led rural and remote education sessions to assist families returning to small towns, significantly reducing their need for frequent travel to regional centres. In collaboration with the leukaemia team, Nikki has supported two regional chemotherapy patients and worked alongside Sporting Chance CNCs in NSW and SA to assist three out-of-state patients. She has also supported patients using CADD pumps for pain management, which has improved their quality of life and allowed them to remain at home for longer periods. Her role has also involved helping many patients return to school by providing school packs, phone support, and virtual meetings. These efforts have been instrumental in keeping families together and providing high-quality care for their children during a challenging time. An overview of key tasks performed during this reporting period are illustrated in Figure 1.

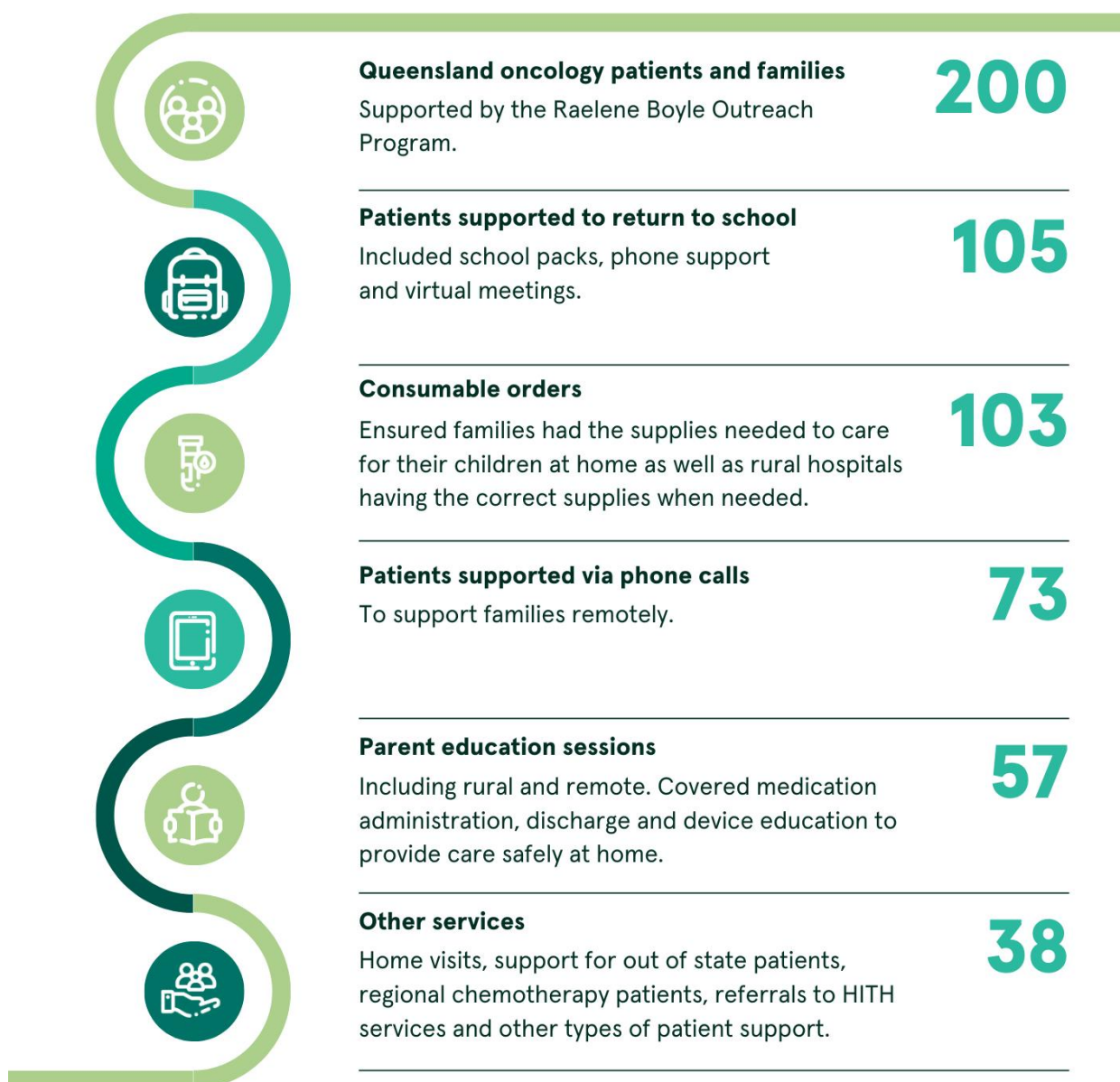


Figure 1 Overview of key achievements between May 2023 and June 2024

Significant achievements

The Raelene Boyle Outreach Program achieved several significant milestones that have positively impacted children's health and well-being between 2023 and 2024. Here are three major achievements and their ongoing benefits:

DEVELOPMENT OF AN OUTREACH CLINIC FOR PARENT AND CARER EDUCATION

One of the program's key achievements is the establishment of an outreach clinic in the outpatient department designed to teach parents and carers essential medical tasks for home care. This clinic provides training on critical skills such as nasogastric (NG) tube insertion, central line dressing, and blood testing. **By equipping families with these skills, the program has empowered them to manage their child's medical needs at home**, reducing the frequency of hospital visits and ensuring more consistent care. This approach not only supports better health outcomes for children but also alleviates the stress and logistical challenges faced by families during treatment.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PRE-HYDRATION AT HOME

The program has also introduced a pre-hydration at home initiative, which **significantly improves patient flow in outpatient settings and reduces the length of hospital stays**. By enabling families to administer pre-hydration treatments at home, this approach has **decreased the need for one additional night in the hospital for many patients**. This both optimises the use of outpatient resources and minimises hospital exposure for children, which can be particularly beneficial in managing their overall health and well-being during treatment.

DEVELOPMENT OF A PROCESS FOR EDUCATING FAMILIES ON NEW NG TUBE MANAGEMENT

A comprehensive process for educating families on managing a newly inserted NG tube has been developed in collaboration with the dietitian. This structured education program ensures that families are well-prepared to handle NG tube care at home, including proper insertion techniques and troubleshooting common issues. By providing families with the knowledge and confidence to manage this aspect of their child's care independently, the **program enhances the quality of home-based care and supports better health outcomes for children with medical needs that require ongoing tube management**. These achievements highlight the program's commitment to improving patient care and family support, ultimately leading to better health outcomes and more efficient management of medical conditions for children.



Impact on families

Nikki's support has been instrumental in helping families remain at home, thereby reducing the burden of travelling to regional hospitals. This approach has not only been convenient for families but has also contributed to better health outcomes by providing consistent and accessible care.

Nikki's dedication and proactive approach as an Oncology Outreach Nurse have made a significant positive impact on the lives of over 200 oncology patients and their families. By focusing on educational

support, direct patient interactions, and effective referral services, she has ensured that patients receive the best possible care while minimising the need for extensive travel.

Patient stories


The real-world impact of the Raelene Boyle Outreach Program can be clearly understood through the patient stories of children and their families who have received support through this initiative. Figure 2 illustrates the experience of a two-year-old patient following a bone marrow transplant, highlighting how the program's support reduced the family's stress and travel burden. Figure 3 shares the story of a 15-month-old child who requires weekly dressing changes; the program has greatly eased the family's logistical and financial challenges, allowing the child's parents to focus on caring for and supporting the well-being of their child. These stories showcase the tangible benefits of the Raelene Boyle Outreach Program and emphasise how the program addresses the diverse needs of young patients and their families, offering both emotional and practical support during challenging times.



Patient: EK
Age: 2 years old
Condition: Post-Bone Marrow Transplant

EK, a two-year-old, was recently discharged from the hospital after undergoing a bone marrow transplant. Initially, EK had to attend the outpatient department three times a week since discharge. During these appointments, Nikki provided EK's mum with training on how to take blood samples from EK's central line at home. **Thanks to these educational sessions, EK now only needs to visit the outpatient clinic once a week.** This has significantly reduced the family's stress and travel burden, allowing them to spend more quality time together at home.

Figure 2 Patient Story 1



Patient: MM
Age: 15 months old
Condition: Requires Weekly Dressing Changes

MM is a 15-month-old boy living in a remote town. He required weekly dressing changes, which initially meant his mum had to drive to Rockhampton and back—a four-hour, 340km round trip. MM has two other siblings, and his dad works away in the mines, making the weekly trips both difficult and costly. To alleviate this burden, Nikki contacted a hospital closer to their home, which agreed to perform the weekly dressing changes. Nikki provided education and support to the local hospital staff, who had never done a paediatric dressing before. This solution has **greatly eased the family's logistical and financial challenges, allowing them to focus on MM's care and well-being.**

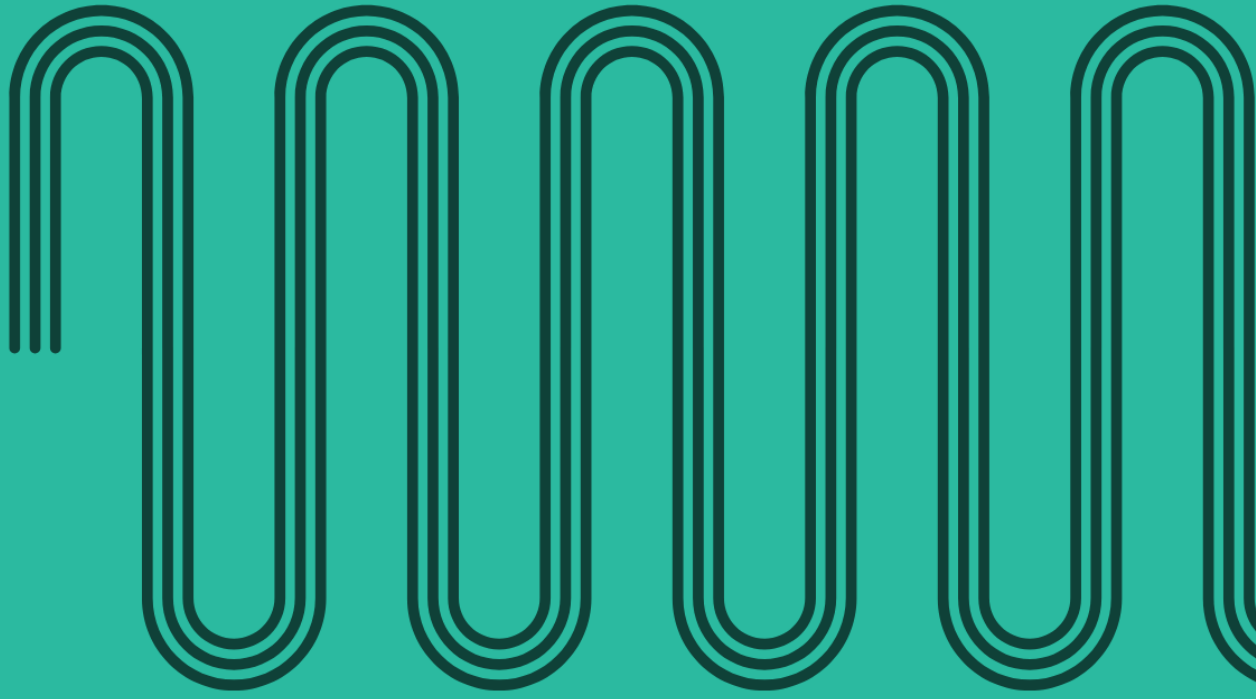
Figure 3 Patient Story 2

Thank you for your investment

The Children's Hospital Foundation and Queensland Children's Hospital are deeply grateful for the unwavering support of the Sporting Chance Cancer Foundation, its patrons, supporters, and friends. Your generous contributions have been instrumental in helping children with cancer face their disease and treatment while remaining surrounded by family and friends, ultimately reducing their time in hospital. As clearly outlined in this report, the impact of the program is profound and far-reaching. Personal stories from children have clearly illustrated the life-changing benefits of this support, demonstrating how the program has transformed the treatment experience and improved the well-being of young patients and their families.

Patient photos





199 Grey Street, South Brisbane 4010
1300 742 554 | info@childrens.org.au

www.childrens.org.au



Children's
Hospital Foundation