

Davoren Park is one of Adelaide's most disadvantaged suburbs, but the community is determined to forge change

Stephanie Richards

4 September 2024



Davoren Park mother Nica Hilditch has received support from a new school nurse service in Adelaide's north. (*ABC News: Stephanie Richards*)

In short:

Family support organisations, educators and the local community in Adelaide northern suburbs are working together to support children facing intergenerational disadvantage.

The initiatives include employing nurses at the local school to help parents navigate the specialist healthcare services.

What's next?

SA Premier Peter Malinauskas says it is crucial the community is the driving force behind the change.

Nica Hilditch's two children have special needs, but they often have to wait more than a year to see specialists such as paediatricians, speech pathologists and occupational therapists.

"You feel like you're very alone in the sense that you can't get support when you need it," the Davoren Park mum said.

"Quite often when you want support, you want it right now – not in 12 months' time."

Ms Hilditch said plenty of services operated in her neighbourhood but securing places with short wait-times, or which offered targeted support for her children, was challenging.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-04/davoren-park-community-overcoming-disadvantage/104304346>

"I know with some of the paediatrician services at the moment, you're waiting 12 months for private, let alone on the public system," she said.

"It can be very draining."



The Davoren Park community is working together to improve children's outcomes. *(ABC News: Stephanie Richards)*

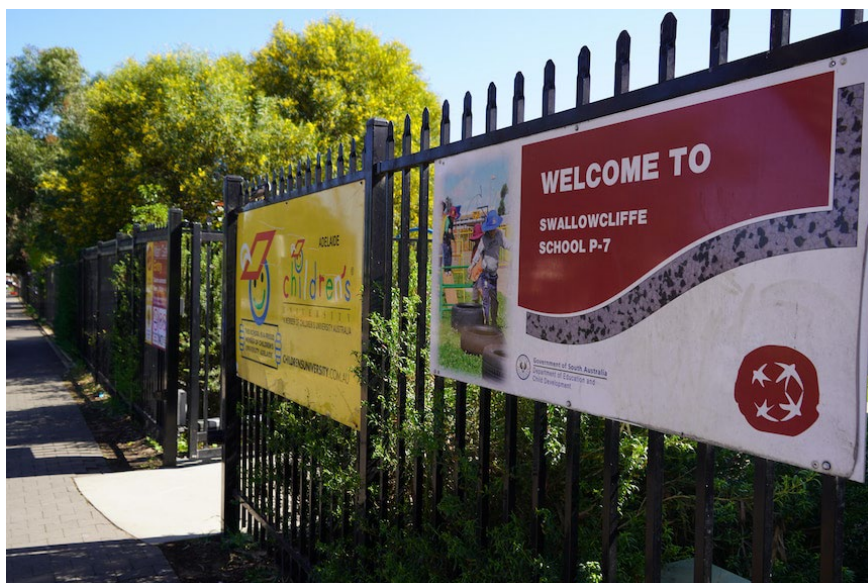
Her family's story is one which is common across Adelaide's north.

The principal of Davoren Park's Swallowcliffe School, Penny Sweeney, said some children spend more than two years on waiting lists for specialist medical appointments.

"We often, as educators, would ring with parents to book [appointments]," she said.

"They would also struggle to be able to articulate to doctors or paediatricians their needs, or their children's needs, so we would be supporting them with that.

"Access to health care is a big issue for families."



Davoren Park's Swallowcliffe School has employed two nurses to help improve children's health. (ABC News: Stephanie Richards)

Community joins forces to improve children's outcomes

Davoren Park is located in northern Adelaide, one of the South Australia's fastest growing areas for families.

But the suburb is also home to entrenched, intergenerational disadvantage.

According to University of Adelaide data released last year, about half of the children in South Australia who are considered developmentally vulnerable live in Adelaide's north.

Last year, local residents, childcare centres, family support organisations and the Swallowcliffe School joined forces to try to improve outcomes for children.



The community hosts regular community barbecues and an after-school kids club. (ABC News: Stephanie Richards)

The community alliance – labelled "Children in the North" – has received more than \$4 million from the SA government across four years.

Some of the funding has already been spent employing two nurses from the nearby Lyell McEwin Hospital, who visit Swallowcliffe School twice weekly to help refer parents to specialist services.

"A good thing that we're able to do here is help families navigate the system a bit because it can be really complicated for them," one of the school's nurses, Rado Gregoric, said.

"Being able to point them in the right direction, or being able to help them find the help that they need, and be really accessible here at the school, is what we're trying to do."



Nica Hilditch's children were on long wait lists for specialist healthcare. *(ABC News: Stephanie Richards)*

Ms Hilditch is one such parent who has benefited from the service.

"They've referred me to services that I wouldn't have known to look for in the local community," she said.

"That means more time for me to spend with my children and less time searching for services for them."

SA Premier says initiative worth 'risks'

Alongside the school nurse service, the Children in the North Alliance has held regular community barbecues, commissioned a new mural, and established an after-school-hours kids club.

SA Premier Peter Malinauskas said it was important for the community to be in charge of driving change, rather than "the big hammer of bureaucratic government departments".



SA Premier Peter Malinauskas meets with members of the Davoren Park community. *(ABC News: Stephanie Richards)*

"I'm not naïve to the fact that maybe the Children in the North program doesn't deliver the results that we're looking for, because we're talking about really complex challenges that are intergenerational," he said.

"There is a genuine appetite to take a few risks here and innovate.

"I don't think we should fear failure, because we've already seen evidence of that, so we've just got to try something different."



Helen Connolly hopes the initiative makes the community a better place to live in. *(Supplied: Commissioner for Children and Young People SA)*

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-04/davoren-park-community-overcoming-disadvantage/104304346>

SA Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly, helped launch the alliance and said success would be measured by listening to the community's feedback.

"We want the story to be that the community says it's a better place to live, there are more things for our kids to do, our kids are happier going to school," she said.

"The indicators of success are really about children's lives and their happiness."