

# ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

Clinical Education Event

November 4, 2025  
5.30pm for 6pm start





# Dr Deborah Hillman White ("Dr Debs")

GP at Medeco Medical Centre Inala working with:

- Mater Integrated Refugee Health Service - MIRHS (new refugee arrivals)
- Mater Multicultural Health Coordination Program - MHCP (complex care CALD patients)

Refugee Health Network of QLD (RHNQ) Clinical Advisory Group (CAG) member

Brisbane South PHN Clinical Advisory Council



# *Acknowledgment of Country*

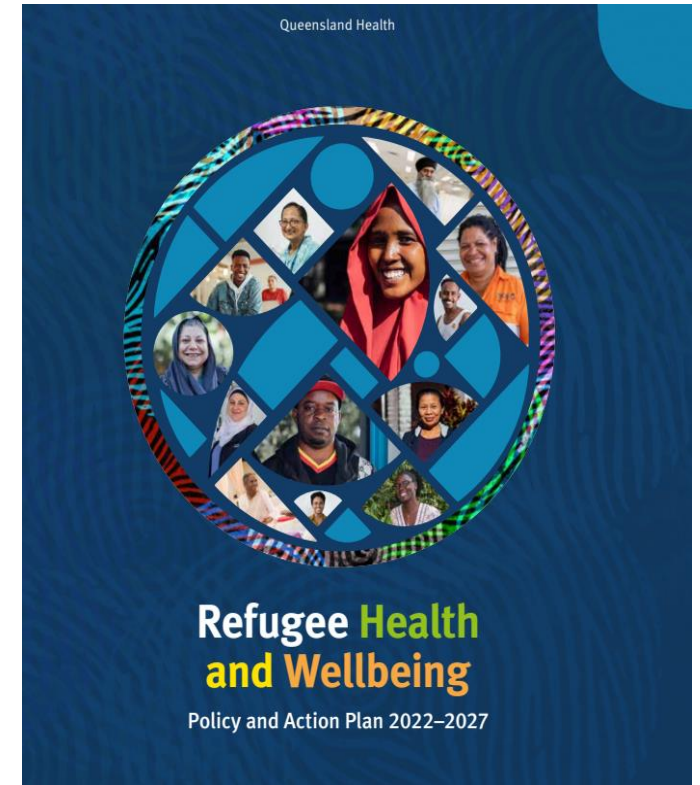
In the spirit of reconciliation, Mater acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connection to land, sea and community.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

# Introductions and Housekeeping



- About ▾
- For Clinicians ▾
- For Patients ▾
- Publications ▾
- Networks ▾
- Training ▾
- News ▾
- 🔍



# Adolescent Health and Wellbeing Topics and Speakers



- **Setting the Scene-** Jacki Howlett - Head of Student Services, Milpera
- **Community Experience and Advice for health workers-** Amiel Nubaha (G11 Mater Refugee Health Advisory Group & Nouralhuda Akhlaki & Soune Htalt Htalt Nin (QPASTT Youth Voice members) – interview with Dr Miriam Wellauer
- **Adolescent & Young Adult Physician & General Paediatrician** - Dr Henry Goldstein
- **Occupational Therapist and Art Psychotherapist at Milpera and HEAL Coordinator:**  
Bethany Mahadeo
- **Panel: Q & A - All speakers**



# Jacki Howlett

HOD of Student Services - Milpera State  
High School



# **Dr Miriam Wellauer**

Milpera State High School GP

# **Nouralhuda Akhlaki & Soune Htalt Htalt Nin**

QPASTT Youth Voice members

# **Amiel Nubaha**

Mater Refugee Health Advisory Group – “G11”

# GP in State Schools

## ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING

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### Clinical Education Event

#### Darling Downs South West

- Charleville State High School
- Cunnamulla P-12 State School
- Harristown State High School (nurse practitioner)
- Murgon State High School
- St George State High School
- Tara Shire State College

#### Far North Queensland

- Gordonvale State High School
- Ravenshoe P-12 State School
- Trinity Bay State High School
- Western Cape College

#### Metropolitan North

- Bracken Ridge State High School
- Dakabin State High School
- Deception Bay State High School
- Everton Park State High School
- Morayfield State High School
- Pine Rivers State High School
- Redcliffe State High School
- The Gap State High School

#### Metropolitan South

- Alexandra Hills State High School
- Bremer State High School
- Brisbane South State Secondary College
- Brisbane State High School
- Goodna Special School (P-12)
- Ipswich State High School (nurse practitioner)
- Milpera State High School
- Ripley Valley State Secondary College (nurse practitioner)
- Wellington Point State High School

#### North Coast

- Bundaberg North State High School (nurse practitioner)
- Burnside State High School
- Kilkivan State School
- Maryborough State High School
- Nambour State College
- Palmview State Secondary College

#### North Queensland

- Heatley Secondary College
- Spinifex State College (nurse practitioner)

#### South East

- Beaudesert State High School
- Benowa State High School
- Currumbin Community Special School
- Elanora State High School
- Helensvale State High School
- Loganlea State High School
- Mabel Park State High School
- Marsden State High School
- Merrimac State High School
- Park Ridge State High School
- Shailer Park State High School
- Woodridge State High School

#### Central Queensland

- Gladstone State High School (nurse practitioner)
- North Rockhampton State High School (nurse practitioner)
- Sarina State High School

**TOTAL ~ 50**



# Dr Henry Goldstein

Adolescent & Young Adult Physician & General  
Paediatrician

# Providing Safe & Quality Care to Young People

## A Practice Guide to Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Care

Written by young people in partnership with health - 2023

Pantone Colour of the Year 2023  
Vivid magenta 18-1750



# **Adolescent & Young Adult Medicine**

**Dr Henry Goldstein  
AYA Physician**

A grayscale background image of a city skyline, likely Pittsburgh, featuring a river and a bridge. The text is overlaid in a bold, orange, outlined font.

**12-15 : EARLY**

**15-19 : MIDDLE**

**19-26 : YOUNG  
ADULT**



**STRENGTHS**

**RELATIONSHIPS**

**SKILLS**

**CONTEXT**

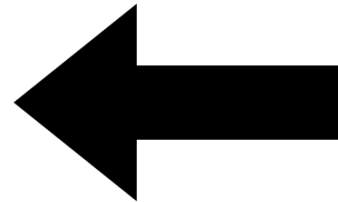
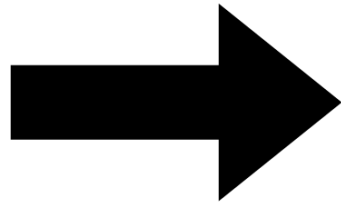


**HIGH SCHOOL =  
ALONE + PARENT**



**TOWARD  
INTERDEPENDENCE**

# GRADED AUTONOMY



# Providing Safe & Quality Care to Young People

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# Bethany Mahadeo

HEAL Coordinator, Arts Psychotherapist,  
Occupational Therapist

# TRAUMA INFORMED CARE: HEAL, MILPERA SHS

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Bethany Mahadeo, HEAL Coordinator, Arts  
Psychotherapist, Occupational Therapist





## OVERVIEW:

- Introducing HEAL – what, why and how
- Consider the impact of refugee and refugee-like experiences for the Milpera student population, and those like them
- Discuss the benefits of working creatively with adolescent refugees
- Outline OT and allied health perspectives on working with this population
- How cross-cultural elements can be incorporated
- What's next for you and your service?

The HEAL service - Home of Expressive Arts in Learning- is a mental health program which specialises in supporting the well-being of refugee-background students in school, via creative methods - such as Expressive Arts Psychotherapy.

This work began at Milpera in 2004.

- **Why set up HEAL ?** Young people were arriving from various challenging areas of the world, having trouble settling, learning and connecting to school.



Students were seen to be feeling anxious, confused, lacking focus, feeling fearful, disoriented, and having trouble with emotional regulation.

HEAL provides strength based, trauma-informed creative therapy that helps make students available for learning.

It is on-site, accessible, responsive and embedded in Milpera's ways of working.

# THE HEAL SPACE: BELONGING, CONNECTING AND GROWING



# HEAL SERVICES:

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- Staffed five days per week, combination of part-time staff – art psychotherapists and a music therapist
- Masters level training in art psychotherapy and music therapy
- Range of professional backgrounds: teaching, occupational therapy, social work, film and music industry
- Combination of weekly individual and group sessions, screening all newly arrived students of refugee or refugee-like background, responding to the needs of students and the school as required

## Milpera 2025- large numbers of refugee and refugee-like adolescents

# OUR CURRENT STUDENT POPULATION

**Supporting them to re-experience relationships differently is the key to trauma recovery and change.**



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**Countries, ethnicities: eg. Afghani, Syrian via Lebanon, Somalian, Rohingya, Iraqi, Eritrean, Congolese**

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**Journeys, visas: humanitarian, women at risk, bridging, family reunification**

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**Past conflicts/ Current conflicts**

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**Settlement stressors**

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**Social media and news: exposure to traumatic images, terrible news overnight, parents highly stressed**

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**Worry for family in war zones or refugee camps**

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**Limited or no access to education in the past**

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**IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON LEARNING**

## Creative & Body-Based Therapies

Why they work: Trauma is stored in the body. It suppresses language and cognition. Verbal processing alone isn't enough, especially for youth or EALD students.



Art therapy

Music and rhythm

Storytelling and narrative therapy

Drama/play-based expression

Yoga and mindful movement

Breathing exercises

Grounding through the senses (touch, smell, sight)

Dance and movement therapy



# WHY USE CREATIVITY WITH ADOLESCENTS?

- ▶ Capacity to use logic/reasoning is impaired by traumatic stress
- ▶ Creativity using arts, music and movement ameliorates the symptoms of trauma
- ▶ Accesses subconscious material quickly and powerfully
- ▶ Allows a non-verbal outlet to process emotions, reduces the need for language, allows the nervous system to regulate. Art is the safe container
- ▶ Model attuned communication and consistent positive relationships
- ▶ Can be paced to allow safe exposure to traumatic memories
- ▶ Encourages self-exploration in a non-threatening, less “cognitive” way
- ▶ Bridging cultural identities visually and physically is powerful
- ▶ Gives the young person a sense of agency and control
- ▶ State of flow is physiologically healing
- ▶ Space for mistakes, sharing skills and ideas, encourages imagination
- ▶ There is no wrong outcome and it's FUN and FAST



# WHEN ART IS THE VEHICLE, THE PRODUCT HOLDS ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES:

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- Burn it
- Bury it
- Rip it
- Frame it
- Gift it



- Cherish it
- Lock it up
- Keep it safe in a file
- Turn it into something else
- Look at it later and reflect

# OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PERSPECTIVES:

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## DO NO HARM - BUT DO SOMETHING!

- The person is an integrated whole
- Context and environment are crucial – physical, social, cultural, spiritual, political, educational
- Meaningful occupations are central to health
- Interventions are tailored and holistic

## ADOLESCENT OCCUPATION: DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

- Building identity
- Gaining independence and life skills
- Engaging socially
- Master (!) executive functioning
- Plan for the future you
- Navigate launching



# THINGS TO CONSIDER:

*GOAL: EXPERIENCE HEALTH IN ALL ITS FACETS, NOT SIMPLY THE ABSENCE OF ILLNESS*

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## WHAT DID THIS YOUNG PERSON MISS OUT ON?

- Developmental tasks of childhood
- PLAY
- Social skills
- Student skills
- Health literacy
- Sense of control, mastery
- Puberty is significant. Brains are under construction!

## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO THEIR FLOURISHING?

- Disrupted attachments, intergenerational trauma, grief, loss, trauma
- Physical health and development
- But also; important questions:

How was your sleep? Did you eat breakfast? How is your mood? Do you have friends? What do you do for fun? How much are you on your phone? Exercise much?

Is there an immediate, practical stressor that needs to be addressed? Can you help?



# WORKING CROSS-CULTURALLY: A HEAL PERSPECTIVE

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## KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

- Visa number
- Country of origin vs. ethnicity or language group
- Historical context
- How many displacements?
- Impact of intergenerational trauma

## LIVED EXPERIENCE

- Your client is the expert on their experience – be curious, learn from them and with them
- What was life like? Food, shelter, safety, school, electricity, transport?



# WORKING CROSS CULTURALLY: A HEAL PERSPECTIVE

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- Respect diversity – ‘refugee’ is not a uniform identity. A single culture holds multitudes
- Honour cultural systems and values
- Acculturation occurs at wildly different rates for adolescents and parents
- Cultural perspectives on adolescence differ
- Repair cultural misunderstandings (you will make mistakes!)
- Use interpreting services effectively
- Prioritise trust, safety and relationship building
- Focus on strengths and building a robust sense of self



# SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE:

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- Be authentic
- Consider your language – it matters
- Mine your own experience
- Be curious
- Be mindful of your own nervous system
- Assume there's a lot more going on than you realise
- Don't take it personally
- Be relentless
- Be practical



# CAN'T ACCESS RESOURCES LIKE MILPERA CAN?

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## WHAT CAN YOU AND YOUR SERVICE DO TO:

- Improve access and reduce barriers
- Be more welcoming and appealing to refugee background youth
- Work in a more sensitive and nuanced way
- Increase advocacy
- See the whole person not just the presenting problem
- Work from a strengths base
- Incorporate creativity
- Foster post-traumatic growth, building connection and identity



# CREATIVE THERAPIES: FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- [About HEAL | HEAL \(healqld.com.au\)](#)
- Australian, New Zealand and Asia Creative Arts Therapies Professional Association (ANZACATA): <https://www.anzacata.org>
- <https://ahpa.com.au/allied-health-professions/art-therapy/>
- Malchiodi, C. (2020). Trauma and Expressive Arts Therapy. Brain, Body and Imagination in the Healing Process. NY: Guilford
- Gussak, D. E & Rosal., M. L. (2016). Wiley Handbook of Art Therapy. 1st Edition. John Wiley & Sons.
- Haeyen, S. & Heijman, J. (2020). Compassion Focused Art Therapy for people diagnosed with a cluster B/C personality disorder: An intervention mapping study. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 69
- Hogan, S., & Coulter, A. M. (2014). The introductory guide to art therapy : experiential teaching and learning for students and practitioners. Routledge.
- Potash, Jordan S, Mann, Sarah M, Martinez, Johanna C, Roach, Ann B, & Wallace, Nina M. (2016). Spectrum of Art Therapy Practice: Systematic Literature Review of Art Therapy, 1983-2014. *Art Therapy*, 33(3), 119–127.
- Rubin, J. A. (Ed.). (2016). Approaches to art therapy : Theory and technique.
- Steele,W.,& Malchiodi,C.A (2011).Trauma-informed practices with children and adolescents. Routledge
- <https://arttherapyresources.com.au/wp-content/uploads/art-therapy-exercise-scribble-chase.pdf>
- <https://www.healingicons.org/fear-no-art-trust-blind-contour-drawing/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUwYCRRa8E> bilateral stimulation with art therapist Cathy Malchiodi



# Panel – Q & A

All speakers

Facilitated by Deka Ahmed



# Evaluation



# Help Us Share Tariku's Story



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**ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING**  
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**Resources**

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REFUGEE HEALTH  
NETWORK QUEENSLAND

- **The Child and Adolescent Health Guide – a resource of the Australian Refugee Health Practice Guide** ([https://refugeehealthguide.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ARHPG BOOK 2 CHILD A4 FA web.pdf](https://refugeehealthguide.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ARHPG_BOOK_2_CHILD_A4_FA_web.pdf))
- **The Magenta Book - “Providing Safe & Quality Care to Young People A Practice Guide to Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Care”** ([https://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/219601/QH-AYA-practice-guide.pdf](https://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/219601/QH-AYA-practice-guide.pdf))
- **Don't Forget the Bubbles** – type in “adolescent” and there's multiple articles (<https://dontforgetthebubbles.com/>)
- **Raising Children's Network** (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/>)
- **Royal Children's Hospital Guidelines** – many of which are specific to adolescent / immigrant health issues (engagement, eating issues, gynaecology etc.) (<https://www.rch.org.au/clinicalguide/#tab-A>)
- **Headspace** – have some good resources for adolescents
- **(Join the RACGP) Specific Interests Child and Young Person's Health** (Chair Dr Tim Jones)

**Gender diverse resources:**

- a) QPASTT - <https://qpastt.org.au/third-queer-culture/>
- b) Transhub - <https://www.transhub.org.au/> <https://equinox.org.au/>
- c) Equinox (<https://equinox.org.au/>)