



## Speech pathology celebrates language for life

**S**PEECH Pathology Week is held yearly to celebrate the profession and highlight the vital role speech pathologists play in helping Australians with speech and language difficulties.

Speech pathology services throughout Sunraysia are currently celebrating the week.

Under the banner "Language for Life", this year's theme explores the importance of general communication and specific language skills, through all stages of life.

Brooke Ryan is one of Sunraysia's 10 speech pathologists.

She is based at the Mildura Base Hospital and works with children from birth to school age, as well as inpatients and outpatients. There are also speech pathologists based at Sunraysia Community Health Services — who work with children from birth to schools age, adult outpatients and also visit nursing homes, Department of Education who visit both Primary and Secondary Schools throughout Sunraysia and Mallee Family Care speech therapists who work with the Early Intervention treating children with special needs

from birth to school age. Private speech pathologists are also available locally.

"The ability to communicate is a basic human need many of us take for granted," Speech Pathology Australia's National president Trish Bradd said.

"Communication is part of our daily life, but for the one in seven Australians with some type of communication difficulty, everyday activities such as ordering lunch, paying a bill or buying a train ticket can be difficult and frustrating.

"Working closely with other health professionals, speech pathologists play an important role in treating and assisting a range of people with speech and language difficulties," she said. Children and adults with communication difficulties may suffer mental health issues and behavioral problems, display poor self-esteem and can struggle to manage social relationships and sustain employment.

Ms Bradd said communication disorders vary in their duration and severity and include problems with speech, using and understanding languages, voice, fluency, hearing, reading and writing.

"Communication disor-

ders can be hereditary, occur in childhood or happen as the result of stroke, neurological disease or serious injury," she said.

A speech pathologist at the Allied Health Department at the local hospital, Ms Ryan said she pursued an occupation in that particular field because she liked working with people.

"Communication is so vital," Ms Ryan said.

"It's integral to relationships, self esteem and development."

Ms Ryan said the initial step when a patient seeks her services is to assess them, then set therapy goals and begin treatment.

Ms Ryan said it is important that she works with children with a speech or language problem while their parents are in attendance.

"I work in conjunction with the family to let them know what to do at home," Ms Ryan said.

"We encourage at least 10 minutes practice a day at home as well as incorporating strategies in everyday activities.

"We use bubbles, stickers, stamps and toys to make things more fun," Ms Ryan said.

Depending on the severity of the speech and/or language problem as

well as other contributing factors, it could take anywhere from two weeks onwards to correct the issue.

"If it's a mild speech problem — such as a four year old not being able to produce the 'L' sound, then it could take as little as a couple of weeks.

"A lot depends on the motivation and diligence of the family with the home work they complete."

Ms Ryan said a big misconception within the community is that there is a long waiting list for local speech therapy services.

"There is a short wait at present at Mildura Base Hospital, but it's not as long as people think," Ms Ryan said.

Often therapists will screen their waiting list and offer advice and give strategies to work on while waiting for an appointment.

Speech therapy at the Mildura Base Hospital is free and no referral is required.

"Early identification of speech and/or language problems is essential," Ms Ryan said.

"Don't wait, contact a speech pathologist with any concerns."



Speech Pathology Week. Debbie Adams (top left), Regine Astum and Terah Hertz