

MEDIA RELEASE
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New help for Aussie kids battling juvenile arthritis

Tasmanian families have funded a new go-to guide for children around the country battling with juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA).

The new guidebook, developed by Arthritis Australia, offers information about where to get help and how to live with the debilitating disease that afflicts one in 1000 children, affecting their joints, eyes, skin and muscles.

Arthritis Tasmania CEO Jackie Slyp said families and carers need more support.

“JIA is as common as childhood diabetes but is often dismissed as growing pains and diagnosed late,” Mrs Slyp said.

“The pain and isolation it causes can take a huge physical and emotional toll on the children and their parents, but the disease’s cause is largely unknown.”

Eight-year-old Anica Doherty and her mum Sandi Doherty helped raise funds to produce the guidebook.

“Anica was diagnosed when she was 2 years old. Our previously healthy toddler stopped walking and was in chronic pain 24/7. No one could tell us why.” Ms Doherty explained.

“Eventually she was diagnosed, but JIA presents differently for each child and it can be confusing to know how to support a child with JIA.”

“6 years later we have found a treatment that is working well for Anica. She can walk again, and 90% of the time she can do everything that her friends can. We are now able focus on supporting her with the social and emotional impact that living with chronic pain has on a child. We think it is important to help other families dealing with the same challenges to ensure that all children with JIA receive the support and understanding they require to grow up as happy and healthy as possible.’

The new guidebook will be distributed freely to parents, families and carers of children diagnosed with JIA.

“It gives tips on managing school and play, and diet and exercise, as well as where to find professional help,” Mrs Slyp said.

“It’s tough but kids with arthritis can lead a happy, productive life.”

The symptoms of juvenile arthritis include swollen, painful joints, stiffness, and a fever or rash.

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