

Inner Wheel walks for good cause

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Linda Wallace leads the walk, breaking through the red ribbon. Pictures: STEWART CHAMBERS 279115_08

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By Eleanor Wilson

The weather was unexpectedly kind to the Inner Wheel Club (IWC) Narre Warren on Friday, as the sun came out for their charity walkathon at Berwick's Wilson Botanic Park.

An army of red t-shirts, hats and jackets sauntered through a two kilometre stretch of the park, raising money for cord blood research.

IWC Narre Warren president Linda Wallace said despite a particularly drizzly forecast, the weather was "stunning."

"We had a mix of [IWC] members, we had about 20 researchers from The Ritchie Centre along with lead researchers professor Suzie Miller and professor Graham Jenkin and there were friends and relatives that came as well," she said.

"We had beautiful sunshine to walk in and a lovely garden to have our morning tea in afterwards where we enjoyed slices made by some of the members."

The walkathon brought in close to \$1000 to go towards leading research into the benefits of stem cells from cord blood at Monash University and The Ritchie Centre at Hudson Institute of Medical Research.

Cord blood research has been a national project for Inner Wheel for the past 20 years, with affiliated clubs across Australia raising money for the cause through similar fundraising activities.

The Ritchie Centre's Professor Suzie Miller said the support of Inner Wheel has been key in assisting the centre to develop clinical trials for cord blood research.

"My team at The Ritchie Centre is specifically interested in brain development, so we're most keen to find how cord blood stem cells might be used as protective therapy for the brain when there's been a complication of pregnancy or birth," she said.

In the last 12 months The Ritchie Centre has been able to take their research and implement it into a ground-breaking clinical trial at the Monash Children's Hospital.

"Financially and through all of their events [IWC] have supported all of the pre-clinical studies where we examined how the stem cells work and that has led directly to this clinical trial," Ms Miller said.

Cord blood, which contains a rich source of stem cells, is known to be particularly valuable for the prognosis of premature babies.

It can also provide lifesaving assistance to patients with blood diseases, immune and metabolic disorders and some forms of cancer.

To date Inner Wheel has raised more four million dollars for cord blood research.

