

# Safe vehicle transport for children with disabilities



**Helen Lindner**, Chief Executive,  
Mobility and Accessibility for Children in Australia (MACA)

**M**ACA's recent national survey by Curtin University showed health professionals report low self-confidence and knowledge when prescribing safe vehicle transport options for children with disabilities and medical conditions.

MACA's new, evidence-informed website [macahub.org](http://macahub.org) – funded by the NDIA – is the first step towards addressing this. It is the result of almost two years of research, advocacy and policy development. Importantly, the resource has been informed by the lived experience of families and the clinical perspective of allied health professionals.

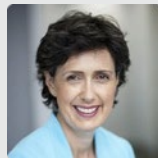
Macahub.org contains independent and trusted information for parents and carers, and allows confidence when making decisions about children's vehicle transport needs. MACA believes every family deserves peace of mind that their children are travelling safely and comfortably.

Health professionals can also find information about vehicle restraints and their safety, policies, jurisdiction-specific template letters and answers to frequently asked questions.

Occupational therapists play a fundamental role in helping MACA to achieve its vision: that every child has access to safe and accessible transport, regardless of circumstance. In this article, we introduce some of these occupational therapists and outline their

connections to MACA, the paths they took to becoming occupational therapists, and why they value their profession.

## Lisa Vale, principal OT at MACA



My role at MACA is to provide the perspective of occupational therapy and an allied health professional – contributing this knowledge to the development of

website content, resources and training. I also advise allied health professionals about best-practice approaches to prescribing assistive technology, and developing strategies to support safe transport for children with disabilities and medical conditions.

### Why are you an OT?

My sister was born with a neurological condition and had frequent hospitalisations during her childhood. As a result, I became aware of occupational therapy from a very young age. When choosing a career, I thought occupational therapy had a great mix of both science and creativity – and I was always focused on paediatrics as I really love working with children.

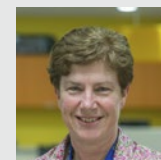
### Why do you value OT?

I value occupational therapy because of its amazing ability to analyse where an activity or performance is breaking down, and co-create solutions with clients and families. We are able to advocate and lobby for our

clients, empowering them to state their needs about everyday supports. It's all about supporting participation in everyday life.

We have so much to offer, and I hope that in years to come the evidence base continues to solidify, and we become more confident and vocal in our scope of practice.

## Dr Susan Greaves, OT manager, RCH



The occupational therapy department at The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, has been working with MACA (and its predecessor TOCAN)

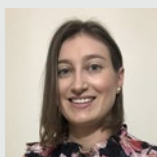
to promote the safe transportation of children – our primary focus being children associated with a tertiary hospital. This work ranges from evaluating lie-flat car beds for children unable to be upright, to finding suitable car-seating solutions for children in hip spicas or braces. This much-needed work aims to help determine and standardise best practice in this area.

### Why are you an OT?

I was attracted to occupational therapy because I felt it provided a broader perspective of healthcare than many other health disciplines, and had a great variety of areas in which to practice. Having said that, I have only worked in paediatrics since graduating.

**Why do you value OT?**

I value occupational therapy because we focus on what is important to children and families, work with them to solve their problems, and offer practical solutions to promote their participation in everyday activities.

**Dr Melissa Black,  
Curtin University**

I worked with MACA to develop and implement a large national survey exploring the transport needs of children with disabilities and medical

conditions in Australia. This project provides us with insights into the state of vehicle transport for children with disabilities and medical conditions in Australia, and directions on how we can better support children and their families to travel safely and comfortably.

The follow-up survey will enable Curtin University to evaluate the impact of MACA's new national information resource.

**Why did you become an OT?**

When I was in high school, I knew I wanted a career in which I could help people, but I wasn't sure what it would look like. I was lucky to meet an occupational therapist, and once I learnt about their work, I knew it was the career for me. What drew me to occupational therapy was the fact you could work with people to make a real difference in their lives.

**Why do you value OT?**

Occupational therapy has given me a new way of thinking about the world and the people in it. It challenges me every day, and forces me to think outside the box.

What is incredibly special about occupational therapy is that we have the privilege to work with people from all walks of life to enable them to participate in what is meaningful to them.

What I really value about occupational therapy is that we see the person first and take a holistic approach to health and well-being.

**Belinda Egan and Kyle Norton,  
masters of occupational therapy  
practice, Monash University**

We were involved in a project for MACA as part of our masters degrees at Monash University. We developed behavioural strategy guidelines for supporting children with challenging behaviours during vehicle transport.

The guidelines assist allied health professionals to develop their knowledge, clinical reasoning and decision-making.

**Why did you become an OT?**

**Kyle:** I worked as a rehabilitation therapist before pursuing an occupational therapy degree. During this time, I had the opportunity to see clients across a variety of different settings, and learn about the roles of different allied health professionals. I was drawn to occupational therapy because I saw how rewarding the profession could be when a client reached their functional goals.

**Belinda:** There have been many times when members of my family have required occupational therapists. One thing I noticed was how much time and effort occupational therapists spent not only caring for and treating members of my family, but also providing support for their carers.

**Why do you value OT?**

**Kyle:** Occupational therapy has a unique ability to improve the quality of life of

an individual through facilitating their participation in occupations they find meaningful. This is often accomplished by thinking outside the box and providing solutions that clients may not have considered, such as altering their environment or providing adaptive equipment to help them regain skills they may have lost. Improving the physical, emotional and mental health outcomes of vulnerable people is an incredible opportunity, and I look forward to helping people for many years to come.

**Belinda:** Occupational therapy is so valuable as it enables everyone from children to elderly people to participate in activities that are important and meaningful to them. They do this by developing interventions which are specific to each individual, whether that be assistive devices or implementation of services.

MACA looks forward to continuing to collaborate with occupational therapists and other health professionals to improve road safety and participation outcomes for Australian children and their families.

**About the author**

MACA is a registered charity dedicated to advancing the rights of children with disabilities and medical conditions to safe and accessible transport. Chief executive Helen Lindner has an early childhood and policy background, and has worked in road safety and the transport sector for a decade.