

# Mum treasures her tight-knit family

LINDA SMITH

IT has been a tough few months for Howrah mum Kirsty Willson.

The 36-year-old has been dealing with life in isolation while caring for three young children and running a popular online beanie business.

But she's also faced the emotional upheaval of staying strong for her husband Mark, who was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year and is currently recovering in Melbourne after a bone-marrow transplant.

Mark noticed bruising on his legs while playing in the backyard with the kids on Christmas Day and by January 8 he was diagnosed with leukaemia.

"He was very fit and healthy and active," Mrs Willson said.

"He was just go, go, go, all the time. So it's been a big change for us."

Originally Mrs Willson planned to be with her husband in Melbourne for the first month following the April 21 transplant while Charlie, 6, Oskar, 7, and



Ciara, 9, stayed in Hobart with grandparents.

But coronavirus border restrictions meant they had to rethink those plans and Mrs Willson ended up staying in Hobart with the kids, while Mr Willson's parents support him in Melbourne, although he can only have one person visit him each day, for one hour.

Mrs Willson had hoped to communicate with her husband via FaceTime but post-operative inflammation plus an infection near his vocal cords as well as an allergic reaction meant his face and throat had swollen and he couldn't talk to her for the

first 10 days. But the last few days have been better.

"He is improving really well," Mrs Willson said.

"He is eating and drinking again and his blood count is increasing naturally every day.

"It looks as though his new immune system is growing and the transplant has worked."

Mr Willson is required to stay in hospital for 100 days before being allowed to return home.

Receiving stem cells from an immediate family member – his brother – means he is expected to recover well.

Mrs Willson runs an online

business – Kwuirky – knitting and selling colourful beanies which are popular on Facebook.

The stay-at-home mum says the business is helping her stay sane during a stressful and uncertain time.

She started the business as a way to help cope with the anxiety and depression she suffered when her children were younger, teaching herself loom knitting using YouTube tutorials.

"Usually I knit during the evening once the children are in bed or while watching a movie with them," she said.

"Growing up, I always wanted two things in life – and it was to be a mother and to have my own handmade shop.

"I started out testing a few different products on the market scene and this is what everyone is going crazy for.

"I just liked the fact that the beanies had a real purpose and weren't just creating more useless waste.

"But because I'm at home it's a nice distraction and it makes me feel like I'm doing something to keep busy.

"The situation that we're in is hard for anyone. But after being through anxiety and depression when all the children were young, I feel like I've done a lot of work on myself and I'm capable of getting through this ... and the knitting definitely helps."

For the past two years Mrs Willson has also been making a special beanie and donating \$10 from each sale to support local charity Homely Retreats, which provides getaways for local families with a parent going through cancer treatment.

Usually her kids and husband make a fuss of her on Mother's Day but obviously this year will be different.

But she said going through such a life-changing experience made her appreciate the positive things in life.

"Normally they'd make a big fuss of me ... breakfast and a pamper day where they'd all give me massages and face masks and maybe a picnic.

"I certainly appreciate my husband and kids a whole lot more now.

"There are always positives out of negative situations."