

# Cottage Capers

The Newsletter for Bear Cottage families



February 2016



## Renovation update

Welcome to 2016, Bear Cottage's 15th year of operation. To kick off the New Year we are finally underway with our renovations, which will include a new roof, air conditioning and lighting systems. We will also see the addition of a meeting room, reconfiguration of office spaces and refurbishment of the spa.

Unfortunately over the next five months the renovation will impact on the amount of respite available but we will endeavour to meet each family's needs as best we can and attempt to minimise noise and disruption. Please note that during this time there will be very limited parking on site so please remember only one vehicle is permitted for each family.

On completion, we look forward to being able to offer a much improved service to our large Bear Cottage network.

## Admission times

Please remember that our admission times are between 2-4pm unless previously organised. This allows for our staff to have time to ensure the admission process is smooth and that we gain all the necessary information about your child.

## Additional support

Along with our regular respite and emergency care, Bear Cottage will continue to provide programs for all family members throughout 2016. Our calendar lists many of the different camps that we run during the year. Reminders and invitations will be sent as they come about, so please do not hesitate to register your interest for these fabulous events.

The team at Bear Cottage look forward to seeing you all in 2016. ■

## Being part of the Bear Cottage family

We would like to think that each and every family member who visits Bear Cottage feels as though they are part of an extended family. Our support is available to them for as long as they need, whether this is accessing respite, speaking with any of our team, or just coming along to our Christmas party once a year to catch up with staff and other families. We hope that each opportunity allows families to feel that they are not isolated but rather connected to a broader community.

It is for this reason that throughout the year we run a number of programs that we hope cater for everyone. We also welcome your feedback so that we are able to refine the programs in place and respond to needs of our families.

As well as our established camps program for senior and junior siblings and our **Mums and Dads Camp**, we also held a **Junior Sibling Day** last year for the first time.

This day is planned for our younger siblings who are not yet ready for sleep over camps. They are great fun and a beautiful introduction for our younger kids. We have an amazing program planned for 2016.



2016 will also see Bear Cottage host its third **Footprints in the Sand Camp** for bereaved families and will again be held at Camp Collaroy. The Camp is for all bereaved families and includes a range of fun and creative activities as well as opportunities for remembrance.

Continued next page >>>





Continued from previous page.

## PitStop Wellness Camp



We are excited that in 2016 Bear Cottage will be able to offer two new Family Support Programs. Over the past two years we have run three successful health and wellness programs

called **Boot Camp at Bear Cottage** for our Bear Cottage Mums and this year will be the first year that we hold a men's health and wellbeing program called **PitStop**. Men regularly take an interest in their cars, and the ongoing maintenance of them. The idea behind PitStop is to attach this concept of regular mechanical tune-ups to their own health. The camp will be open to bereaved and non-bereaved Dads and is a structured program covering all sorts of checks, services and tune ups and supports. Dads are assisted to take charge of their wellbeing and work to becoming 'road worthy' – healthier, happier and be able to better manage stress whilst having fun in a supportive environment. Please see the flyer with more information on PitStop included with this newsletter.

## "Gramping" – Bear Cottage Grandparents' Camp

We are fortunate to meet so many grandparents who play a unique, special and significant part their grandchild's life. We see the magical bond that exists between a grandparent and their grandchild. Grandparents have a special place in the family as a trusted adult. Their support provides an emotional and social safety net for the entire family, helping the grandchild feel safe and secure as well as providing practical, emotional and/or financial support to their own children.



This year, we are inviting Bear Cottage bereaved and non-bereaved Grandparents to come "**Gramping**". The Camp will be held from **Friday 17 June 2016 to Sunday 19 June 2016** and will be located in Manly. Bear Cottage is in the process of building a Grandparents database and we invite Grandparents to express their interest in the camp by sending an email to [elizabeth.arnott@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:elizabeth.arnott@health.nsw.gov.au). Spaces are limited and a formal invitation will be sent closer to the date. ■



## Congratulations!

We were very proud to hear that **Narelle Martin**, our Nursing Unit Manager was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for service to nursing, particularly palliative care for children. As many of you would know, Narelle has been with Bear Cottage since it opened in 2001. ■

## Staff news



Sadly, the day of the family Christmas party was also Play Therapist **Zena's** last day. Zena was a friend to many and provided a fantastic play therapy program on Sundays and Mondays. She will be sadly missed and she would like to pass on her goodbyes to all.

This month we also said goodbye to one of our super AINs, **Hannah**. Hannah will be pursuing her career as a registered nurse at North Shore Private. We look forward to keeping in touch.



**Kylie** our wonderful chef, who has provided delicious meals in the kitchen has also said goodbye for a career move.

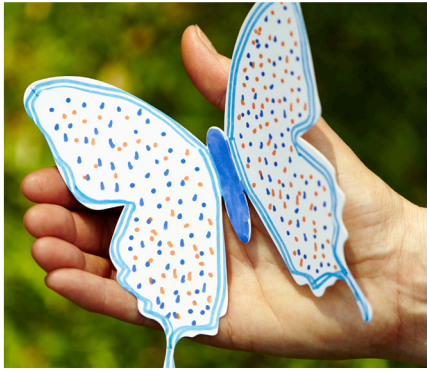
The Bear Cottage team has welcomed **Judy** into the Art Therapy role. Judy comes along with

loads of experience and creativity in this area and already we are seeing some of her creations come to life. Welcome also to **Megan** and **Sevi** who have both joined the Registered Nursing team and welcome back **Emma** from maternity leave. ■





# Lasting memories



*"The greatest gift in life is to be remembered"* (Ken Venturi) and this is why we celebrate and remember the lives of the children at Bear Cottage at every opportunity. **Remembering Day** is one of those occasions.

Each year our bereaved families are invited to participate in a more formal service. It is an opportunity for families to not only commemorate and remember their children and to see staff and connect or re-connect with other families. For some families it may be comforting to be with people who truly understand. By witnessing those that are further

along their bereavement journey, it may help to see that maybe they too can continue to live without their child. For some family members, being with people that truly understand may grant them the permission to let the emotion and the grief out, a release from the brave face that is often their mask.

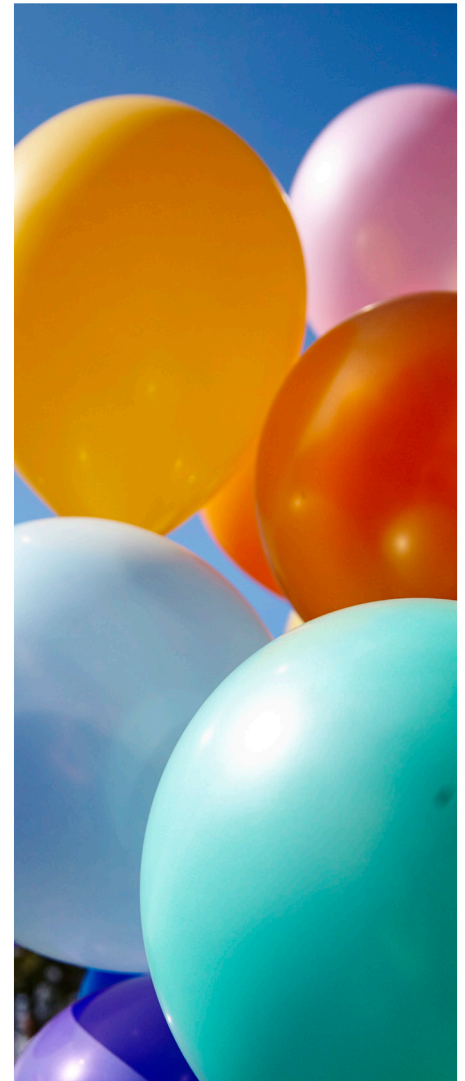
The service is held in the beauty and serenity of the College, allowing relatives the chance to return to Manly – a place that can have a special meaning, without the confrontation of returning to Bear Cottage.

As they enter, parents are given a candle inscribed with their child's name which they light for the duration of the service and can take home. One mother felt that taking their candle home was a constant reminder that their child has not been forgotten and that the support they receive is continuous.

There are reflections from staff, volunteers and family members – beautiful, personal accounts exemplifying the importance of family, love and support. The slide show demonstrates the significance of each and every child that has been known to Bear Cottage and is a pictorial illustration of the fact that once you are a member of the Bear Cottage family, you are so forever. One mother expressed that seeing a photograph of her son was a public acknowledgement of his existence and for her this was very significant.

Balloons are very important to Bear Cottage and on this day we encourage families to write messages on and participate in a balloon release. A father expressed that by doing this, he felt he was sending a message up to his child, letting her know that she was still very much loved and missed but also giving her reassurance that they were doing OK.

The afternoon comes to a close after the chance to share afternoon tea and a chat and the chance to do some memory making craft. It is a poignant reminder of the love and support that is shared by the staff and families of Bear Cottage and an appreciation for the lives of our children – *"to live on in hearts we leave behind is not to die"*. ■



**Part of Footprints in the Sand**  
Bear Cottage's Bereavement Service

## Parent's corner

### Are you eligible to use a MLAK key?

The **MLAK** key allows people with a disability to access a number of public facilities. These facilities include Liberty Swings (such as the one at Bear Cottage). The MLAK key also gives access to accessible toilets in many locations including National Parks and elevators in railway stations.

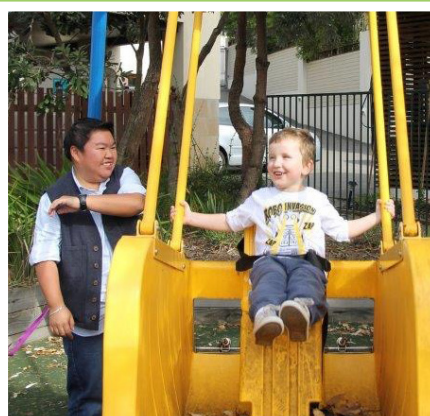
When visiting Bear Cottage you may have noticed that there is a gate into the St Patricks Estate just up from the entry gate to Bear Cottage that is accessible via the MLAK key. This is so that Bear Cottage children in wheel chairs and their families can access this area more easily.

MLAK keys are available for people who have a disability from locksmith businesses that belong to the **Master Locksmith**

**Association.** You may need to have a letter from your doctor, disability organisation or health centre. The location of the swings can be found on the Liberty Swing website.

[www.libertyswing.com.au/index.php/home/find-a-swing-near-you.html](http://www.libertyswing.com.au/index.php/home/find-a-swing-near-you.html)

[www.masterlocksmiths.com.au/mlak.php](http://www.masterlocksmiths.com.au/mlak.php) ■



## Remembering our children

Sloane Monti  
23/09/15 – 28/11/15

Melvic Faaleaga  
25/08/09 – 30/11/15

Darragh Donohoe  
25/03/01-23/12/15

Jack Woodhams  
16/10/08- 5/01/16

Isaac Kadamani  
26/08/11 – 19/01/16

Matthias Mohr  
17/02/14 – 31/1/16

Max Wilson  
14/08/01 – 1/02/16

## Valuable volunteers



*Aaron started volunteering in March 2015 working on the play team and also walking Frankie. It is something he very much enjoys doing and is a real change from his corporate life . . .*

There are a couple of reasons why I started volunteering at Bear Cottage. First and foremost, I simply wanted to make a difference to the lives of these amazing children. Secondly (and almost selfishly), I felt I needed a new challenge in my life. Coming from the corporate world, it can be easy to lose track of what's really important in life. Playing a small part in these children's lives, whilst seeing first hand the pure love from their families, really puts everything in perspective for me.

There are so many incredible memories I have volunteering at Bear Cottage. I love seeing the happy smiling faces when I come into the house. Bear Cottage enables me to work directly with the children, may it be cooking, music therapy, art and crafts or simply hanging out with the children watching movies – even if I have watched 'Frozen' 15 times. I love walking Frankie, the Bear Cottage trained dog and enjoy seeing the comfort Frankie brings to everyone in the house. There is one 12-year-old boy who loves rugby league and I enjoy watching the footy games with him and the banter he provides cheering against my favourite team.

Walking into Bear Cottage you never know what to expect and at times you might feel like you're outside your comfort zone, although what I discovered is how much you learn about yourself being out of that comfort zone. Spending my time at Bear Cottage has helped me grow as a person through self-discovery giving me a better understanding how I deal in certain situations resulting in a stronger more confident person. ■



**24-30 July 2016**

## "I love Bear Cottage"

Respite at Bear Cottage means different things to different people. We have children staying with us accompanied by their mums and dads, brothers and sisters. These families are then free to do as much or as little as they like during their stay whilst at the same time being able to enjoy the beautiful Manly location.

For others it is a chance for their child to come unaccompanied which means that other family members can take a different kind of break. We hope that whichever way families choose to utilise our services, that it works for them and that the end result is the same.

In the lead up to Christmas, 10 year old Heba stayed with us while her family were holidaying overseas. Coming to Bear Cottage unaccompanied is something that Heba has done before and something that she enjoys very much (and so do we!)

For Heba's parents, it was a relief knowing that they could enjoy their time away with their other children and that Heba was also having a "holiday" of her own.

Dad Mahmoud said "I was so happy that Heba would be staying at Bear Cottage because she enjoys it there and I know that she will be well cared for".



And from mum Nissrein ". . . there is no other respite service that is able to cater for Heba and her special needs. So there would not have been a holiday if it wasn't for Bear Cottage. I am forever grateful and thankful to Bear cottage for giving us the chance to experience an amazing holiday with my husband and other children, knowing Heba is well looked after and happy. Really I don't think words can express my gratitude towards Bear Cottage enough."

Heba also wanted to tell everyone what she likes best about Bear Cottage . . .

"My favourite food is when Kylie cooks pasta and rice and I like EVERY dessert! My favourite thing to do is painting. I've painted a picture with everyone at Bear Cottage in it so I can remember everybody when I go home."

Heba was with us in the lead up to Christmas and she spent time with one of



our volunteers writing a letter to Santa listing a couple of gift suggestions. Our volunteer was impressed when she very cleverly insisted that we also include a photo of her with the letter so that Santa would know exactly who she was!

Reflexology was something that Heba very much enjoyed saying it "felt nice and didn't tickle".

Of course, Frankie sleeping on the bed was another highlight. According to Heba, Frankie would hide under the covers so that when they were pulled back she would jump out and surprise her. Frankie even warmed up the bed for her and then stayed awhile to have a cuddle. We always knew Frankie was a thoughtful and considerate dog!

Always one to love an opportunity to perform and entertain, she wrote a lovely song with Gy our Child Life Therapist, which we all enjoyed listening to. It went something like this . . .

*There was a princess named Heba  
Who was friends with a king named Gy-ba  
They played all month doing stuff  
Doing cooking, art and bubbles  
They played around the fountain  
Doing spirit fingers all day long  
It made them very hungry  
And so they went inside for lunch*

Finally, Heba would like to tell other people to stay here because "we have ice cream and I love coming and it's really good!"

We hope that Heba and her family were well rested after their two very different types of respite. ■

