Bear Cottage is an uplifting and inspiring place where life is celebrated, lived to its fullest and also fondly remembered.

BACKGROUND
Located in Manly on Sydney’s Northern Beaches, Bear Cottage is a warm and home-like environment providing respite, support and end-of-life care for children with life-limiting conditions and their families. Bear Cottage is the only children’s hospice in NSW, one of only two in Australia and the only one in the world affiliated with a children’s hospital.

Staff at Bear Cottage are committed to providing continued medical care in a non-hospital setting. Staff do not wear uniforms and medical procedures do not take place in the children’s rooms, which are designed to appear like a normal bedroom. This ‘home away from home’ is complete with a pet dog, Frankie, who is always around to provide some extra comfort.

Children’s hospices seek to enhance the quality of life for children with life-limiting illness by providing support, comfort and reassurance to families at their time of greatest need. At Bear Cottage, staff believe a child’s life, however brief, should be enriched, enjoyed and celebrated.

HISTORY OF BEAR COTTAGE
Bear Cottage is an initiative of The Children’s Hospital at Westmead and was first proposed in 1988 by former Chief Executive, Dr John Yu Oncologist Dr Michael Stevens, to enhance the Hospital’s palliative care program.

The location was found in 1995 with St Patrick’s Estate in Manly offering the perfect place to create a ‘beach house’ type facility, offering respite and palliative care to children and young people in a beautiful and tranquil surrounding.

The community rallied behind the proposal and helped to raise $10 million to construct the facility. Bear Cottage was officially opened on St Patrick’s Day, 17 March 2001.
At Bear Cottage, life-limiting illness is an everyday reality. Bear Cottage is dedicated to providing families with a place where they can spend quality time with their child and help create some lifelong memories, while providing support to families through difficult times.

As a medical facility, Bear Cottage is set up to provide excellent paediatric palliative care 24 hours a day, with access to some of the best medical resources in the world. Nurses are available to provide medical assistance, administer medications and offer support and guidance around the clock to patients and their families.

As a respite facility, Bear Cottage is a home away from home. Staff and volunteers are on hand to take care of the cooking and cleaning, allowing families to forget about the stresses of everyday life. As part of the holistic care provided to children at Bear Cottage, full-time child life therapists and volunteers work with children to engage them in play, music and art therapy. This service not only creates a space for children to relax but also give parents time to recuperate and spend time with one another.

Families needing respite will often stay at Bear Cottage for between seven to ten days and may visit up to four times a year. There is no limit put on the length of stay for end-of-life care.

FAST FACTS

- Bear Cottage was built entirely thanks to community donations
- Bear Cottage was officially opened on 17 March 2001
- Over $3.6 million is currently needed each year to keep Bear Cottage running each year
- Bear Cottage relies on donated funds to continue providing the facility free of charge each year
- Money raised goes toward helping fund families to stay at Bear Cottage for respite and end of life care, funding important camps for kids and parents and providing play, music and art therapy
- Bear Cottage cares for children from across Australia, regardless of where they receive their primary care
- The majority of families who access the service are from NSW
- The children who visit Bear Cottage range from newborn infants to children up to 19 years of age
- Bear Cottage offers accommodation for parents and siblings of the children staying.
- All meals are provided for children and their families
- Estimates suggest there are well over 5000 children aged 0 – 19 years across Australia requiring palliative care
- In the last year alone, Bear Cottage has cared for over 220 children with a life-limiting illness
- In the last 12 months, there have been 23 children who have come to Bear Cottage for end of life care, where they can be surrounded by love and support in a happy, safe environment for their final days
- In the last 14 years, Bear Cottage has supported nearly 800 families, both current and bereaved, as they go through their heart-wrenching journey.
Bear Cottage services and facilities

Bear Cottage has been specifically designed to create a home-like environment for children with life-limiting illness. It provides a range of state-of-the-art services and facilities to deliver the very best care to the child and their family.

Services

Bear Cottage offers respite and therapy, child life therapy and camps to help families cope with their child’s situation. Each of these services is tailored to the child’s/families individual needs to make the experience as stress-free as possible.

• Respite and Therapy: families caring for a child with a life-limiting illness often require additional support. At Bear Cottage, a family support team is available to provide assistance and coping strategies to families, from when a child is first referred to Bear Cottage and continuing throughout the care of their child. The team offers support throughout the end-of-life period and provides ongoing bereavement and emotional support.

• Child Life Therapy: Bear Cottage offers play, music and art therapy as a fun and creative outlet for children and families to express themselves. The different areas of child life therapy are powerful tools for alleviating anxiety, promoting feelings of control and giving opportunities for self-expression. It is also used as an avenue to help families cope with their child’s illness.

• Camps: Each year, Bear Cottage organise a number of innovative camps to bring children and families dealing with a life-limiting illness together. These camps provide the opportunity to connect with other families and children with similar medical conditions. The camps offer a positive distraction for children, parents and siblings travelling a similar life journey. Bear Cottage organises kid’s camps, sibling camps, mums’ and dads’ camps, bereaved families camps and a Wellness (Boot Camp) for mums and dads. We also hold a “Gramping” camp for our grandparents.

• Footprints in the Sand is Bear Cottage’s bereavement support program which has been designed to support the existing programs offered by Bear Cottage. As well as our existing Key Worker Bereavement Support Program, Remembering Service and Bereavement BBQ’s we are hold regular Bereavement Morning Teas and an annual Bereaved Families Camp.

Facilities

Facilities at Bear Cottage include:

• Individual children’s rooms
• An end-of-life room
• Two family suites
• Multi-sensory room
• Sensory garden
• Spa
• Multi-media/games room
• Wheelchair accessible play areas
• Parents’ retreat and quiet area
• Multiple play and relaxation areas
• Quiet room
• Commercial kitchen and dining room.
Staff
An expert multidisciplinary team provides 24-hour care for the children and families at Bear Cottage, taking care of not only their medical needs, but also the daily chores like cooking and cleaning.

Clinical Team
- Nursing Unit Manager
- Paediatric Palliative care consultant
- Experienced paediatric palliative care nursing staff
- On-call GPs
- Assistant nurses
- Social Workers
- Child life play therapists
- Music therapist
- Art therapist

House Staff
- Fundraising Manager
- Community Relations Manager
- Business Manager
- Volunteer Manager
- Housekeepers
- Chefs
- Maintenance Manager

Bear Cottage is also supported by a dedicated team of more than 140 trained volunteers.
Narelle Martin  
Nursing Unit Manager  
Narelle Martin is the Nursing Unit Manager at Bear Cottage. Narelle has an active role leading the clinical care team and strives to ensure that all families who stay at Bear Cottage are well cared for, with their lives enriched in a holistic home like environment. Narelle’s desire to work in paediatric palliative care came from 20 years working as a nurse at The Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children (now known as The Children’s Hospital at Westmead), primarily in the intensive care and oncology units. Narelle commenced nursing at Bear Cottage when it opened in 2001. In 2007 she took up the role of patient liaison nurse, working directly with families and promoting the work of Bear Cottage amongst health care professionals before taking on the role of Nursing Unit Manager in 2008. In her time at Bear Cottage, Narelle has instigated many family-centred programs, including introducing music and art therapy programs, and has championed for the introduction of social workers.

Gy Wen Ho  
Child Life Therapist  
Gy Wen Ho is one of the child life therapists at Bear Cottage who dedicates his days to making children smile. Gy’s work at Bear Cottage, which began in late 2008, includes organising camps for patients and their siblings, arranging activities for the school holidays, providing diversion activities for children and providing opportunities for children to express their thoughts and feelings in a way that makes them feel comfortable and safe. Gy completed a Health Science Degree with a Major in Play Speciality at the University of Western Sydney. This sparked his interest in children and their inquisitive developing mind and led him to complete a Masters in Early Childhood at Macquarie University. During this time he worked at The Australian Museum helping children to use play as a tool to help them understand the world around them. Since starting at Bear Cottage, Gy has helped countless children and families on their journey through the use of ‘play’.
As a Registered Music Therapist, Phoebe Cormack spends her days Bear Cottage connecting and engaging with children through music. Starting as a volunteer to trial the Music Therapy Program in 2009 and continuing with the program when it was formally introduced, Phoebe uses music to help the children and families at Bear Cottage cope with illness, express their emotions and instil a sense of control over their situation. Phoebe has completed a Bachelor of Music at Southern Cross University and Master of Arts in Music Therapy at the University of Technology, Sydney. Since her graduation, she has worked predominantly with children and adolescents with disabilities, facilitating music therapy sessions in a range of special education schools, seeing private clients and being involved in community-based music therapy programs. In 2013, Phoebe won best non-medical presentation for the year at the Grand Rounds at The Children’s Hospital at Westmead on Paediatric Palliative Care and Pain Management.

Liz Arnott
Social Worker
Liz Arnott is our social worker at Bear Cottage. Life is for living and Liz feels privileged to support our children and families. The families’ love, courage and caring for their children is inspirational.

Liz provides supportive grief and bereavement counselling and advocacy as well as information and referral and support to the whole family. Together with the Bear Cottage Family Support Team, Liz provides creative communication, play and has a key role in the programming and running of Bear Cottage Camps for the children, siblings and their families.

As well as extensive experience in Disability and more recently experience in Paediatric Palliative Care, Liz has completed a Bachelor of Social Work Degree at The University of Sydney and has post graduate qualifications in management, disability, grief, loss, bereavement and holistic wellness. On behalf of Bear Cottage, Liz had presented at international conferences and has a role in providing training and support to Bear Cottage staff and volunteers and the wider paediatric palliative care sector.
Philly Smith
Clinical Nurse Specialist

Philly Smith is a Clinical Nurse Specialist in Paediatric Palliative Care at Bear Cottage, a role that sees her working with new patient referrals and liaising with colleagues from other hospitals and disciplines. Philly started at Bear Cottage in 2006. Her special interest in bereavement support has seen her take an active role in Bear Cottage’s Bereavement and Sibling Programmes, including helping to organise the Back to Bear Cottage BBQ’s, bereaved family camps and Remembering Day. Philly completed her nurse training at St Marys, Paddington in the United Kingdom in 1992. Over the years, Philly has gained further experience in a variety of paediatric environments both in Australia and overseas, including three years working in oncology at Great Ormond Street Hospital and Royal Marsden Hospital and four years working as a Paediatric Community Nurse in Kent.

Judy King
Art Therapist

Judy King is the Registered Art therapist at Bear Cottage. Judy has been an artist for many years and also still works as a registered nurse intermittently. She combined these two worlds by completing the Masters in Art Therapy at Western Sydney University in 2008 and has been working with a variety of different client groups since then. This includes adult palliative care and mental health, chronic pain, troubled adolescents within the school system and pre school children.

Her passion is working with children and she has co-written a number of chapters in two recently published books based on her clinical work, “Trans generational Trauma and the Aboriginal pre school child” and “Art Therapy in the Early Years”.

She encourages all levels of creativity, using a variety of art materials, to help children and their families create precious memories together and explore the different factors that have brought them to the Cottage.
How is Bear Cottage different to Ronald McDonald Houses?
Ronald McDonald House provides home-like accommodation for families who live outside a 100km radius of the hospital that their child is receiving treatment at. It allows families to stay close to the hospital where their child is undergoing treatment but does not provide nursing care or professional support for the children and families staying there.

Bear Cottage provides medical support as well as accommodation but treatment is palliative not curative and therefore limited to pain relief and symptom control.

How many staff work at Bear Cottage?
Approximately 50 staff including the manager, nursing staff, social worker, play therapist, art therapist, music therapist, week day and weekend chefs, handyman, housekeepers, administration assistant, volunteer coordinator, fundraiser and community relations. Bear Cottage also has a Staff Specialist who works 2 days a week, four GPs who service Bear Cottage on a roster basis and a full time social worker. In addition, Bear Cottage has over 140 volunteers who perform various tasks from working with the play therapy team, housekeeping duties, dog walkers, drivers, kitchen duties etc.

What is the criteria to stay at Bear Cottage?
Families who use Bear Cottage have a child with a life limiting illness. Often these illnesses are progressively debilitating.

Are there any other children’s hospices in Australia?
This is the only children’s hospice in NSW. There is another children’s hospice in Melbourne called Very Special Kids. There is a third being built in Queensland.

How is Bear Cottage funded?
Bear Cottage was established by donated funds. Although Bear Cottage has recently started receiving some government funding, it continues to rely on donated funds to provide the programs that make Bear Cottage unique. Families do not have to pay to stay at Bear Cottage.

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