

Bear Cottage – a very special place

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 three in Australia.

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 fully trained Assistance Dog, Beau.

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 was an initiative of The Children's Hospital at Westmead and was first proposed in 1988 by 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.



The importance of Bear Cottage

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 life-long 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. Experienced nurses and doctors are available around the clock to provide care to the children and offer support and guidance to 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, child life, music and art therapists and volunteers work with children to engage them in play, music and art.

Families needing respite will often stay at Bear Cottage for between seven to ten days and are entitled to up to 4 weeks booked respite per year dependant on availability. There is no limit put on the length of stay for end-of-life care.



Bear Cottage

FAST FACTS

- Bear Cottage was built entirely thanks to community donations
- Bear Cottage was officially opened on 17 March 2001
- Over \$4 million is currently needed each year to keep Bear Cottage running each year
- Families do not pay to stay at Bear Cottage, nor does it impact on their NDIS package
- Bear Cottage relies on donated funds to continue providing the facility free of charge
- 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 until their 19th birthday
- 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 300 children with a life-limiting illness
- In the last 12 months, there have been 16 children who have come to Bear Cottage for end of life care, where they will be surrounded by love and support in a happy, safe environment in their final days
- In the last 19 years, Bear Cottage has supported over 1000 families



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 has an extensive Family Support program offering innovative programs to all family members.

- **Respite:** Families who care for a child with a life-limiting condition often do so around the clock for many years and Bear Cottage acknowledges the importance of respite.
- **Therapies:** Bear Cottage offers play, music and art therapy as a fun and creative outlet for children and families to express themselves.
- **Camps:** Each year, Bear Cottage organises a number of innovative camps to bring families together. These camps provide the opportunity to connect with others sharing similar situations. Camps offered include age-specific siblings' camps, camps for mums and dads, bereaved families camps and a "Gramping" camp for our grandparents.
- **Footprints in the Sand** is Bear Cottage's bereavement support program. This program includes an annual Remembering Day Service, "Back to Bear Cottage" BBQs and our Bereaved Families' Camp.

Facilities

Facilities at Bear Cottage include:

- Individual children's rooms
- Family suites
- Multi-sensory room
- Sensory garden
- Beautiful gardens with ocean views
- Spa
- Multi-media/games room
- Wheelchair accessible play areas
- Parent's retreat and quiet area
- Commercial kitchen and dining room
- 'Clifton Gardens' – our end-of-life room



Our staff



Bronwen Simmons
Community Relations Manager



Rachel Simpson
Volunteer Manager

Bear Cottage 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
- Palliative care staff specialist
- Experienced paediatric palliative care nursing staff
- On-call GPs
- Social Worker
- Child life play therapists
- Music therapist
- Art therapist
- Physiotherapist

House Staff

- Community Relations Manager
- Volunteer Manager
- Administration Assistant
- Housekeepers
- Chefs
- Maintenance Manager

Pet Therapy Dog

- Beau

Bear Cottage is also supported by a dedicated team of more than 140 trained volunteers.

Biographies



Narelle Martin, OAM

Acting Nurse Manager

Narelle Martin is the Nursing Unit Manager at Bear Cottage. Narelle leads 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.

In 2016 she was awarded an OAM for her work for Services to Paediatric Palliative Care and Nursing.



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'.



Belle Keevers

Registered Music Therapist

Belle Keevers has been working as a music therapist for over a decade and believes passionately in the power of music to reach a person, even when the essence of that person may seem

outwardly to have been obscured by the presence of a physical or cognitive disability.

Belle holds a degree in Social Work from the University of Sydney, a post-graduate diploma in Music Therapy from the University of Technology, Sydney and a Masters' in Arts/Music Therapy from the University of Technology, Sydney. She has also completed training in Piano Pedagogy with the University of Southern Queensland and Kodaly Music Education at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

She has worked in hospitals, community health centres, mainstream and special schools as well as in her private music studio. For several years, she worked at a music therapy clinic attached to the Music Therapy Department of the University of Technology, Sydney.

Belle has past experience working as a music therapist at several special schools with children who have special needs as well as with adults at a post-schools options service and feels privileged to be part of the Bear Cottage team.



Lauren Gough

Social Worker

Lauren Gough is our social worker at Bear Cottage. Lauren is so passionate about supporting children and their families and feels so privileged to work here at Bear Cottage, getting to know families and walking along side them.

Lauren provides supportive grief and bereavement counselling and advocacy as well as information, referral and support to the whole family. Together with the Bear Cottage Family Support Team, Lauren provides 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, Lauren has completed a Masters of Social Work Degree and has post graduate qualifications in disability, grief, loss, bereavement and counselling.



Philly Smith

Acting Nursing Unit Manager

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 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.



Bear Cottage – where life is for living



Dr Nicole Armitage

Paediatric Palliative Care Specialist

Nicole is a Paediatric Palliative Care Specialist who works at Bear Cottage two days a week. Nicole is passionate about providing high quality care to patients in need.

Along with her four GP colleagues, Nicole provides holistic and comprehensive medical care to Bear Cottage patients to achieve optimal comfort and quality of life. Nicole feels it is a privilege to work with the highly professional and caring team at Bear Cottage and together with the team, help care for the patients and their families that she meets at Bear Cottage.

Nicole studied medicine at Adelaide University and trained in paediatrics at Sydney Children's Hospital in Randwick and Children's Hospital Westmead in Westmead. She also works for HammondCare for the Greenwich community palliative care team.

Frequently asked questions



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 where their child is receiving treatment. 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 60 staff including the manager, nursing staff, child life therapist, art therapist, music therapist, week day and weekend chefs, maintenance manager, housekeepers, administration assistant, volunteer manager, fundraising and community relations manager. Bear Cottage also has a Paediatric Palliative Care Staff specialist who works two 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 walking, driving, 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?

Bear Cottage is the only children's hospice in NSW. There is another children's hospice in Melbourne called Very Special Kids and Hummingbird House recently opened in Brisbane.

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.

CONTACT DETAILS

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