

# Cottage Capers

The newsletter for Bear Cottage families



Summer 2020

## Welcome



Well what a year 2020 has been!

We have had many changes that we have had thrust upon us due to a pandemic, including isolation and the inability to travel wherever we please. For us, the experience has also brought about the realisation

that these are the experiences and feelings that many of our Bear Cottage families endure every day of their lives. We have been given hands-on education as to what it may be like being a parent of a child with complex needs.

Our goal throughout this time has been to continue to provide a safe haven of care for families at Bear Cottage, whilst also reaching out to you all in your own homes.

With 2020 coming to an end, we have finished the year with what I feel is one of our most beautiful initiatives in the 19 year history of Bear Cottage – our **“Christmas Caravan of Care”**.

Taking Bear Cottage on the road to say “hi” and to visit your communities has brought smiles and happy tears, to not only our families but to the Bear Cottage team of staff and volunteers. To see the children in their own environment, to catch up with some of our bereaved families and re-connect with those who may have graduated, has given us so much joy.

Whilst Bear Cottage may be a place that gives – it is what you all give back to us – that cannot be measured.

Sadly, due to the COVID-19 outbreak on the Northern Beaches, our third trip to Southern NSW has been postponed, but we will re-schedule this trip for early next year and look forward to seeing those families when we can.

On behalf of our Bear Cottage team, thank you all for being who you are and allowing us into your lives. Rest assured, Bear Cottage will be here for you whenever you need us.

We wish you all a lovely and safe festive season and hope that 2021 brings you much happiness. 🐾

Warmest wishes,

**Narelle Martin, Acting Nurse Manager**



## Christmas Caravan of Care

This year saw the cancellation of many of our Bear Cottage events and most disappointingly, our much-loved Christmas party.

When we knew that holding the party was no longer an option, we decided if our Bear Cottage families couldn't come to us, then we would bring Christmas to them – and so the **Christmas Caravan of Care** idea was born!

It was a great idea but then we started to work out the logistics! Travelling more than 3000km, visiting 270 families in more than 45 locations. There were Santa sacks to be made, donations of toys needed and gifts specially selected for each child and their siblings. Our bus was decorated and Santa had his suit drycleaned and beard trimmed.

It was a big job but one that the entire Bear Cottage team (staff and volunteers) have wholeheartedly embraced. It has been an absolute privilege to be welcomed into your homes, to meet other members of your family and even have a cuddle with your pets – cats, dogs and even cows! It has also given us a great appreciation of the distances many of you travel to visit us.

We were often reminded of our “city-slickerness”, particularly when one mum on hearing that we were lost, told us to “Go West!!!” We weren't quite sure whether that was right-West or left-West!

The smiles and love that we have received along the way have been enough to nourish us all for a long, long time and we are very grateful for the opportunity to bring Christmas cheer to you.

As well as visiting our families, we were also keen to support the local hospitals that care for your children and ensured that we also provided gifts to the paediatric wards at **Manning Base, Armidale, Tamworth, Dubbo and Orange Hospitals**. We also donated to local Aboriginal communities in Dubbo and Orange and hosted a BBQ lunch for the children at the **Allira Aboriginal Day Care Centre**, with the help of **Dubbo Police**.

Our Caravan of Care would not have been possible without the support of a number of organisations who have donated goods and services. These include our wonderful friends from **Accor Hotels** who provided accommodation for our staff members and who also support Bear Cottage throughout the year. **Blackdog Creative Marketing** designed the artwork which decorated our Bear Cottage bus, **IVE Group** who produced the decals that covered our bus. Our mascot, “**Manly Bear**” was provided by **My Teddy**. Manly Bear was an invaluable participant on our trips – he loved having his photo taken with many of you and is probably the most photogenic member of the Bear Cottage team! Thank you to **Hasbro** for an incredibly generous donation of games and toys, **Cakes by Kathleen**, **Dolphins of Mollymook**, **Dubbo** and **Orange Police** and our incredibly supportive community who so generously donate toys and gifts to Bear Cottage each Christmas for our children.

We couldn't have asked for a better way to end the year and we thank you all for your strength and resilience that continues to inspire us every day! 🐾





# On the road with the Christmas Caravan of Care





# The Story Project



In the last edition of **Cottage Capers** we introduced you to **The Story Project** – a very special new initiative which encourages family members to share stories about what is most unique about their child and to have

the opportunity to have these stories recorded by one of our trained volunteer biographers. The end result will be a hard copy book which includes those stories, favourite photos and drawings, which will then be given to keep.

Whilst still in its pilot stage, we are very excited to now have three families who have already started sharing their stories. We anticipate that each biography will take around six to eight sessions to complete and may include interviews with parents, siblings, grandparents and other carers/friends /important people, all contributing to the final story. Our biography volunteers are able to visit either in your home, at Bear Cottage or at another health facility if appropriate.

Biography volunteers **Sylvia and Katie**, reflect on their experience so far:



*"It's a real honour to be included in the new biography project which aims to provide a tangible record of a child's life in the form of a book, with photos and artwork and the memories of parents, grandparents, siblings and carers and I'm thrilled that contact has been made with my first family. As someone who has failed miserably at putting photos into albums, my hope is that this will be as*

*stress-free as possible for the families. Whilst we appreciate it may be emotional re-living the happy and the sad moments all over again, our hope is that each biography will provide comfort and joy to those who take part."* – Sylvia



*"Starting the biography process was exciting and nerve wracking at the same time and I feel incredibly grateful that families, who are going through so much, would entrust me with their precious stories. I hope that I can create something that really captures the essence of their child, something they can cherish and value for years to come.*

*I hope that families can find some comfort and joy in sharing their stories with me. Being on this journey is incredibly rewarding and humbling."* – Katie

If you would like to know more about The Story Project and are wondering if this is something you and your family would like to be involved with, please contact **Volunteer Coordinators (Rachel and Sarah)** on either: **0429 072 585 / 0409 349 516** or email:

**SCHN-Biography@health.nsw.gov.au** 🐾

## Introducing . . . Child Life Therapist Erin

Hello, my name is Erin.

### Where are you from originally?

I'm from the Snowy Mountains region of NSW, I studied a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) in Albury, and taught for five years in Canberra. I moved to the UK to complete a MA in Play Therapy, gained a few years post-qualifying experience in London and have been living on the Northern Beaches for the past two years.



### Can you tell us a bit about life before Bear Cottage?

I have had many years of experience educating (from birth to 12 years) and therapeutically working with a diverse range of children from a variety of settings both in Australia and the UK.

My Masters dissertation research explored the importance of the therapeutic relationship when working with children who have a chronic or life-limiting illness.

### What inspired you to work in Play Therapy?

As a young child, I personally experienced the power of therapeutic play whilst in hospital for a period of time. This early experience had a long lasting impact throughout my lifetime, inspiring me to become a Play Therapist so I could support other children who have gone through life difficulties.

### What do you like most about your job?

I am passionate about providing Play Therapy to all children in need, supporting them through play to decrease internal conflict, enhance emotional regulation, build resiliency and improve their overall well-being.

As a Child Life Therapist at Bear Cottage, my role has allowed me to utilise my skills as a Teacher and Play Therapist, to best support patients and siblings during their stay.

### What kind of play do you enjoy the most?

In the play room I enjoy engaging with sensory materials, singing, reading stories, exploring sand trays, and any form of creative expression. 🐾

**Erin is looking forward to meeting you all on your next visit!**



# Sand play at Bear Cottage



**Sand Tray Therapy** is another tool that we have been using with children, siblings and carers at Bear Cottage to help express what has brought them to Bear Cottage. The familiar medium of sand can help children (and adults) achieve feelings of comfort and security and allow a space to share their stories, whatever they may be.

Some time ago Trish Young, a retiring Art therapist, generously donated her extensive array of miniatures and sand trays to Bear Cottage, which has allowed us to introduce this activity.

If families are interested in taking part in Sand Tray Therapy, please speak to either Art Therapist **Judy**, Child Life Therapists **Gy** or **Erin** or our Social Workers. 🐾



## 2021 Calendar of Events

Whilst we are hopeful that our regular Bear Cottage events will proceed in 2021, rather than sending out our yearly calendar with this issue, we will instead be making contact with families throughout the year to let them know of scheduled events. 🐾

## Remembering our children

**Alana Catton:** 20/01/13 – 27/09/20

**Christian Adamski:** 8/9/2012 – 30/9/20

**Robyn (Bobbi) Butler:** 18/05/17 – 16/10/20

**Nicholas Bednarz:** 19/2/2020 – 21/10/20

**Natasha Mort:** 28/9/2015 – 11/11/20

**Saskia Loader:** 29/02/16 – 11/11/20

**Haider Shenawa:** 19/07/18 – 18/11/20

**Kingston Dang:** 1/11/12 – 12/11/20

**Usman Andan:** 15/10/08 – 24/11/20

**Mitchell Ray:** 21/11/13 – 6/12/20

**Marcus Manning:** 7/11/07 – 08/12/20

**Varis Kong:** 13/8/2015 – 11/12/2020

**Kiran Meeraya:** 25/10/2018 – 20/12/20

## Staff news

After many years we have said a fond farewell to our much-loved Chef **Owen**. Owen has worked tirelessly in the kitchen over many years producing wonderful meals for many. He is off on a long awaited relocation to Tasmania and to pursue a dream of opening a pizza business and a quieter life.



Owen

**Amy**, our inaugural Physiotherapist, has also left to further her career in management but we are fortunate to have **Laura** joining us this month who comes with much experience from SCH.



Laura

Each year our Undergraduate AINs endeavour to realise their dreams of becoming New Graduate Registered Nurses in some of the larger teaching hospitals. This is a highly competitive process and we were all very excited to hear that this year, **Jess** has been offered a position at SCH and **Bryarna**, **Emily** and **Roanna** will all be commencing at CHW in the New Year. Congratulations from all of us!



Tess

Our nursing team has had a boost this month with the addition of RNs **Tess** and **Talia**. Some of you may remember Tess as a few years ago she worked with us as an AIN. After three years in intensive care she has returned to the place she loved. Talia brings with her experience in the palliative care community. Both are already valuable members of our team.



Talia

With our undergraduate nurses about to move into the acute care setting, we have welcomed into new AIN positions **Poppy** and **Isabelle**. Both looking forward to meeting and caring for our many beautiful children. 🐾