

'Mums' camp' at Bear Cottage



Daisy, with mother Kellie and brother Felix.

When a child suffers from a life-limiting disease, life for the family can be very difficult. At Bear Cottage, where the emphasis is on family-focused care and respite, it's not just the child that is cared for, but the entire family.

Whilst the medical needs of the child are met, how do the mothers, especially, cope with the emotions involved and deal with the day-to-day activities to keep the family going? With this in mind, Bear Cottage initiated a 'Mums' Camp' in November 2007, to give mothers a chance to come together with their sick child and other siblings. It was a success, with five mothers and a total of fourteen children staying for five days. Three dads came and went off to work each day.

"It feels like a real home," said Kellie who was down from Tamworth with her little boy, Felix, and her 17-month-old daughter, Daisy, who suffers from a life-limiting disease.

"When I first heard about Bear

Cottage, I felt it would be too confronting facing up to the reality of Daisy's illness," said Kellie, enjoying a cup of coffee with other mothers in the communal tea room.

"But I now know just how supportive it can be... talking to others on how they were coping and how to work through some of the problems with their siblings. In the end, you have to decide yourself how you're going to deal with the issues, but at least you know you're not the only one going through something like this."

There were treats for the mothers through the week while their children were cared for by the staff and volunteers at Bear Cottage. Local Manly businesses pampered the ladies with facials, massages and a beachside lunch. A Melbourne Cup lunch at the Manly Pacific Hotel was a chance to get dressed up and enjoy the company of other ladies for lunch – not a regular event in their busy lives.

"Felix hasn't realised that Daisy is blind and keeps showing her things. I haven't told him yet, but when he asks, I feel I'll now know what to say. Being at Bear Cottage and talking to the staff and other mothers has helped me so much to feel confident with this."

Organiser of the Mums' Week, Patient Liaison Nurse Narelle Martin, said the success of the first 'Mums' Camp' means they will be running more this year.

Bear Cottage, an initiative of The Children's Hospital at Westmead, is the only children's hospice in New South Wales. Since it opened in 2001, it has made a significant difference to the lives of many families – be it respite care, end of life care or bereavement support after a child has died.

It costs more than \$1.6 million to run Bear Cottage each year and this is entirely funded by the community and our committed donors. If you would like to find out more about Bear Cottage, please call Robin on (02) 9976 8300 or visit www.bearcottage.chw.edu.au 🐾

