

Annual Review 2020 – 2021

Bears Of Hope Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support



Vision, Mission & Values

Bears of Hope Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support provides leading support and exceptional care for families who experience the loss of their baby.

We seek to provide crucial information and embrace families during their difficult time of loss, and beyond. Bears Of Hope's mission is to provide ongoing comfort, support and counselling to parents and families who have experienced the loss of a baby during pregnancy, birth and infancy.

Our Vision:

To provide leading support and exceptional care for families who experience the loss of their baby.

Our Mission:

Bears offered at every hospital providing vital
Early support
An Australia wide program which provides timely and
Relevant information to families who experience
Stillbirth, miscarriage, neonatal or infant loss
Ongoing comfort and a lifetime of support
From families who understand
Helping to challenge and shape beliefs surrounding loss
Outstanding care
Passionate pregnancy & infant loss support
Education and awareness

Our Values:

- Committed to achieving our vision with integrity.
- Dedicated to and passionate about making a difference.
- Respecting grief is personal and unique.
- Every family has the right to be offered support without judgement.
- Equal acceptance and acknowledgement of every loss.



President's Report

Amanda Bowles
Bears Of Hope CEO & Co-Founder

2020 shocked the world in ways we were truly not ready to experience and it seems the aftermath has continued through 2021 and we are left to wonder when and how we will come out the other side. While global businesses were left on their knees in financial disrupt and many families losing not just one but all incomes, I was in awe of the incredible fundraising and generosity that remained for Bears Of Hope through this past year.

The changing restrictions and border closures meant that some of our key events and support services continued to be offered as online only, we thought this was a negative – particularly for our incredible Choosing Hope walks. What we learned was that providing this event as a virtual event made it even more inclusive and we can't wait for restrictions to ease and for us to offer both the virtual and in person events for the future.

Our cuddle cot fundraising skyrocketed this year through some incredible online influencers that used their knowledge of the algorithms and their connections and managed to send their fundraising campaign viral...it defied belief! The amount of support not just financially but the conversations that this campaign generated and awareness for our organisation was truly a sight to be seen. What seemed to be overnight, Sarah & Brad Kearns raised almost \$125,000 for cuddle cots in honour of their first born son Buddy. However there was actually a lot of work that they did in the lead up to that 'overnight' fundraising and they worked hard with their fundraiser for almost 12 months before the 'big event'. Their fundraising triggered so many others wanting to also open fundraising pages and share their stories and connect more people with Bears Of Hope who may have otherwise have not known we were here to support them or their loved one after the loss of their baby.

With a small team of part time employees I am so proud every year of what we manage to achieve but this past year really stood out and showed what an invaluable, decisive and connected team we are. In particular I'd like to thank Kelly and her team of volunteer and contracted counsellors that had to make many changes to meet the requirements and restrictions being placed on them as counsellors and also meet the needs of bereaved families that were being isolated physically from their support networks now more than ever. There were challenges across so many health services across Australia and I was in awe of how our support team embraced these changes and restrictions and accepted that the challenges they faced were challenges they needed to work around to ensure they could continue to reach the families that needed us through this time.

Almost 600 private counselling sessions were provided to bereaved families...these families could have spent in excess of \$65,000 collectively on these services yet each of them were able to access our fee free services with thanks to the generosity of our fundraisers and donors.

With no government funding we can only provided these invaluable services because of your support and we are truly grateful each time you choose to support Bears Of Hope and the families we serve.



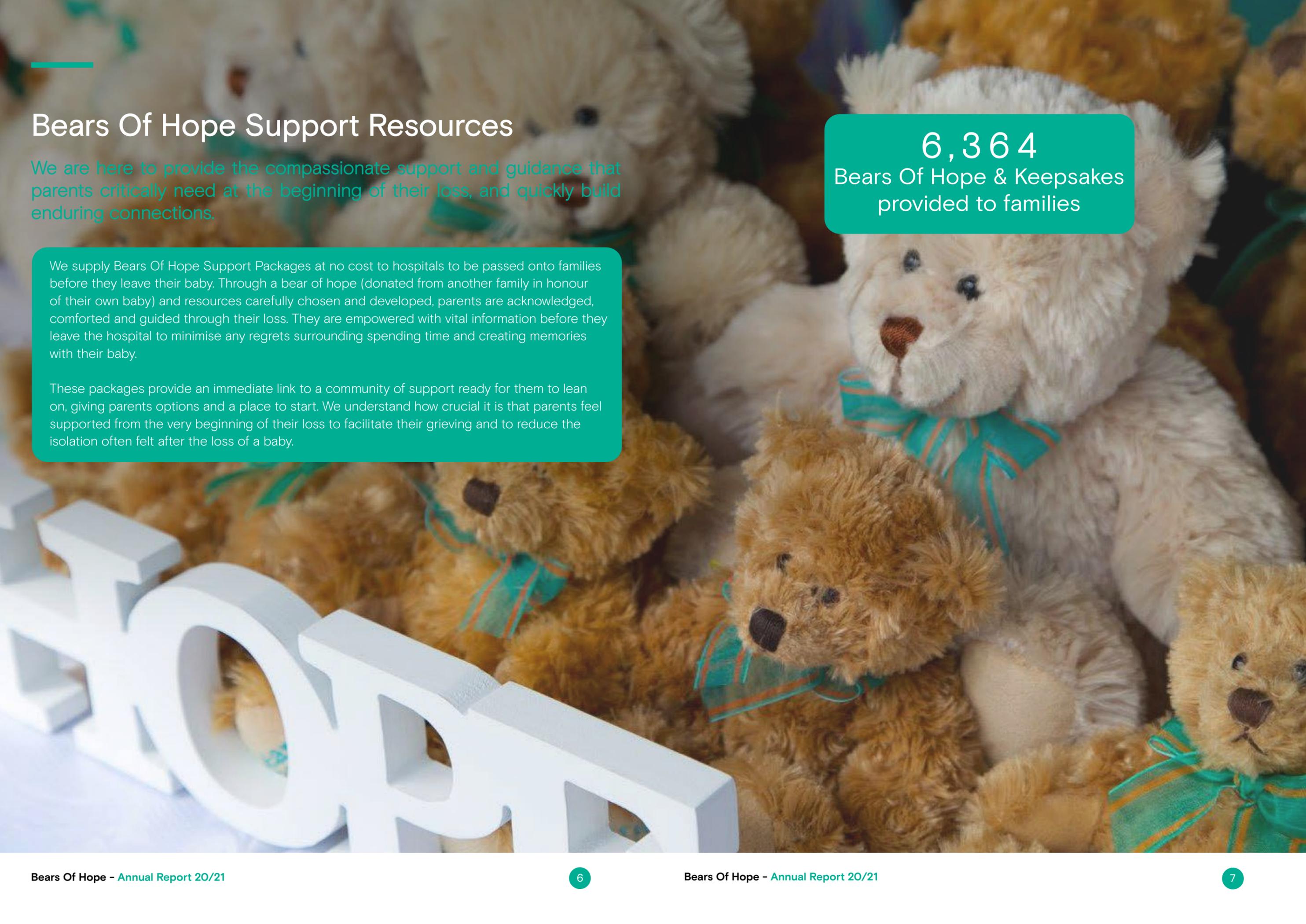
Amanda Bowles
CEO & Co-Founder

Everyday in Australia:

- 6 babies are stillborn
- 3 babies die after and before their first birthday
- A miscarriage occurs every 3.5 minutes

1 in 4 pregnancies end in loss.





Bears Of Hope Support Resources

We are here to provide the compassionate support and guidance that parents critically need at the beginning of their loss, and quickly build enduring connections.

We supply Bears Of Hope Support Packages at no cost to hospitals to be passed onto families before they leave their baby. Through a bear of hope (donated from another family in honour of their own baby) and resources carefully chosen and developed, parents are acknowledged, comforted and guided through their loss. They are empowered with vital information before they leave the hospital to minimise any regrets surrounding spending time and creating memories with their baby.

These packages provide an immediate link to a community of support ready for them to lean on, giving parents options and a place to start. We understand how crucial it is that parents feel supported from the very beginning of their loss to facilitate their grieving and to reduce the isolation often felt after the loss of a baby.

6,364

Bears Of Hope & Keepsakes
provided to families

Beyond The Bear Support

Counselling & Support

Our Beyond The Bear Support team of 5 registered counsellors (Including 1 x paid part-time employee, 1 x contractor and 3 volunteers) provide numerous support services nationally to meet the ongoing and changing needs of families through their grief journey. These include scheduled Face-to-Face Counselling, Online Counselling and Phone Counselling, Support groups as well as adhoc Phone Support, Facebook Messenger and Email support.

All of these services are available 6 days a week, from 9am – 7pm, at no charge to bereaved parents and their families. We fund this through the generosity of the community and given we have no government funding we are proud of the incredible services we provide to families in their time of grief. This year we launched an online booking system that has streamlined the booking service and allows families to directly book their appointments personally without needing to wait for confirmations, it has improved the service level and decreased the administration of initial contact with the support team.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has meant the majority of our support services were conducted 'virtually' with face-to-face counselling picking back up as the government eased restrictions in NSW. Whilst COVID-19 meant that a lot of our additional support and 'connection' event's were unable to be held, including our annual Mother's Day, Remembrance Day & Christmas celebrations and the Men's Sport & Support Weekend's, we were able to move our support groups to a virtual platform and host 2 online groups each month to allow 'virtual' connection and peer support during the pandemic. Bears Of Hope already had these platforms and systems in place as we have led the way in meeting the needs of our more rural families for some time.

The isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the need people have for the connection and support offered by Bears Of Hope when navigating their loss and personal grief in a time of great unknowns. We worked with the community to find other ways to connect and seek support in a time where physical connection was limited and ever changing and whilst the physical connection and peer understanding is so important, we are grateful for the families that found courage to 'virtually' connect with us through this time.

Bears Of Hope also have a range of Facebook pages, mediated by our trained staff, that allow our community of parents to connect directly with each other, share their stories and feelings, and provide a level of peer-to-peer support and these continue to be a space that many parents seek connection through.

593

Fee free counselling sessions provided

74

Fee free counsellor facilitated support group participants

We added an additional service called 'Interviews with Greg J' that provided a connection for bereaved dads to be able to feel validated in their own thoughts and feelings through 10 minute interviews that looked at different aspects of support and grief validation. We also continued to run our WhatsApp group for dads and commenced the initiation of a Q&A for 'Pregnancy After Loss Support' which saw some new interactions for that page.

The support team have done an incredible job through this very challenging year and I am grateful for the expertise and commitment to Bears Of Hope's vision and the families we serve.

Kelly Merchant
Beyond The Bear Support Services

Cuddle Cots

A Cuddle Cot is a cooling system that has been designed to fit within a Shnuggle basket and lies beneath the precious baby. It allows families uninterrupted time with their baby to shower them with love and create treasured memories before they say their final goodbye.

We received a remarkable increase in requests for Cuddle Cots around Australia this year. With thanks to our incredible community fundraisers and donors, we were able to fulfill 96 placements – more than double on the previous year. A special thank you to Brad & Sarah (Team DadMum) who funded 19 of these Cuddle Cots in honour of their son, Buddy Kearns. Through their social media presence, they helped to educate the wider community on the significance of the Cuddle Cot, inspiring many others to help fund more for Australian hospitals, funerals homes and hospices.

Fundraising for a Cuddle Cot provides parents with purpose and helps them to feel like they have done something special in honour of their child; ultimately supporting them in their own loss as they help to support others.

Having their baby's name acknowledged on the plaque and embroidered on the hood, brings a sense of comfort and purpose fulfilled and helps to reduce the isolation for the the families who will need it in the future.

A Family's Story



"On the 10th of February at a weekly routine check in, our world was turned upside down. It was the day we found out our baby's heart had stopped beating. It was the day our lives changed forever. It was a textbook perfect pregnancy. We had heard our healthy angel's heart beat just 7 days prior during our last check in. How could this be? We had everything prepared months in advance for the arrival of our little bub and were only 4 weeks away from starting a new chapter in our lives with our first born baby.

We were 36 weeks, so close.

The 11th of February was the day we finally got to meet our baby. This date will now always be Angelica's birthday and passing date. It wasn't until giving birth that we found out we had a beautiful girl.

We had no idea what would exactly happen after delivering Angelica. We didn't know what to expect in terms of what would be possible with how much time we would have to spend with our girl. It was then that we found out about the Cuddle Cot. We were lucky enough to be at a hospital that had one.

This meant the world to us. Without the Cuddle Cot, we wouldn't have been able to create the memories we did in the time we had. We were able to take full advantage knowing she was with us and it helped heal our hearts in that moment. Every family deserves to spend time with their babies after birth to tell them stories, introduce to family members, give their babies as many cuddles and kisses as possible, take photos, observe all their features, play songs and share all that you can in the limited time you have when you're in this situation. We will forever be grateful for being able to do all those things and more thanks to the amazing Cuddle Cot.

There is nothing we can do to help reduce the number of stillbirths but we can help families in need that are suffering through this pain. Thanks to our family and friends, we raised enough money to donate 5 cuddle cots."

– Angelica Tsoutsas's parents, John & Mel Tsoutsas



Cuddle Cot Placements in 20/21

NSW 39 (2020/2021)
14 (2019/2020)
94 since 2016 **39**

ACT 1 (2020/2021)
0 (2019/2020)
5 since 2016 **1**

VIC 17 (2020/2021)
11 (2019/2020)
49 since 2016 **17**

TAS 4 (2020/2021)
0 (2019/2020)
5 since 2016 **4**

SA 4 (2020/2021)
1 (2019/2020)
5 since 2016 **4**

WA 4 (2020/2021)
1 (2019/2020)
8 since 2016 **4**

NT 3 (2020/2021)
1 (2019/2020)
6 since 2016 **3**

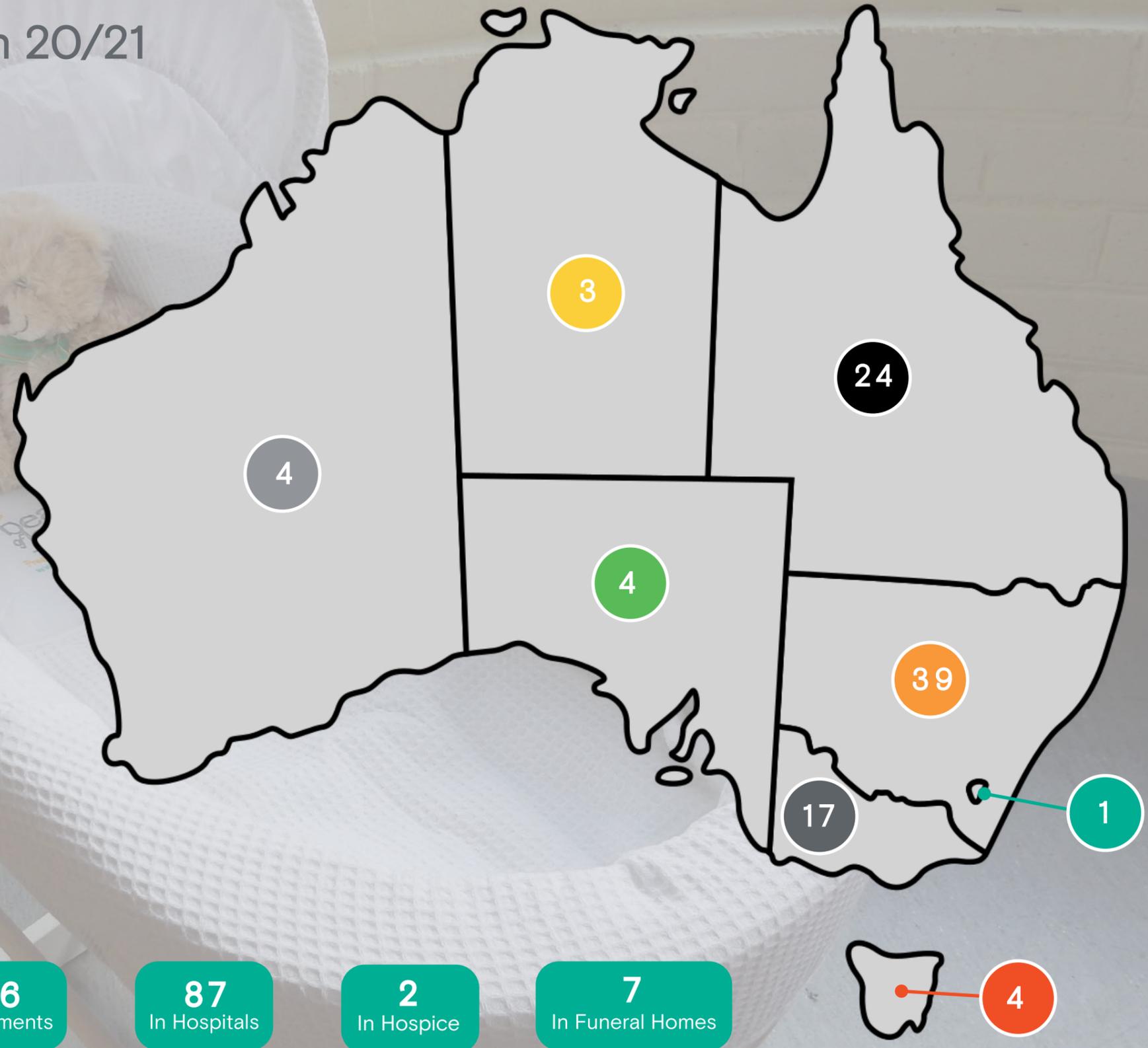
QLD 24 (2020/2021)
15 (2019/2020)
58 since 2016 **24**

96
Placements

87
In Hospitals

2
In Hospice

7
In Funeral Homes



Choosing Hope – Walk Your Way 2020

With restrictions in place for public gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic we were forced to rethink our annual Choosing Hope Walks. Choosing Hope Walk Your Way was created!

Choosing Hope is not only a fundraising campaign, but a support program designed to connect bereaved parents and families to a larger community, offering peer-to-peer support.

Walk Your Way was designed to allow families to honour their baby/ies by dedicating their steps taken. Without the ability to connect with other families in person, all participants were encouraged to take lots of photos and share their journey online.

The campaign was well received with an incredible response including 353 individuals sign up to fundraise for Bears of Hope – 76% were new to fundraising for Bears of Hope.

All funds raised from this years Choosing Hope campaign were allocated to our Bear Support Packs – providing an additional 1115 bereaved families with support.



'Thank you for creating this opportunity to not only raise awareness for an important cause but for allowing me to share my daughter with my community. I will be taking part in Choosing Hope every year.' – N. Vella

10,170,391
Steps taken for our babies

10,238km
Walking in support of bereaved families

353
Individual Choosing Hope Sign-ups

1115
Support packs funded for Bereaved families

Beards Of Hope 2020 – Grow Now, Shave Later

Beards Of Hope is a national awareness and fundraising campaign where any bereaved dad, family member or mate can get involved and grow their beards between 1st June and 31st August.

Held annually since 2014, the campaign enables a bereaved dad to express their grief and to seek support from those around them. It is not just a fundraising campaign but also a support service in itself, enabling dads to connect with each other for peer-to-peer support.

With COVID-19 apart of our every day lives during this campaign, our central focus was to create genuine connections with our fundraisers and connect all the bereaved dad's taking part directly with our counselling team. We encouraged all our participants to take advantage of the staying home message by getting a start on growing their beard early.

One of our fundraisers – Luke & Cassie Akehurst (Team Squirt) were lucky enough to be able to hold a raffle and a shave off event as part of their fundraising. They had huge support from their community, family & friends and were able to raise \$13,920.00 during for Beards Of Hope as well as bring awareness into their local community.

Funds raised from this year's Beards of Hope campaign will be used for funding our Beyond the Bear support services including counselling, support groups & Dads Sport & Support Weekends.

This very successful campaign highlighted the fact that the wider community sees and recognises that bereaved father's need to be validated and acknowledges and supported through their loss; equally as much as a mother does. We are proud to pioneer that movement, and for some men, that support can be in the simple act of doing. eg. Growing a beard, speaking about their loss and their healing can start. We proudly partner with them in their grief.

154
Fundraisers

43
Teams

\$122,793.14
Funds Raised



Blocka – 2020 Beards Of Hope Fundraiser



Come the 11th November, we made our journey to Blacktown Hospital to bring our lil guy into this world. After 12 hours of labour, he was born at 9:30pm on the dot. He proved everyone wrong and was born with a heartbeat, and for the most pure 22 minutes of my life, we were a family of three. Together.

22 has become a very special number for us as Rory was born at 22 weeks, survived for 22 minutes, and was born on 11/11 (11+11=22). 11th Nov now has an extra special meaning for me, as it's not only Remembrance Day, but it's also my beautiful son's birthday.

I've always had a beard, it's defined who I am. Not many people have seen me in my adult life without one. So I made the decision to completely shave and start again, putting all my vulnerabilities out there for everyone to see with the hope that it starts a conversation that we have been longing to have for the last 7 months.

I am a dad, and I grieve too.

– Rory's Dad – Jake Farrugia – Beards of Hope Fundraiser 2020

Community

Packing Days

4

Packing Days

22

Volunteers

274

Boxes Filled

2990

Bear Packages Packed

Award Winners

2020 Founders Award
Pia Dorer

2020 Community Spirit Award
Amy Sherar



2020 Volunteer of the Year
Codie-Renee Bayliss

2020 Corporate Supporter of the Year
GoFundraise



Thank you to our valued Corporate Supporters & Sponsors

We are so grateful for your generosity. Thank you for standing alongside of us and helping us provide hope and support to so many grieving families this year.



Sponsors



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- WTribe
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Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support

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Bears Of Hope Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support

*“A life so brief, a child so small,
you had the power to touch us all”
– Anonymous*

