

bears
of hope®

Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support

Annual Review 2022 – 2023

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.



Everyday in Australia:

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

1 in 4 pregnancies end in loss.

'As I reflect on the accomplishments of the past year, I am humbled by the generosity and support of our community. It is through your unwavering commitment that we are able to provide comfort and solace to families in their darkest moments. Our Bears Of Hope and keepsakes and cuddle cot donations to hospitals, each made possible through your donations and fundraising efforts, stand as a symbol of compassion and support for grieving families across Australia.'

Co-Founders Report

Amanda Bowles

Bears Of Hope CEO & Co-Founder

Dear Supporters and Friends,

As we reflect on the past year at Bears Of Hope Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support, I am filled with gratitude and awe for the journey we have embarked upon together. Our mission to provide leading support to grieving parents and families has not only continued but has flourished in the face of challenges.

Our support focus for the year has been on expanding our reach into regional and rural areas of Australia, recognizing the need for support beyond city limits. Through initiatives like our "Looking Inward into Grief" workshops held in various communities, we've been able to extend our arms further, embracing those in need and fostering community connections. The response has been heartening, with parents finding solace and understanding through these workshops.

Innovation has been at the forefront of our endeavours, with the introduction of the healing power of nature through our Nature Therapy walks, allowing parents and families to find moments of tranquillity amidst the storm of grief. The success of these walks in Southern Sydney and Central Coast has inspired us to extend this opportunity to other states, spreading the healing touch of nature far and wide.

Our commitment to inclusivity led us to host our first online Q+A panel focused on the experience of bereaved dads. The honesty and openness shared by the participating dads illuminated the path for others navigating similar journeys. This event marked not just a success but a milestone in our continued efforts to create a supportive and understanding community through our BearDs Of Hope channel. The annual Sport and Support Dads Weekend continues to provide a platform for dads to explore grief in practical ways and find solace in shared experiences. Despite the challenges posed by weather, the weekend was a testament to the resilience and strength of our community.

Our monthly support and wellbeing groups continue to be pillars of strength for many. Introducing new concepts like metaphors has enriched our discussions, allowing for deeper exploration and understanding of grief.

Our annual Choosing Hope walks have continued to be a source of connection and remembrance for bereaved families. Despite challenges such as weather-related postponements and cancellations, these events have provided a platform for families to come together, honour their babies, and find solace in community support.

As we look ahead to the future, let us continue to walk hand in hand, spreading love, understanding, and healing to all those in need. Together, we can create a world where no parent grieves alone.



Amanda Bowles
CEO & Co-Founder

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.

6,203
Bears Of Hope & Keepsakes
provided to families

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.





A Family's Story

After having three kids, our whole world changed when our fourth child passed away from a rare disease. We knew from a scan at 25 weeks, that there was little to no chance of survival after birth. Time stood still for the 42 minutes we spent with Faith and when she took her last breath, the grieving process begun.

My stay at the hospital was a blur. I was taken into surgery after the birth to stop bleeding. Due to loss of blood, I subsequently needed a blood transfusion.

At some point that week, we received our Bears Of Hope support package. I remember looking through all the gifts we had been given. My initial thought was what an amazing gift to give to someone who has lost a child & I had no idea that organisations like this existed. It was also sad that we have to have organisations like this to begin with!

It made me realise that I am not the only one who has lost a child, and I won't be the last. It brought comfort at a time of such loss.

Tragedy struck again one year later when we lost Phoenix to the same disease after 26 minutes. During such a distressing time, I was relieved when we received another Bears Of Hope support package.

These bears sat with both Faith & Phoenix in their cuddle cots for my stay at the hospital and received a lot of hugs from me when I returned home.

It was like a part of the kids had transferred across to these bears and I felt connected to those that had donated them and lost a child themselves. I didn't feel alone.

Ten years on, I still have everything that we received in those Bears of Hope packages in a box of little keepsakes we have for both Faith & Phoenix. Now Faith sits with the bear of hope donated in honour of Albie 9/10/2012 and Phoenix sits with the bear of hope donated in honour of Harrison Scott Spencer 25/7/2011, wrapped around their urns.

A sincere thank you to those who donated these bears of hope and support resources to my family.

Bears of Hope plays such an important part in the grieving process, bringing comfort and healing after the loss of my babies. I was acknowledged, comforted and guided through my grief. These packages provide an immediate link to a community of support giving parents a place to start right from the beginning and beyond, and the bears become some treasured keepsakes.

Melissa Mazlin
Our Remember This December lead campaign story 2022.

Beyond The Bear Support

Counselling & Support

This year has seen a range of supports offered to both parents as well as to the extended families. Our focus for this year was on providing supports into the more regional and rural areas of Australia where we took our Looking Inward into Grief workshop to Batemans Bay, Mornington Peninsula and Dubbo. This one-day workshop offered parents an opportunity to explore their grief in a reflective way and simultaneously enable community connection. We look forward to the continuation of these workshops in 2023/24 to more locations around the country. We connected with over 25 parents across the workshops and explored opportunities for ongoing supports within the area.

Our supports are all about trying new things and this year we introduced the idea of how nature can be a support to both parents and their families through our Nature Therapy walks. These were held in Southern Sydney and Central Coast. We received positive feedback from those that attended and will be extending the opportunity to other states in the upcoming year. The guided walks with a nature therapist offered opportunities for parents to sit in nature and engage in all the senses to find calm and peace within the grief and anxiety that can often feel like it is taking control.

We also offered our very first online Q+A panel with a focus on the experience of being a bereaved dad. We are extremely grateful to the 5 dads that gave their honest and open thoughts on their early days of loss and then on the strategies they have in place to move forward with their grief. This event was a great success, and we look forward to it becoming an annual event.

Our Sport and Support Dads Weekend was held in September 2022 where we had a great turnout of dads from both inter and intra state. The weekend was spent exploring grief in practical ways as well as extending to a supportive peer platform through the Saturday night BBQ. It is always rewarding to our team to receive the feedback that these weekends offer bereaved dads a safe space to be open to their own feelings & thoughts and feel connected. This year the travel to and from the venue offered an additional bonding moment with the wet weather and slippery road.

The strength of our monthly support groups continues to grow through the dedication of Bec, in looking after them and ensuring each month we have a topic and focus activity to consider. We introduced the concept this year of metaphors and found this to be helpful in identifying and exploring the range of grief reactions experienced.

Every year I am amazed at what we can offer on a national level with no government funding and with the support of our community. We never take for granted the position we are in to offer parents support in their most vulnerable of times, to be able to hold the space safely to explore the painful and intense emotions and to continually advocate families. We are for ever grateful to the parents that entrust us with our support services, and we are honoured to be able to know your child and the love you carry for them.

Kelly Merchant
Beyond The Bear Support Services

143

Fee free counsellor facilitated support group participants

1129

Fee free counselling sessions & support groups provided

Our counselling services continue to go from strength to strength and we have an outstanding team of male and female counsellors who provide support to bereaved parents. Our services extend across 6 days and include after hours up until 8pm on a weeknight. Our platforms for support include online, phone (telehealth), face to face in Castle Hill and Miranda (NSW) and extended to Hobart in May 2023. With the incredible support of the Bears Of Hope fundraisers and donors, we are privileged to offer these services at no cost and to be able to walk with parents through the grief of their pregnancy loss, into the anxiety of pregnancy after loss and the mixed emotions that can arise anywhere in between.



Cuddle Cots

Our cuddle cots are such a valuable asset to grieving families in the hours and days following the loss of their baby. We are so deeply appreciative of everyone who fundraises or donates throughout the year, to help fund a cuddle cot to place at an Australian hospital, hospice or funeral home in need.

This year, we placed 48 cuddle cots (50 – 2021/2022) and 2 individual snuggle baskets into 46 hospitals, 1 hospice and 1 funeral home. Since 2016, we have donated or placed, 328 Cuddle Cots in total, with 304 in hospitals, 9 in Hospices and 15 in funeral homes. Nine individual Moses/shnuggle baskets have been donated during this time.

Each cuddle cot costs \$6500. They are personalised honouring a precious baby with their name embroidered on the hood of the snuggle basket and engraved on a plaque. This legacy of love provides parents with purpose and helps them to feel like they have done something special in honour of their child; supporting them in their own loss as they help to support others.

In October 2022, we closed the campaign to new fundraisers as we had around 15 cuddle cots waiting on placement, as requests from health services had quietened by this point. In February 2023, we reopened the campaign, due to an influx of requests. Hospitals were mostly in need of multiple cots in the one unit or adding resources to other units as to not share between units. Some were needed to replace older cuddle cots or cooling systems.

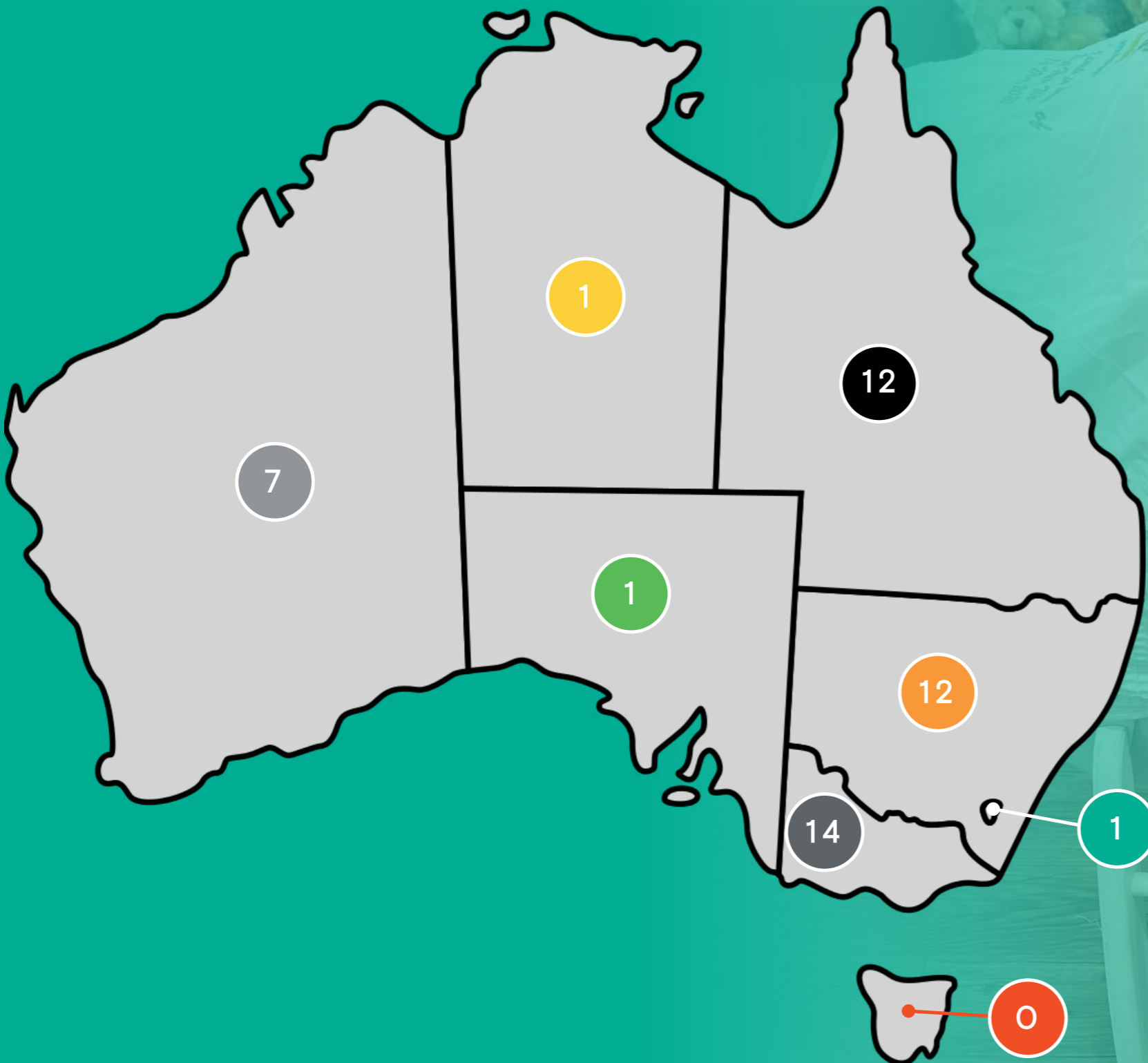
Bereaved families feel immediately supported with access to a Cuddle Cot, which leads to improved experiences for the families, connections to our support services and a reduction to the isolation often felt after the loss of their baby.

Ultimately, it means that the receiving families have access to absolute sacred and uninterrupted time with their babies and the fundraisers & donors can create a special legacy for a much loved and deeply missed baby.

Most families are still wanting to be able to personally present the cuddle cot they fundraised for, where possible. Some visit the hospital after we have directly couriered it there, or visit our office to see it before we send it off. That personal touch from fundraising through to personally donating the cuddle cot is very much a need for many families to see the process through.

The highest fundraiser was 7-Eleven in support of their work colleague, Kit and Blake Norrish, honouring their son, Arlo. They raised \$39,301 and funded 6 cuddle cots. These were donated throughout Victorian hospitals.

Cuddle Cot Placements in 22/23



NSW	12 (2022/2023) 18 (2021/2022) 124 since 2016	12
ACT	1 (2022/2023) 2 (2021/2022) 8 since 2016	1
VIC	14 (2022/2023) 9 (2021/2022) 72 since 2016	14
TAS	0 (2022/2023) 2 (2021/2022) 7 since 2016	0
SA	1 (2022/2023) 2 (2021/2022) 8 since 2016	1
WA	7 (2022/2023) 3 (2021/2022) 18 since 2016	7
NT	1 (2022/2023) 3 (2021/2022) 10 since 2016	1
QLD	12 (2022/2023) 11 (2021/2022) 81 since 2016	12

48 Placements	46 In Hospitals	1 In Hospice	1 In Funeral Homes
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Arlo's family, with the help of 7-Eleven, Loan Market Group, family, friends and work colleagues, raised an outstanding \$39,301, funding 6 cuddle cots. These were placed in Victorian hospitals including Bass Coast Health, Gippsland Southern Health Service, Gladstone Hospital, Swan Hill Hospital, Box Hill Hospital & Royal Women's Hospital, Parkville.

bears of hope
Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support
www.bearsofhope.org.au
Lovingly donated in honour of
Arlo Nornish
2nd January 2023

Life in the future.

We never thought we'd be going to the hospital to leave without our baby, but we did. 6 families a day in Australia have to. By being open and sharing Arlo's story we hope we can raise awareness and money for the unfortunate reality that stillborn and neonatal deaths happen. We hope the money raised can help those families get the support and resources to help them with a little light in the darkest of days."

A Family's Story



"In November of 2019, before our worlds were hit by COVID, we learnt of my endometriosis diagnosis. This put the wonders of our future family at the forefront of our minds. After trying naturally for a few months we sought the help of an IVF specialist – we knew my endometriosis had affected my fertility but it came as a shock to also find out that Blake had a condition called azoospermia. The only way for us to build a family was through IVF. After surgeries for both Blake and myself, we were able to commence our first round of IVF. Three egg collections later and four transfers, we saw those two beautiful lines on the pregnancy test.

Our pregnancy was uneventful. With healthy scans and tests we found out we were having a beautiful baby boy – Arlo. He was a mover and a shaker, like his mum and dad. Loved the water and danced when the record player was on.

At our 38 week scan everything was looking good and we were due to go in for a scheduled c-section just a short 7 days after, as Arlo was breech. A few days later I had reduced movements so decided to head into the hospital. I knew something was wrong. After what felt like a lifetime the obstetrician told us that our little boy had gone, and with those few words, our life changed forever.

Life after.

Our Baby boy Arlo was born at 8.57pm on 2nd January 2023. Weighing 2.795kg and 50cm long – he was perfection. Nose and hands like his mum, ears and feet like his dad. A perfect blend. It's still not known how or why Arlo passed and we probably will never know, however it most likely was due to a hyper-coiled cord with a blood clot.

We spent 5 beautiful days with our baby boy in the hospital thanks to what is called a Cuddle Cot. A cuddle cot preserves his body by keeping it cool whilst he sleeps. We were able to hold and kiss our baby boy for those five days and although we were not gifted a life of time with him, we were gifted those special moments.

My auntie also experienced the tragic fate of a stillborn 31 years ago with my cousin Djemma, who was born with a still heart at 38 weeks, also due to a cord issue. She did not have a Cuddle Cot, so only received 30 minutes with her baby girl. The appreciation Blake and I have for those 5 days is beyond imaginable.

Choosing Hope – 2022

Choosing Hope is a walk of honour and remembrance in support of bereaved families. These walks are 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. The sense of community is incredibly important to the Bears of Hope Theory of Change with reducing isolation being one of our crucial outcomes.

2022 allowed us to reintroduce physical events and we organised walks in Sydney, Brisbane, Launceston, the Central Coast and Melbourne. Unfortunately, due to weather, our Launceston event was postponed by 6 weeks and our Melbourne event was cancelled.

In conjunction with these physical locations, we also continued our virtual event – Walk Your Way. Walk Your Way meant we were not limited by location and people from all over Australia were able to take part!

Our goal for 2022 remained for families to feel connected to a community of support, to honour their babies in a meaningful way, help raise awareness and funds for our services.

1600

Support packs funded for Bereaved families

802

Choosing Hope Fundraising Pages Created

9,701.62

Kilometres Walked

5,922,531

Steps Taken

“The event was incredibly personal and respectful to families. Organizers made an incredible effort to ensure families had as much participation in how their child was remembered. Little things like writing their names on the remembrance cards keeps parents in control of how their babies are remembered. I loved being referred to as “River’s Parents”. Great effort by the team. Was great to connect with other families and hear their stories.

– Sydney Choosing Hope Guest



Beards Of Hope 2022

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.

We were excited to launch our new Beards Of Hope website. The new website was designed to be a balance of support resources for Bereaved Dads and their families and a portal for our beards fundraisers.

We had 148 registrants sign up to support our cause. 116 of the 148 were first timers to participating in Beards Of Hope. Once again we were thrilled to see an increase in family and friends signing up in a show of support for the bereaved Dads.

Our highest individual fundraiser for the year was Gordy Power, who raised \$8,120 in honour of his son Maverick William Power. Our highest team fundraiser for the year was Team Lily's Legends who raised \$10,652 in honour of Lily Rae Crawford.

128
Fundraisers

20
Teams

\$101,134.88
Funds Raised

Before & Afters from a few of our 2022 participants!



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.



**TED DUNN
FOUNDATION**



Aurea
Birdie Wealth
BWBuilds
CHEP Network
CWA in Tasmania - Bothwell Branch
DJL Project Management Pty Ltd
Everly Lane
Innovational Electrical Solutions Pty Ltd
JCs Autocare
Lions Club Oatley
Marshall Family Foundation
Penny & Co Collection
Pivot Wealth
Snuggly Jacks
Special Build Pty Ltd





Community

Packing Days

5
Packing Days

28
Volunteers

403
Boxes Filled

4466
Bear Packages Packed

With Covid-19 behind us, we were able to invite community members and corporate groups back into our warehouse for packing days. This involves packing our bears with valuable resources into our Hope, Sophie, or Xavier bags.

Over this past financial year, we were fortunate to have 3 corporate businesses, Optus, O'Briens Glass & Olympus Tech come in for packing days and pack 343 boxes of resources. In addition to this, our volunteers packed another 65 boxes of resources.

Thank you to all for your incredible help throughout the past year, enabling us to continue supporting families across Australia.

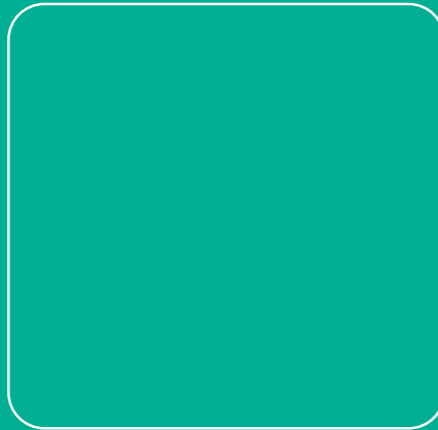


Award Winners

22/23 Volunteer of the Year
Briallen White



22/23 Founders Award
Shane Hay



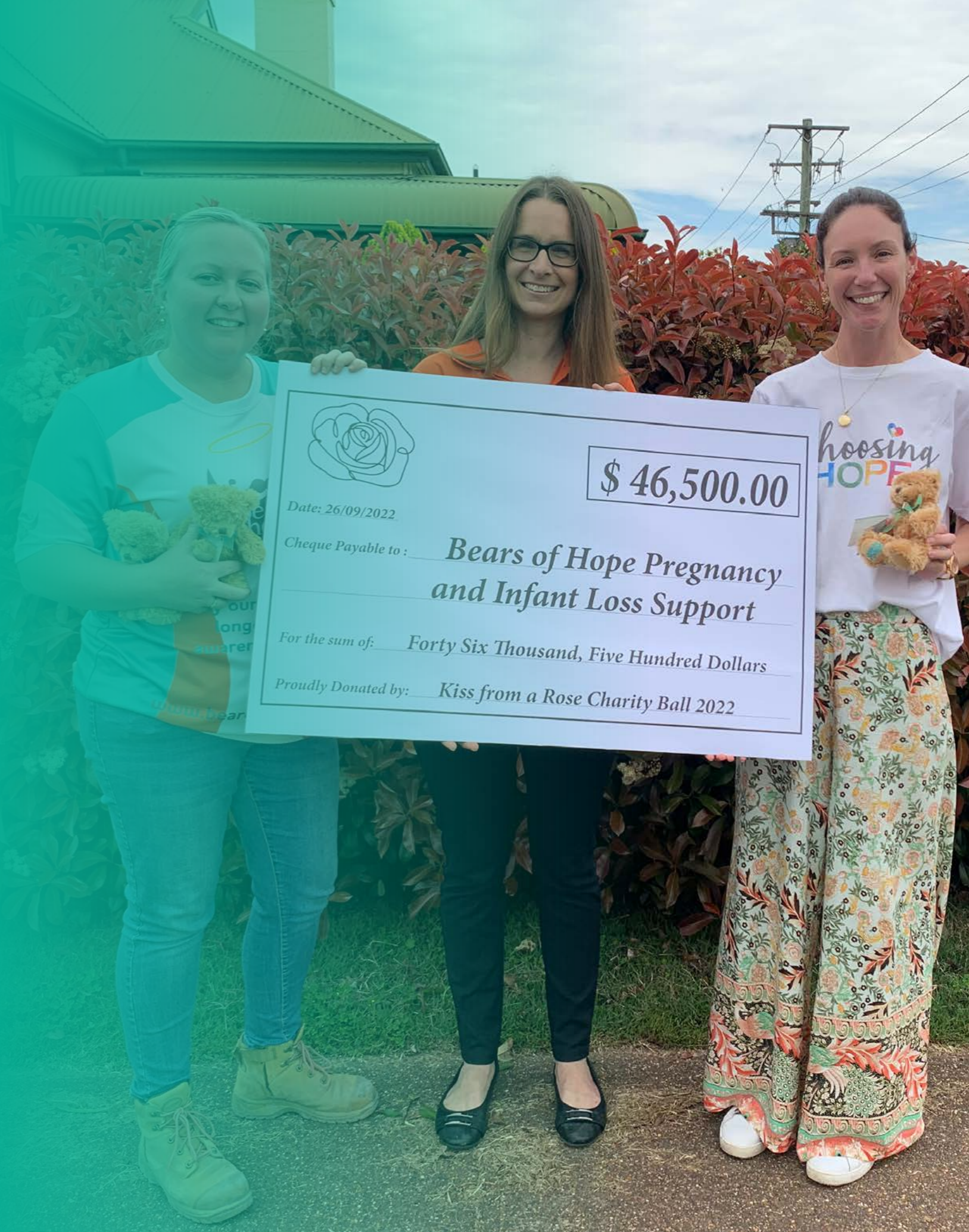
22/23 Corporate Supporter
of the Year
Ted Dunn Foundation



22/23 Community Spirit Award
Danielle Carey & Brooke Williams



22/23 Community Spirit Award
Jess & Hayden Crawford





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

