

Starting school: Building children's confidence and agency



Each year The Infants' Home farewells many of our preschool children, some of whom have been with us since they were infants or toddlers, as they embark on the next big step to start 'big school'. The prospect of going to a new place, having a new routine and meeting new people can be understandably scary for many children—just as it can be for many adults!

Gorton House preschool Educator Nicky believes one of the keys to helping children prepare for the transition to school is to make the new school space as familiar as possible for the children.

Unfortunately, in 2020, COVID-19 made preparing children for a positive transition to school particularly difficult. Children usually have many opportunities to become familiar with their new school through orientation visits, and participation in 'buddy' or mentoring programs with older school students. However in 2020 these activities

were significantly reduced or completely suspended, and most information sessions and school tours for children and families were run virtually. It was clear that an innovative approach was needed to help children become more familiar and comfortable with the schools they were going to.

Nicky encouraged children and their families to visit the children's new schools on weekends to see what the environment looked like through the gates and fences. She suggested that families take photos of their child visiting their new school to share with their preschool friends and Educators.

Families emailed the photos to Nicky and a book documenting the children's visits, experiences and reflections was created. This 'school journal' became the catalyst for many discussions between children and with Educators. The Educators also helped children from Gorton House to connect with children in

Robinson House who would be going to the same school as them, and they took photos of the children together, which they gave to the children to help them to recognise a friendly face when at school.

'Scared' and 'nervous' were the main feelings that children identified in relation to starting school, so Educators encouraged the children to unpack what might be behind these emotions. Many children said they were worried that they would not know any of the other children, or that they would have no one to play with. Educators encouraged the children to think about strategies they could use if they found themselves in these situations.

After some consideration, the children suggested that they could look for another child they knew, to say hello to, or ask to play with children they didn't know, or ask a teacher for help. Some children also suggested they could look out for other children who seemed nervous or lonely and ask them if they wanted to play. These conversations were recorded in the journal, which the children regularly revisited, discussed and added to with the Educators. Opening up these discussions helped the children to gain a sense of confidence and agency in their own transition to school experience.

While it is always sad to say goodbye to our preschoolers, we are confident that they leave us with the skills and confidence to take ownership of this next important step in their journey.



A message from our CEO

During late 2020 and the first half of 2021 we have undertaken a number of projects for our Gorton, Johnson and Robinson House centres with funding received through the NSW Quality Learning Environments program and the NSW Government Community Building Partnership program. These projects have been focussed on purchasing resources and refurbishing learning spaces to enhance the delivery of our centres' educational programs.

In February we launched our inaugural 'Baby Time' playgroup with support from Inner West Council. The playgroup, which will run until the end of June, has been well-received. We are seeking to secure funding to deliver this successful program again in the future.

Congratulations to our Johnson House centre which was once again rated as 'Exceeding the National Quality Standard' under the National Quality Framework following their Assessment and Rating visit in February. This fantastic result reflects the team's outstanding professionalism and dedication. Great work team!

Elizabeth Robinson
Chief Executive Officer

*each child,
every opportunity*

Welcome back to The Infants' Home

One of the most challenging aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the way in which it has limited our capacity to welcome our friends, donors and supporters onsite. However, as restrictions eased during late 2020 and early 2021, we began welcoming back visitors with COVID-safe measures in place.



November 2020: We welcomed a keen volunteer team from Deloitte, our first Corporate Volunteers following the suspension of the program in early March.



December 2020: State Member for Summer Hill, Jo Haylen MP (left), presented our CEO Elizabeth Robinson with a cheque for funding under the NSW Government's Community Building Partnership 2020 program.



March 2021: CEO of Fairwealth Australia, Frank Fontana, presented Elizabeth with a cheque for almost \$3,000, which was raised for us by Fairwealth Australia through their 2020 annual Salaried Officers & Wages Picnic.

HMAS Sydney: Our friends and supporters for 56 years!

HMAS Sydney II 2020 Memorial Service

On 19 November last year our President Mary Verschuer (pictured right) and our CEO Elizabeth Robinson attended the HMAS Sydney II Memorial Service to commemorate the 79th anniversary of the sinking of the HMAS Sydney II. Each year we are invited to attend the Memorial as special guests given our organisation's long association with HMAS Sydney, as their adopted charity since 1965. Mary laid a beautiful wreath in commemoration of the 645 men lost when HMAS Sydney II was sunk off the coast of Western Australia on 19 November 1941. It is always a moving ceremony, with family members of those lost in attendance.

HMAS Sydney V Deployment

On 11 March 2021 we wished all of our friends and supporters on HMAS Sydney V, a safe and successful deployment as they set sail to conduct combat systems sea qualification trials. The ship departed its home port at Fleet Base East with a full crew for its deployment to the US. We look forward to welcoming the crew back to The Infants' Home when they return to our shores.



Corporate Volunteering

We have now resumed our Corporate Volunteer program with a COVID-Safe Plan in place.

Volunteering with us is a great way for work colleagues to strengthen their team dynamics. Volunteers help to maintain our buildings and grounds, assist with events and support our children's programs.

If your team is interested in volunteering with us, please register your interest on the 'Corporate Volunteering' page on our website (theinfantshome.org.au).



NSW Quality Learning Environments program

The NSW Government's Quality Learning Environments (QLE) program supports eligible early childhood education services to improve their learning environments to positively impact experiences and outcomes for preschool aged children.

Through the 2019 and 2020 rounds of the QLE program we were delighted to receive support to undertake a range of projects to enhance the delivery of our programs for preschool children.

These included:

- Refurbishing the sandpit and verandah in Johnson House.
- Refurbishing the courtyard, installing a new shade sail and purchasing a new mud kitchen for Robinson House.
- Installing a rainwater tank and outdoor seating for the Kitchen Garden and purchasing new foam gross motor equipment for Gorton House.



New seating for the Kitchen Garden outdoor classroom.



Robinson House's new shade sail.

Digitising our historical records

The Infants' Home offers a free records search service for people who attended our residential care facilities, which operated from our inception in 1874 until the early 1970s.

Former residents are known as 'care leavers'. Accessing records of their time in care is often integral to piecing together their early years, and can offer insights into their past and identity that they may have been denied as a child in care. Records searches can also be undertaken for families of former residents, and family history searches can also provide an insight into a family member's past that is often unknown to the family. Twenty record searches were completed in 2020, the highest number completed over a 12 month period since we began providing this service in 2006.

We are grateful to have received funding of \$5,000 through the 2020 Heritage Grants Program, which was administered by the Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS) on behalf of the NSW government through the Heritage Council of NSW. This grant supported the digitisation and indexing of a priority selection of our historical records, held at the State Library of NSW, to assist us to improve our record search processes for care leavers, preserve our historical records and improve access to our organisation's history. Further information about our free records search service is available on the 'Our History' page on our website (theinfantshome.org.au).



History volunteer wanted

The Infants' Home's historical records comprise thousands of records of children and mothers who spent time in our residential facilities from 1874 to the mid-1970s.

We are currently digitising our records and we are seeking a volunteer to work remotely to assist with indexing these. Our indexing database is cloud-based and can be accessed securely from anywhere with an internet connection.

This opportunity would suit someone who is comfortable using digital technology, and experience in data entry. A passion for history and an understanding of privacy principles will be advantageous.

Hours can be set by the volunteer, however the ability to work for a minimum of one day per week is preferable. Either face-to-face or remote induction and training can be provided.

If you are interested in volunteering for this role, please contact Sarah Brand, Project Officer, by email to sbrand@theinfantshome.org.au.

Johnson House rated as 'Exceeding the NQS'



Congratulations to Johnson House's integrated team of Educators and Allied Health staff for the centre's rating of 'Exceeding the The National Quality Standard (NQS)' following their Assessment and Rating visit in February.

The centre received four Quality Area ratings of 'Exceeding NQS' and three Quality Area ratings of ratings of 'Meeting NQS' to achieve their overall 'Exceeding' rating—an outstanding result!

Launch of our first RAP



In November 2020 we launched our inaugural Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). Our vision for our Reflect RAP is to raise awareness within our organisation by gaining and sharing knowledge and being respectful and inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and rights. We are very excited to be on this important journey.

Responses from our community to the question *'What does reconciliation mean to you?'* have included:

- *'It means don't leave people out.'*
- *'Acknowledge the mistakes of the past and work together to a beautiful and harmonious future.'*
- *'We have to share the land.'*
- *'Listening. Respect. Kindness. Sharing.'*

National Reconciliation Week: *'More than a word. Reconciliation takes Action'*



National Reconciliation Week (NRW), 27 May–3 June, is a time for all Australians to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' shared histories, cultures, and achievements, and to explore how each of us can contribute to achieving reconciliation in Australia. The theme for NRW 2021 is *'More than a word. Reconciliation takes action'*.

We invited our community to participate in creating a reconciliation tree as part of our journey to reconciliation. Children,

families, staff and supporters were invited to contribute by answering the question *'What does reconciliation mean to you?'* on the back of a specially designed postcard. They were then encouraged to visit the RAP space in our foyer to add the postcards to our reconciliation tree.

We have been delighted by our community's enthusiastic and thoughtful engagement in this activity, and we look forward to extending upon it during NAIDOC Week, 4-11 July 2021.

Best School Garden Award for our Randwick Family Day Care Hub

In December our Family Day Care team at Randwick won the 2020 Best School Garden Award in the Randwick City Council Garden Awards. The garden is an amazing place for Educators and children to interact with nature, whether it be with the native bees or with the

resident blue tongue lizards in the 'lizard lounging area'. The children also learn about planting, harvesting and composting and get to sample the vegetables, herbs and fruits the garden produces. Educator Support Officer Barbara Millist (pictured) accepted the award.



New 'Baby Time' Playgroup

We have been running a new supported Baby Time playgroup each week at The Infants' Home, since February this year. This targeted playgroup is for children aged birth to 12 months (or until they are walking competently) and their parents and carers. The playgroup is facilitated by one of our qualified Child and Family Health Nurses and a qualified early childhood Educator.

Many parents and carers attending our other supported community playgroups for children from birth to school age had provided feedback that they often felt uncomfortable with letting their younger children participate independently among older and more mobile children at these playgroups. They wanted their infants and younger, less mobile children, to be able to attend a playgroup program that is tailored to meet their specific safety and wellbeing needs.

Each Baby Time playgroup session runs for 1.5 hours, with an additional half an hour made available for parents and carers to consult individually with the Nurse and/or Educator where they have concerns or queries regarding their child's wellbeing or development.

The playgroup's facilitators provide an environment that supports parents and carers to develop their skills in observing and understanding their baby's cues and to be



responsive to their baby's health, wellbeing and development needs. They can also receive one-to-one advice, information and support on areas such as sleep and settling, breastfeeding, food and nutrition, daily routines, development and play and services in the community.

Each term, three of the playgroup sessions have included a 45-minute group information presentation on a relevant topic, including 'Safe Homes', 'Play and Grow' and 'Healthy Mouths, Healthy Diet'. The playgroup facilitators speak with parents and carers to determine appropriate topics for these.

A key focus of the playgroup is to connect parents and carers with each other to assist them to build

their social and support networks. There is also an emphasis on assisting parents to link in with other supports, programs and services in the local community, such as health services, early childhood education and care, early intervention services, social groups and other community services.

We are delighted that the Baby Time playgroup has been so well received, with steady attendance levels overall, including a number of regular participants.

Thank you to Inner West Council's Community Wellbeing Grants for supporting the delivery of our Baby Time Playgroup. We hope to be able to secure support to continue delivering this program in the future.

The Infants' Home Community Playgroups

The Infants' Home runs five free supported play groups in Sydney's Inner West. These include our weekly playgroups at Ashfield Park, Ashfield Public School and Croydon Park Public School, our weekly Baby Time playgroup at The Infants' Home and our fortnightly Fathers and Children's playgroup, which is also held onsite on Saturday mornings. As 'supported playgroups' they are facilitated by staff from The Infants' Home with early childhood, nursing and allied health qualifications.

Children, parents and carers attending our playgroups benefit from access to free, play-based early learning programs and having opportunities to connect with other families. Our playgroup facilitators can also provide families with information and advice regarding child wellbeing and development, and they can assist families to access services and supports in the community, including early intervention and family support services.

Information about all of our playgroups, including the latest playgroup calendar, is available under the 'Services' section of our website (theinfantshome.org.au).

Celebrating 147 years of The Infants' Home

On 15 May 1874 a group of courageous women fought against accepted wisdom, the Church, the press and prominent citizens of the day to establish a home for abandoned infants and unmarried mothers with children. 'The Sydney Foundling Institute' was initially founded in Victoria Street in Sydney's Darlinghurst.

It was the first and only home in Australia to cater for abandoned children and to provide accommodation for unmarried mothers and their babies, many of whom had nowhere to else to turn. It was not uncommon for unmarried mothers during these harsh times to abandon their babies or to turn to infanticide and suicide. Unlike other institutions of the time, the Sydney Foundling Institute championed the practice of keeping mothers and babies together in the first instance.

In 1876, after two difficult years in inner city Sydney, philanthropist Thomas Walker, a successful

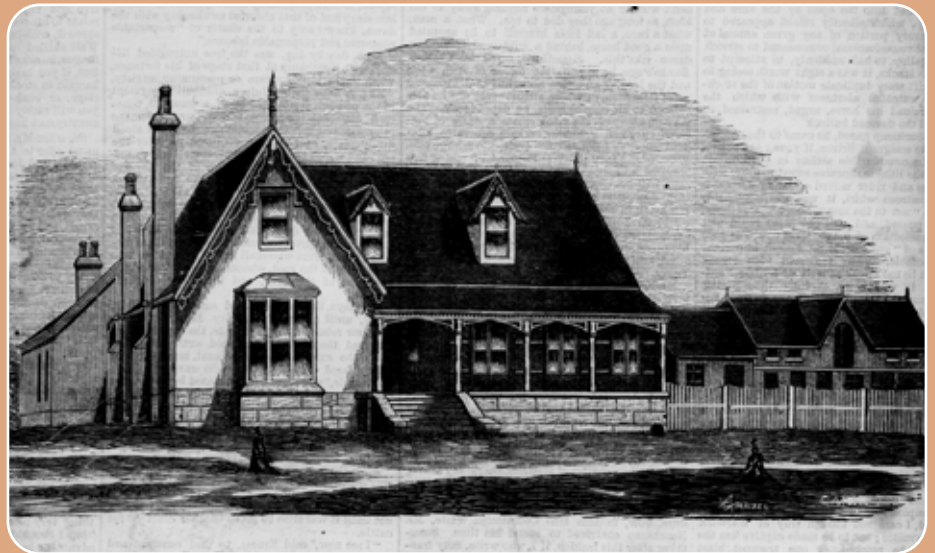


Illustration of 'Gorton', 17 Henry Street Ashfield c.1877.

pastoralist and banker, suggested the organisation relocate to bigger premises. He paid £3,000 to purchase our current 4.5-acre property, named 'Gorton', in Henry Street, Ashfield, which he donated to us.

After the move to Ashfield our organisation was renamed 'The Infants' Home'.

Through 147 years of continual operation, which have included two World Wars, the Great Depression, outbreaks of disease, pandemics, and great social and political change, The Infants' Home has continued to evolve to meet the needs of young children and their families.

Out and about with children at The Infants' Home

Each day Educators work closely with our children to create play and interest-based learning opportunities for them. All of our children, regardless of their age, skills or abilities, are supported to learn and develop by building on their inherent strengths and interests, and through interacting positively with their peers and Educators. Some experiences may be one-off activities while other interest-based projects can evolve and be revisited over many weeks or even months. Here are a few of the learning experiences that our children have been participating in recently.



The children in Rigby House love to garden, and they enjoyed planting seeds, transferring the little seedlings to the vegetable garden and caring for the plants as they observed them grow.



Regular visits to the Goose Paddock inspired Gorton House children's interest in spiders and insects, with children discussing and researching the lives and life cycles of several spider and insect species.



The children in Johnson House had been enjoying imaginative play scenarios based on shopping, so a dedicated play space was set up including a counter, cash register and grocery item boxes.

Vale Marion Young



Marion celebrated her 91st birthday at The Infants' Home.



Marion and Jean as toddlers.



Marion (right) and Jean, on one of their many visits to The Infants' Home.

In November 2020 we sadly said goodbye to our friend Marion Young, (1923–2020), who passed away at the grand age of 97 after a full and wonderful life.

Marion and her twin sister Jean (1923–2018,) came to The Infants' Home when they were just a month old, following their mother's untimely death. Their father Lionel visited them regularly and he helped to make furniture and paint walls for The Infants' Home.

Marion and Jean returned home at age six when their father remarried. They were brought up within a loving family and both went on to live successful and fulfilling lives, and to have families of their own.

Marion and Jean had a lifetime association with The Infants' Home, making regular visits and attending some of our special events.

We are honoured to have played a part in Marion and Jean's life stories, and to be able to remember them as a part of our organisation's rich history.

Our history



We remember popular and flamboyant Australian entertainer Jeanne Little, who sadly passed away in November last year, aged 82. Jeanne made her debut on the Mike Walsh Show, an Australian variety daytime television series that ran from 1973 to 1984. Jeanne won the Gold Logie Award for Most Popular (Female) Australian entertainer and TV personality in 1976, and she appeared in numerous television shows, as well as on stage. During the 1970s Jeanne, pictured above at our annual fete, volunteered her time to entertain some of our resident children.



Yes, I would like to help give 'each child every opportunity'

- I would like to make a donation of \$ _____ today
- I would like to become a regular giver, please debit \$ _____ monthly from my credit card.

My donation will be made by: cheque (made payable to The Infants' Home Ashfield), OR by credit card (Mastercard / Visa)

Card Number _____ / _____ / _____ / _____ Expiry Date ____/____

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