

Playing up at the Be Centre

THEY say it takes a community to raise a child, and the Rotary Club of Upper Northern Beaches, NSW, is playing its part in the local community, ensuring traumatised children get the help they need.

For a decade, the Be Centre, based in Warriewood, has been supporting children aged three to 13 years impacted by trauma or presenting with emotional, psychological, behavioural and/or social issues. With little government support, nearly 75 per cent of services are provided free of charge for families in crisis.

"More than 120 of the most vulnerable children receive free therapy programs," Be Centre executive director Marisa Chilcott said. "These children are impacted by family breakdown, domestic violence, neglect, torture, sexual abuse, parental/carer drug and alcohol abuse, parent or sibling suicide, illness or death."

Rotary has sponsored a therapy room in the newly refurbished centre and recently, along with a matching grant from Rotary Australia Compassionate Grant Fund (Dick Smith), supported 10 children to complete programs.

"Be Centre is a unique charity," Marisa said. "It is the only charity of its type in Australia and is one of the largest providers of Play Therapy services in the world. Our focus is on improving the wellbeing of each child so they have the best opportunity to reach their potential, be better students and, eventually, workers, parents and community members."

Be Centre has some of the most experienced Play Therapists in Australia and conducts more than 2500 sessions annually. Children are referred to Be Centre by Family and Community Services, Anglicare, Catholic Care,

psychologists, school counsellors, GPs and the local palliative care team.

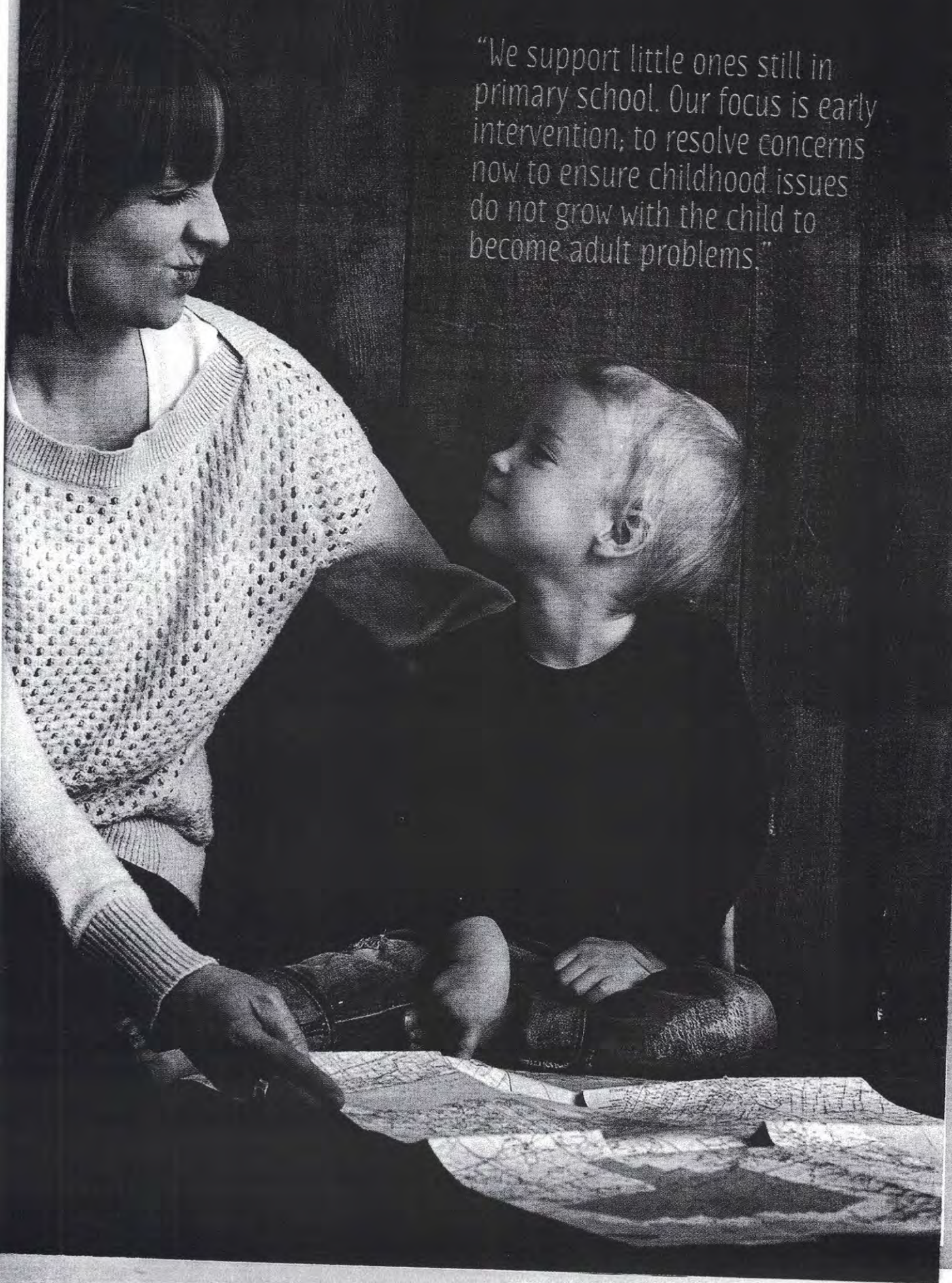
"We support little ones still in primary school," Marisa said. "Our focus is early intervention; to resolve concerns now to ensure childhood issues do not grow with the child to become adult problems."

Be Centre uses an evidence-based, age appropriate psychotherapy modality – Play Therapy. The 12-18-week programs are designed for younger children, who use play like an adult may use words. The therapy allows a child to explore and express their feelings, make sense of situations, resolve issues and build trust and resilience. Commonly used around the world, this effective early intervention ensures young children are supported in the important primary school years where the basics of literacy and numeracy are established.

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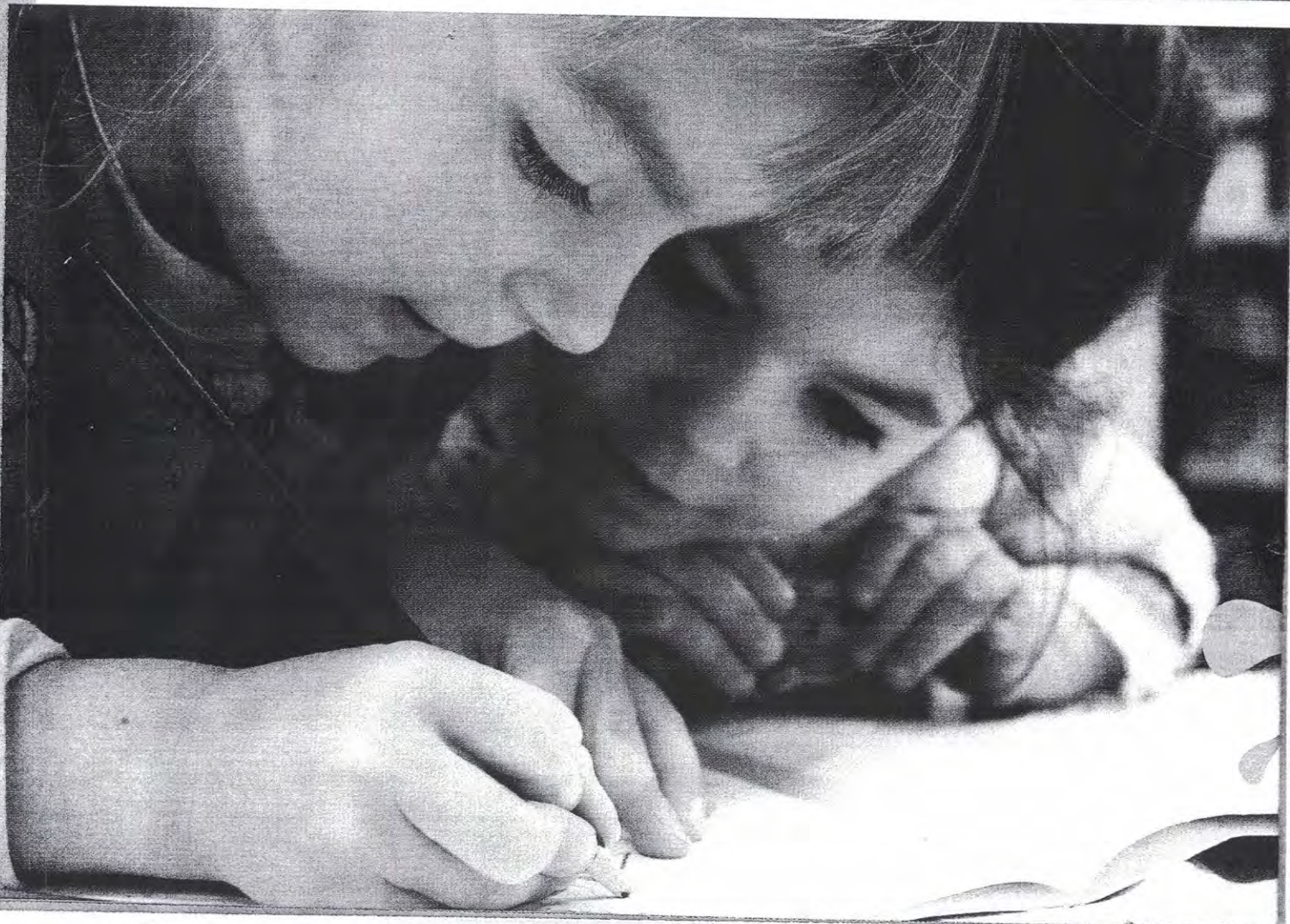
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Children in trauma go into “fight and flight” mode, where cortisol is released in the brain. This makes it virtually impossible for the child to concentrate. The frustration that can result leads to behavioural and social issues, disciplinary action and, in the longer-term, absenteeism from school.

“By addressing these problems early, the child has the best chance of getting a good start in to high school,” Marisa said. “We know Play Therapy works. As well as great feedback from parents/carers/guardians, teachers and referrers, Be Centre also monitors each child’s progress using a paediatric assessment tool, which shows 91.6 per cent of children who attend Be Centre’s programs show improvement post therapy.”

Be Centre also provides free parent/carer counselling, because we know this improves the outcomes for the children.



"Our clinical team are experienced mental health professionals," Marisa said. "Play Therapists have an undergraduate, related degree in psychology, counselling, early childhood education, paediatrics or nursing. They then further their training and complete a certificate in Play Therapy, perform 100 hours as an intern, then go on to complete a diploma and Master's in Play Therapy through Deakin or Charles Darwin University.

"It just makes sense that by giving a child support early, it will help them navigate their teenage years with greater self-esteem and resilience," Marisa said. "Our local Rotary epitomises their mission of *Service Above Self*, ensuring the most vulnerable children in our community face a brighter future."

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"Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood."

— Anonymous

