



Winner of Sydney South Volunteer Team of the Year 2011
Finalist for NSW Volunteer Team of the Year 2011
Winner of the Government of NSW Community Service Award 2009
Sutherland Shire Community Group of the Year 2006/ Finalist 2009

End of Year Report, December 2011

Outcomes and Highlights of 2011

- Our volunteer team won the 2011 Sydney South Volunteer Team of the Year, *“showing outstanding commitment and dedication to volunteering and have enriched the organisation and community in which they serve”*. The team was a finalist for NSW Volunteer Team of the Year, 2011. This award recognises the outstanding efforts of the 2.4 million volunteers in NSW and promotes the importance of volunteering in the community.
- The trained volunteer home visitors at Sutherland Early Support Service (SESS) have the credo **“hold a mother”** so she can **“hold her baby”**. These volunteers undertake the core work of our service, visiting their family weekly, enhancing the mother’s parenting knowledge, promoting health and well being, providing physical and emotional support, promoting key messages for reaching developmental milestones and encouraging the principles of early literacy and parent/child interactions. Our community has benefited from the dedicated work of our volunteers. They have assisted in achieving positive outcomes in the families they have worked with, helped with difficulties before they have become entrenched, strengthened protective factors and worked to promote the resilience and capacity of the families in our local area. *“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”* (Leo Buscaglia).
- Our service has contributed to a new **mother’s wellbeing**, often referred to as satisfaction, happiness, the quality of our relationships with others and how well we handle life. Mental health is defined by the World Health organisation as *“a state of wellbeing in which the individual realised his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”*. Supporting mothers with Postnatal Depression and Anxiety is a common scenario for our

volunteers. Our emotional and practical support in the home and help with appointments works well in partnership with mental health services, child youth & family counsellors and psychologists. The relationships that have been developed with our families are very important as the “Intimate attachments to other human beings are the hub around which a person’s life revolves” (John Bowlby).

- **Volunteers** are well placed to promote the philosophy of enjoying children – babies, toddlers and older children, savouring the chaotic moments, the mess and the unexpected moments of hilarity. These experiences matter as much as learning how to count, or knowing colours and shapes. The more lightness in the home, the less tension and stress – that helps a home feel safe for a child. Volunteers can encourage a mother to be flexible in her parenting approach, to manage the unexpected and to laugh more often and stress less. Maggie Dent, in her New Beginnings newsletter discusses the importance of this approach and quoted Jane Doyle, a specialist child psychologist, “*From a neuroscience point of view, babies are hardwired to experience joy with their parents and the more they are delighted in, the more it is going to increase or promote brain growth. This really sets the scene for the whole way they regard themselves, their relationship and their place in the world*”.
- One of the extraordinary **achievements** of our service is that for over 14 years of service we have never had recurrent operational funding from local, state or federal government, other than our office space. (SESIAHS). We thank our local community organisations whose support has allowed us to keep working **this** year – the Rotary Clubs of Sutherland, Sylvania, Engadine and Caringbah, Cronulla-Sutherland Leagues Club and Sutherland District Trade Union Club through the CDSE funding, the Big Sister Movement, The Highfield Committee, Sutherland Shire Council Community Grants, the Inner Wheel club of Sutherland, the Commonwealth Bank Community Fund, Zonta, Miranda RSL Sub-Branch, the Lioness Club of Sutherland Shire, Wigbo Pty Ltd, Distraction Gift Store and private individual donations. We thank all of our donors for recognizing the significance of our work and we continue to lobby for recurrent funding to ensure ongoing service, future planning and expansion.
- Our new **facebook page** at - www.facebook.com/SutherlandEarlySupportService is attracting attention. Our strategy for using this social media was to improve our profile, presence, recruit volunteers, get sponsorship and connect with clients and service providers. A recent post on our page from a client assisted by two volunteers this year stated:

“Having caught up with Carolyn (volunteer) yesterday, again it reminds how instrumental the support provided by this service was a life saver for me. I cannot and will not ever be able to thank you all enough for the love and strength you gave us. We would not be where we are today without you. My heart felt thanks.”

Our **core service** is **home visiting family support** provided by a team of volunteers who are trained and supervised by our two “best practice” coordinators. We are currently supporting 59 vulnerable families with children who were referred to our service due to lack of support, isolation, difficulty adjusting to parenthood, multiple births, anxiety, postnatal depression, or issues of ill health / disability . Each family is linked with a trained volunteer who provides one-on-one support in the family’s home. Some of our high needs family have two volunteers to assist them. Each volunteer is supported and supervised by two professional coordinators who also provide the initial and ongoing monthly training.

A snapshot of the caseload is as follows:

It has been another very busy year in 2011. We also get many inquiries from the St George area requesting assistance. We are not in a position to assist these families.

We have taken 69 new referrals in 2011 and closed 66 client files. We are currently working with 59 families. Many families, often with multiple issues, benefit from 8 to 12 months support from their volunteer. At any one month we can have 50 to 60 families we are assisting.

Multiple birth families: currently 16 families

Post Natal Depression/anxiety: currently 29 families

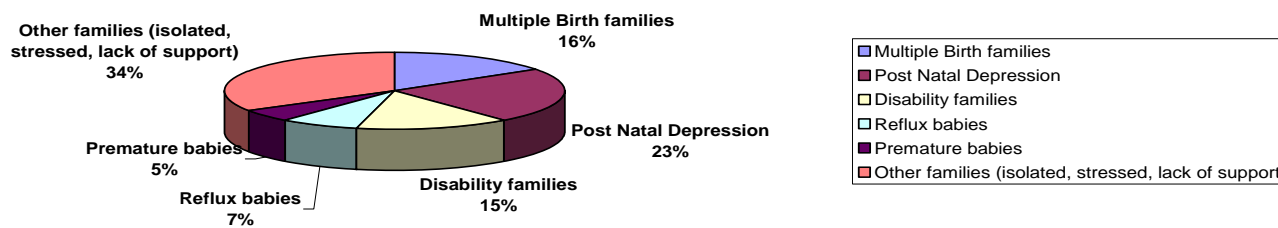
Disability mum or child: currently 21 families with disability/health problems

Other cases we have assisted are mothers or babies with issues of ill health or disability, premature infants, reflux babies, clients from Culturally &

Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds and defence force mums. Some families fit into several categories, e.g., a mum with PND who has twins with reflux. All our families lack support whether through geographical distance from families and friends, deceased parents, work requirements of their partner, recent move into the area, or limited social contacts/resources.

The graph on the next page illustrates the SESS client family caseload.

Cases by Type 2011



Community Support & Funding

Those who invest in our service help us benefit the local community now and in the future. We would like to thank our supporters for this year:

- The local **Rotary clubs** – Sutherland, Caringbah, Sylvania & Engadine for their financial support in 2011.
- The **Big Sister Movement** for their support of ‘work by women for women’ in the local area.
- The **Highfield Committee** at Sutherland Hospital for their continued recognition of our work within the health service area.
- **Zonta** for assistance with submission writing and financial support for volunteer training in 2011.
- **Cronulla Sutherland Leagues Club** for supporting our project through CDSE and for making us one of their community partners for 2011.

- **Sutherland District Trade Union Club** for supporting our project, “Volunteers Holding the Mother- Holding the Baby” through CDSE for this year.
- The **Commonwealth Bank Community Fund** for their award for our project “Beyond Baby Blues”
- **Sutherland Shire Council**, through the community grants program enabled us to support families with issues of disability and ill health.
- **Miranda RSL Sub-Branch** for their continued support of local Defence families
- **Local service clubs – Inner Wheel Club of Sutherland, The Lioness club of Sutherland Shire**
- **Individual people** in our community who have donated to our service.
- **Local business – Wigbo Pty Ltd, Distraction Gift Store**

Advisory Committee

Our Advisory Committee consists of ten committed volunteers (including two home visiting volunteers) who attend monthly meetings to address issues of long term funding and strategic planning for the service. President Stan Nurthen, Phil Whyte, Martin Iffland, Mary Jacobs, Sue Shoebridge, Yvonne Moffitt and Peter & Jenny Pidoux have worked throughout the year to secure funding in many areas. We acknowledge the **strong Rotarian representation** on our committee and thank them for their time and effort on our behalf and their personal support of the coordinators.

Shire Community Service Inc. (SCS) our auspice body provides administrative backup for us.

Community partnerships

Over the years we have built up valuable partnerships with people and organisations in our local community who want to help and support families in the area. Many of our families have benefited from the care and nurture provided by:

- **South East Sydney Illawarra Area Health Service** for assistance with office accommodation in Possum Cottage in the grounds of Sutherland Hospital. We work closely with health workers and the central location has allowed for easy access to mothers in the maternity floor and Possum Cottage.
- **Sutherland Shire Council (staff & councillors)** for their advocacy and support of families with disability and ill health through the Community Grants.
- **St Luke’s Anglican Church** for training facilities for volunteers every month in their fellowship centre.
- **Kingsway Community** church for organising and delivering beautifully presented Christmas Hampers for our families to enjoy and providing us with space to train the new volunteers in 2011.
- **The Manna Programs at Gynea & Caringbah Baptist churches.** Thank you to coordinators **Janet Chapman and Anne Giovias** and all their volunteers for the provision of a wonderful meal program that helps our clients and allows them to feel cared for by members of their community.
- **Care and Concern** – Shelby Timmons and her team of volunteers assisting with meal support. This is a new and additional program and invaluable for our families.

- **Leonie Freed from St Luke's Anglican** for her meal support program
- **Gateway and Cronulla Christian churches for maintaining our food pantry** so that we can support families with food boxes when finances are critical. Our volunteer **Fae Verdich** is the wonderful link between the churches and our cupboard. Our pantry is accessed by the domestic violence counsellor at Caringbah Community Health when she has a client in need of food help.
- **Speakers** this year who assisted with the professional training of volunteers. Madeline Chapman, Diversity Health Coordinator Sutherland Hospital: Gillian Minto, Immunisation program officer for Division of General Practice: Sarah Brynes, Infant Massage Instructor from Life's Little Wonders: Emma Hutchings from Early Childhood Services: Kim Taylor, Counsellor and Therapist from Spirited Life. Thank you for sharing your expertise and knowledge with our volunteer team.

Volunteers and Training

Ongoing monthly volunteer education included guest speakers on varied topics such as Cultural & Religious Issues, including Death & Dying, Infant Massage, Play & Game ideas, Immunisation & Infectious Diseases, Help me love my Baby – a DVD looking at Infant attachment, The Art of Breastfeeding, including twins, Case Discussions by the coordinators of SESS and Building Emotional Resilience in Children. Volunteers were also treated to with special morning teas and an end of year thank you brunch.

One of our volunteers was presented with a **Cook Community Award** for 2011. 18 new volunteers trained in March/April this year. The Kingsway Church provided us with their facility to utilise free and we thank them for their generosity and the opportunity to use their facility. Some comments from that training group included:

"The presentations and information given by Anne and Lina were outstanding. The effort they put in to give the volunteers as much information as possible to help them become confident in their role was exceptional. It was also great to hear from the volunteer who had been with the service for some years."

"The training made me understand what an incredible impact the service has on so many vulnerable women and children and how rewarding it must be to help these families achieve positive outcomes."

"I realised that I was going to be doing something very worthwhile and rewarding which made me feel wonderful. I had a tear in my eyes on many occasions."

On the recent news that our volunteer team had won the regional component of the 2011 NSW Volunteer Team of the Year, a volunteer responded by email and said, **"We the volunteers, are extremely fortunate to be involved with an organisation which is so professional and caring. The volunteers are a result of a great training program and very caring and hard working co-ordinators. I have worked with a lot of volunteer organisations and I really believe that yours is one of the best. Both Lina and Anne are a credit to the organisation. How lucky are those families out there that receive support from SESS."**

There are prospective volunteers already on the waiting list to train in 2012. our successful submission for CDSE funding will cover the costs of volunteer training for next year, thanks to the Cronulla-Sutherland Leagues Club and Sutherland District Trade Union club.

Outcomes and client comments

Our many and varied clients are enormously grateful for the practical help and support they receive from their volunteers and the client surveys completed at closure of our home visiting indicate how valued the support is.

Our home visiting service produces **valuable outcomes for families** in the Sutherland Shire:

- Reduced isolation
- Improved access to services
- Improved self esteem, positive mental and physical health outcomes for mothers and babies
- Building resilience in mothers
- Reduction in stress and family crisis
- Improved parenting skills, family functioning and wellbeing
- Improved health, knowledge and skills of volunteers through active community participation and training
- Flow-on benefits of a caring, healthier and inclusive community
- Building social capital or the glue that hold society together

Recent feedback letters from our clients:

A mother with postnatal depression who had newborn twins and a toddler said: *“I was blessed with two volunteers who were a perfect balance for my family. It was a lifesaver for me, honestly saved me in some very dark situations when I could have made some bad/damaging choices”*

An isolated mother with twins and a 17 month old; one of the twins was very unsettled, had a brace and needed regular physiotherapy appointments wrote: *“Words can’t express how much I looked forward to my volunteers’ visits. I wasn’t alone and I would be able to get to appointments, get things done like shower, or washing, or just enjoy my kids. Thanks”.*

Another mother who was grieving the loss of her mum was linked with two volunteers and commented: *‘I had a new baby diagnosed with reflux who wouldn’t sleep during the day and a 16 month old toddler who didn’t sleep properly. My husband had just started a new business and wasn’t there for physical support. Rachel (volunteer) helped me to rest and recover and Jan (volunteer) became like a surrogate nanna for my children and a surrogate mother for me. She helped with emotional support throughout a time of grieving. Continue what you are doing so well”.*

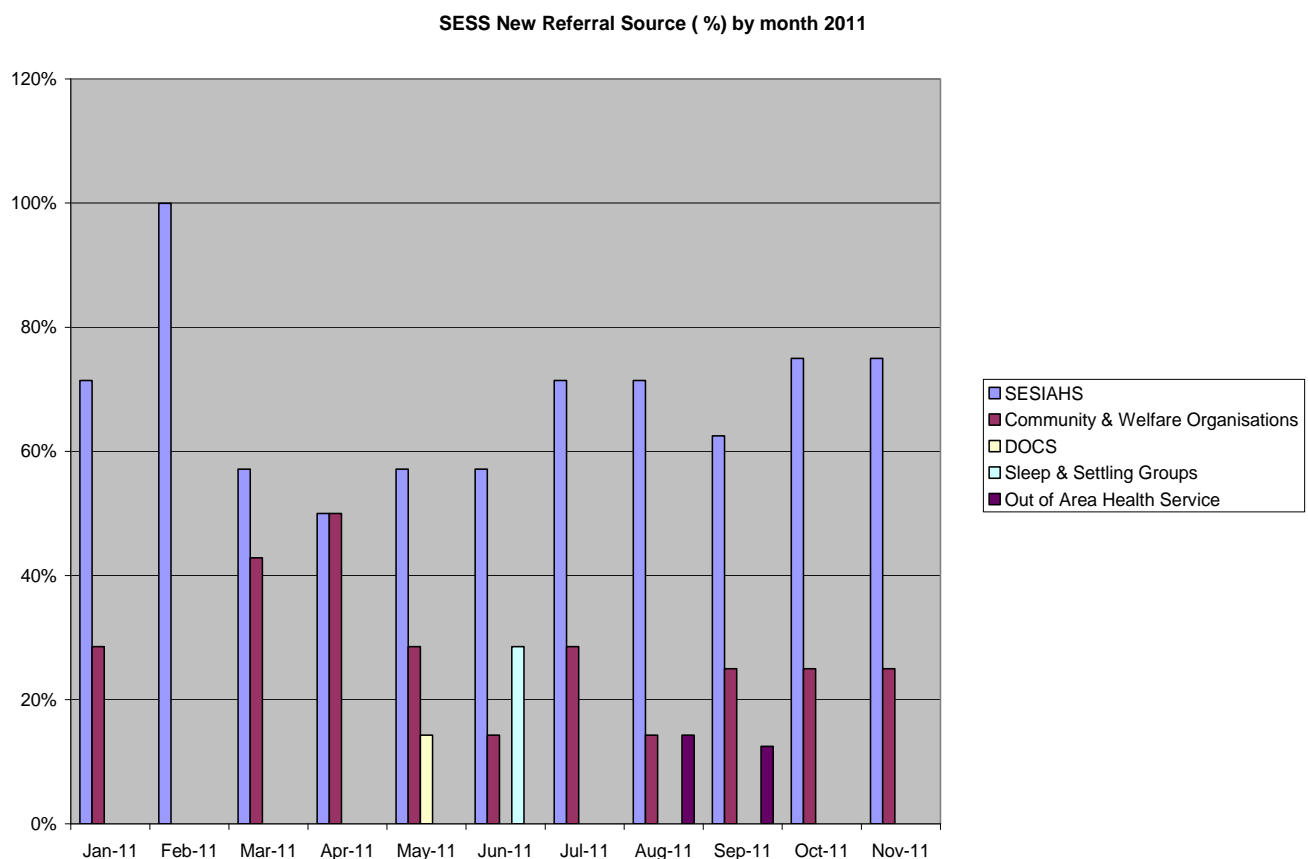
A young mother who has a history of depression and anorexia, with a newborn, and children aged 2 and 4 years said in a letter to her volunteer: *“I couldn’t really thank you enough for the time you have given my family this year. From all the crafty fun things you do with the kids, to feeding and changing nappies,*

to helping me to learn to cook, to being someone I can trust with my worries and fears, to being supportive in every unthinkable way, you do so with a warm generous heart, a big smile, and loads of energy. The kids adore you as do I. Give your family all my thanks for sharing you with me every week. Thank you”.

Referrals

As in previous years our main referral base (see graph below) continues to be health workers in the hospitals, Community Health centres or the Child and Family Health Centres. There has been a reduction in referrals from the Early Childhood Clinics and we think this is because of reduced hours in the local clinics and mothers accessing nurse support at the local chemists. This is an area we intend to follow up so that the nurses in the chemists are aware of our service and can refer when they see a mother who is struggling.

The graph below illustrates our referral sources:



Agencies we work with in a professional partnership to ensure the best care for our families:

Sutherland Shire Early Childhood Centres
Sutherland Hospital Social Work Department
Perinatal Mental Health Team Sutherland Hospital
Child Youth & Family Team at Caringbah Community Health Centre
DOCS child protection service
Brighter Futures Early Intervention Service
SDN Child & Family Services and Community Services
Possum Cottage at Sutherland Hospital
Sutherland Family Services
Local Paediatrician Dr Glenn Stephens
Local General Practitioners
Local counsellors/welfare workers
Southside Clinical Psychology
Caringbah Community Health Centre
Engadine Community Health Centre
Tresillian
Karitane
Whispers Cottage
St George Hospital
Multiple Birth Association
Sylvanvale
Local Psychologists/counsellors
Southern Community Welfare

We thank all the workers from these agencies who work so hard to provide optimum care and support to families with new babies in the Sutherland Shire.

Administrative, Educational Support and Training

This year the coordinators attended the following meetings and forums as part of their work:

SCS Management Meetings, monthly and AGM
Sutherland Shire Child & Family Interagency bi monthly
SESS Planning Day, Feb 2011
Executive Steering Committee for Sutherland Child, Youth & Family Interagency.
Sutherland Shire Interagency monthly
Monthly meeting with the Perinatal Peer Supervision team
Client case work meetings
Rotary meetings and change over dinners.
NSW Government Community Forum
Visits by Pru Goward, Minister for Family and Community Services & Minister for Women and Melanie Gibbons, Councillor and State Member for Menai to our offices
NSW Government Volunteering Strategy consultation

Volunteer Managers Breakfast
Office meeting with Dr D Bartlett, Woolcock Institute of Medical Research
Office visit by “Good Beginnings” Inner West coordinator
Department of Defence office visit by family liason officer and social worker.
Gynea Fair resource and fundraising stall
Healthy Minds Expo, Cronulla Mall.
Book launch of “Wednesday Sisters”, part written by former client
Cronulla Sutherland Leagues Club WAG meeting, home game and fundraising.
Multiple Birth Association luncheon as a guest speaker
We have assisted a number of students completing community welfare studies for the HSC, Loftus TAFE & UTS.

Professional development

The coordinators attended the following professional training sessions and courses to enhance their knowledge and skills:

Anne Van Vuuren has attended:

The Accidental Counsellor, CCWT

Domestic Violence Training course Level 1

Grief & Loss Training

Understanding Mental Illness and its Impact on children and parenting.

Perinatal Peer Supervision monthly

Lina Willmott has attended:

Workplace Debriefing and Support, CCWT – 2 day workshop

Social Media Workshop – 2 days

Karitane Conference- Relationships in 3D

Work Health and Safety Act 2011 training

Perinatal Peer Supervision monthly

In Conclusion

The critical nature of the helping relationship is evident in our program. Our home visitors help build resilience in vulnerable mothers. They notice their strengths, act as positive role models, and help them on the right path. We are often the safety net through difficult times. This builds the mother’s self esteem and she can then transfer these positives to her children as well as other areas of her life.

“Before any kind of lasting change at all in behaviour can be made, families need to feel safe and cared for. Healing and recovery are impossible even with the best medications and therapy in the world without lasting connections to others” (Dr Bruce Perry).

Volunteers are at the heart of our service, both in direct work with families as well as indirectly on our advisory committee. It is a privilege to work with such gifted and generous volunteers who achieve such remarkable, positive outcomes.

Lina Willmott and Anne Van Vuuren
Coordinators, Sutherland Early Support Service

