



Clockwise from right: colour abounds in the nursery room, Sally Lock and her team; storytime; fun in the preschool room; the boys.

Opposite page: the harbourside front yard; fun with bubbles and paint



Sally's Palace



When you first visit Sally's Place in Mosman, it's easy to think you're in the wrong location. The heritage-listed, former army barracks building blends with its beautiful bushland surrounds.

No bold signage or big colourful banners herald your arrival. The tranquillity of Sydney Harbour and national park are the only obvious landmarks.

However, when you hear the familiar background of children's chatter and laughter, you know you've found the right place.

Once you're through the front door, colour abounds and a central playground is a hive of productive activity.

Staff in Sally's Place t-shirts occupy three classrooms that cater for up to 48 children a day, from babies to five-year-olds. Framing the playground is a freshly-renovated building with a deep verandah, inviting art room, kitchen and administration rooms.

Sally's Place opened last August after the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust put the project out to public tender. Following a six-month process, Director Sally Lock won the bid and relocated from Perth, where she ran a similar 'boutique-style' service in Claremont.

Sally's Place is located within Georges Heights, originally owned by the army and taken over by the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust about five years ago.

Unlike other NSW services, Sally's Place does not fall under Department of Community Services jurisdiction, because it is on Commonwealth land and its landlord, the Trust, is a federal government agency.

A new early childhood education service on Sydney Harbour Federation Trust land does not operate under standard state regulations—yet quality care is still at the fore.

By **Katie Sutherland.**

While the service is not legally bound to NSW legislation it mirrors DoCS legislation in every practical aspect. In line with this, the Trust has commissioned Community Child Care Co-operative as a consultant to assist with compliance matters and ongoing spot-checks (obviously, other services in New South Wales do not have this option).





‘It’s actually a more personal arrangement than going through DoCS,’ explains Lock. ‘Because we’re going through Community Child Care Co-operative, we’re dealing with the same person each time and you feel really well-supported.’

‘We’re very lucky in that way I guess. If you make a call to DoCS you don’t know who you’re calling. You’re just a number.’

Lock says she’s committed to delivering a better than average standard of care.

‘Obviously the minimum standards are adhered to, but... we want to provide more than the minimum.’

The service implements excellent staff to child ratios, with three staff to 10 babies in the nursery, three staff to 16 toddlers and three staff to 20 preschoolers.

‘I came from Perth, which is 1:4 [one staff member to four babies] so to think 1:5 is completely foreign to me,’ says Lock. ‘I’m comfortable with 1:4 but with 1:5 there are

reasons it’s not working.’

She adds that as well as obvious benefits to the children, her staff benefit from higher ratios.

‘My theory is that I don’t want any staff member to be on their own, so the only way to avoid that is to employ one extra staff member in each age group... there is always that sense of security in the room.’

‘The thing it always comes back to is that the staff are relaxed. They don’t feel awkward about leaving the room when they have to go and prepare art or the next activity.’

There’s no denying the service caters for a privileged demographic and fees in excess of \$100 a day not only reflect what’s on offer, but help to provide the better staff-to-child ratios.

The classrooms are handsomely furnished in pieces imported from Europe and America and even the organic linen and teddy bears are straight from a designer magazine.

The service offers a structured timetable of extra curricular activities such as dancing, French language classes, music and sport—from sack jumping on the front lawn to ball games at the local oval.

‘What we believe is that we offer the children everything in terms of a range of experiences and they’ll choose what they love. So far all the children love everything that we’re doing.’

Being surrounded by so much bushland and space also means plenty of excursions for all—whether it’s picking up sticks along the old walking trail, watching sailing from the lookout or spontaneous picnics amongst the eucalypts and kookaburras. ✨