

Paying it forward

This year, Newport's Deborah Killelea and her husband Steve are marking 25 years of philanthropy, including a significant contribution on the Northern Beaches.

Story by Rosamund Burton

Newport resident Deborah Killelea was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in January this year for her significant service to the community through charitable organisations. She is director of The Charitable Foundation, which she co-founded in 2001 with her husband Steve Killelea to help eradicate poverty and conflict. She is also the founder and chair of the Warriewood-based Be Centre, the largest Play Therapy centre in Australia.

Deborah was born in Newcastle and lived there until age nine, when her family moved to London due to her father's role with the Australian Diplomatic Corp. Eighteen months later her father was transferred to Germany, so she became a boarder at her London school. At the conclusion of term, from age 12, she travelled alone by bus to Victoria Station, then by train to Dover, where she met her

younger brother and the pair took the ferry to Ostend in Belgium, where their father was waiting for them.

When she finished school, her father was working in Yugoslavia, so she lived in Belgrade for 18 months, before the family returned to Australia. Deborah did her nursing training at Manly Hospital, then worked as a nurse with Royal Far West Children's Health Scheme. At that time children, many of whom were Aboriginal, came from the country for specialist treatment and stayed in Manly without their parents and for months at a time. Sponsored by Royal Far West, she trained as a recreational therapist, and for 10 years until 1980, she organised leisure activities for children aged two to seven. When Deborah married in 1974, the children with whom she had worked were outside the church to wish her well.

Deborah and her first husband had three children

– Rebecca, Louise and Anthony. When Anthony was 18 months old the marriage ended. It was two years later, in 1992, that she met Steve Killelea at the Narrabeen ice skating rink.

"We were both parents watching our children skate," she recalls. Steve's daughter Jennayah is a year younger than Rebecca.

"Steve and I fell in love and have been happy ever since. We knew each other for about 12 months and decided we'd become a unit." So, 33 years ago, Deborah and her children moved into the beachfront house in Newport where Steve and she still live today.

"Steve and I always refer to having four children," Deborah says. "We do not make a distinction." Their three daughters, with their partners, now each have four children of their own, and once a year Steve and Deborah bring all the family together for a two-week holiday in Italy.

"The cousins love each other and being together and this annual holiday really does keep that family unit and bond together."

By the time Deborah and Steve met, he had developed a computer program called Enlighten, which enabled users to look inside complex computer systems to detect problems; in the mid-1980s his company was listed on New York's NASDAQ. His next venture was Integrated Research which develops systems management products. Its programs are used by stock exchanges and manage Visa, American Express and Mastercard networks and ATMs worldwide. Integrated Research was listed on the Australian Stock Exchange in 2000.

"We made a lot of money," Deborah recounts with her down-to-earth honesty, "and decided we would start a family foundation with a percentage of it." So, in 2001 Deborah and Steve founded

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