



## **A Week That Changed Us All**

*By Deborah Neale, Managing Director, Emergency Pedagogy Without Borders - Australia*

### ***Emergency Pedagogy Crisis Intervention in the Wake of the Bondi Beach Terrorist Attack***



In the early evening of 14<sup>th</sup> December 2025, as families and communities gathered for the opening of Hanukkah, a terrorist attack unfolded at Bondi Beach in Sydney.

Sixteen people were killed, including 10-year-old Matilda, and 43 others were seriously injured. Police later confirmed that improvised explosive devices were also present and defused at the scene. In the hours and days that followed, shock, fear, grief, and disorientation rippled far beyond those physically present. Children witnessed unthinkable violence. Families lost loved ones. A whole community was left carrying questions that had no answers.

In the wake of such violence, the nervous system does not respond with words. It responds with freeze, fragmentation, fear, and silence. This is where Emergency Pedagogy begins.

## Emergency Pedagogy Without Borders - Australia enters the space

From 27 December 2025 to 3 January 2026, a 16-member team from Emergency Pedagogy Without Borders – Australia, led by myself, Bernd Ruf and Lisa Devine, offered emergency pedagogical crisis interventions for children and adults, alongside psychoeducational Trauma lectures for parents and the wider community.



**Back:** Conor Fox, Catherine Pilko, Marcus Pater, Mathis Engel, Bernd Ruf, Deborah Neale, Phil Ingelmo, Mamiko Kimura, Lynne Collett, Lidija Juka, Lisa Devine.

**Front:** Vanessa Snaith, Diane Tatum, Ellie Grien, Connie Voisey-Barlin, Teri Jenkins.

Across this intensive week, we reached **approximately 300 people**.

Among those who came were many children and adults who had been **directly present at the attack**, including the family of **10-year-old Matilda**, who was killed. Others arrived carrying secondary trauma — parents trying to hold their children together while their own sense of safety had been shattered; Grandparents, community members, educators and psychologists desperate to support children without causing further harm.

Children do not process Trauma in the same way as adults. They can't process with words.

Emergency Pedagogy does not ask you to tell your story. It does not rush healing or meaning-making. It begins by restoring safety in the body, through rhythm, repetition, play, movement, artistic activity, and reliable human presence. From there, something essential can begin to return: breath, connection, and the possibility of life moving forward. Perfect for children who have experienced a traumatic event such as the Bondi

Attack. Perfect for anyone in the first 6 months following a crisis such as the Bondi Attack when Trauma is only a Wound and not yet an illness.

*A wound of the soul, just as a physical wound when cared for properly, will heal.*

In the week following the Bondi attack on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 2025, something profoundly human unfolded.

In the midst of shock, grief, fear, and disbelief, a community came together — guided by the principles of **Emergency Pedagogy** — to offer what was most needed in that moment: **safety, rhythm, warmth, presence, and hope.**

***“Emergency Pedagogy is First Aid for the Soul”***

***– Bernd Ruf***

That week, Emergency Pedagogy Without Borders – Australia was born.

In just seven days, we became a registered charity, launched a website, established safeguarding frameworks, convened an emergency board meeting, created resources, booked venues, coordinated teams, and reached hundreds of families and educators. Integrity was non-negotiable. Care was paramount. Humanity guided every decision.

But what mattered most was not what was built — it was **what was held.**

### **Holding people at their most vulnerable**

Children arrived carrying experiences no child should have to hold. Parents, Grandparents and community members arrived carrying their own shock, doing their best to remain upright as their nervous systems trembled beneath the surface. Educators, therapists, and psychologists came too—not with answers, but with questions—searching for ways to help without causing further harm.

Emergency Pedagogy meets people in this fragile space. Drawing on methodologies from the Waldorf Steiner tradition and Anthroposophy, as well as a deep understanding of trauma, it works with the natural healing forces of children and adults in the aftermath of crisis. Healing is invited gently—through play, the arts, movement, and the creation of child-safe spaces where nothing is demanded and everything is paced.

Here, the arts speak when words are too much. Rhythm returns. Repetition steadies. Gentleness rebuilds what has been shaken. And within this quiet re-establishing of safety, something begins to soften—breath by breath, step by step.



## At the heart of the response

At the centre of this extraordinary intervention were Bernd Ruf, founder of Emergency Pedagogy Without Borders, and Melanie Ruf, head of Parzival Zentrum Trauma-stream, who flew to Australia on Christmas Day — offering us the only free week they had in the next five months.

There are no adequate words for our gratitude.

You carried us with your immense experience, your calm authority, your encouragement, your humour, and your deep trust in both the work and the people doing it. You brought steadiness without heaviness, wisdom without ego, and joy alongside grief. Even in the darkest of circumstances, you made it human — and yes, you made it fun. We love you both dearly.



## The team that made the work possible

**Lisa Devine** (Christian Community), as Head of the Therapeutic Team, your presence was nothing short of extraordinary. You truly had our backs. Your capacity to translate — between languages, disciplines, nervous systems, and hearts — was masterful. Bringing Emergency Pedagogy to Australia in partnership with you has been a privilege. I am deeply grateful you are here.

**Diane Tatum** (Rudolf Steiner College), witnessing your work with adults was breathtaking. People arrived frozen, shut down, overwhelmed — and through your mastery, laughter, play, and connection returned. The transformations were profound. You are a true master of your craft.



**Mathis Engel**, our joyous force and jack of all trades — wherever there was a need, you were there. Food, fun, carpentry, logistics, translation from German to English, and everything in between. Your generosity and readiness made the impossible possible.

**Ellie Grien** (Newcastle Waldorf School), thank you for your quiet, consistent presence. You missed nothing. Your trauma expertise was offered exactly where it was needed, and your documentation of this work is deeply respectful and beautiful. Your contribution will continue to speak long after this week.

**Connie Voisey-Barlin** (Newcastle Waldorf School), you are a gem. Through rhythm, games, body percussion, and joy, you brought light back into despair. For some, smiles returned for the first time since the attack. Everyone who entered the space felt your warmth.





**Phil Ingelmo** (Lorien Novalis Steiner School), thank you for the magic of storytelling. The stillness you created — across ages, across grief — was unforgettable. Faces young and old softened into peace as they listened. It was humbling to witness.

**Teri Jenkins** (Birali Steiner School), your generosity cannot be overstated. Driving two days from Queensland on Christmas Eve to be with us speaks volumes. Through movement, games, and laughter, you brought light into darkness and joy back into bodies.



**Catherine Pilko** (Glenaeon Rudolf Steiner School), **Lynne Collett** (retired from Glenaeon Rudolf Steiner School), and **Mamiko Kimura** (Lorien Novalis Steiner School), what you created for the very youngest children was extraordinary. You transformed a small corner of the Scout Hall into a true haven. For the first time since the attack, these little ones felt safe enough to relax, leave their parents' sides, and begin to play again. Parents continue to share their gratitude. The impact you made is immeasurable.





**Lidija Juka**, (Kamaroi Steiner School) one moment stands out among many — sitting quietly with Matilda's little sister. In that moment, everything about Emergency Pedagogy made sense. Presence. Love. Care. The difference you made to her and to her parents will echo for a lifetime. I know Matilda is deeply grateful.



**Conor Fox** (Newcastle Waldorf School), watching you work with primary and high school students was a joy. Through shadow puppetry and storytelling, you helped weave a healing narrative from an eclectic cast of characters. During the final performance, the healing — for both children and adults — was palpable.



**Vanessa Snaith** (Kamaroi Steiner School), the expertise and care you brought to the adults participating in your painting and drawing workshops were deeply healing. Thank you for the profound difference you made.

## The work behind the scenes

**Marcus Pater**, your behind-the-scenes leadership was immense. Flyers, posters, stakeholder communication, governance, and your role as both board member and steering committee contributor held this work together. Securing Rudolf Steiner House as a venue and enabling Zoom access meant over **300 adults**, from Sweden, China, Finland, and beyond, could attend our trauma talks. What we achieved together is extraordinary.

**Meg Quinlisk**, Meg thank you are amazing. From the 14<sup>th</sup> December you had my back. From the USA where you were on holiday, you were a yes! I can do that. Thank you for being my rock as we went into turbo drive to enable this intervention to happen. I am so so glad you are on the Board. You hit the ground running, you know exactly who I needed to connect with first and actually made this whole intervention possible. Thank you I am so grateful.



**Susan Jack**, our team Clinical Psychologist, from the moment I met you at the SEA National Teachers Conference, I knew you were the one to have our backs. Thank you for your care, your initiative, your professionalism. The Intervention team have been so well held, and it shows. Thank you, thank you, Thank you.

To the **Emergency Pedagogy Without Borders – Australia Board** — Bernd Ruf, Deb Richards, Anna Wetzel, Allison Whitmill, Jennifer West, Anna Campbell, Marcus Pater, Megan Hatton and Meg Quinlisk — your foundational work over the past 12 months made this intervention possible. In one intense week, countless threads came together because of your commitment, teamwork, and unwavering integrity. I am proud beyond measure.

**Fady Kassab**, creating our website in record time — and continuing far beyond what you committed to — was nothing short of heroic. You are a rock star.

[Emergencypedagogy.org.au](https://emergencypedagogy.org.au)

### **The wider circle of support**

Thank you to **Kamaroi Steiner School**, especially **Vanessa Snaith (principal)**, for being an immediate yes — offering resources, expertise, and deep care across **seven three-hour Emergency Pedagogy workshops** delivered throughout the week. The impact of your work with parents continues to ripple outward. Thank you for being on the team. You are extraordinary leader. Thank you.

Thank you **John Pater** and **Rudolf Steiner House** for hosting and recording our talk on trauma in children, creating a vital and lasting resource.

Thank you **Rob Kaldor at 2GB Radio** for opening the door to share Emergency Pedagogy across Sydney.

Thank you **Dani Finch** for your tireless work connecting with the Jewish community and ensuring families could access support.

Thank you **SECA (Steiner Early Childhood Australia)** — especially **Heather** — for being the first to donate. Your early confidence mattered deeply.

Thank you **Terence** at the NSW Reconstruction Authority for listening, advocating, and connecting us with the Premier's Department. Collaboration with you has been inspiring.

Thank you **Premier Chris Minns** for publicly recognising this work.

Thank you to the **Bondi Community Hub team**, the **1st Clovelly Scout Hall and John Watts**, and to everyone who shared flyers and made spaces available — reaching over **250 families** so far.

Thank you **Jane Bradshaw** - General Secretary of the **Anthroposophical Society in Australia**, **Andrew Hill** CEO of Stiener Education Australia, **Diana Drummond**, Principal of Glenaeon Steiner School, **Peggy Day** - Pedagogical Section in Australia and Rudolf Steiner College, and all **Emergency Pedagogy Certificate participants** for your steadfast support.

**And finally, and with deepest love and respect**

To the children, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles and community members, of Bondi and Bronte who came to us in their most vulnerable moments.

It has been deeply humbling to walk alongside you, to witness your courage, your tenderness, and your transformation.

***I will leave you with their words.....***

*Being part of the Emergency Pedagogy Without Borders – Australia intervention in the wake of the Bondi Beach attack has been one of the most humbling experiences of my professional life.*

*From the very first moments, we were meeting families who arrived carrying visible shock in their bodies and faces—parents holding themselves tightly, children quiet in ways that felt far too heavy for their age. There was no fixing to be done, no answers to give. Our work was simply to create a space that was safe, gentle, and human, and to trust the process of presence, rhythm, and creative activity.*

*What stayed with me most was witnessing the gradual softening. Over time, shoulders dropped. Breath deepened. Children who had barely spoken began to move, to paint, to laugh. Parents allowed themselves moments of rest, conversation, and even lightness, sometimes with visible surprise at their own capacity to feel it again. There were moments of joy that felt fragile and precious, but also deeply real—proof that life insists on returning, even in the aftermath of horror.*

*To witness trauma slowly releasing its grip—making room for play, connection, and genuine moments of fun—was a powerful reminder of why this work matters. It affirmed that when we meet suffering with patience, creativity, and compassion, something tender and resilient can begin to grow again.*

*By Ellie (new pedagogue on Australian team)*

*In the aftermath of the Bondi shooting, I became aware of how deeply events like this can affect a community — even for those of us who were not directly involved or personally connected to the victims. While I did not experience the event firsthand, I noticed a lingering sense of unease, sadness, and reflection that stayed with me in the days that followed. It was in this context that I chose to attend a post-trauma session facilitated by Emergency Pedagogy at the 1st Clovelly Scouts Hall on Friday 2/1/2026.*



*The session offered a calm, thoughtful space to pause and reflect. From the outset, the facilitators created an environment that felt safe, respectful, and grounded. There was no assumption about what anyone should be feeling, which I found particularly meaningful. Instead, the session acknowledged the broader ripple effects of traumatic events and how they can quietly impact individuals and communities in different ways.*

*The practices we were guided through — such as gentle grounding exercises, breathing, and reflective activities — were accessible and supportive. They helped me slow down, reconnect with my body, and become more aware of how external events can register internally, even when we are not directly affected. This kind of trauma-informed, non-confrontational support felt very appropriate in the early aftermath of such a distressing event.*

*What I appreciated most was the emphasis on compassion, presence, and choice. The session didn't seek to dramatise the event or force emotional responses; rather, it offered practical tools and a framework for understanding stress, shock, and collective impact with sensitivity and care. It was clear that the approach was grounded in specialised training and experience in crisis and trauma-informed education.*

*I left the session feeling steadier and more informed, with a greater appreciation for how trauma-informed, pedagogical approaches can support not only individuals but whole communities in the wake of difficult events. In my view, offerings like this are a vital part of community recovery, helping people integrate their experiences and regain a sense of safety and connection. I'm grateful to Emergency Pedagogy for providing a space that was thoughtful, inclusive, and quietly supportive during a challenging time.*

*Boaz Magal  
Bronte, NSW 2024  
Australia*

*As a participant;*

*Attending the Emergency Pedagogy Without Borders workshops was an incredibly supportive experience and I am so grateful to have gone to 2 separate sessions.. From the moment I arrived, I was greeted with warm smiles and a wholesome energy that felt safe and calm. I found it so helpful to leave my head behind and work through the body with movement and rhythmic activity. It felt like such a safe space to let go and breath out completely after holding onto this tension for so long.*

*Our adult games were playful, engaging and even humorous at times, which we all needed and craved for. The artistic part of crayons and painting, allowed us to process and express this trauma without actually speaking about it and all the heaviness that it encircles it.*

*Through this creative expression, we were given the opportunity to take off the layers of emotions and feelings we have been carrying around from the event in a very slow, mindful and tender way.*

*I believe everyone in our local community is wounded in some way – whether they were there at the event or not. And these sessions gave us the safe space to connect with ourselves and the others in the community who also hurting.*

*I would recommend this Emergency Pedagogy to all ages, to support them in these early stages of trauma. To be held, heard and understood by these angel volunteers felt so healing and nourishing. I sincerely hope they can return to the community soon, to hold this caring space for anyone needing support.*

*As a Carer;*

*I attended the Emergency Pedagogy as a carer supporting a young 5 year old girl who was present at the shooting with her mother surrounded by the all chaos of that evening. Her senses were completely overloaded and she came in glued to her older brother and parents. Knowing the child quite well, I was able to guide her to a space specifically for the younger children- leaving her parents to be supported in their own program to deal with their own trauma.*

*Miss S started the session with head down, quite stiff and closed off to the other people in the circle. However after a short time and with the help of a weight supported knitted chicken, she began to open up and gain trust in her surroundings. She proceeded to join in the singing and playing and connected with the teacher and other children. She let go of the chicken and engaged in play and moved props around in story to make a little ocean scene . I must admit it was simply profound to watch this unfolding before me and that she was given an opportunity to gain a sense of trust in the world again.*

*By the end of the session that was filled with simple playful activities such as storytelling, baking, movement, games and painting, I observed Miss S lighter, smiling and even excited in her play.*

*I honestly believe this kind of First Aid for the Soul should be given to as many children as possible who were directly or indirectly affected by that massacre. Every part of the session fed Miss S and the other children's physical, spiritual and mental well being. They are given a serene space that holds them with care, safety and with the highest positive intentions. It was a privilege to be part of and witness Miss S and the other Children's transformation to be able to leave the space after 3 hours finding their rhythm of breath and life again.*

*Thank you so much team. I know she and the others were so well fed that session and any other sessions they attended.*

*Bec Whitcombe*

*Early Childhood Educator*

*Steiner Playgroup Facilitator*



*Dear Deborah,*

*I attended the Creative Trauma-informed workshop run by Emergency Pedagogy Without Borders yesterday with my 8-year-old daughter.*

*I found the workshop truly therapeutic for both of us. It has given me confidence about how to guide my daughter through trauma, which has lifted a huge burden from me.*

*The workshop wasn't at all confronting and didn't require any direct talk about trauma; instead, it used beautiful, creative exercises for both children and adults to calm the mind and body.*

*Speaking with the facilitators (about some specific concerns I had around parenting through trauma) was also immensely helpful. As I was hearing Bernd explain some of the natural phases and processes of trauma. I'm so grateful.*

*On top of that, we had fun! My daughter absolutely loved the craft and play and loved creating a shadow puppet show. I especially loved doing the watercolour painting.*

*A huge thank you to all the facilitators for holding space for us so beautifully.*

*With so much gratitude,*

*Laura and Freya*



*Hi Deborah :)*

*It was so wonderful to attend your workshops last week. What a team you have. Far out!*

*We are so grateful for this absolutely incredible offering at this time. May you be blessed with all good things for this kindness and this deep care.*

*A hug from us*

*Jessy x*

Dear Deborah,

Thank you for a very profound day of workshop activities for healing trauma.

I felt a deep shift the next day, and then in the afternoon we had our bi-weekly Dances of Universal Peace gathering, at which Carolina and Margaret came. We did an afternoon of Creation dances from different spiritual traditions.

I was then invited to talk about my experience at the Bondi Beach vigil by the Rabbi who reads out the names of the deceased 3 times a day.

Here's a copy of my poem:

### **BONDI POGROM 14/12**

By **Arjuna Ben-Zion Weiss**



The joy, the horror  
Children playing in the park  
Chasing soap bubbles  
Jewish Music playing  
On loud speakers  
Images of Chanukah  
a festival of Light  
on a giant screen  
The quiet ocean  
blue turquoise  
The blue sky  
the white clouds above  
eating free donuts  
playing with the baby animals

screams of joy –

and then the horror

the sound of fireworks

or bursting balloons -NO!

the policemen shout

get down run

Oh my God



*this is gunfire*  
*screams of horror and panic*  
*Crouching down*  
*behind the plastic chairs*  
*we were sitting on*  
*our faces in the Earth*  
*Shema Yisrael*  
*Adonai Eloheinu*  
*Adonai Echad*  
*I pray again and*  
*again and again*  
*with the bullets flying overhead*  
*and the screams of horror*  
*Oh my God!*  
*This is a Pogrom in Bondi*  
*I pray to the Earth Mother*  
*I pray to the Sky Father*  
*I pray for the police*

*Come come come*  
*Where are you?*  
*The bullets keep coming*  
*The sirens arrive*  
*Thank God they're here!*  
*The bullets keep coming*  
*103 or them*  
*In all this horror*  
*I feel divine protection*  
*Earth Mother, Sky Father*  
*They are here too!*

*I think of my ancestors  
In Eastern Europe  
How often they were murdered  
in Pogroms!  
And yet our people survived  
Then the firing stops  
The silence fills the air  
I look up and see  
Bodies covered in blood  
I see people running with First Aid  
They begin to attend  
to the wounded  
I'm in deep shock  
This couldn't be Bondi Beach!  
my sacred Dreaming place  
the next day along with the police  
come the flowers  
hundreds of flowers  
candles and stones  
songs and prayers  
of love and hope  
I return to the place of horror  
and it's become a place  
of joy again - because  
Love is stronger than death!*

*17 – 12 – 2025 [📅](#)*

*In peace, Ben*

Hi Deborah,

*I found the session with Bernd Ruf very informative. I learned so much about what trauma is and how individuals may be affected by traumatic events. I learned how important it is to apply pedagogical first aid quickly after a traumatic event to reduce the long term impacts of those events and the ways in which this first aid can be applied.*

*We are living in a time where traumatic events are increasing around the globe and here in Australia. I believe it is so important to carry out this work so that every person is equipped to know how to provide an environment and experiences in the face of trauma, so that children and adults are able to release the soul cramps that trauma causes, thereby reducing the impact of those traumas in the immediate time frame and in the long term as well.*

Warm regards

Julie Torrisi

Hello Deborah,

*I attended the Emergency Pedagogy Seminar on Saturday 27th and the Workshop on Sunday 28th.*

*What I learnt at the seminar, I was able to see in action at the workshop.*

*I found the embodied processes to be intuitively healing and therapeutic. The seminar gave the theory as to why things so.*

*I have since been using these practises with my two children. My eldest daughter, now 11 1/2, was in Israel during the October 7th terrorist attacks. Though she wasn't at the border, her Auntie's home in Jerusalem, where she was staying, was under constant rocket fire for days. She eventually had to leave the bomb shelter with her Dad and travel to the airport in the hope that her flight was still running. At the airport, the rockets were exploded above her by the missile defence system; they were unable to access a bomb shelter at the airport.*

*Once she arrived back in Sydney and settled, we then found ourselves at Westfield at the time of the stabbing. This brought back the PTSD from Israel.*

*On the night of the Bondi terrorist attack, my eldest daughter was at her friend's Bat Mitzvah. This was in Rosebery. Her friend relayed events in real time as their father, Alex Ryvchin, is the chief executive officer of the Executive Council of Australia. He, and his wife and 3 daughters, would normally light the candles at the Chanukah celebration, if not for the Rosebery Bat Mitzvah. My daughter again experienced PTSD at the news of the Bondi terrorist attack.*

*I am sharing this in an attempt to explain the stress the Eastern Suburbs Jewish community has been under these last 2 years, not to mention the antisemitism rife throughout Sydney's creative community, and on university campuses, where my daughter's father can no longer lecture due to his fears of being identified as Jewish on campus.*

*I would love to bring both my daughter's to any upcoming Emergency Pedagogy workshops.*



*I genuinely believe the workshops will be of huge benefit to the Jewish community, and to the larger Bondi/Eastern Suburbs community.*

*I know many people who were at Bondi at the time of the attacks. I have shared the workshops, and hope many will be able to access this incredible program.*

*People may need time to feel they can trust the program, and will be more likely to attend once they know of others who have attended.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Anna Orszaczky*

