

# History of Beacon Hill Community Kindergarten



Beacon Hill Community Kindergarten is run by the community for the community. The Centre is owned and operated by the parents of the children who use it, and is dependent on their effort, individual and collective, for its ongoing welfare and improvement. Many parents who have gone before have worked very hard to make the Kindergarten the excellent facility it is today, and parents of the future will benefit from the efforts of those who now carry on the responsibility of its continued good health.

The Kindergarten was founded in 1981 though a private kindergarten has operated at the Community Hall from as far back as the 1950's, first under the proprietorship of Mrs Ellis, and later Mrs Judy Mann. When Mrs Mann decided to sell in 1981, largely because keeping the Kindergarten financially healthy would have made the facility too expensive for the people who used it, the parents of the time decided to buy it themselves on behalf of future generations. The prime movers were a committee of parents which included Peter Dean, Allen Young, Stuart Horton and Tim Hogan.

This had a couple of major benefits. It allowed them to run the Kindergarten on behalf of the community, thus qualifying for government subsidy, provided by the State to make preschool education a more affordable option for a wider range of families. It also assured the centre's operation on a continuing basis, free of the whims and uncertain viability of private owners. And it allowed them to retain as teaching director, Judy Mann, who had earned great respect in her time as the Kindergarten's proprietor.

Financing the purchase of the Kindergarten on the community's behalf required some deft skills. A proprietary limited company was set up so that debentures could be issued and money borrowed to make the initial purchase. Warringah Shire Council chipped in with a considerable loan, many parents took private debentures, and eventually the Kindergarten became the property of the Beacon Hill Community Kindergarten Association Limited. The members of this company, which remains today, are the parents of the children, who pay \$5 for a voting share in the company at the time of enrolment. They elect a Board of Directors from the shareholders (parents), who in turn represent them in the financial and administrative running of the Kindergarten.

At the time of its setting up back in 1981, much detail had to be attended to, and the work of the original parents was an exemplary effort in terms of community involvement. A constitution had to be drawn up, approval had to be sought from the then Department of Youth and Community Services, the Company had to be formed and registered with the Department of Corporate Affairs, and a staff maintained to keep the preschool operating at the high standards insisted upon by government and parents.

The present site of the Kindergarten was erected by Warringah Shire Council as a community hall in the 1960's, superseding a lesser hall which stood on the ground now occupied by the oval. The "new" hall still serves the community in many ways, and the Kindergarten is one of its

tenants. When the Kindergarten was run privately, their usage was limited to the lower hall. The area that is now the kitchen, the office and the front room in which the library is situated was at that time used by the Beacon Hill Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade. About the time that the Kindergarten switched to a community-based operation, the bushfire brigade moved to new premises in Willandra Road. The Council then allowed the Kindergarten to maintain the area formerly used by the fire fighters as part of their tenure. A kitchen was constructed, an office area set aside, and the front room set up as a permanent kindergarten facility. The lower hall still is used by a variety of tenants, and thus has to be set up and packed away each day.

At the time the bushfire brigade was in residence, the outside area was largely asphalt and concrete gutters. In 1985 major reconstruction was undertaken to remove much of the asphalt, to grass in a larger area of the playground, construct a bike track and gardens and build a “state-of-the-art” sandpit.

Judy Mann resigned in 1989 and shortly afterwards the Board of Directors employed Mrs Sue Wyatt as Teaching Director. The Kindergarten continued to grow and change to meet the needs and expectations of a new generation of parents. A pergola, built by parent Wayne McLean, was added in 1990 to increase the play area and improve staff supervision. In 1991 the parents continued the fund raising efforts to provide a native garden and sensory track. The garden was designed by Sue Wyatt and parent, Pam Truswell. Pam Truswell supervised construction carried out by parents during a massive working bee. The aim of the garden was to provide the children with a natural play environment where they can observe insects, birds and plants. All of these things have combined to provide a kindergarten environment vastly different from that which existed in the days that it was privately owned.

The Kindergarten Board is required by regulation to employ qualified staff of the highest standard. The excellence with which they maintain teaching programs and centre activities – the teaching director and staff have sole responsibility in these areas – is well known.

Sue Wyatt introduced changes to the operation and program at Beacon Hill Community Kindergarten. Two units now operate on a rotational basis allowing for greater individual attention. The Special Needs program also grew and now represents 10% of enrolments. A part-time special needs teacher (a position held by Sylvia Harper, Heather Morse, Donna Higgins, Margaret O'Donnell, Suzanne Turner and Kate Brown) and later a special needs aide (Heather Evans, Michelle Mott and Sue Gostelow) was employed to assist the children. Beacon Hill Kindergarten enjoyed such an excellent reputation and growing waiting list that the priority for enrolment became the year prior to school entry.

Sue Wyatt resigned after 7 years of dedicated service and Lynne Sewell replaced her as Director. The Kindergarten continued to maintain a full enrolment. During Lynne Sewell's tenure as Director Warringah Council undertook a major renovation of the premises to make the Kindergarten a standalone service without the necessity to pack away every day. The Kindergarten was the beneficiary of the Section 93 funds gathered by the Council as a result of the development of Red Hill. The Kindergarten's contribution to the renovation was the installation of a play ground designed specifically for 3 – 5 year old children. The Kindergarten employed the services of Ric McConaghy to lead this project. The resulting playground has since been visited on many occasions by early childhood professionals as an example of best

practice in outdoor learning environments. It also meant the end of many years of worn out grass and a playground that simply could not be used in wet weather.

During the rebuilding process we were very lucky to be offered temporary accommodation at Beacon Hill Public School. They provided a classroom block (fortunately with one toilet for emergencies though it did get very smelly at rest time!), storage facilities, permitted us to arrange plumbing for craft preparation, private access to a toilet block and fenced off part of their playground as a designated area for us. It was very cosy but we did and will forever be grateful for the true community gesture.

Our new premises were christened with much celebration in the year 2000. Since that date the Kindergarten and grounds continue to be maintained by the parent community through donations and working bees.

Lynne Sewell departed at the end of 2000 and was replaced by Jane Hoskins at the beginning of Term 1, 2001. In September 2002 the Kindergarten reached a major milestone – 21 years of excellence. The community came together for a wonderful open day complete with cake and dignitaries to join in a celebration of everything we value and stand for. It also served as an opening of our new facilities. It was an amazing day.



During Jane's time as Director the traditional attendance pattern of the 3 day group followed by the 2 day group was changed to allow more flexibility for working families. When Jane left in May 2006, Lesley Hubbard was persuaded to apply for the Directors role. Lesley has been a part of the Kindergarten community, as a parent, Board Member and Educator since 1992. Since her appointment the Kindergarten has established a strong standing in the wider community and has continued to grow and thrive as a centre of excellence.

The significant contribution of all the staff has been vital to the excellence achieved by the Kindergarten Assistants and teachers who have worked at the Kindergarten include Noreen Doust, Judy Rickard, Keren Merryweather, Ann Taylor, Celia Thomas, Deborah Nadilo, Robyn Adams, Tricia Greedy, Laurelle Regan, Lynette White, Tory North Ash, Tiffany Hutchings, Lesley Ansell, Anna Voss, Catherine McManus, Susan Montrose, Sue Brodie, Kerrie Koster, Kathy White, Jo O'Connell, Leanne Henry, Lesley Hubbard, Elaine Henderson, Gail Bonnor, Rebecca (Bec) White, Jane Fritsche, Jane Megitt, Irene MacDonald, Marian Young, Lauren Wight, Toni Rand, Carol Powell and Sally Price. Office Assistants Michelle Rumble, Sue

Cheney, Liz Keeling and Sann Phin have also played an important role in the Kindergarten's continued successful evolution.

Our community tag is a label in deed as well as in name, and the well-being of the Kindergarten and the benefit that the children derive from it is directly proportional to the involved interest of the parents of the children who start their educational life within our precincts. The contribution in time and effort which they make has been critical to the well-being of the centre and is the essence of everything we do.

But the wider atmosphere of the Kindergarten, and its maintenance as a centre of excellence, can only reach its full potential with the enrichment of a caring and committed parent body. It was such a body in the first place who established the Beacon Hill Community Kindergarten. Many parents since have built on that start to make the Kindergarten the wonderful place it is today.