

## Ten years of walking on the Child Side

August 2011

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In 2002 parents of two families made a choice to set up a learning environment in a small house which they could teach, theirs and other children, using Reggio Emilia principles. Ten years on and Karron McDonald and Leonie O'Connell are still as determined as they were when they first started.

Child Side playgroup and school relocated to their current location in Boyanup in 2006, comprising three school buildings, a modern fully equipped undercover area and many outdoor facilities. While the buildings are now much bigger it is still an intentionally small community based school with approximately 40 students, for up to year 7 students. Walking into the school it is immediately evident that the children are very comfortable in the invigorating school environment; the school has been set up to make it so. Equally energising is the environment in which the school is situated adjacent to, groves of trees, a wetland and even a lake ideal for walking jogging and cycling round.

While Karron and Leonie have been the pillars of the school's development for the last decade they openly admit that the school would not have survived and thrived as it has without the community that supports it. Parents and families of all the children have and continue to play a huge role in the school community.

Child Side is one of a growing number of schools across Australia that are affiliated with Big Picture Education Australia, which is based on the principle of one student at a time - a community of learners and is small by design. Parents and families are very much involved in this; the school encourages parents to get involved in their children's morning work; allows parents to provide 'living book' real life experiences to lessons by sharing their life and work knowledge and skills; holds regular workshops, social events and busy bees; and has an active Committee of Management and Parent and Friend Group that could not exist without input from these community members.

The sense of community also shows in the children, who can be seen playing across age groups with older children looking out for the younger children. This is helped by the classes having mixed age groups, so the different aged children are not separated from each other during lesson time. This also allows the children to be taught by the same teachers for a number of years, which helps in providing consistency and building respect and understanding from and to both children and adults alike.

Child Side is an active member of the Australian National Schools Network, which supports and encourages innovative practice.

On the Friday 9<sup>th</sup> September the school will be opening their doors from 9:30 and accepting enrolments, more so for kindy children those turning 4 by 30/06/12, but all are welcome to come along and take a walk on the Child Side.

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Contact:

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In the early days lessons were in a specially set up living room:



Parents and families mucked in when the school moved location:



The school is now well established in a great environment:

