

## **The Joan Matheson Distinguished Service Award 2015:Pattie Morgan**

Our friend and colleague of many years passed away in April 2015 after a brief illness.

Pattie's professional interests spanned mobile preschool services, special education, outdoor playspaces and sustainability. In all of these spheres Pattie demonstrated strong advocacy for children and play, a creative and inspired approach and sensitively given wisdom to others. Further, at Pattie's funeral her own children fondly recalled how everything was a learning experience and how their mother's natural sense of curiosity and wonder pervaded their lives. All of these attributes, along with her infectious laugh and work ethic, contributed to Pattie being an inspiring early childhood professional over many years.

She began her teaching career in NSW, but later moved to Victoria where she is best known for her varied roles. In relation to the Victorian mobile preschool services she is the acknowledged pioneer as Michelle Hocking recalls:

*In the early 1990's I worked on the North West Mobile Pre-School and this was my first introduction to Pattie's work as the archives revealed her to be the program pioneer and her work served as a template for other Victorian Mobile services. Minimalist approaches were critical on the Mobile "truck" and Pattie's notes and diagrams on how the vehicle might be organised and prepared, with meticulous attention to detail and obvious dedication to the task were evident. This valuable and (considered by some) controversial program would simply not have run as effectively without Pattie's pioneering work at the inception stage.*

Pattie also undertook further studies in special education at the Institute of Early Childhood Development, Melbourne and she had a particular interest in working with children and families in this area. She was an educator with the City of Knox taking a leadership and teaching role in a unique program for children needing a second year of four-year old preschool. It was also in this setting that her passion for designing outdoor playspaces came to the fore. Deb Moore first met Pattie in this context and as her Preschool Field Officer recalls:

*I will never forget Pattie's insistence in providing challenging places, equipment and materials for her children and their program. Not for these children was a 500mm board off the ground going to be enough; no, it needed to be a flying fox; a rope up a tree; and, a rocky outcrop to scramble over. Not for these children would a few odd wooden blocks be enough; they had a shed full of blocks of wood, pipes, ropes, pulleys, and materials to put together in a way only Pattie would have condoned. And, not for these children a sedate 'lawn' to play on; no, they had to 'work' on their own meaningful inventions and create their own dry creek bed, digging out the dirt for months before its completion so they could traverse the ravine they had constructed. At times, Pattie had to argue her case to 'allow' her children these 'privileges' rather than revert to a program deemed 'safe' by government officials. But, she was always able offer her pedagogical reasoning and inevitably convince them of the error of their thinking.*

Pattie was a Play Australia Board Member for 10 years and after finishing her work at the Knoxfield Preschool she continued her advocacy for outdoor play through her role as a consultant and trainer. She worked for many years with Kerry Rogers, and they made the perfect team, complementing each other's skills and experiences. Pattie promoted significant change in outdoor playspaces. Her easy ability to connect with educators and children and to 'read' play as well as the outdoor landscape and vegetation were invaluable in her design work. She was a very talented designer, and produced in collaboration with her clients, and in particular with her colleague Justin Staggard, many beautiful concept plans for outdoor play which were then used to guide the development in services throughout Victoria, as well as in the ACT, SA and NSW.

In more recent years Pattie was an active participant in the group of Australians who travelled to Hong Kong, Cardiff and most recently Istanbul to attend IPA Conferences. Pattie's Poster Presentation at the Hong Kong Conference is remembered most fondly, as well as our efforts to keep up with her as we climbed Hong Kong Island! Pattie and Cathy Kiss travelled together in Wales in 2011 and most recently in Greece, exploring the history and terrain, enjoying extensive walks and visiting playspaces along the way.

Pattie lived sustainably before it was fashionable and she practised sustainability in early childhood settings well before the National Quality Standards were implemented. She was also an active member of Environmental Education in Early Childhood Vic. Inc. over many years.

Our sincere thanks Pattie for your insights, wisdom and dedication, and know that your legacy lives on through children's play in many natural and challenging outdoor playspaces. She was a magnificent friend to us all, we loved her, and we shall never forget her. Pattie, we salute you for a life of outstanding service to your family, your community, and the children of Australia.