

# *Endeavour Hills Uniting Church Childcare Centre*

Plans for the Childcare Centre began in 1983 when land was purchased for the construction of the Endeavour Hills Uniting Church. A Government Capital Grant of \$165,000 for the Childcare section of the building followed, and in 1986 this wonderful community service commenced with Janine Ashton employed from the beginning. Kath Mellowdew joined in 1988.

Janine became the Co-ordinator in 1997. After her second child was born, she and Kath shared the Co-ordinator's role until the closure of the Centre at the end of 2013.

In the early days the Centre was guided by Synod's Early Childhood Unit (Consultant - Joy Williams). In 1997 the Government took away the Operational Subsidy of \$25,000 per annum which caused challenges for the Centre.

Diane Hall joined the staff in 2001 and served there for over 10 years. Throughout its many years of existence, the Centre always maintained its High Quality Accreditation.

In July 2005 Connections was directed by Synod to take over the management of UC Kindergartens and Childcare Centres. It was somewhat problematic for a while because the two were quite different.

Prior to this time, Geoff Lacey had joined the Childcare Management Committee in 1997. Over the years he organized working bees for Church folk and Childcare parents to comply with changing regulations. In 2005 he and Catherine Gonsalves formed an Advisory Committee with Geoff as Co-ordinator, Stan Ashley looking after finances and computers, and Lynne Bryan doing the gardening.

Generally, Geoff was Mr Fixit, saving the Centre thousands of dollars. His hours of voluntary work over the years were huge. Work was done inside to keep up with regulations. The outside play areas of grass and tanbark were replaced by softfall rubber and artificial grass. Fences were replaced or made higher and retaining walls were renovated. Sandpits were moved many times.

Security Systems were installed and floor coverings and blinds were replaced.

In the last few years enrolments fell due to the competition of many Childcare Centres in Endeavour Hills. With low enrolments in a small centre and new regulations in 2011 requiring a kindergarten teacher be employed in the next 2 years, as well as changes to staff ratios, closure became inevitable. In discussion with Connections, our Church Council agreed to close the Centre after so many years.

This was a very sad decision to make after a history of such good relationships on the shared site. We thank the staff for the magnificent job they performed. Janine and Kath, after 27 and 25 years respectively, along with other staff members, served very professionally with great caring and provided a varied program, all to the benefit of the children and their parents.

