The Whare Pūrerehua and Māra

The new whare pūrerehua or butterfly house at Grey Lynn Kindergarten was completed and installed on Friday 25 January this year. It stands proudly beside and complements our new butterfly garden.

Our journey began a year ago. It has been a real community effort to establish a butterfly garden. For example:

- Gizella, an architect parent designed the garden and the butterfly house.
- Parents and tamariki helped clear away the rocks and prepare the area with kāiako Peter.
- Some parents gave a koha towards nectar plants chosen specifically for butterflies and helped plant these at the start of Term 4 last year.
- Kate, Head Teacher, and her husband Colin made stakes for the wooden border. The border was donated by our friends at Bunnings Grey Lynn.
- The Auckland Kindergarten Association filled the garden with top quality soil.
- The butterfly house was built in three days by Stu, a British carpenter WWOOFing around NZ (www.wwoof.nz) with help from his partner, Laura.
- Roger, from The Men’s Shed, helped us organise the materials for Stu to use.
- With the support of Lionel and Val, Jeff from Papatūānuku Kokiri Marae helped with the installation and foundations of the house as well as recycled concrete stepping stones for the garden.

Kia ora to one and all – a real ‘Village Approach’!

What inspired a butterfly garden at Grey Lynn Kindergarten? It was the week I spent with Jacqui Knight (a.k.a. The Butterfly Lady) when I was a WWOOFer in January a year ago. Her garden was clearly very attractive to monarch butterflies as there were so many of them there. I learned so much by spending a bit of time with Jacqui, chatting about ‘all things butterfly’ and doing a bit of mahi (work) in the māra (garden).

It was so inspiring to see these beautiful pūrerehua fluttering around and I remembered my very first week at the kindergarten when the monarchs were out in full force around a large swan plant... now gone. I recalled how much the tamariki loved the butterflies, caterpillars and the chrysalises so the idea formed that it would be great to get that back and extend on those interests.

At the same time, the teaching team at GLK had been pondering what to do with ‘the old rock pit’ that had been there for years. It had served its purpose very well but was now looking a bit tired, rundown and in need of something new and inspiring for the tamariki. The ‘rock pit’ had been used for water play, but not much else.

I asked the teaching team what they thought about having a butterfly garden in that area instead and they were immediately all for it! They heard about my adventures with pūrerehua and what I had learned about butterflies and creating a garden. We all know about swan plants, but it’s the nectar plants that will keep the monarchs hanging around your garden!

As a kāiako, I led the process of developing the butterfly garden as my contribution to our Enviroschools programme, but it has been a huge team effort. With a kindergarten community there’s always a lot going on, so the butterfly garden waka had to be parked from time to time throughout the year but with patience, perseverance and the right support, we got there in the end!

As monarch butterflies have had a slow start to the season Jacqui gave us two caterpillars to help kick off the population. We now have five or six male monarchs happily flitting around the garden, usually in the hottest part of the day, which is awesome to see.
As time goes on, this number will no doubt increase.

Over the last week, as it has been so hot, we’ve been getting the sprinkler out for the tamariki to run through to cool themselves down. We watched in delight as a couple of the butterflies joyfully flitted in and out of the water. The hose was on the mist setting and they were having fun cooling themselves down too!

During this last year the tamariki have seen the butterfly garden and house progress from an idea, to a plan, to a reality and are now benefitting from the fruits of our collective toil. Already this year they’ve watched the life cycle of monarchs, planted heritage zinnia seeds in egg shells, planted cosmos seedlings in egg shell ‘pots’, watered the garden, weeded, identified plants, observed which plants the butterflies land on, what they do when they land on them, watched other pollinators and insects, had discussions about wasps and other pests in the garden and counted the number of monarchs they’ve seen. They’ve talked about being scientists, made observations about the natural world around us, chatted about why we need pollinators in the garden and their role and looking after Papatūānuku as kaitiaki in general. All this and more in just two weeks!

It has been a fabulous learning journey for us all and long may it continue for many tamariki, whānau and kaiako to come!

Where to next?

I’ve just sourced nettle thanks to Isabel Harris who is a champion for the kahukura (red admirals). I will hang it up in a pot in the butterfly house away from everyone, to encourage kahukura and kahukōwhai (yellow admirals). In the weekends, it will be put out in the hope that these beautiful butterflies will use them as host plants for a new population at the kindergarten!

Thanks in particular to Jacqui and the Monarch Butterfly NZ Trust for their ongoing advice and support – you’ve been fabulous and it is much appreciated by all of us at Grey Lynn Kindergarten.

Top: Jeremy noticed the soil was a bit dry and decided to give the plants a drink.

Top Right: Many questions were asked by Arie as he engaged in discussion with a kaiako.

Centre: Chosen enjoys being kaitiaki of Papatūānuku.

Right: Otis checking on the cosmos seedlings growing in their egg shell pots.