



TOOGOOLAWA SCHOOLS

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

2009



*“The most precious gift
in education is character”*

Message from Our Founder

2009 saw the Toogoolawa star shine so much brighter.

These three little schools have now started attracting media attention and even attention from the University of Queensland, in respect to their practice of mindfulness and how mindfulness can be and needs to be incorporated into schooling curricula as a basis for general health, wellbeing and happiness.

This year has seen increased uncertainty with the global financial crisis, which has highlighted the solid foundation of the teachings such as mindfulness. As in previous years, I commend the teachers for their continued commitment to personal development and ongoing self-transformation, which is an inherent structure of the Toogoolawa program.

What differentiates Toogoolawa from other schools is the nature of the students and the issues that they need to deal with. This is not the subject of any textbook for teachers. Our years of experience have highlighted the importance of staff and their commitment to the fundamental ideals of Toogoolawa, which are the human values of love, peace, truth, right action, and non-violence within us all. Staff have to not only teach these values but also live them, and I commend the staff for their dedication to being role models for these noble virtues on a daily basis, integrated with their own mindfulness.

Toogoolawa is a journey that all of us who are involved make with an open heart and the ambition of making a positive difference in young boys' lives. Our rewards are seen daily in our students' self-esteem. Their understanding and adoption of the human values shine through in their persona.

Ron and Su Farmer, the navigators of the Schools, as well as the three headmasters and all the staff and volunteers, are congratulated on their amazing work throughout 2009 and the foundation that creates for us in further expansion during 2010.

I'm honoured to deliver this annual report for 2009 and commend it to all those who are interested in the work and service of Toogoolawa, a place in the heart.

John Fitzgerald
December 2009

~ Embracing the Changes Gratefully ~

‘Nothing is permanent, but change’. This is one of the more familiar wise sayings about change that I am aware of. It is true, nothing remains the same - we are not the same person in this year as we were in the last, nor are those who are close to us, and our environment has undergone change as well.

The road that we have travelled throughout the year 2009 presents much for reflection and gratitude. We can reflect on how many changes we have gone through, all of them making us grow and be open to what we can become. As times change and we have had these new experiences, each one of us has emerged a better person able to deal with ever-more challenging situations. It is said, ‘*Change is the essence of life. Be willing to surrender what you are for what you could become. Change always comes bearing gifts*’. Witnessing these changes within myself, in all the staff involved in our work at Toogoolawa, in the students themselves and also in the Toogoolawa Schools’ environments, makes me feel humble and grateful for the Inner Light that is always there to guide each one of us in every step along the way, and for the love and commitment offered up by each one of our staff and so many students to make the Toogoolawa journey a meaningful one for all.

In 2009 Toogoolawa took a big step towards revealing to a wider community how the truism of ‘love changes everything’ is pivotal to all that goes on in our three Schools: we wrote and published our first book explaining the Educare philosophy, in the context of telling some of the stories of how our boys had a glimpse of that special place in their heart when they shared a part of their lives with us. The book has touched many people in the short time since its release and has reached some prominent politicians and senior figures in education. We hope that this ray of the Toogoolawa Light will touch more and more people in our world today.

We have been approached by University of Queensland psychologists and educationists to engage in a joint research study on how our students are responding to the Toogoolawa mindfulness program. The steps to be taken will help illuminate the path lying before us in this part of Educare throughout the next year. The aim of the study is to see what effect the practice of mindfulness has on our students, and how the Toogoolawa mindfulness program could be applied in mainstream schools. This is another big step for all of us as we tread mindfully and happily through this exciting landscape.

There will be even more changes in each one of the Toogoolawa Schools, and as before, in unity we will embrace the changes with an open heart. Mahatma Gandhi shared his wisdom about changes in life, saying: ‘*We must become the change we want to see in the world.*’

I believe that the changes we have already experienced are preparation for the greater tasks that lie ahead for Toogoolawa. And each of us is ready for these new challenges.

My heartfelt gratitude goes out to our founder and mentor, John Fitzgerald, for his ever- strong commitment and faith in the Toogoolawa Journey and for his loving guidance and support gifted to me, always walking beside me as we hold the vision of Toogoolawa’s Light close to our hearts.

To all our loving staff of Toogoolawa, my gratitude goes out to each one of you for your steadfast commitment, selfless dedication and love, and for your confidence in the Journey ahead of us.

To all of our friends and supporters of Toogoolawa, wherever you may be, and to all of the generous staff of JLF – thank you for your valuable time and loving support so readily given to our Toogoolawa Family.

May we step each day further into our future in Toogoolawa with the courage, patience, love and wisdom required to experience a new horizon of our Self.

May the light of our soul bless the work that we do with the love and the warmth of our heart.

May we see in what we do, the beauty of our own soul.

May the sacredness of our work bring healing, light, and joy to those who work with us and to those who see and receive our work.

Namaste.

Su

~ Teaching Happiness ~

A few weeks ago the teaching staff across all three Toogoolawa Schools (QLD, NSW, VIC) shared a staff development hour using conference phones. The topic for discussion was: 'Ideas and strategies for teaching happiness to our students.'

All agreed that, first and foremost, we are to teach by example – to the extent that we can retain our inner contentment, a quiet joy in relating to others, and an easy sense of humour, so too will the boys in our care observe and model the fine art of being happy.

It was also agreed that the unique Toogoolawa blend of sacred ritual, practice in mindfulness (e.g. observing the breath), and the integration of the five Human Values of Love, Peace, Truth, Right conduct and Non-violence into all aspects of the school curriculum, played a major role in creating a school environment which enhanced each student's happiness. Unsolicited feedback from visiting social workers and guidance officers who have known students before they came to Toogoolawa bears this out. It is not uncommon to hear words to the effect of: "This is not the boy I knew. He used to be angry and sad, hardly alive. Now he is so happy. What did you do to him?" Some teachers might reply, "That's what Toogoolawa does. It helps them find the strength and joy that's been hidden inside."

A good analogy of what happens to a boy in a Toogoolawa School is the flower garden. When the student first comes to us his 'garden' is full of 'weeds'. That is, he is caught up in negative thinking, feeling and behaving. We can ask: "How to get rid of these weeds?" As with any garden, pulling out the weeds is a very short-term measure – they will just grow back again. In contrast, the most effective method is to keep planting more and more flowers in the garden until there is no room left for any weeds.

It is the same with our students. Certainly the teachers use good behaviour management strategies to put a brake on negative behaviour (eg. warnings, time-out, loss of points, and so on). That is, the student is encouraged to pull out a few of his 'weeds', to practise some self-restraint. However the main focus is on planting flowers in the 'garden' of the mind. The students are encouraged to change the content of their thinking, hour-by-hour, week-by-week, so that their thoughts, words and actions are more in line with the five Human Values which recognise each person's true goodness and potential.

The various practices in mindfulness throughout the school day allow the student to discover that thoughts can pass through the mind like birds in the sky, without leaving a trace behind. They can experience for themselves that we do not have to be shackled by thoughts which are cruel to oneself

and to others – such thoughts can be discarded and replaced with thoughts in line with universal Love, Truth, Peace, Right Conduct and Non-violence. In this way, ‘flowers’ come to take the place of ‘weeds’ filling the ‘garden of the mind’ – kind thoughts; thoughts of sharing, consideration and peacefulness; loving, friendly and compassionate thoughts; thoughts of courage, perseverance, self-respect, self-confidence and self-reliance.

One of the foundations of the Educare philosophy guiding Toogoolawa Schools is that pure, lasting, unsullied happiness lies within each one of us – students, parents, and staff alike – oftentimes hidden from conscious awareness like the sun obscured from our view behind a thick blanket of cloud. When the ‘gardens’ of the mind and heart are cultivated to grow more and more ‘flowers’, the clouds of negativity begin to disperse and our sun of happiness starts to shine through.

When the boys in Toogoolawa get their first taste of this inner delight they are naturally motivated to persevere in the ways of this unusual School which involves them in prayer, meditation, life-skills, affirmations, rituals of light and humility, as well as their academic pursuits. Like all of us, at some level they sense that the happiness and joy waiting within is vast and limitless, and that it can be accessed regardless of what the external world might lure or challenge them with.

Each one of the boys attending Toogoolawa Schools has chosen to be there – they are the ones who make that all-important phone call after the first interview requesting enrolment. Since we all share the common goal of finding a more lasting happiness, we can assume that this is certainly the wish of all of our students. Toogoolawa Schools will continue exploring ways of helping each one of them to discover the joy of being alive, the happiness of loving and being loved, and the satisfaction of aiming for the best within themselves.

Ron

~ Gerry's 2009 Report ~

Toogoolawa School - Ormeau, QLD

It was the best of years; it was the worst of years.

We have seen great changes materialise before us this year as the school buildings have been renovated and the site enhanced; new staff appointed; new programs implemented and new boys touched by the hand of Toogoolawa.

Sadly we also saw the passing of our first Toogoolawa Old Boy to die by his own hand. We owe it to all the boys who pass through our doors to find meaning in Tommy's tragic death.

The School Site

With the help of John Fitzgerald and additional funds from the Federal Government through the ‘Investing in our Schools Program,’ ‘National Solar Schools Program’ and ‘National School Pride Program’ we have been able to:-

- Completely renovate the kitchen, dining room and bathroom in the Venerable School House
- Completely renovate the Quiet Room
- Paint the exterior of the Demountable and School House
- Renovate the floor of the staff room

- Recarpet the demountable and Quiet Room
- Create a computer room and a store room in our new building
- Create a wireless computer network
- Install a new water tank
- Install a new solar powered hot water system
- Install a 2Kw solar power system
- Renovate the front and back verandas' of the School House
- Install new rainwater pipes in the demountable
- Repair the rust damage to the steel stumps under the Demountable
- Put up some New school signage
- Repair the roof
- Provide three aluminium seats for lunch

2010 will see us with a new school library courtesy of the 'Building the Education Revolution Primary Schools of the 21st Century Program.'

The four working bees organised by John Hardy and supported by the many 'Friends of Toogoolawa' have been responsible for:-

- Painting the exterior of the New Building
- Moving our back fence to allow for a nursery
- Maintaining the school grounds
- Painting the front veranda balustrade and our shipping container
- Lots and lots of other little jobs

Staff

Carol Ngamoki moved on to further her career in July. We are lucky to have Matt Wiebusch, Angus Baillie and recently John Creek join our Ormeau team. They each have complementary skills which when combined with Helen's make us a very flexible and unified team.

Students

Presently we have 17 boys enrolled. 28 have passed through the school this year. 6 have returned to mainstream schools, 1 to a traineeship, 2 moved away from the area and 2 into a work related program. These boys certainly teach us to understand their needs. Recently we had to send some students home from a school camp. Through their frustration, anger and refusal to follow instructions they showed us that they will only step up to the mark if we give them repeated small doses of the experiences we wish them to master. They were masterful at team building games, preparing lunch and dinner, washing and wiping up and creative problem solving (all activities which are part of a normal Toogoolawa week) but hopeless at walking through rugged terrain with backpacks. We would have been quite at home on the 'Brat Camp' reality show! Next time we'll make sure we keep their demons at bay by toughening them up with a graded program of bushwalking and trekking.

Tommy

Tommy's funeral was just after Easter, the Christian Season which celebrates Jesus' triumph over death. What meaning can we draw from Tommy's death?

We seem to read more and more frequently these days about some children as young as 12 using alcohol, drugs and chomping on a regular basis. Unfortunately these early habits continue into adulthood. Recent statistics tell us that children who start smoking marijuana at 12 can expect a 12% decrease in their IQ. Why is it that these kids all of a sudden aren't kids anymore? What is missing in these young lives that require drugs and alcohol to fill the vacuum? Why is it that in one of the richest nations on earth our kids are so depressed that suicide becomes an option?

Soon after Tommy's death I happened to pick up 'Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning,' written by Viktor Frankl. Frankl spent time during the Second World War in Nazi death camps.

Frankl writes....."As to the feeling of meaninglessness on its own, it is an existential despair and a spiritual distress rather than an emotional disease or a mental illness.....people suffering from it....should know that despair over the meaninglessness of life constitutes a human achievement rather than a neurosis. After all, no animal cares whether or not its existence has a meaning. It is the prerogative of man to quest for meaning to his life and to question whether such meaning exists. This quest is a manifestation of intellectual sincerity and honesty. In particular, it is the challenge of youth to question the meaning of life.....However, the courage to question should be matched by patience. People should be patient enough to wait until, sooner or later, meaning dawns on them. This is what they should do rather than taking their own lives or taking refuge in drugs.....However survival cannot be the supreme value. Unless life points to something beyond itself, survival is pointless and meaningless...Only those who were oriented towards the future (in German POW Camps) toward a goal in the future, toward a meaning to fulfill in the future, were likely to survive.our industrialised society is out to satisfy all human needs and its companion, consumer society...to create ever new needsbut the most human need....the need to find and fulfill a meaning in our lives.....is frustrated by this society (the society we have created)...more specifically such phenomena as addiction, aggression and depression are, in the final analysis, due to a sense of futility...Of the drug addicts studied by Stanley Kripper, 'things seemed meaningless' to not less than 100%" (end of quote)

Children aren't born with a GPS to take them on life's journey to their final destination. They have to be shown that meaning can be found by living a virtuous life. The search for the grail was only undertaken by the knights who believed in its existence and Percival found the grail because not only did he believe but he understood the symbolism, the metaphor and the sacrifice needed to complete the journey. Unfortunately we've indulged our youth and crippled them to such an extent that sacrifice, remorse, humility and regret are not present on the emotional radar screens of a lot of students these days. They want every request to be answered with a 'Yes' and they don't want to be burdened by consequences.

The Prayer of St Francis that we say every day teaches students a better way, a gentler way. This short prayer not only polishes the inner diamond but when properly internalised melts the ego so that we look out at the world through unselfish eyes. Toogoolawa spirituality is about coming to the fullness of life. Not about being selfish or self-destructive or climbing into holes so deep and dark that we never feel as though we've hit the bottom. The message of St Francis is never to give up on life and never to doubt that a small act of kindness can heal what otherwise may have died not only in someone else but maybe even in ourselves.

Frankl continues...."The fact remains that not everything can be explained in meaningful terms. But what now can be explained is at least the reason why this is necessarily impossible. At least it is impossible on purely intellectual grounds...but what is unknowable need not be unbelievable. In fact where knowledge gives up, the torch is passed on in faith.....in other words the scales are equally high (on the scales of life meaningfulness and meaninglessness are equal).....we must throw the weight of our own being into one of the scales..."(end of quote)

Our quest is to make sure Toogoolawa boys are started on the journey of self discovery early enough so that when they face answering the big questions of life they know what scale to jump on.

Many thanks to John Fitzgerald for his continuing presence at school. As a male role model and mentor John's example affects the boys on many levels. Thanks also to Su and Ron for their continued support, guidance and love.

Gerry Moloney

~ Helen's 2009 Report ~

Toogoolawa School - Ormeau, QLD

This year we were not able to visit as many organisations to perform our community service. Reasons for this were generally beyond our control. However, the boys have showed exemplary pride in our School and it's surrounds. Time that would otherwise have been spent out in the community helping, we have spent beautifying our own surroundings.

The one venue that we continued to visit this year was the Animal Welfare League at Coombabah on the Gold Coast. It is an easy 20 minutes drive from Ormeau and therefore not too taxing on the boys.

At the Animal Welfare League the boys have performed many helpful tasks. We have washed dogs, groomed cats and dogs, taught tricks to dogs, helped re-organise some of the office space, prepared treat bags for training animals as well as many hours petting and socialising cats and kittens.

Most of the animals in the shelter are abandoned or unwanted by previous owners and so the tender, loving care that our boys have showed towards these animals is invaluable in preparing them for rehousing.

Meanwhile, at the school front the boys have mowed and mowed and mowed! They have mulched gardens, painted signs, cleaned our buildings, constructed tables and chairs and planted trees and bushes. The school is looking the best it has ever looked. Well done boys and thanks to each and every one of you for your massive efforts.

~ Matt's 2009 Report ~

Toogoolawa School - Ormeau, QLD

Being relatively new on the Toogoolawa scene, I am still adjusting to the habits and remarks the boys exhibit and make during the average school day. However, after speaking with seasoned pros like Helen and Gerry, it seems that students will continue to surprise and baffle me even after years of experience. Once I'd considered this notion I thought, *"Isn't it great that we work in a job where we are constantly amazed and challenged by what happens day to day, or even minute to minute."*

There's nothing I enjoy more than to sit with the rest of the Ormeau staff at 2:00pm with a cuppa in hand, smiling and reflecting on the day's events and successes.

The boys remind me of myself when I buy a new toy, like a stereo system. I like figuring out how to make it work by myself and without reading the instructions. They too prefer working individually on most tasks, rather than in a group setting; as well as attempting tasks with very little teacher instruction. Where possible I promote this style of explorative/ discovery learning, yet make myself available to them by roaming the room. In my brief stint with them, I have seen the pattern change from me offering assistance to them, to them now taking the initiative and asking for help.

However, my role in working with boys, which are mainly 13 and 14 years old, is also to prepare them for the work force. In knowing that the real world is made up of communication and working in teams, it has been a major focus of mine to assist the boys in feeling comfortable in working with others, as well as teaching what suitable forms of communication are. The whole staff role model these behaviours daily, but over the past few months I have also tried to build a sense of team through the initiative games I provide for them in class. Some examples of the initiative games we play are:

Rope Shapes

Resources: Rope 25 to 50 metres, Blindfolds x 4 or for the whole group.

Rules: All students to be blindfolded except two nominated students called the communicators.

Objective of the activity is to create a square using the rope. Students may not let go or move along the rope. You can extend the group with harder shapes.

Tie the Knot

Resources: One, 2 metre long, piece of string, per person.

Rules: The group, consisting of 4 to 8 students, stand shoulder to shoulder holding a piece of string between each person. The aim of the exercise is to tie a single knot in the middle piece of string, without letting go of the bits of string you are holding. In other words the students become a part of the whole piece of string. Be sure that all student ideas are heard. Trial and error. No time limit. No harm if mistakes are made.

Tower Build

Using any items ranging from newspaper to paddle pop sticks to pipe cleaners to playing cards, the idea is simply for each group of 2 to 6 to build a tower as high as possible. Students will be required to discuss and plan an approach before beginning which may take some initial individual trial and error.

Another key to preparing students for the work force is work experience. All of our students that are 14 years old are given the opportunity to participate in this program. I've been working closely with Julie Bromley at B.R.I.T.N. (Beenleigh Region Industry Training Network) to prepare the boys and get paper work filled out. Although we have had many boys in this age group come to us only recently, we have managed to finish the year with four boys spending two days a week in placements, from bike shops to mobile dog groomers to diesel mechanics. Many of our 13 year olds are excited at the prospect of turning 14 next year, so they too can take part in work experience.

Although I am feeling more comfortable with my position every day, I am still experimenting with the types of activities and lessons that the boys respond positively to. Although I don't always get the reaction I am after, I enjoy seeing the potential that these guys hold within them; and I am certainly looking forward to delving deeper into their abilities in 2010.

~ Angus's 2009 Report ~ *Toogoolawa School - Ormeau, QLD*

What a time to start at Toogoolawa? In the few months that I've been here I've worked with a cohort of students who, at different times, have demonstrated solid; enthusiasm, individualism, teamwork, passion, patience, humour, leadership and potential.

Enthusiasm has surfaced in those students whose strong effort towards achieving individual goals is rewarded with barbeques, trips to the beach or the movies and stoked congratulations from a caring staff. It is exemplified in the smiles of kids acting in the scooter and skateboard advertisements that they planned and created. And it was seen in the keen welcomes offered to the many new students who started in Term 4.

A true individualism has become evident in many students as they struggle to master the art of controlling their actions and reactions. It's easy to follow the crowd, especially when it is doing the wrong thing, and it's easy to get sucked into an argument by an antagonistic personality. Congratulations to the guys who have found the mindfulness to stand tall and ignore provocations and the strength to be a mate when someone needs one.

Teamwork has been at the forefront of much of our curriculum. The kids anticipate that the series of touch football games they have been playing will culminate with the defeat of a skilled team of adults, fielded by JLF, in the second last week of the year. If these guys can continue to show the collaborative and supportive attitudes demonstrated when they climbed to the top of a dangerously tall Hoop Pine whilst tied together at Meebunn-bia, then I'm confident they can be the victors in this next challenge.

In my opinion 'passion' is the key. The kids who are passionate about footy will lead the whole cohort to victory. The kids with a passion for food, and you know who you are, have hunted for recipes, called in help, asked for ingredients and put together great lunches and afternoon tea's for the lot of us – demonstrating a community spirit that I haven't seen in other schools. The guys who are passionate about riding scooters have turned this into a breakdown of advertising techniques and an effective advertisement of their own. The guys who love the world have taught me more about capital cities, volcanoes and the Dead Sea than I knew before joining them. And the graffiti artists amongst us have applied their skills to creating positive colourful murals. Where ever possible, continue to relate your learning to what you love – whatever it is.

The extraordinary levels of focus that we expect during whole school meetings, meditation times and silent sitting provide plenty of opportunities for students to practice patience. We don't finish until all have applied themselves. This has translated into an environment where forbearance is expected and in which some students have found the confidence to acknowledge that teasing from others reflects those children's problems not their own. The patience these guys show towards antagonists demonstrates a power learned at Toogoolawa that will see them travel a long way in whatever direction they choose.

The genuine happiness of the staff at this school permeates all aspects of life at Toogoolawa. From the engaging lessons offered in the high school class to the restorative justice circles that involve all students in dealing with serious issues, an underlying vein of humour conveys the high regard and respect that staff have for all individuals. Students pick up on this and there are times during most days when a genuine feeling of wellbeing expresses itself as we all laugh at Matt's accidents on the football field, Gerry's reverse psychology, or the mysterious attitudes and mindset of the only women amongst us, Helen and Alice.

The year has finished with a camp during which the leaders amongst us stepped up and completed a short 2 night hike and an extremely challenging high ropes course. Four guys weren't scared off by the daunting appearance of a complicated web of ropes, pullies, rotting logs, and narrow ladders strung between the tops of trees deep in the Australian bush. Two were even able to control their breathing, and thus their nerves, for long enough to defy death and negotiate the most difficult elements of the 3rd stage. I hope these guys apply the same techniques and confidently tackle the challenges they face next year.

There is not a student at Toogoolawa who hasn't exhibited potential beyond belief. Ben, Brent, Corey, Troy, Shane, Jesse, Isaiah, Jayden, Jake, Keanu, Jack, Brodie, Kepa, Dylan, Kristian, Ned, Tyler and Tom. You are all 'stand up' fellas. You know what your strengths are, build on them, build each other up, and have fun.

~ Neil's 2009 Report ~

Toogoolawa School - Wickham, NSW

We have had another significant and successful year at Toogoolawa School, Wickham. We have had some wonderful young men enrolled in the program with the vast majority able to make some fundamental changes in the way they see the world and they are now in a better position to move forward and continue their personal development and education.

In the first half of the year there were nine boys enrolled and all but two made through till the end of the year, which is a great achievement. We added to our enrolment at the beginning of Semester 2 because we were very fortunate to welcome John Herron back on staff. John was the foundation principal of the school and his wealth of understanding and experience makes him a wonderful addition to our staff. The extra teacher meant we could take our enrolment up to twelve and we did that very quickly and at time of writing that is our enrolment.

Apart from welcoming John back, the most significant thing about 2009 was the inspection of the school by the NSW Board of Studies (BOS), in early July to confirm our registration for another five years. Overall the BOS Inspectors were very pleased with what they saw and our Registration has been approved.

It was an interesting exercise, because it brought into focus some issues that needed attention. Some related to our policies and procedures but the major issue was the provision of the NSW Curriculum across the Key Learning Areas (KLAs) – English, Maths, Science, History, Geography, Personal Development, Health, PE and Visual Arts.

The Policy and Procedures area was very thoroughly put together by the Directors of Toogoolawa Schools Ltd, Su and Ron Farmer, who in their usual manner, worked tirelessly to update the existing comprehensive documents to meet the very demanding expectations of the BOS. Their effort was particularly meritorious because at the same time they were heavily involved in the preparation of a set of Policies and Procedures for the both the Ormeau and Hastings Schools. They are amazing people, inspirational really.

In the area of curriculum we knew we would require a deal of understanding from the BOS Inspectors and that was forthcoming as they realised that our program does not exactly fit the standard model. They offered advice on how we could better meet their requirements and we have put those recommendations into practice during Semester 2 and we now have a sound basis for curriculum provision into the future.

Kim Irvine started the year as our Teaching Assistant and quickly developed into an extremely valuable member of staff to the point where she is highly respected by staff and students for the enthusiasm and energy she puts towards her job, especially towards helping the students become better decision makers. Her cooking lessons are very popular with the students and the food produced is highly regarded by all.

An innovation in Term 4 was the employment of a part time remedial teacher to assist the year 8 boys polish their literacy skills before heading on to Year 9. We were very fortunate to have the services of a wonderful teacher, Sue Burke, who had recently left the mainstream school system, where she had been Head Teacher – Welfare. Sue has a real gift for relating to our boys and providing them with the opportunity to bring the best out of themselves. She has worked way beyond her paid hours and has done a fantastic job. We were able to employ Sue due to the efforts of Michael Quinn and his staff at the NSW Office of Custodian Wealth Builders, so a big thankyou to those people.

Apart from the Directors, staff and students, the great asset of our school is the wonderful building we occupy. We are housed in the Seaman's Mission building with an abundance of space, including a wonderful little chapel, and a large, round, tiled atrium entrance. These features combine to create an ambience that helps the boys feel safe and secure. This enhances the impact of the Toogoolawa Program and overtime, the students are able to make fundamental changes to the way they see the world.

As 2009 draws to an end and we reflect on the past twelve months we can see a great deal of development in the majority of our students with several Year 8 boys already placed in programs for Year 9 and beyond. The future looks positive as well, with a new teacher joining the staff in 2010 and a corresponding increase in student numbers. This development provides an opportunity for even more young men to partake in the Toogoolawa experience. We are currently in the midst of a series of interviews for new students and as our reputation spreads we are receiving a larger number of referrals each year.

As well, on behalf of everyone at Toogoolawa School, Wickham I would like to mention the people at JLF who have been of tremendous assistance this year. Adam Jackson is just fantastic to work with, he gets things done with no fuss or drama and is always available to support us. The same can be said of Sam Townsend in Accounts and Melissa Symington on HR matters. To those people, thank you so much for your assistance.

Finally, it goes without saying that John Fitzgerald deserves a huge amount of praise and thanks for his commitment to the Toogoolawa Schools. It is wonderful to think that he provides such support to young boys in trouble. He also fully supports the staff and it is always uplifting to hear him speak at our annual conference and feel the passion and energy he has for the important work we do. It is a pleasure to be part of something headed by a person of his stature.

~ John's 2009 Report ~

Toogoolawa School - Wickham, NSW

As many may know I have been away from Toogoolawa for most of 2008 and 2009 whilst working at a remote community school up in the Kimberley in Western Australia. Previously I had worked in the Newcastle school for nearly 7 years and had the urge to go up there to broaden my experience and get a better understanding of the issues facing indigenous communities in Australia and see if I could make some small contribution to the education of the students.

Overall it was a magnificent experience. My wife, Sally, and I were totally 'green' when it came to the aboriginal culture and the way of life in the remote areas of Australia. Once we got there we had a quick and profound awakening to the conditions and the problems associated with life for our indigenous population. To try to summarise here would be too simplistic and probably off the mark as we are both aware that we still don't know anywhere near enough. However we met some truly amazing people who are able to survive and be happy in conditions that we westerners would soon find unbearable. Much to my admiration and though I will miss her greatly, Sally is going back there next year for a few months to keep working with the beautiful kids she helped out when we were worked at the school. She has developed a lasting bond with the place and the people that she needs to maintain.

On my return to Toogoolawa in Wickham Neil, Su and Ron and the boys at the school welcomed me in such a warm and loving way that I felt I had not been away so long. I found that the school had been growing strongly in the way of the Toogoolawa philosophy and the boys were happy, well fed

and wanting to be there. Neil has done a wonderful job with the boys this year and some of them have made incredible progress with their behaviour and academic confidence.

Very soon I was back into the daily routine and feeling happy to be home again. With Neil overseeing the educational and teaching aspect of the school my role was to handle the administrative matters that need attention. This has been a perfect fit and the school is running well at this point with a view to a likely expansion next year with an extra teacher and 4 more boys. This, I believe, will see great development of our capacity and effectiveness.

It was good to see that the boys still go out to the nursing home at Edgeworth for community service on Tuesdays. As the bus driver I got to take them out each time and call the bingo numbers for the residents. It is always so heartening to see the kindness and respect the boys show the elderly residents on each visit and to see the reaction of the residents when our boys arrive. I look forward to seeing this and the other service projects continue next year so the boys gain greater insight into their world and how to fit into it best. I believe 2010 will see our schools move forward to better outcomes for our boys and more recognition of our methods from the education sector. I am just glad to be a part of that again.

John Herron

~ Kim's 2009 Report ~

Toogoolawa School - Wickham, NSW

What a great year 2009 has been. I started at TOOGOOLAWA at the beginning of 2009 and I have learnt a great deal about the students as well as some things about myself.

Teaching the kids to cook has been lots of fun for all. We started off with cooking stir fry because it was something all of the kids were familiar with. We are now cooking anything from pikelets to chicken schnitzel and gourmet pizza. The kids have had lots of fun along the way as well as learning how to prepare and cook a nourishing meal for themselves. They take a lot of pride in what they cook, especially when they get to serve the food to their classmates and they come back and ask for seconds because it tastes so good. What a great feeling for the chefs. To see the smiles on their faces is priceless.

We have also been helping out at 2 community gardens. The kids have been learning about growing your own vegetables and how to look after a garden. They have also reaped the rewards by having seen the food grow and then eating the beautiful fresh produce. The kids almost got to taste a snail that had decided to stay on the lettuce instead of going down the drain.

We have recently started going to the SOUL CAFE. This is a cafe that provides meals to the homeless in a cafe setting. The kids get to help with the cooking and serving of the meals to each individual table. Then they help to clean up afterwards. After this is all done the kids get to sit down and enjoy a meal. What an experience for all of us. We have seen young families and young adults to older people using this service. It really makes everyone realise just how lucky they are to have someone in their lives that cares for them and supports them.

To the boys who are leaving, thanks for a great year. I am sure all of you will have wonderful lives ahead of you because you are all great kids. I hope you don't miss my singing in the car too much.

To Neil and John thanks for your never ending support and love throughout the year. You make it a pleasure to come to work everyday

Ron and Su, you are truly inspirational people. We can all learn a lot from you. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of Toogoolawa.

Love and Peace to you all

Kim

~ Todd's 2009 Report ~

Toogoolawa School - Hastings, VIC

The 2009 school year has been a time of positive growth and change in staff, curricula and facilities for Toogoolawa School, Hastings. Much of the change has been driven by the introduction of a therapeutic music program and by a commitment to refine and improve our existing programs.

We are so very blessed to have a team that is devoted to each other and to the boys and their families. That devotion has been strengthened and deepened by our new teacher, Daryl McKinlay, who came to us from the Southern Teaching Unit in Melbourne. Daryl is a member of a Mornington Peninsula Band, The Swifts, and has used his musical passion and talent to help develop our music program.

Funds raised at our second annual fund raiser were spent wisely by Daryl and Haydn to purchase electric and bass guitars, drums, microphones, a key board and other musical equipment. Our music program has truly become the birthplace of many virtues. We see courage to perform in music transferred to courage to complete challenging Mathematics and English assignments. Harmony in the band is transferred to harmony in the classroom. It is impressive and heartening to see our boys singing and playing with self-confidence and pride.

Our aim this year in curriculum development has been to narrow and sharpen our focus by specializing in numeracy, literacy, physical education, music, and values education. This new focus has allowed us to increase the time allocated to literacy and numeracy. In the literacy program we introduced the Lexia Reading program, a program similar to our Mathletics numeracy program. Using the Lexia program our boys work independently at their ability level. Depending on their performance, the program automatically provides practice on specific areas when needed and moves on to more difficult areas when each student is ready. Through Lexia and Mathletics we are able to closely monitor student progress and to make activity adjustments for each student where needed.

I think parents, students and teachers would agree that the most challenging yet exciting development for our school in 2009 has been capitol works made possible by \$300,000 in Federal government funding. We are very proud to present for the 2010 school year two new classrooms with individual work stations and a computer for each boy; a completely refurbished music hall, a new lunchroom; new cricket oval; and refurbished reception and administration offices. While 2009 saw many challenges in working alongside construction, we are beginning to see the development of a more peaceful and therapeutic environment for our parents, students and teachers. Thanks so much to everyone for their patience and understanding.

Finally, I would like to say how grateful I am for the wonderful teamwork Carol, Haydn, Daryl, and I have experienced this year. It is encouraging to see everyone contributing in their own special way-- Carol supporting the boys, parents and all of us by listening and caring so much, Haydn and Daryl working in complete harmony in the music program, and Daryl and I supporting each other as we develop the numeracy and literacy programs. Our whole school community—parents, teachers, Su and Ron, benefactors—have invested heavily in the future of our boys and in the lives of many boys to come.

Love to all,

Todd Mikkelson

Principal

~ Daryl's 2009 Report ~ Toogoolawa School - Hastings, VIC

It seems more like six weeks rather than six months since I joined the team here at Toogoolawa School, Hastings. The time has really flown! I felt immediately 'at home' and valued when I arrived, and I have received wonderful support and friendship from my talented and inspiring team mates, Todd, Haydn and Carol. It is thoroughly a team effort and we are all supported by the Toogoolawa way. One thing that has really struck me with Toogoolawa School, is how the times of silent sitting and the focus on gratefulness and the virtues, love, peace, truth, right-conduct and non-violence really set the foundation and culture for the school. Rather than a focus on individual personality, the virtues help to create a great sense of unity and purposefulness within the team. This is great modelling for the boys and it has given me such delight to witness boys really turning their behaviour around; moments of realisation when they experience their true character as peaceful, loving and self-assured. With new classrooms, exciting music program and stimulating curriculum in place, there is much to build on and look forward to in 2010.

Love and peace to all,

Daryl McKinlay

~ Carol's 2009 Report ~ Toogoolawa School - Hastings, VIC

The past year working at Toogoolawa Hastings has brought great personal growth in my professional life as a counsellor and my personal life with one often mirroring the other. Surrendering to ill health and a major operation, surrendering to many structural and physical changes as the buildings and land at Toogoolawa Hastings underwent massive renovations, surrendering to time as my body healed, surrendering to the demands created by the Victorian Government review processes have all called me to deepen my living of the values and philosophies of Toogoolawa. Patience, tolerance, letting go and letting God, have been lessons for my journey throughout the year. The gifts have also been many, the opportunity to work with the boys at deep personal levels in one on one counselling and watching them grow in their own ability to have patience and tolerance, moments of peace and joy in amidst chaos and seeing the boys claim practices of mindfulness as their own ie "I suppose it's time for mindful walking" as they set off and no staff member had said a word. Working at Toogoolawa not only 'grows' the boys it 'grows' us to. I feel privileged and honoured to be a part of the team of Toogoolawa schools and look forward to the next growing year of 2010.

Students' Thoughts of Human Values

Live in love, get immersed in that love

What this means to me is show love to the people in my class by not thinking or saying mean things to them.

A positive story from my life about this is about my little brother, Blair. He shows me love with a kiss and hug and I ask him to play a game of football and he says yes. We get on well because we show love to each other.

The benefits of doing the thought for the week are if you are like a fish immersed in water and immerse yourself in love you will be happy like the fish because he can still swim.

From now on I am going to do this by being a kind, caring and loving person because this will make the world a better place for me and others.

My advice to others who are trying to learn is to be nice to as many people as you can and you will get respect and love in return.

By Mathew, Toogoolawa School – Wickham, NSW

If we have enough love in our heart we can overcome everything

What this means to me is just about all problems or difficulties can be solved by a loving approach.

A positive story from my life about this is there are two boys from Toogoolawa School who are friends and they had a fight at school and it wasn't necessary. They could have had more brains and approached it like an adult. Instead of showing love and patience to each other they hurt themselves and their friendship.

The benefits of doing the thought for the week are if you love someone and care for yourself you can overcome your difficulties.

From now on I am going to do this by showing love to all people and all living things.

My advice to others who are trying to learn is be loving and caring for all the people around you.

By Michael, Toogoolawa School – Wickham, NSW

Harmful habits could destroy your health

What this means to me is if we do things that are unsafe or healthy our life will not be happy.

A positive story from my life about this is about a husband and wife who have a great life together. They eat sensibly, don't smoke, only drink small amounts of alcohol and never use drugs. They exercise all the time and once they flew across Australia to Perth, bought some bikes and rode back to Newcastle. They are just very healthy and happy.

The benefits of doing the thought for the week are that good food, proper sleep and exercise will make you feel and look good and you will live longer.

From now on I am going to do this by not doing things just because other people do them, like smoke or eat junk food. I will try to be like that healthy couple and enjoy my life.

My advice to others who are trying to learn is to look after your body. You don't want to end up like my Pop who died last year because of lung cancer because he smoked.

By Tegan, Toogoolawa School – Wickham, NSW

Be true to your higher Self, to your conscience.

To put it into simpler words, this thought means to do the right things by following your conscience.

A story that illustrates this thought could be: I used to steal every day. Now I have realized to myself that there is no meaning in it except trouble.

If I wanted to become better at demonstrating this thought for the week I could set better examples for being true to your higher self.

By Kepa, Toogoolawa School – Ormeau, QLD

Be true to your higher Self to your conscience.

To put it into simpler words, this thought mean always listen to your conscience, to do the right thing.

A story that illustrates this thought could be John went to boarding school. His friend used to wake up at midnight to go rob the tuckshop. He always said no. John always said no cause he was listening to his conscience.

If I wanted to become better at demonstrating this thought for the week I could always be truthful.

By Jayden, Toogoolawa School – Ormeau, QLD

Be true to your higher Self to your conscience

To put it into simpler words, this thought means try to keep your diamond clean.

A story that illustrates this thought could be: one day I stole some lollies from coles and I asked my mate to do it. He said no and I asked him to do it the next day and he said to me if I do it again he will not be friends with me so I stopped doing it.

If I wanted to become better at demonstrating this thought for the week I could not do bad things and do what good people do.

By Brodie, Toogoolawa School – Ormeau, QLD

We should not go against our conscience

To put it into simpler words, this thought means listen to your conscience.

A story that illustrates this thought could be: When I listen to my conscience I am good and I can control my anger. But when I don't listen to my conscience I go crazy and swear off my head but now I am excellent.

If I wanted to become better at demonstrating this thought for the week I could listen to my conscience.

By Tyler, Toogoolawa School – Ormeau, QLD