

PONSONBY KINDERGARTEN 100 Years Celebration

Thursday 26 February, 3.30-5.30pm,

22 Ponsonby Terrace, Ponsonby

Robin Houlker, Life Member, Speech Notes

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa,

Tēna koe e te whānau o te kura kōhungahunga ki te tūwhera i tēnei hui.

He mihi ki ngā mate o te wā, haere haere haere atu rā

He mihi ki ngā tangata whenua o te rohe nei ko Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei tēna koutou

He mihi ki ngā Mana Whenua o Tāmaki Makaurau

Tēnā koe ki te maunga o Maungawhau

Tēnā koe ki te awa o Waiatarau

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

Mihi to Auckland City Council Members:

Alexandra Bonham, Waitemātā Local Board Chair – here in partnership and support of the AKA.

Apologies from our Mayor, Wayne Brown, with a message carrying his good wishes, and our Deputy Mayor Desley Simpson – also sending a congratulatory message... and Mike Lee, Local Councillor

Welcome to Chloe Swarbrick: MP for this area but also a great advocate for our kaupapa,

Honourable Judith Tizard – past Minister of the Crown, kindergartener (Mission Bay) and local resident

Rosslyn Noonan – previous Chief Human Rights Commissioner, but well-known as the first Kindergarten Teachers' Association (KTA) General Secretary, and then of NZEI.

Reverend Prince, from All Saints Church, Ponsonby

AKA Board members, John Gillon, with apologies from Danielle Chandler and Ankita Sharma,

Other AKA Life Members Sue Crockett, with apologies from Denise Iverson, Bruce McLauchlan

Welcome to our CEO Pauline Winter, and the ELP team,

principals from some of the local schools,

past teachers and teacher aides, past 'kindergarteners' and whanau here,

and then most important of all, the tamariki and whanau of 2026 and your wonderful teachers.

Welcome to all. Haere, Haere, Haere.

What a very special day!! A Huge Happy Birthday for Ponsonby Kindergarten!!

Ko Robin Houliker taku ingoa, long time teacher, teacher lecturer, teacher advocate, Board representative, AKA Life Member – and very honoured to be asked to speak today.

As a past kindergarten teacher (of the AKA of course) I do love birthday celebrations because they represent important milestones and memories of being together. (refer to the displays)

This is a time of awahi and a time to create new memories... our past, our present, and our future are all represented here today.

Thank you for coming to make some new memories and reflect on past ones.

The Auckland Kindergarten Association has stood for many things in our 108-year-old history but today I'm focussing on the most important...

We stand for a garden of learning for every child, Te Māra Mātauranga. kinder – garten – the garden of the child. And that implies imagination, curiosity, creativity, engaging children at **play!**

Our Kaupapa is our pledge to ensure large outdoor play areas (not the minimum standard) and a strong ethos of commitment to the environment – more than half of our kindergartens are participants in the thriving Enviro-Schools programme.

And that learning is centred within our world first, and widely admired, bi-cultural curriculum – our taonga - Te Whāriki – and yet currently we are resisting political pressures to make it null and void.

To deliver our curriculum, Te Whāriki, the AKA stands by our professional commitment that **teachers are fully trained and qualified** - because this remains the greatest indicator of quality provision.

Our mandate, which we have fought for, for so many years, is that all our teachers are qualified with their early childhood degree, registered, employed within the state sector, and recognised as being in a profession, and in parity with their primary and secondary colleagues – our herstory provides the battle to win this progress and recognition goes back to very early days in the AKA and are detailed in our written history – women fighting and speaking up for what is fair and just, and in our case it was, and is, always driven by passion and concern for our tamariki and mokopuna.

Some of those battles were fought right here more than 50 years ago, when forces indicating closure were beyond the Association. It required years of negotiation and advocacy, including direct requests to government and the council for help, to enable Ponsonby Kindergarten to stay open. It's vicarious sites – and conditions – included a hall, a room in the school, a Nissen hut, the basement of the Council Hall, and at times it was hardly fit for purpose.

But, throughout that journey our dedicated teachers got on with the job. It is not surprising to us, that in the 50's and 60's Head Teacher Gwen Gilbert gave 26 years of service here, ensuring that closure did not happen, and that the social services, could continue to be offered.

These services were very much part of what kindergarten meant in those times. History highlights that teachers prepared an all-day meal for the children, established and tended a vegetable garden to grow the kai needed, and visited mothers and war brides to offer support after the war. Have we gone full circle?

The kindergarten teachers saw this as part of their work, and always the children were at the heart of it. So, we resist today moves to make ece services more **flexible** in their employment requirements, and current attempts to be regulated for all the wrong things.

So a big shout out in memory of Gwen and I ask you now to show your appreciation for the AKA teachers here today who also have given service – especially Rosemary Martin who I understand was here as Head Teacher for 22 years.

Gwen had not long retired, but her legacy ruled, when I found myself here for my final section (as it was known then) to be a trained kindergarten teacher. My records reflect, and I can remember our home visits into the community, following up children who were not attending, encouraging new enrolments etc. I was upset and quite cross that we weren't meeting the needs of all the families as much as we could, due to lack of understanding of what some families endure to survive and the 'systems' that prevented access.

AKA cares very much about these issues of equity, and if you look back in our history you can see how the AKA has always stepped up to be innovative and responsive - engaging in collaborative projects such as all day kindergartens, mobile preschool units, family literacy, play groups, teaching initiatives such as Incredible Years etc.

This is because **our strongest pou is - our communities.**

100 years represents that we have always, nearly always, been here – every suburb in Aotearoa has a public kindergarten and their contribution to New Zealand families is immeasurable – so that deserves to be recognised, respected, treasured and nurtured and not 'sold off'.

The gathering here today provides us a picture of you, as advocates that kindergarten is a public good. And as the kaitiaki you will ensure we won't be closing anytime soon – thank you!!

So today we also launch a **new Donate to Kindergarten initiative** – it's a campaign for the AKA to alert the community that we are not-for-profit, underfunded and we humbly ask for your help – so we can still be here when the kindergarten turns 200.

Long ago we identified that another pillar the AKA stands on is access for all children – not just for those who can afford it – this is equity in action. And our kindergartens need help to make sure this happens.

It's wonderful to be together, wrapped around by our special visitors to celebrate in aroha, passion and commitment to the kindergarten philosophy...

I'm proud to be involved with this wonderful organisation and passionate about what it represents and stands for.

Long may it continue, till we are 200 years in Ponsonby, hopefully by then with policy makers who finally understand why our tamariki deserve to learn and grow in the gardens of Aotearoa taught by highly qualified teachers.

Tū ana tātou ki ō tātou pae maunga

Let us stand on our mountain ranges, our tūpuna give us our horizon.

And a very, very, very happy birthday!!!

And I have wondered if there is anyone here today who is having a birthday along with the kindergarten?

Robin Houlker

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