



# Kia ora! G'day, Yumalundi!

**GABBY MILLGATE**

**M**Y NAME IS MISS GABBY AND I'M THE NATURE PEDAGOGY LEADER AT WODEN VALLEY CHILD CARE CENTRE IN CANBERRA. IT'S A NOT FOR PROFIT EARLY LEARNING Centre and a parent committee managed service, which means the executive part of the service have their children as top of mind when it comes to making executive decisions. I am lucky that the committee supported the innovation of my Nature Pedagogy Leader role, which was the vision of the WVCCC Director, Izabela Lisiecka. The current Director is Paulina Jagus, who continues to support Izabela's vision to create a childhood for children in nature.

In 2016 Izabela, Aaron Knudsen and parents had created the Narragunnawali garden with a chook house, compost bays and garden beds. This was a vast improvement on the hot plastic grass, concrete and soft fall environment that fulfilled safety regulations but had no impact on the sense of wellbeing and belonging that connection with nature provides.

When Aaron left WVCCC to start his own Pallet Play business I was approached by Izabela to work with all the children to embed sustainable practice and lead the Nature Pedagogy programme.

I was given lots of trust and freedom to create outdoor environments where children could really connect with nature and

benefit from the wisdom of looking after the land, the animals and the people.

We created our Garden of the Future out the front of the centre. It was a wonderful way to go beyond the bars of the centre. We grew corn, beans and giant sunflowers. The children's contributions made people smile as they walked to and from the hospital. It also became a place where parents could pick greens to take home for dinner. But the location of the garden outside the centre meant children only accessed it when I was with them or a parent. Consultation with educators showed me we needed to create these gardens within the centre to maximise engagement with the Nature Pedagogy programme.

The following winter we all created garden beds by hauling our compost, manure and dirt up to the top yard. Luckily moving dirt and compost around is something children are really good at. The goal was to create a summer oasis of green in the brownest, hottest part of the yard.

The goal was also to create a garden robust enough to allow children to pick fruit and flowers freely.

In the meantime, I began to recognise the effect Acknowledgement of Country was having on children's relationships with the land, the animals and each other. The children kept

their promise to the Ngunawal people (to care for the land, the animals and each other) and our garden grew and thrived. In December the children picked and ate the corn they had grown. Some children gorged themselves on raw beans and sunflower seeds. In January our children decided the watermelons were ready and they cracked them open with sticks like wild humans.

We all waited for the leaves of the pumpkin vines to wither before we harvested our pumpkins.

Being responsive to children's needs is something I enjoy as it invites creativity and imagination. It's a thrill to imagine and then discover our youngest children looking through their perimeter fence at daffodils, jonquils and tulips while they sit in a sunny lush spot, pulling at real grasses and munching on rainbow chard growing within arm's reach. The educators are giving me feedback on how the babies seek out these spaces we've created and spend a longer than usual time there. The seeds were planted during a seed sensory experience activity. We've improved on the bare dirt and red bark on the hostile ground around the fence to inviting lush groundcovers and shade loving violets. A small bench has added a social element to the area where passing busses are always a thrill to see.

I've worked previously in centres where somebody was paid to create a wonderful landscape for children. The children ran over and destroyed most of the plants.

Involving the children in planting and caring for gardens means they all flourish.

"Can I have more vegetables?"

"Help yourself-just hold the plant with one hand and pull the bean with the other."

"Can I pick some flowers?"

"Of course, let me show you the places where we have lots of flowers."

I'm so passionate about what I have discovered in my experiences with children. I really think making the world a better place starts with loving and understanding the nature of nature.

We talk to the land.

We dance for the rain.

We appreciate, care and share.

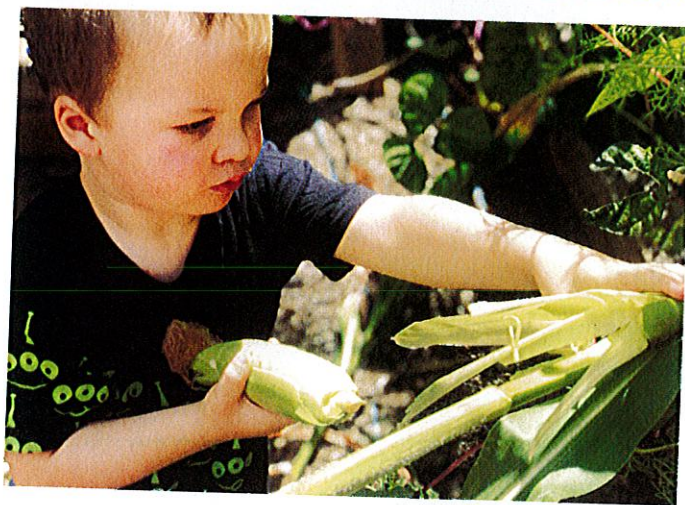
We are nourished by our efforts and we are not separate but connected to the cycles and seasons.

One of the ways I want to advocate for Nature Pedagogy is through my first book. It's about chickens in early childhood settings. It's a book where educators and children can learn about chickens together. There are stories, tips on what chickens need, how to hold and put away chickens, compliance as well as vet recommended methods for keeping healthy chooks. Through the publisher Phoenix Support there are free down-loadables and a checklist. There are also classroom ideas and a special guide for educators on embedding Acknowledgement of Country and establishing rights and responsibilities.

Have a look here: <https://phoenix-support.com.au/shop/product/mill-01-the-book-book-book-by-gabby-millgate-1041>

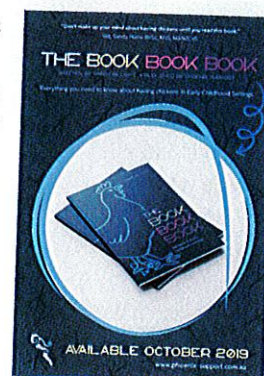
I really hope that we can all meet and have a yarn about how we can give children access to the environments that reveal them to be confident, capable and responsible citizens of the world.

See you at the Wellbeing Mana Atua conference in March 2020.



### The Book book book: -Chickens in Early Childhood Settings

This Book book book is for teachers and children to learn about chickens together. It's pages contain everything you need to know about chickens. If you are thinking about getting them for your early childhood setting, you need this book. If you already have chickens, this book will continue your journey of learning about them with the children.



**THE EVOLUTION OF MISS GABBY** Before finding her calling as a Nature Pedagogy Leader. "You're terrible Muriel" stamped Gabby Millgate into the Australian national consciousness. Gabby Has been quoted by Madonna, Will Ferrell and James Cordon. In the years between filming and release of Muriel's Wedding (1994), Gabby graduated from Charles Sturt University (BA Comm). '95-'99 Gabby starred in and wrote TV sketch comedy on Full Frontal and was invited to be the only comedian on Celebrity Big Brother.

**Don't miss Gabby at Wellbeing Mana Atua 2020.**

For more information and to register visit: [www.childspace.co.nz](http://www.childspace.co.nz)