

# Native wonderland awaits

A playscape paradise filled with 1240 native plants is what children will delight in darting through when the First 5 Year Early Childhood Education Centre opens its doors later this month.

First 5 Years managing director Melissa Webster said an official ceremony would be held on 20 May following on from an open day for the families who have connected with the centre.

The playscape, which features an imposing fort, is an original concept driven by community consultation and engagement with the Emerald Historical Society, the local agricultural industry, Kestrel and Sojitz Blue, the Central Highlands council and Mayor Kerry Hayes, and Bush Kids.

Ms Webster said her passion for native plants and need for hardy varieties that could tolerate a Central Highlands summer led to an Australia-wide search for the selected species.

"We have had to source these plants from all over Australia," Ms Webster said.

"Now obviously, we had to identify ones that were going to survive and thrive in Central Queensland.

"We also had input from our landscape architects, as well as major input from nurseries because my particular passion is I wanted all natives and I wanted many to be as indigenous to the area as possible."

The plants were delivered to Emerald Co-operative Society's Mitre 10 where they are being watered and cared for until they go into the ground.

Ms Webster said she was indebted to Mitre 10's Justin Benjamin and employee Sabrina Zlatarich for their care of the natives gathered on-site.

"Justin has been unbelievably kind in managing these 1200-plus plants for us, as has Sabrina, and I don't even want to think about the hours she's spent searching for some of these," she said.



First 5 Years director Hollie McCarthy (front) with Emerald Mitre 10's Lani Ash and Sabrina Zlatarich surrounded by native plants sourced from all around Australia destined for the playscape area at the early childhood education centre.

Ms Webster said the landscape architects attached to the project, Wearthly Concept, could make it to Emerald to construct the playscape.

"With all the problems in the building industry, Wearthly, who is one of the best in Australia, couldn't make it for the build but in true Emerald spirit, Peter Davies from Cardav Constructions, our builder, stepped in to help," she said.

"We also managed to find someone local who is a stone mason by trade and landscape gardener to step up to deliver the project with Peter's help.

"So it's all coming together because of Peter and Justin and it's just a beautiful community story."

Next week, Ms Webster and her staff of 23 educators will begin to plant out the natives with everything from lemon scented myrtle

trees to cut-leaf daisies, Better John Callistemon, wild irisk, Grevilleas, weeping tea trees and bottle brush, native violets, grey coastal rosemary and other woody herbs, tussock grass, all selected to create harmonious colours, textures and scents.

"Honestly, it's going to be a native bonanza for these children," she said.

"It's just going to be beautiful."

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