

# Nicola Chisnall Memorial Award Nomination 2015:

The support network behind Meraki Montessori  
A school that Community built.

We would like to nominate ALL of the amazing community that gave up their time and Christmas break to enable this little Montessori Primary School to come into fruition in just three months for this award.



## Our Story

The support network behind Meraki Montessori - A school that Community built.

Our proprietor Karin Waechter first heard the call for a Montessori primary school on the North Shore as she was wondering about the future of her son that was enrolled in a local Montessori preschool. She found she was not alone in this and decided to delve deeper as to why there were no Montessori Primary schools on the North Shore. On her journey she found there were other families who were also pondering the same problem and had been on this quest for years. As she decided to take action and give this Montessori initiative a shot little did she know there was a community out there that was just waiting to be united!



## The Journey begins

### North Shore Montessori Trust

Karin discovered a very important piece of the puzzle early in her journey. Upon discussions with people in the Montessori network she found out that there were two classrooms of Montessori materials being held in storage by the North Shore Montessori Trust from an old Montessori Primary School that had closed down in Long Bay. The North Shore Montessori Trust (a special thanks in particular to Nicky Partridge, Chris and Tricia Craig) had taken guardianship over these materials and written into their trust document that they would kindly gift these materials to any Montessori Primary initiative that was willing to start on the North Shore. They had put in years of hard work previously in pitching to other mainstream schools to try and adjoin a Montessori Unit, but unfortunately they had little success. They kindly shared ALL of the knowledge they had gained in their journey to ensure Karin could give this her best shot.



### Steven Arnold AUT

With this knowledge Karin got into contact with Steven Arnold who ran the Montessori Education papers at Auckland University of Technology. Steven gave her a lot of support and advice about what was involved in setting up a school, the steps she should take to begin and most importantly belief in her ability to achieve it! Karin also met Meraki's head teacher Rebecca Nicholson through Steven and all of a sudden she had two classrooms of materials and a trained Montessori teacher. The next challenge was to find a beautiful location.



### NGATI WHATUA RUNANGA

Through Jerry Norman from the Ministry of Education Karin found out about a beautiful old Steiner school that was owned by Ngati



Whatua Runanga. After many negotiations and discussions the location was finally secured (in just over a month!) and a beautiful partnership was formed between Meraki Montessori and Ngati Whatua Runanga. A special thanks to Viv Colquhoun, Harold Bloomstein and John Marsden from Ngati Whatua Runanga who helped push this decision through quickly and to Joanne Nicholson and Glenn Higham who helped with our lease and property sourcing.

#### NOVA MONTESSORI SCHOOL

Having never run a school before both Karin and Rebecca had some questions regarding the paperwork and day to day processes involved in starting and running a school. Nova Montessori in Christchurch offered to share invaluable information about how their procedures and processes ran allowing Rebecca and Karin (with help from our second teacher Katie Thomson) to learn quickly and put together a 40 page private school application form on the processes, teaching approaches, assessment and reporting procedures of Meraki Montessori. This was worked on over the Christmas break and sent to the Ministry of Education for consideration in the New Year. The time and advice given by Nova at a time when they themselves were extremely busy was invaluable and so greatly appreciated.



Titoki Montessori, Koru Montessori, Montessori Beginnings, Coast Montessori, Birkenhead Point Montessori, Riverhead Montessori, Little Steps Montessori, Acorn Montessori And Maru Montessori

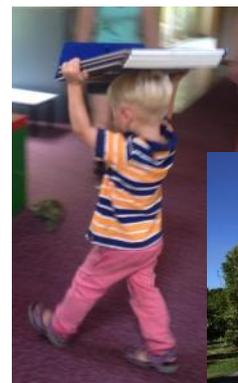
A parent information night had been in the pipeline as a way to get word about this new Montessori Primary initiative out into the community. Meraki Montessori's actual location ONLY got confirmed the night before this evening (which left our head teacher who was running the evening a little restless to say the least!). Due to the support of all the of the above mentioned North Shore Montessori Preschools a wonderful turnout of over 50 parents, teachers and children alike turned up at AUT (who graciously hosted our evening!) to find out more about this exciting new initiative.



Numerous Volunteers, Facebook Page Supporters And The Montessori Community

Now that we had a location and the word was out we had small problem. It was basically Christmas time and we had an oldish building to get up to Ministry of Education standards in around 3 weeks. Miraculously, volunteers and Montessori supporters from all throughout the North Shore community and beyond offered their precious

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holiday time to help paint, clean, landscape, garden and prepare the building for the beginning of the school year. Karin and her family and many volunteers spent most of their Christmas break at Meraki Montessori and for that we just cannot thank them enough! We also had numerous tradesman who agreed to come back to work before their holiday was over to help us get up and running in time.

#### AUT 2015 MONTESSORI SUMMER SCHOOL STUDENTS

To give us a deadline to work towards we organised a Meraki Montessori Open Day picnic to allow for the community to view our premises. It was the day before opening and we were still unloading the 16 pallets of Materials that the North Shore Montessori Trust had so kindly gifted us, there was plenty of cleaning to still be done and we had lots of items to be moved to the shed. Of course another miracle occurred and around 30 students from the Montessori Summer School papers at Auckland University of Technology turned up to offer their services. Karin, Rebecca and Katie nearly cried as they watched the saying 'many hands make light work' become a reality. In just over an hour the students had the school looking fabulous and all ready for the visitors to arrive the next morning. Two of the students even came BACK after open day to help set up more materials in preparation for our first day at school. The timing of these wonderful volunteers could not have been more perfect.



#### Montessori @ Howick Primary

Being a new Montessori Primary School in the area both teachers Rebecca and Katie felt very strongly about providing a supportive resource for the founding parents who were enrolling their child in Meraki Montessori. From this the "Montessori Parent Survival Guide" was born. Olivia Browne from Montessori @ Howick Primary offered to collaborate and help with the creation of this resource. Without her help and amazing editing skills this resource would not have been ready in time for our new enrolments. She has continued to support us (along with the Howick Montessori trust ) to be included in the Montessori Community by helping to organise a Primary Network BBQ and a school trip to help our children mix with the wider Montessori Community. We are so grateful for her help - again at a time when she was very busy herself!



#### The Founding Parents And Tamariki Of Meraki Montessori

After a successful open day with GREAT support from the Montessori community, we now had our provisional registration from the Ministry of Education and were open to take enrolments. The five founding families who have entrusted us with their children's education are people we are extremely lucky and grateful to have on board



with us. We count our blessings every day that we get to work with these tamariki and look forward to the many more families we will get to know in our future.

### What Next?

Here at Meraki Montessori our vision is to stay relatively small so that we can remain responsive to the needs of our community that has so graciously given us so much of their time to allow us to exist.

We are excited about sustainability and the partnerships we have had the freedom to create with businesses and social enterprises that have great stories behind them. We would one day love to have a preschool and high school running in conjunction with our primary.

Who knows, after the support we have received in just three months we believe anything is possible!

To everyone who has been a part of our journey ( and that is a LOT of you) we want to say thank you, you have helped to build our school with 'Meraki' the soul, creativity, or love put into something; the essence of yourself that is put into your work.

*Submitted by Rebecca Nicholson and Katie Thomson.*

