

# NATURE KINDERGARTEN FAMILY HANDBOOK 2019



**Nurturing Natural Learning**



# Family Handbook for 2019



**WELCOME TO THE WILDERNESS  
LEARNING COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY!**

This Family Handbook aims to provide you with important information about our Nature Kindergarten programme and our hopes towards a growing community of self-directed custodians of our beautiful earth. We feel honoured to join you and your family in this learning adventure, and we're very excited to deepen our connections to each other and to the earth throughout this coming school year.

This is our pilot phase, and information in this handbook will be updated as needed during the development of our fledgeling outdoor Nature Kindergarten.

<b>ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Our Vision &amp; Mission.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Our Philosophy.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Our Learning Culture.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Who We Are.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<b>PROGRAM INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Curriculum.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Flow of the Day.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Developmental Benefits .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>The Circle of Community (Values &amp; Expectations).....</i>	<i>7</i>
<b>LOGISTICAL INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Enrolment Requirements.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Locations.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Term Calendar.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Drop-off &amp; Pick-up Procedure .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Gear List.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Getting Dirty!.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Contact Information &amp; Staff Details.....</i>	<i>10</i>

<b>POLICIES AND PROTOCOLS .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>Child Safety Protocols.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>First Aid Protocols.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Fees and Payment Policies.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Cancellation &amp; Late Payment Policies.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<b>GRATITUDE.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>FURTHER READING AND REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>13</b>

“Education is not merely acquiring knowledge, gathering and correlating facts; it is to see the significance of life as a whole. It is understanding oneself, for it is within each of us that the whole of existence is gathered.”

- Krishnamurti, Education & the Significance of Life -

“Take time to do things. Be patient. Listen, listen, not just to me, but to the movement of life in the universe.”

- Gladys McGarey M.D. Quote from her 11 year old son -

# Organisational Information

## Our Vision & Mission

Vision: To create South Africa's pioneer Nature Kindergarten, inspired by the *Waldkindergarten* model in Europe and adapted to our South African context. We offer a natural, emergent, immersion learning experience that cultivates a deep connection to nature, community and self.

Our Nature Kindergarten will be held completely outdoors in all seasons throughout the year, to encourage children to learn, explore and play in a natural environment with adult facilitation that nurtures their learning experience rather than just leading it. There is ample research proving the vast benefits of immersing children regularly in outdoor, natural learning environments. Our learning, physical, emotional and spiritual goals are based on holistic and respectful practices towards the children and our natural environments.

## Our Philosophy

We cannot live without nature. For us to thrive, we have to be in a thriving environment that can support and nurture us. We believe that we have no choice, for the future of our children and their children, but to follow the lead of children's innate intuition to learn, observe and connect with nature. To balance our modern lifestyle, we need total immersion in our natural world.

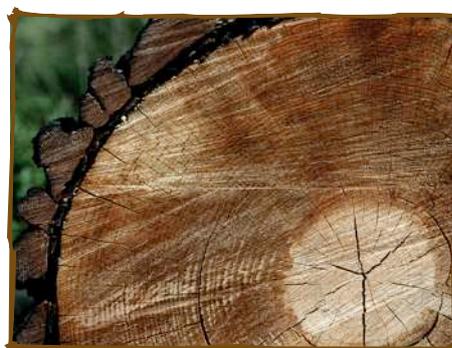
We want to nurture slowing down, mindful observation and deep listening. We aim to support each child in reaching their own conclusions about what they experience and observe, and to trust what they feel based on this. We also believe that every child is a genius in their own way. Mainstream schooling only caters for a limited type. We believe that a learner-led environment with constant living and changing aspects, and facilitators who take the responsibility of supporting each child in their individual strengths and interests, will enable all children to develop their innate genius.



Making bubbles with reed straws, the immense lessons in simplicity of water



The perseverance of life, the fallen climbing tree that still grows.



Nurturing patience for the natural flow of time, finding what roots ground us

## Our Learning Culture

In our modern, fast-paced, technocratic lifestyle, a serious imbalance in our way of growing, learning and developing as young children has become increasingly problematic, disconnected and pervasive. This disconnect affects us and our natural world in every way imaginable, and is why our development, health and happiness is becoming increasingly hampered, traumatised and damaged. Children are taught off manufactured toys, books and technological devices, within boundaries of walls, concrete, fences and often security bars. What are the psychological, emotional, physical and spiritual implications of this?

The Nature Kindergarten learning process encourages children to play, engage with, observe, question, and mindfully, creatively and practically work with their surrounding natural environment. This is a learner-led process of discovery and building on their interests and knowledge as they engage with their environment and each other. Fundamental skills of reading, writing, maths and problem solving are all incorporated in the natural creative processes of negotiating the environment and developing activities mindful of the resources and abundance provided to us by nature.

The physical results of outdoor learning enable children to experience the different seasons, weather patterns and natural phenomena of the environment in a safe and facilitated way. This enhances mental, physical, spiritual and emotional health. This outdoor immersion boosts their immune systems, increases tactile, sensory and fine-motor development, and balance. It teaches conscious awareness of the self in relation to other, necessary for staying safe and taking risks. Outdoor learning also teaches practical skills lasting for the rest of their lives.

Emotionally, this natural learning supports the child's trust of their own intuition. Learner-led facilitation role-models respect for each other and oneself. Group learning establishes clear and strict agreed-upon boundaries for safety and therefore secure and healthy emotional skills and development. Most importantly, we nurture social and emotional connection with each other and our mother earth.

Our kindergarten nurtures spiritual development by reconnecting young children to our sacred mother earth, and to observing God - the Creator - through nature. We support their continued attunement to all the life that exists in their environment. They will have the space to develop, grow and change with the changing environment around them, learn how it can nurture them if they nurture it, and understand the power of their imagination and innate creativity.

## Who We Are



Malcolm Devine is a husband, father, musician, juggler, qualified plumber with over 30 years experience and has a special interest in EMF (electromagnetic frequency) radiation. He grew up in the city but spent 3 years of his childhood in a small village where he was immersed in nature. This profoundly influenced his beliefs and outlook on life, and he has always lived in the countryside as an adult, having many experiences with local tribal cultures. He is a genius who felt there was serious incoherence in mainstream curriculum, leaving school at 16 years of age to do a practical trade. He is most qualified to truly understand the need for nurturing the different ways children learn, and is passionate about children who cannot thrive in a mainstream classroom.

Linda Devine is a wife, mother, artist, qualified art psychotherapist and avid gardener. She too grew up in the city but was regularly taken into the mountains for retreats as a child. She is also one of the last generation of 'wild' children - having grown up playing outside daily with the neighbourhood children in the Joburg veld, to return home only by suppertime. She has studied long in the academic system, receiving her MSc in Art Psychotherapy International, cum laude, in Edinburgh UK. After working as a therapist with 'problem' children struggling to stay in mainstream schooling, she realised the severe limitations of that way of learning. She is passionate about child development, the resulting symptoms of our human disconnect and traumas, and believes holistic health, development and self-knowledge can only be nurtured through deep understanding and connection with nature.

# Programme Information

## Curriculum

Our Curriculum is inspired by various approaches:

- *Reggio Emilia* which emphasises emergent curriculum based on what the children show an interest in. Facilitators have the responsibility to provide the resources and adapt activities according to what the kids are interested in, to support them in their choices and guide them to explore further.
- *Self-Directed Education* trusts the innate desire of every child to learn and understand their world. By giving them the opportunity to choose what they learn about and being flexible to each child's individual style and pace of learning, they are able to follow their passions and interests without fear of failure or comparison with others. This is also an important function for self-empowerment and is fundamental in showing and growing respect in each other, child and adult alike.
- *Montessori* understands the importance of mixed age learning, and places importance on task completion. Although the methods are usually structured around mainstream curriculum, we have some Montessori learning materials that can support and further a child's learning in a specific area, if these tools are a more familiar process the child prefers to engage in.
- *Waldorf* places emphasis on the whole (spiritual, mental, emotional, physical) of the developmental stages and the educational aspects of these. Creativity is fundamental to a child's development and there is emphasis on the use of good quality and natural materials.
- *Waldkindergarten* is the original model of outdoor immersive learning. At no point do children learn in an indoor environment. Shelter is provided in risky weather, but otherwise the aim is to provide as varied an outdoor learning environment as possible. Growing, harvesting, preparing meals to share, fire work and other practical skills are ingrained in the everyday flow of the learning experience.

These are just brief examples of the different pedagogical aspects we keep in mind for a child's learning development. This is in no way exhaustive and the main goal is to remain *flexible, respectful and open to the individuality* of each child.

## Flow of the Day

The Kindergarten will run 5 days a week (Mon - Fri), from 08:00 - 13:00. Drop off is between 08:00 - 09:00 and pickup is at 13:00.

08:00 - 09:00: Drop-off & Freeplay

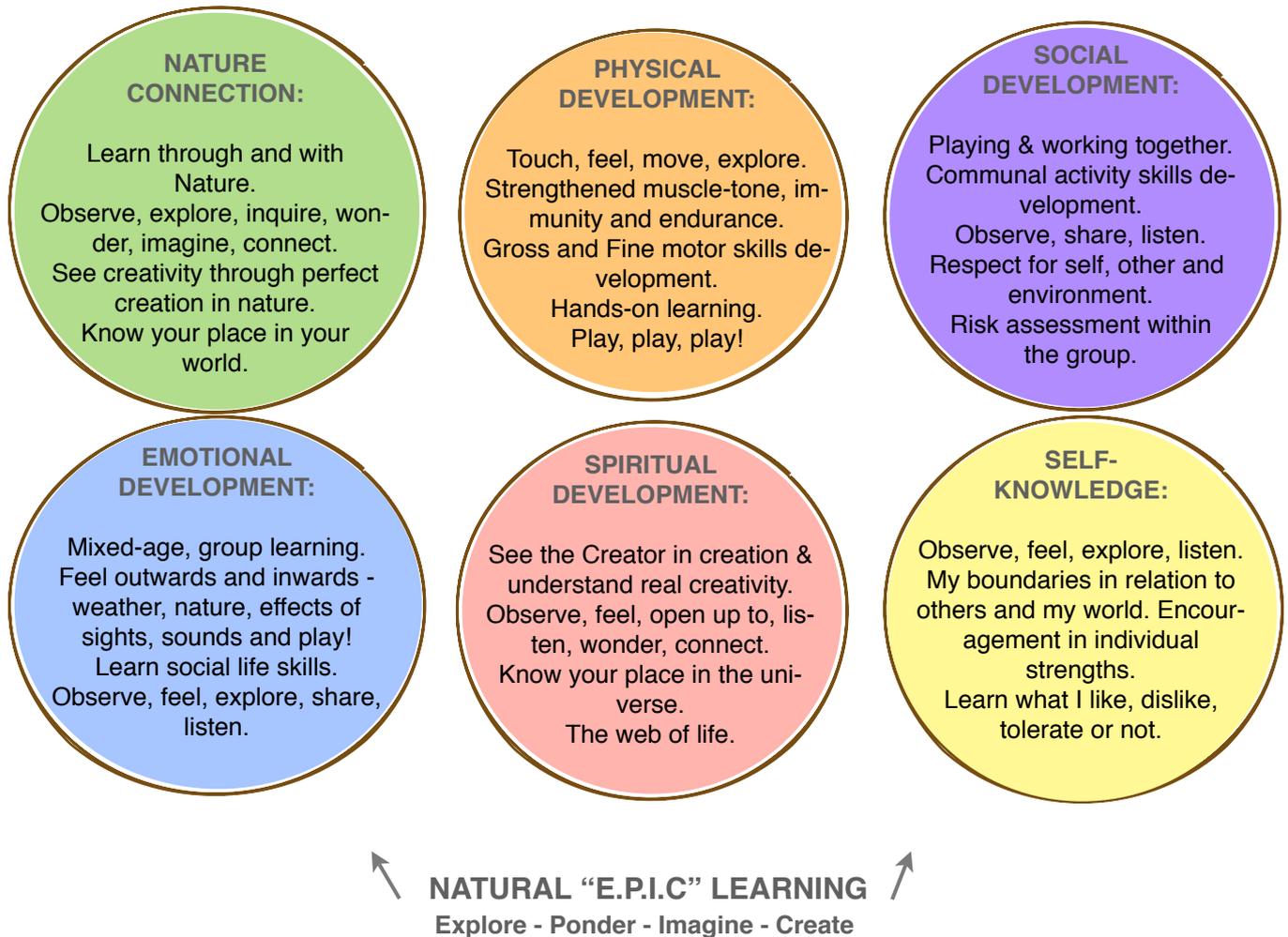
09:00 - 12:00: Emergent Learning, Play & snacks. This could include projects and crafts, structured games, unstructured exploring, observations etc around child-led themes of interest. Journalling things learnt and of interest will be a regular way for the children to keep record of what they're doing. One day every week will be out on a hiking trail.

12:00 - 13:00: Lunch. Children will work together to harvest, prepare and share a healthful whole-foods meal. This will be a time to gather communally and share stories of the day. Clean up of the space, food and selves will be part of this time.

## Developmental Benefits

Our Curriculum incorporates philosophies and practical ideas inspired from a large range of pedagogical theories, but ultimately it is about the CHILD and their individual development.

We work **CREATIVELY** to support and follow the child in their natural strengths, intelligence, tendencies and interests, to stay in wonder and learn through their connection with **NATURE**.



## The Circle of Community (Values & Expectations)

We welcome and accept children of any race, nationality, language, social and cultural background. Our kindergarten has strong values based on nurturing a child in developing their full potential while learning with and connecting to nature. We welcome every child and parent who shares our belief in this way of learning, and we communicate with every child and parent equally about our philosophies and policies.

Our kindergarten community respects the equal value of each child and facilitator's individual strengths and interests. For everyone to have a safe and nurturing learning experience, we have strict behavioural guidelines and social policies that we work out with the group and expect every child and facilitator to adhere to; in respect of self, other and our environment. For the benefit of all involved, we reserve the right to ask a learner or facilitator to leave if we are unable to negotiate respectful adherence to fundamental behavioural expectations, potentially causing harm to the rest of the group.

This type of learning process demands active parental support and participation. We are a cooperative, not a school institution, and as such we endeavour to include the child, their family and the wider community. We believe this type of early childhood learning can set the supportive foundations for alternative further education such as homeschooling & unschooling, creating a social network for children of all ages. Our longer term goals are to create a central hub for rich and diverse specialised learning experiences as a support for homeschoolers in our greater community.

## Logistical Information

### Enrolment Requirements

All children need to be fully potty trained and able to use the bathroom independently to attend our Nature Kindergarten. We understand accidents occur with preschool children. The extra set of clothing you provide will be used if an accident does occur.

Our kindergarten accepts children from 3 - 7 years, but depending on their level of development and ability to work with the group, we reserve the right to accept children only when they are developmentally ready.

*A special note:* If a child is having a wobbly day, we welcome parents to stay for a time or the entire morning as needed. Again, our priority is the security, happiness and individual needs of the child. For this reason, we see no logical reason for preventing primary care-givers from nurturing their child in times of need.

### Locations

Wilderness Learning Cooperative (WLC) is based at the Duiwerivier Railway Siding. This land is rented long-term from Transnet and includes a variety of different learning environments.

- In the centre, we have created a tamed *learning glade* which has a variety of areas for children to engage and play in. This includes the parking, toilets, vegetable garden and shelter for risky weather. This is where we will start and end every day, and includes supportive learning resources.
- On the eastern side of the property we have a *scrubland* learning area. This is a more open, sunny flood-plain space. Its an environment of fynbos, mid-level bushes, reeds and grasses.
- On the western side, we have a small *forest* learning area. This is an overgrown, shaded, dense space of ground-covers, reed grasses, bushes, creepers and trees.
- One day a week will include a *nature reserve* hike. The children will go on an 'out' hike for the whole morning. It is always the same environment and allows for longer distance and endurance experiences in a safe but wild environment. We feel that regular immersion in the surrounding reserve is important for developing a sense of respect and understanding for our local wilderness. The opportunity for covering longer distances aids health and physical development of strength, endurance and agility.

### Term Calendar

Our terms will be the same as government school terms but starting on Mondays, ending Fridays for convenience. Terms for 2019:

**Term 1:** 7 January - 15 March (9 weeks)

*Autumn Holidays:* 16 March - 31 March (2 weeks)

**Term 2:** 1 April - 14 June (10 weeks)

*Winter Holidays: 15 June - 7 July (3 weeks)*

**Term 3:** 8 July - 20 September (10 weeks)

*Spring Holidays: 21 September - 29 September (1 week)*

**Term 4:** 30 September - 6 December (9 weeks)

*Summer Holidays: 7 December - ± 6 January (± 4 weeks)*

## **Drop-off & Pick-up Procedure**

*Drop-off is from 08:00 - 09:00.* While this gives more flexibility and convenience for parents to get your children up, ready and to kindergarten, it also allows a beneficial segment of freeplay time as the children come into the space together.

*Pick up is at 13:00.* We would like to keep pick up to a specific time so that tired children can all leave at similar times. It allows for better closure and ending after a busy day, and once bellies are full children will benefit from home time. This also gives parents a chance to share interesting new things your child might want to show you, without your young one losing the joy of the day having to sit around waiting for you when everyone else has gone. If pick up happens swiftly, it also gives us a chance to connect with and make time for any parent questions, updates and/or concerns.

*Late Pick-up:* To be clear, we are not a day-care facility. Sometimes late pick ups are unavoidable - life happens. However, please keep in mind that late pick ups can be stressful for children and we are developing an afternoon program as well. If for some unforeseen reason, you are not able to pick up your child at the specified time, please communicate this to us *as soon as possible*, so that we may best prepare ourselves and your child for this.

## **Gear List**

We are an entirely outdoor school and we operate in *all weather conditions*. It is imperative that your child is dressed for comfort in wet, windy, cold and hot conditions, as we spend much of our time making direct physical contact with nature and the elements. You can expect your child to be sitting directly on the earth, splashing in puddles, hiding in bushes and playing with mud.

To ensure the safety and happiness of the entire learning group, please outfit your child according to our recommended gear list. If we feel as though your child is inadequately dressed for the weather conditions and does not have the appropriate clothing with them in their backpack, we reserve the right to contact the adult that is responsible for them and request that they immediately bring adequate gear. A failure to dress appropriately for the weather is not only a safety risk, but can have a negative impact on the well-being of the entire group and the learning experience for all.

### *What Your Child Should Bring Each Day:*

- Backpack
- Full Water bottle
- Snack (Healthy and filling for an active day - please no junk food!)
- Ziplock Bag w/ Extra Dry Layers (Extra pair of socks/ base layers)
- Towel
- Sunscreen
- Fun extras could include:
  - Favourite Naturalist Field guides (stored in ziplock bag in case of rain)
  - Magnifying Glass
  - Bug Catchers (Catch and Release Only)
  - Collecting Bag
  - Nature Items

### What Your Child Should Wear Each Day:

Head:

- Hat (In *colder* weather, one that covers the ears / In *warmer* weather for sun protection)

Body:

- Base layer
- Middle layer (Wool or Fleece recommended for insulation in *colder* weather)
- Outer Waterproof Rain jacket and pants for *wet* weather
- Gloves / Mittens (optional for *colder* weather)

Feet:

- Gumboots (a must for muddy and wet exploring)
- Socks (with closed shoes and gumboots in *wet* and/or *cold* weather)
- Sandals (please only supportive, protective sandals- no slip-slops- in *warmer* weather)

\*\*Dressing in layers, in general, is a great strategy to stay warm. However, please note that layers that are too tight and leave no air space can actually make your child colder. \*\*

### Please Make Sure Your Child Doesn't Bring:

- Sweets or other junk food
- Fizzy and sugared drinks
- Money
- iPods and other electronic devices
- Trading cards, stuffed animals, or any other toys

## **Getting Dirty!**

When your child comes home dirty from exploring and creating, we have done our job! Children are often very muddy by the end of the day. Mud, water, sand and creative play is core to the experience of exploring the natural world. Please dress your child in clothes that you are okay with getting dirty and let your child know that they have permission to get dirty!

Packing a plastic bag/s for bringing home muddy clothes in is helpful. A towel to dry off a soaking child is great too. An old sheet or newspaper for your backseat is also a good idea. Please be sure before each morning that extra dry socks and clothing layers are in your child's backpack in a zip-locked bag.

## **Contact Information & Staff Details**

Being present with the children is our number one priority. If you attempt to contact us while we are facilitating in the field, we'll do our best to answer/return your call as soon as possible.

**\*\*Leaving a clear text message (SMS not Whatsapp) would be the preferred way to get in touch with us during the morning.\*\***

**Linda Devine: 060 856 1872**

**Malcolm Devine: 072 746 7019**

### Important Facilitation Concerns:

We are not qualified teachers, we are **learning facilitators**. WLC will not be registering as a pre-school due to the strict infrastructure and curricular regulations. At present there are no regulations for a completely outdoor Nature Preschool as exists internationally. For this reason we are called a *Learning Cooperative*.

We do not adhere to current curricular requirements set out by the Department of Education, although we are well-read about them. We believe that the emergent curriculum and learner-led approach is far more beneficial to young children gaining a solid foundation in learning *how to learn*

rather than just being told what to learn. Literacy, maths and standard assessment skills are a part of our society and therefore a natural part of a child's learning environment. We are setting the foundation for a flexible and varied future in their education, we are not just getting the children 'grade 1 ready'. In South Africa *children are not legally required to be 'schooled' before the age of 7*, and therefore are not legally required to have curriculum or assessments thrust on them either.

## Policies & Protocols

### Child Safety Protocols

As an outdoor kindergarten, child safety is our most important consideration. Our safety protocols cover environmental, travel, activity and social aspects to ensure that the children feel safe and secure at all times. Because we will be in various natural environments and our goal is safe but free exploring, we are limited to *5-6 children max. per facilitator*.

We have clear safety protocols about the environment that we go into daily. All facilitators will be responsible for checking the space and having basic safety skills. We will also have clear safety protocols regarding transporting the children if such a need arises due to the location of a learning space away from the Duiwerivier site.

An important part of natural learning is manageable risk-taking. Our facilitators will use best practice in all activities to both hold the space and nurture safety awareness in the children. The children will learn real-life practical skills like tool, craft and fire making. In all these scenarios, clear safety protocols will be followed.

### First Aid Protocols

All facilitators will have basic first aid knowledge for any emergencies that may arise out in the field. We will also have a working knowledge of snake identification and snake-bite procedures. A first aid kit will be carried in the field at all times.

We are also interested in the use of natural and herbal remedies, and understand the concerns of having your children in the South African bush. We will have natural tick-repellent strategies in place, and will include learning about different plants and their repellent and healing uses in our practical learning process.

### Fees & Payment Policies

While we endeavour to make our kindergarten as affordable as possible, we do need to cover a high adult-to-child facilitation ratio. We also endeavour to bring quality care, learning and resources to the learning experience.

We are committed to maintaining financial integrity and success through carefully monitoring the flow of money and our financial agreements. Our budget is very lean to keep fees as low as possible.

A non-refundable **registration fee of R150** is required on enrolment to confirm your child's space in our programme. Please note that spaces are limited!

**Our fees for the 2019 pilot phase are R1400 per child/ month.**

Our Fees include:

- Daily facilitation and learning
- A yearly Journal for each child
- All craft, project and quality stationary resources

- Entrance into a SANParks Nature Reserve
- A healthy, wholefoods, fresh lunch provided everyday

\*Fees must be paid by EFT by the **1st of every month**.\*

**\*We are able to work out flexi part-time fee structures also\***

**Banking details:**

MISS L. SCHMIDT  
CAPITEC BANK  
ACC NO: 1359127591  
SAVINGS ACCOUNT  
BR CODE: 470010

**Cancellation and Late Payment Policies**

Due to our financial responsibilities, we require a term's notice of cancellation.

- In the event that a family withdraws enrolment before the end of the term, fees through the current payment period will be retained and payable.
- Should your payment extend 20 days past due date, WLC reserves the right to ask that your child not attend further until payment is made.
- Payment must be made, or a plan to pay must be worked out, within 30 days of payment due date or WLC reserves the right to "de-enrol" your child from the program.

**Gratitude**

Thanks for reading! We know that was a lot and we appreciate you taking the time. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. We are so excited to begin this adventure with you: the pilot phase of a pioneer immersive Nature Kindergarten in South Africa!

Now the fun part - see you in the forest!

## Further Reading & References

There is so much academic and social research proving the benefits and importance of nature pedagogy. Instead of listing pages of specific articles and reports, we have listed the general resource websites and international associations with whom this research can be found. We have also included a few international multicultural examples of forest kindergartens in practice.

### Resource Websites:

- <http://www.childrenandnature.org>  
and for research: <http://www.childrenandnature.org/learn/research/>
- <https://www.naturepedagogy.com>
- <http://naturalstart.org> and for research: <http://naturalstart.org/research>
- <http://creativestartlearning.co.uk/resources/international-forest-schools-and-nature-kindergartens/>

### International Associations for Nature/ Forest Kindergartens:

- Austria: <http://www.waldkindergaerten.at>
- America: <http://forestkindergartenassociation.org/>
- Britain: <http://www.forestschoolassociation.org/> and <http://www.forestkindergartenassociation.co.uk/index.php>
- Canada: <http://childnature.ca/>
- Czech Republic: <http://www.lesnims.cz/>
- Denmark: [www.skovforeningen.dk](http://www.skovforeningen.dk) and [www.skovforeningen.dk/site/skovboernehaver/](http://www.skovforeningen.dk/site/skovboernehaver/)
- Germany: <http://bvnw.de/> and <http://www.sdw.de/waldpaedagogik/index.html>
- Sweden: <http://www.friluftsframjandet.se> specifically: <http://www.friluftsframjandet.se/detta-gor-vi/forskolor-och-skolor/i-ur-och-skur/>

### International Nature School examples:

- USA: <http://featherandfrond.org/about> and <https://botanicgardens.uw.edu/education/youth-family/fiddleheads-forest-school/>
- Germany: <http://www.waki-ilmmuenster.de/>
- Spain: <https://bosquescuola.com/>
- UK: <http://www.outdoorkindergarten.org/> and <http://www.eastwood.wandsworth.sch.uk/forest-school/>
- Denmark: [www.skovbh.dk](http://www.skovbh.dk) and <http://farumskovboernehave.dk> and [www.ringstedskovborn.dk](http://www.ringstedskovborn.dk)
- Sweden: [www.skabersjoskolan.se](http://www.skabersjoskolan.se)
- New Zealand: <http://www.playandlearn.net.nz/long-bay-nature-kindergarten>
- Japan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNI5p1M96xE>