

The great outdoors

Kindilan manager Rebecca Fox enjoys the nature at Kindilan.
Photos by Chris McCormack



Kindilan manager Rebecca Fox ascends the rock climbing tower.

By Debbie Neilson-Hunter

Kindilan, the name behind Redland Bay's outdoor education and conference centre, means 'joyful place'. For thousands of school children, it has lived up to its indigenous name – thanks largely to the foresight of its manager, Rebecca Fox.

Although Kindilan turned 60 this year, its future looked glum when Rebecca took the helm in 1999.

Originally built as the state training centre for Girl Guides Queensland (who still own and use it), she said it was run down and making a huge loss.

"It was a blank canvas when I arrived. My office was a tiny room with a busted lead pencil and a pen that wouldn't work."

Encompassing 220 acres of tranquil bushland with a purpose-built lake and bordering the Days Road-Bayview Conservation area, Rebecca said she saw it as a "magic" site with great potential.

She quickly put her business plan to work employing professional chefs in the kitchens and installing wi-fi and data projectors in two conference halls. She raised accommodation standards, increasing the number of beds from 176 to 191. Staff numbers have gone from just one to 35 "all with a minimum Cert IV in Outdoor Recreation".

Open year-round and equipped with a high and low ropes course, 12-metre climbing wall, 18m abseiling wall and an 80m flying fox, today Kindilan rates among the top 30 school camps in Australia, hosts 14,000 guests a year, 9000 of whom are engaged in an outdoor adventure program. Its school holiday programs, for prep to year 12, are in high demand.

"Up until two years ago the adventure program only catered for children eight years

and up," Rebecca said.

Going back to work shortly after having her own two children – Mardi, now 5 and Max, 7 – she said she was shocked to discover how under resourced the Redlands was in outdoor holiday activities for little ones; school vacation care and long day care being her only options.

So she teamed up with her project officer Kiera Field, who had childcare qualifications, to devise a Kindilan program for children 4-7 years that successfully met accreditation requirements for the Child Care Rebate.

Rebecca said the first Goanna Gang holiday program ran with 10 kids – "Max and some of his school friends" – in December 2010.

Word quickly spread and the popular program now caters for up to 40 children over three days. Activities are play-based and range from rafting, climbing (with special grommet harnesses), arts and crafts, damper-making to 'catching things in the creek'.

One of only two nationally accredited campsites in Queensland, Kindilan also operates specialist regional programs, like the Grandparents Respite Program for carers in Bundaberg, Yeppoon, Townsville and Cairns and is used as a training and events venue.

Last year Rebecca also became one of 12 lead trainers for the International Campsite Directors Course.

But the 42-year-old's proudest moment came last month when she received the Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation's award for Outstanding Achievement by an individual.

Nominated by her staff, she said it was an honour she was humbled by.

"This is normally something you get in your 60s after giving your life to it... I am in amazing company."