

## RiotACT on-line article 5 September 2019- DOWNER FROG SETTLE IN TO NEW HOME

The re-development of the old Downer primary school site is in full swing, with stage one almost completed and stage two about to commence. While there has been significant consultation on how the site would be developed to meet the needs of a changing community, it has also seen changes to the landscape on the site and some loss of habitat.

For a group of Downer residents, losing the old school pond containing spotted marsh frogs, Peron's tree frogs and eastern froglets due to challenges with building sitings and the location of a basement car park has been deeply felt.

Since the pond's establishment in the early 1960s, the frogs have provided a welcome spring chorus for the residents of Downer for over 70 years. The old school pond provided precious and rare refuge for frogs, helping them to survive the millennium drought and the many changes we have seen to our city in the past decades.

Given no suitable location in the new development existed to retain this precious wildlife, the Downer community has been working to ensure these frogs would be given a safe new home.

Over the last few weeks, a project has been mobilised to create new pond habitat adjacent to the site. Last weekend the project culminated in the relocation of about 200 tadpoles to a new home, not far from their original location.

This is an example of the community working together to respond to an issue and create a new environmental asset in a local neighbourhood. Local resident Fiona Dickson and the Downer Community Association (Miles Boak, Sam Hussey-Smith, Greg Mulvaney, Amit Barkay, Sue Dyer, Jacqui Pinkava and Stephen Sedgwick) worked together to make it all happen. Frog Watch, a local environment organisation advised on how to undertake the project, with Rod Petich and Emma Burns advising on how to undertake this delicate operation given the sensitivity of frogs. Community Housing Canberra (CHC), the affordable housing organising redeveloping the site provided the funds to construct a new pond and surrounding native garden.

Finally, local residents brought their volunteer labour to make it all happen. Lots of residents attended on the relocation date, with ACT Wildlife volunteers providing expert assistance, lunchtime music provided by local rock star Pete Lyon, and staff from the Downer Village Vet getting involved in the event.

Plenty of frog life was found on the day, with adult frogs and tadpoles all carefully relocated to the new site.

Frogs reflect local biodiversity and are often seen as a good indicator of environmental health, given their sensitive skin responds quickly to environmental changes. At a time where we are seeing redevelopment in our local suburbs, it is important that we work together to identify local biodiversity in these sites and protect what we can. As residents of the bush capital, this is an example of a community coming together to support local ecosystems.

*Rebecca Vassarotti is a board member of Community Housing Canberra.*