



FIFTEEN TREES AND THE VILLA ORCHARD

Fifteen Trees and St Francis Xavier Primary School Ballarat East: Building thriving relationships blossomed through environmental change.

Recently, we had the honour of interviewing Colleen Filippa, founder of Fifteen Trees, an organisation that plants trees to reduce companies' and individuals' carbon footprint. Colleen, based in Brown Hill, started Fifteen Trees nine years ago and, within these short nine years, the company has spread Australia-wide and even to New Zealand.

Colleen, an environmentally-minded educator with a passion for creating long-lasting environmental change, first had the idea for Fifteen Trees as she dreamt of improving her local environment. In the early days of Fifteen Trees, Colleen set about to find community groups and schools to help her plant and care for the trees. With her own sons having attended St Francis Xavier Primary School, it was one of the early schools with which she connected.

Over the past nine years, with the help of Fifteen Trees, our school has planted over 2000 native trees in our picturesque 20-acre setting. Part of our grounds was previously used for farming and the local environment was cleared. As part of our 'Environmental Education' program, we discovered the importance of biodiversity and wished to revegetate this land. With the help of Colleen and local businesses, we have been able to successfully do just that.

Last year, Fifteen Trees helped us to continue to follow our dreams and we created 'The Villa Orchard'. Brian and Maree of Harrison Funerals donated forty mature fruits trees which we planted on the edge of our 'Perma Patch' to create a beautiful orchard.

Together, Fifteen Trees and St Francis Xavier Primary School have created a carbon-neutral natural wonderland where biodiversity flourishes. Long lasting, thriving relationships and environmental change like this are only possible when someone brave enough follows their dreams. We thank Colleen for being such a great role-model by following her dreams. We also thank those who already act for environmental change and encourage local businesses to reach out to Colleen and help us revegetate our local schools, parks, creeks and homes, one tree at a time!

*Written by Bridie, Lucy, Olivia, Sophia (students) and Sarah Page (teacher), St Francis Xavier Primary School
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Amelia and Isabella Year Six Environmental Education Captains 2016 - leading the 'Villa Tree Planting Day' activities in 'The Paddock' – Planting with Fifteen Trees and J. G. Gardner Homes. Photographer: Sarah Page