



Wellbeing through Nature

PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Sally Holliday

CEO

Karissa Preuss



Landcare
ACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Ngunawal people, the traditional custodians of the ACT and region. We recognise and respect their continuing connection to land, waters and community, and ongoing leadership in caring for Ngunawal country.



ABOUT

The Wellbeing through Nature program is an initiative of Landcare ACT, which builds on the knowledge of long-term Landcarers that caring for the environment is also good for their own health and sense of wellness.

Funding for a 2 year pilot project has been provided by ACT Government through the 2021 *Health Promotions* Grants program.

The Wellbeing through Nature program is underpinned by a large and growing body of international research showing that actively and purposefully connecting with nature is good for mental health, wellbeing, and social connectedness.

The program has three key objectives:

- Improve the mental health of individuals living with complex mental health challenges
- Improve the social connectedness of individuals from priority populations; and
- Expand the reach of nature-based activities, to improve community mental health and social connectedness, beyond the life of the program.

The first year of the program has been completed (with some delays due to COVID), and program funding will cease at the end of 2023.



**OVER 50 EVENTS
WERE HELD DURING
THE FIRST 12
MONTHS OF THE
PROGRAM**

WHERE WE ARE AT

The first phase of the pilot has focussed on developing and testing activities which engage our priority populations;

- young people,
- culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people,
- older people,
- Aboriginal people,
- people who identify as LGBTQIA+, and
- people with a lived experience of mental health challenges.

Activities are grounded in mindfulness and self-reflection with a deliberate emphasis on slowing down, activating the senses and consciously noticing your surroundings

Over 50 events were held during the first 12 months of the program.

Activities have included:



Guided nature walks and cultural walks



Propagation and planting workshops



Adventurous volunteering activities



"Froggy Fun" evenings and Nature Art activities



"I enjoyed doing something I wouldn't normally do, discovering new nature places in Canberra I'd never been to before"

"I loved learning about the local environment. Once something is brought to your attention you really begin to notice it in ways you never have previously"

"A great way to take gentle time for myself. I enjoyed all aspects of this opportunity - walking, learning, looking, seeing, smelling, listening and reflecting"

"Getting out in nature, feeling useful, keeping active, having fun. Because these things are all good for my mental and physical health. I feel much better after each activity than when I first arrived"

MID-POINT EVALUATION

EXTERNAL RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY THE
UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

RESEARCHERS FROM THE
UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA
HAVE EVALUATED FEEDBACK
FROM 168 PARTICIPANTS



CONNECTION TO NATURE

94% felt the program helped them
to connect to the local
environment

CONNECTION TO OTHERS

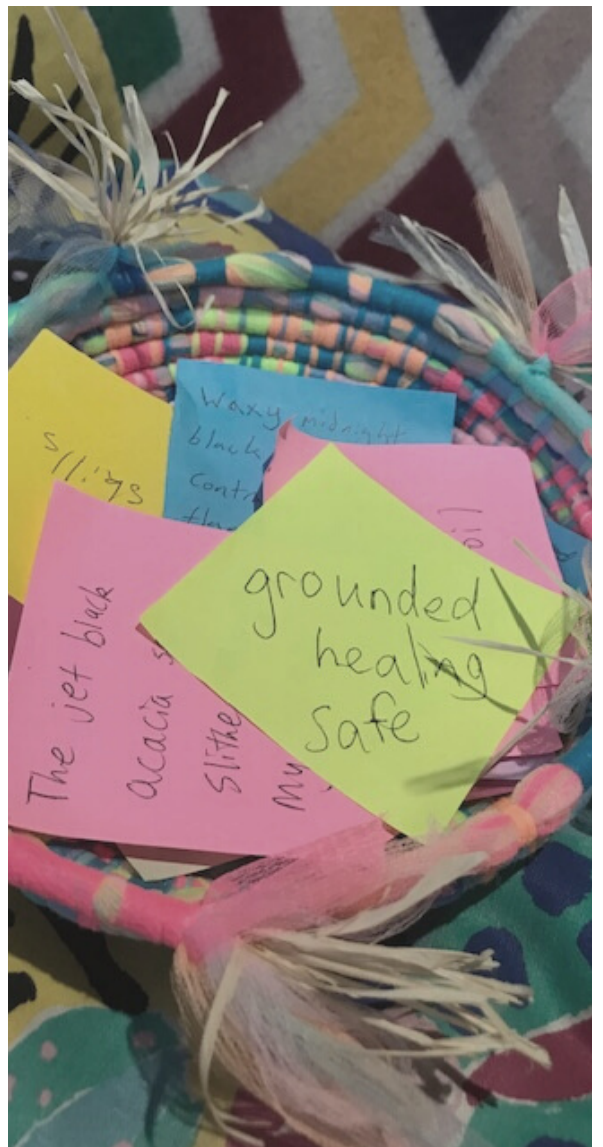
75% agreed that the program
helped them to feel more
connected to others

MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

91% felt that the program was
good for their mental health

WELLBEING BENEFITS

94% thought the program was
good for their overall
wellbeing



THIS YEAR

The focus for 2023 is on consolidating relationships with partners, offering selected events for target demographic groups, and integrating the program into routine Landcare volunteering, with an explicit and intentional focus on Wellbeing and Nature Connection.

Key activities for 2023 will include:

- Come and Try days with selected on-the-ground Landcare volunteering groups, aimed at supporting groups to support new attendees, and encourage the general public to engage with nature through active conservation activities
- Connect and Care package of resources and training for volunteer groups to begin incorporating a focus on nature connection and personal wellbeing at “regular” events run by existing groups
- Continued “Pride Grows” event series with LGBTQIA+ people
- Targeted Youth activities such as UMDR Adventurous Volunteer partnership
- Exploring a partnership with U3A to engage older persons
- Continuing to develop relationships with First Nations people



YOUNG PEOPLE

UPPER MURRUMBIDGEE DEMONSTRATION REACH (UMDR) ADVENTUROUS VOLUNTEERS



Landcare ACT brought eight university students together to form a UMDR Youth Paddling Crew. Before adventurous volunteers undertake conservation activities along the river corridor (such as weed mapping and erosion control), they first need to complete a rigorous 2-day white water skills course – designed to equip paddlers with the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully plan their journey, assess risks, avoid hazards and keep the crew safe as they navigate their way downriver.

On day one, facilitator and experienced paddler Ian Royds put the crew through their paces including paddling techniques and emergency rescue procedures. On day two, the crew undertook a river trip from Point Hut Crossing to Pine Island. Though the experience was demanding (mentally and physically) the experience provided crew members with further opportunities to develop their leadership and communication skills whilst working together as a team.

YOUNG PEOPLE

YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL (YAC)

Landcare ACT consulted the ACT Youth Advisory Council (YAC) about engaging young people in environmental volunteering. The YAC team decided to spend a day doing adventurous volunteering at Outward Bound. This team building day was the first time the group had spent time together in physical space after more than two years due to covid impacts.

The day incorporated a mix of conservation, wellbeing and adventure-based activities. After learning about woody weeds and removing invasive elm saplings, the team replenished their energy over a barbeque lunch, before tackling the high ropes course. This experience encouraged each YAC member to challenge themselves and build personal resilience, whilst fostering an atmosphere of camaraderie, communication and teamwork.



WELLBEING THROUGH NATURE PROGRAM

"The day at Outward Bound was a really great way for myself and my peers to contribute to our local environment, strengthen our social connections and improve our wellbeing. Connecting to nature, helping nature to thrive, being mindful of my surroundings and contributing to my local environment alongside my peers has really helped build my wellbeing and improve my ability to be mindful and present.

We know many young people want to make a difference to the environment but don't know where to start. We also know wellbeing and mental health is a key issue for young people. The Wellbeing through Nature program addresses both issues at the same time. I am really looking forward to the next Wellbeing through Nature event"

- Nicholas Villiers, Co-chair, ACT Youth Advisory Council



OLDER PEOPLE

UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE (U3A)



Landcare ACT has partnered with Ginninderra Catchment Group (GCG) to develop a conservation-based course especially for older persons. Run through the University of the Third Age (U3A), *Canberra Ecosystems: Cultivating Habitat for Wildlife* is designed to equip participants with knowledge of Canberra's ecological systems, particularly native plant species and their significance in habitat restoration.

The six week course combines theory-based lectures (delivered by ecologist Rainer Rehwinkel) and hands-on propagation sessions in the GCG nursery. Participants will also visit Landcare sites to observe rehabilitation of the landscape as a means of applying their learning to their own gardens.

INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS



Wellbeing through Nature brings together volunteers from different ages, backgrounds and points of view - which is a catalyst for intergenerational learning and knowledge sharing. Conservation activities are designed to be inclusive of all-skill levels - ensuring everyone has something to contribute. Working in pairs or small groups leads to conversation and camaraderie around a planting hole. Older group convenors are teaching new faces about the patch they look after, whilst students bring energy, enthusiasm and ideas to conservation projects.

CULTURAL AWARENESS

MT TAYLOR CULTURAL INTERPRETIVE WALK AND WORKING PARTY



"Getting out onto country is a healing process both physically and mentally. Caring for country is vital for our wellbeing."

- Wally Bell, Ngunawal Elder and Landcare ACT Board Member

"I learned so much more about First Nations people and cultures. It was a privilege to be on a walk with Wally Bell, whose welcome to Country was a very spiritual and uplifting experience."

- participant feedback

“The benefits of participating in Landcare events are priceless. Being amongst like minded people and caring for our country by following the tradition of our First Australians is very rewarding and has definitely increased my sense of belonging and wellbeing.

Participating in Wellbeing through Nature events has given me a much better appreciation of the environment we live in. I realise I am connected to this country and it's up to me as a member of the community to look after it. I have joined a local Landcare group and participated in the planting. I now enjoy watching it grow. I also intend to join a Landcare group closer to home.

Thank you for providing these wonderful opportunities.”

- Mira, program participant



LGBTQIA+

"PRIDE GROWS" SERIES



Landcare ACT has worked closely with Meridian ACT, ACT NRM and Greening Australia to establish Pride Grows - LGBTQIA+ events for the whole community - with the view to cultivating a safe, supporting space for people to come together and care for nature. Participants are given opportunities to take part in different stages of conservation, seeing plants make the journey from propagation to planting.

(CALD) CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE

COMPANION HOUSE

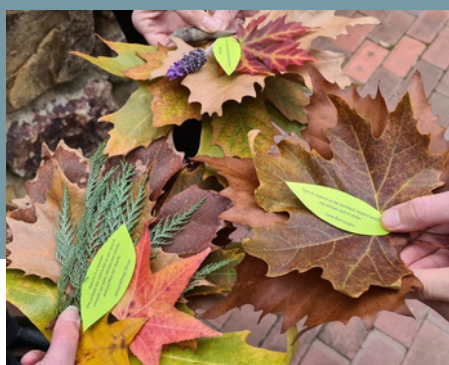


In seeking to engage CALD communities in nature-connection activities, Landcare ACT partnered with Companion House - a community based organisation assisting survivors of torture and trauma. Based in Cook, Companion House is located very close to the Mt Painter Nature Reserve.

A guided walk, led by Friends of Mt Painter Convenor Sarah Hnatiuk, was thoughtfully designed to engage clients of Companion House, specifically those living with chronic pain, alongside members of the broader community. One participant reported having a deeply moving and life-affirming conversation with another participant from Companion House, who shared his journey in seeking asylum in Australia whilst overlooking the expansive view.

NATURE CONNECTION FOR MENTAL HEALTH

SELF-REFLECTION IN NATURE - SHORT COURSE



A six week series entitled *Self-reflection in Nature* invited participants with lived experience of mental ill-health to come together in a safe and supported environment to explore the transformational healing potential of nature.

Participants met at a different location each week, and utilised the *Tree of Life* narrative therapy process to document and share their insights and learnings with one another. This series was run in partnership with Wellways' *Step Up Step Down* program for young people needing support between hospital and home.



"I am going through a very tough time (grief, trauma, depression) and this was the most positive and uplifting experience I've had in a while. It really helped me explore new ways to de-stress by tuning into nature.

It makes me feel better in myself, and more able to face the challenges that life throws at me. (The program) helped with my feelings of gratitude towards nature, inspired me to spend more time in nature and helped to show me that hope is not lost it just needs to be worked for"

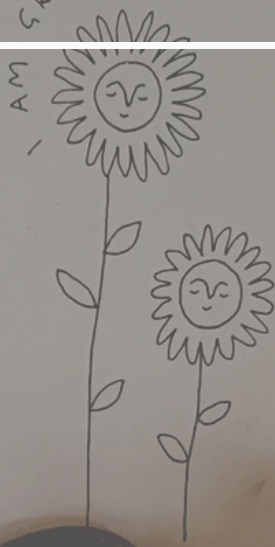
- Samantha, course participant

WELLBEING THROUGH NATURE PROGRAM



I AM CONNECTED TO
THE WORLD AROUND ME

I AM GROUNDED



I LOVE PLAN
NEW



I
AM
READY
TO
BLOOM

QUESTIONS?

APRIL 2023

ceo@landcareact.org.au

wellbeing@landcareact.org.au