



Wellbeing through Nature

PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Sally Holliday

CEO

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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 the 2 year pilot project was provided by ACT Government through the 2021 *Health Promotions Grants* program.

The Wellbeing through Nature program was 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 had 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.



**OVER 100 EVENTS
WERE HELD DURING
THE TWO YEARS OF
THE PROGRAM**

KEY ACTIVITIES

Activities were designed to engage 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 100 events were held during the two years 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



- [Reflections in Nature Series](#) - a 6 week series for participants with lived experience of mental ill-health and other chronic health conditions
- [Guided Walks](#) - Mindful Meanders, Frogs by Night, cultural walks exploring Ngannawal connections to Country with elder Wally Bell.
- [Come and Try Days](#) - a chance to try Landcare and learn about local groups
- [Adventurous Volunteering for Youth](#) - environmental volunteering for young people with an emphasis on physical activity and teamwork
- [Propagation Workshops](#)
- [Habitat Restoration Plantings](#) - rewilding urban areas, rural dams project
- [Therapeutic Horticulture Activities](#) - sustainable foraged floristry, flower pressing
- [Pride Grows](#) - LGBTQIA+ community
- [Deepen Your Nature Connection Course](#) - a 5 week series exploring the myriad benefits and applications of nature connection with a view to cultivating a personal practice and facilitating opportunities for others
- [Shared calendar](#) - hosted by Landcare ACT. All the Landcare and Environmental Volunteering opportunities from across the region in one place. Easy to navigate and filter according to preferences.
- [Canberra Festival of Nature](#) - celebrating Canberra's natural beauty for the duration of spring

OUTCOMES

The Wellbeing through Nature program has achieved its objectives of:

Improving mental health of 300 individuals with complex mental health
Although we did not undertake preliminary screening for the program based on pre-existing conditions, many attendees have reported experiencing social anxiety, depression and PTSD prior to taking part in the program.

The Wellbeing through Nature Program has identified and removed structural barriers to engagement in Landcare for focus population groups. For example, Canberra's LGBTQIA+ community has been supported by Landcare ACT in partnership with Meridian ACT, Diversity ACT and ACT NRM to form "Pride Grows." This group has been very popular, with over 50 attendees at annual planting events.

Repeat attendance has been high - a core group has formed. Some participants have attended over 20 activities across the 2 year period, stating that nature connection has been a significant part of their recovery journey and ongoing wellness practice.



OUTCOMES

Landcare ACT has improved the social connectedness of at least 500 individuals. With over 1000 attendances at key events, over 600 of these can be attributed to unique attendees

101 CORE ACTIVITIES

1304 ATTENDANCES

- 50** Guided Walks
- 38** Conservation Activities
- 8** Therapeutic Horticulture Activities
- 5** Deepening Nature Connection Sessions



OUTCOMES

Landcare ACT has increased the capacity of existing conservation care groups to support mental health and social connectedness.

Early on in the pilot program, Landcare ACT held a community consultation/think tank session entitled “Cultivating a Community of Belonging” involving catchment groups, member groups, program participants and community partners. Together, we identified barriers to engagement in environmental volunteering and how we could collaborate to remove these. Glenn Flanagan from Companion House facilitated a focus discussion around the experiences of new migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. We also discussed barriers for the LGBTQIA+ community.

During the ACT Environmental Volunteers Conference, Landcare ACT incorporated a panel discussion on Nature Connection, and a workshop on attracting, engaging/supporting, and retaining volunteers. Landcare ACT also provided assistance to Landcare Groups to hold Come and Try Days. These events were well attended and resulted in new memberships.

“Friends of Aranda Bushland (FoAB) were very pleased to host a Come and Try day. We did a variety of activities including monitoring vegetation, and concluded with an interpretative walk. It was enjoyed by the participants, several subsequently joined FoAB. We look forward to meeting them again at our regular work parties.”

- Ian Falconer, Convenor Friends of Aranda Bushland

After participating in the Wellbeing program, volunteers report joining Landcare groups and other associated groups such as ACT for Bees, Greening Australia and citizen science programs like Canberra Nature Map.



PARTNERSHIPS

We have collaborated with program partners focussed on the provision of mental health support, such as Wellways' Step Up Step Down program, and Headspace's Youth Advisory Groups.

Partnerships - Advocacy, Health and Community Services

- Wellways
- Communities at Work
- Woden Community Services
- ACT Mental Health Consumer Network
- Diversity ACT
- Meridian ACT
- Headspace
- Companion House
- Multicultural Hub
- Volunteering ACT
- ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS)
- ACT Youth Advisory Council
- Canberra Interfaith Forum
- University of the 3rd Age (U3A)
- Suburban Land Agency - Mingle Whitlam and Mingle Taylor

Partnerships - Environment-based

- Catchment Groups - Ginninderra Catchment Group, Molonglo Conservation Group, Southern ACT Catchment Group
- Frogwatch
- Waterwatch
- Friends of Grasslands (FOG)
- ACT Parks and Conservation Service
- ACT Natural Resource Management - Connecting Nature, Connecting People Project
- ACT for Bees and other Pollinators
- ACT Urban Woodland Rescue
- Woodlands and Wetlands Trust
- Ginninderry Conservation Trust
- Australian National Botanic Gardens
- National Arboretum
- Nature Fix
- Nature Art Lab
- Upper Murrumbidgee Demonstration Reach (UMDR)
- Canberra First Garden Club
- Australian National University Landscaping Team
- Greening Australia

END-POINT EVALUATION

EXTERNAL RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY THE
UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

RESEARCHERS FROM THE
UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA HAVE
EVALUATED FEEDBACK FROM 61
PARTICIPANTS WHO ATTENDED A
TOTAL OF 191 SESSIONS



UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA

MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

90% reported that the program
was good for their mental
health

QUALITY OF LIFE

88% agreed that the program
improved their quality of life

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

85% felt that the program helped
them feel more connected
to others



“Fresh air, exercise, enjoying nature, learning about places in Canberra I’d never been to before, learning new ways to de-stress by tuning into nature, learning to appreciate nature and the need to protect it, feeling much better after each activity than when I arrived, meeting new people of varied backgrounds. And, last but definitely not least, learned so much more about First Nations people and cultures, in particular, the Ngunnawal people”

NATURE CONNECTION

WITH OUR PARTNERS NATUREFIX

Nature Connection is not simply contact with nature. Rather it is the nature of the contact that really counts. Our emotional and psychological connections with nature are key. Connecting with nature in an embodied, mindful, present way is part of a chain reaction.

With this in mind, the Wellbeing through Nature Program has intentionally fostered curious, embodied inquiry. Guided walks have been all about slowing down the pace in which we encounter our surroundings, activating the senses, giving mindful attention to the little details through soft focus, and amplifying moments of awe and wonder by sharing our experiences with others. Participants have also been encouraged to look to nature for wisdom and insight, for example relating one's own life journey to the resilience of an elder tree.

Since personal and planetary health are interlinked and mutually dependent, we can't take people out of the equation - much as humans may be the cause of significant environmental problems, they must also be part of the solution. Time in nature and traditional education alone are not enough to catalyse change. Rather appreciation of nature is linked to greater awareness and in turn, action!

A measurable construct defined as...

- ...A consistent **state of awareness** that unites symbiotic **thoughts, feelings, and direct experiences** into traits supporting everyday actions that nurture and respect humanities interrelatedness with the rest of nature.

Simply - how one thinks about, feels and experiences the natural world



Landcare ACT

naturefix

DEEPEN YOUR NATURE CONNECTION

*It's not just **contact** with **nature**
It's the **nature** of the **contact***

REFLECTIONS



Before the onset of the Wellbeing through Nature program, anecdotal reports from Landcarers indicated that acts of environmental stewardship improved their personal wellbeing. Indeed, this was the seed idea driving the Wellbeing through Nature program. As it turns out, the reverse flow is also true.

Extensive global research (particularly metastudies - studies of studies) demonstrate that on their own, traditional environmental education or simply spending time in nature is not enough to promote pro-conservation or sustainability oriented behaviours. Instead, supporting Nature Connection is one of the most significant actions to increase these behaviours.

When faced with large-scale challenges like climate change and species loss, working alongside others toward a shared purpose is a powerful antidote to eco-grief, overwhelm and loneliness, shifting us out of paralysis and into collective action. Communing with others in nature has been a key part of this program.

Existing environmental volunteers and conservationists are at real risk of burnout. It's necessary to carve out time and space to recharge our personal energy, not just give tirelessly to the cause. Landcare ACT has facilitated opportunities for Landcarers to nourish their own wellbeing through nature-appreciation workshops such as nature journaling with Nature Art Lab where the focus was less about "doing" and more about being, noticing and appreciating.

NEXT STEPS



Over this two year program, the Landcare ACT team and extended Environmental Conservation Community have built up a deeper collective understanding of the value of nature connection for personal and planetary health.

As an organisation we are now better equipped to share this with on-ground volunteers, and provide the skills and training needed to embed these principles across the network.

Landcare ACT will continue to offer opportunities for nature engagement and connection.

- Landcare ACT has received two small Environment grants to support roving Landcare groups, Pride Grows (for LGBTQIA+ community and allies and a group especially for young people aged 15 - 30 years.
- We have secured an ACTEW AGL community grant to support women to engage in nature connection and environmental volunteering.
- We will continue to promote our shared calendar to support the community to engage with nature connection and conservation activities
- We will continue to facilitate monthly guided nature connection walks

THANK YOU



ACT
Government

Our thanks to the ACT Government for making this project possible



**UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA**

Thank you to Dr James Neill and Masters student Hannah Black at the University of Canberra

wellways

mental health | disability | rehabilitation

Thank you to our primary program partner Wellways, particularly Regional Manager Lachlan Atyeo and the team



Special thanks to Ngunawal elder Wally Bell for his guidance and support



Finally, thank you to our partners, and to everyone who attended a Wellbeing through Nature event.



DETAILED ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Date	Location	Activity
02/02/2022	Jerrabomberra Wetlands	Guided walk for World Wetlands Day
12/02/2022	Australian National Botanic Gardens	Guided walk: Curious Minds
18/02/2022	Lyneham Loop	Guided walk/Conservation Activity
03/03/2022	Self Reflection through Nature - National Arboretum	Guided walk (6 wk series)
09/03/2022	The Pinnacle	Guided walk - Parks Week
10/03/2022	Self Reflection through Nature - English Garden Yarralumla	Guided walk (6 wk series)
13/03/2022	Clean Up Australia Day - Yerrabi Pond	Conservation activity
17/03/2022	Self Reflection through Nature - Leafy Ainslie	Guided walk (6 wk series)
20/03/2022	Rewilding Emu Creek	Conservation activity
24/03/2022	Self Reflection through Nature - Gungahlin Hill Reserve	Guided walk (6 wk series)
27/03/2022	Clean Up Australia Day - Lake Ginninderra	Conservation activity
31/02/2022	Self Reflection through Nature - Mulligans Flat	Guided walk (6 wk series)
01/03/2022	My Creative Nature - Lake Ginninderra	Guided walk
05/04/2022	Mulligans Flat with Mark Butz	Guided walk
07/03/2022	Self Reflection through Nature - Botanic Gardens	Guided walk (6 wk series)
18/05/2022	Guided Walk - Fetherston Gardens	Guided walk
20/05/2022	Comms@Work Staff/Volunteer Walk - Fetherston Gardens	Guided walk
26/05/2022	Mt Painter	Guided walk
09/06/2022	CASP walk with ACTCOSS + Wally Bell	Guided walk
11/06/2022	Bluetts Block AM Session	Guided walk
11/06/2022	Bluetts Block PM Session	Guided walk
18/06/2022	Working Party Namadgi Visitors Centre	Conservation activity
03/07/2022	Wildflower Restoration Planting - Diddams Close	Conservation activity
20/07/2022	Guided Walk - Mulanggari Grasslands	Guided walk
23/07/2022	Guided Walk - Botanic Gardens	Guided walk
07/08/2022	Dam Restoration Planting - Top Naas	Conservation activity

DETAILED ACTIVITY SUMMARY CONT.

Date	Location	Activity
13/08/2022	Bragg St Park Working Party	Conservation activity
17/08/2022	Dam Restoration Planting - Paddy's River	Conservation activity
04/09/2022	Cultural Walk and Working Party Mt Taylor	Conservation activity
07/09/2022	Froggy Facts for Bright Young Things	Guided walk
11/09/2022	Self Guide Wildflower Walk	Guided walk
14/09/2022	Froggy Fun for Everyone - Ginninderry CALD focus	Guided walk
16/09/2022	Wellways Youth/SUSD Walk - Botanic Gardens	Guided walk - youth focus
16/09/2022	Frogs by Night for Grown-Ups	Guided walk
23/09/2022	Dam Restoration Planting - Lambrigg	Conservation activity
24/09/2022	Propagation Activity St Marks MCG	Therapeutic Horticulture - Propagation
25/09/2022	Dam Restoration Planting - Booroomba Station	Conservation activity
28/09/2022	Dam Restoration Planting - Rocky Crossing	Conservation activity
01/10/2022	Youth Advisory Council Trip to Outward Bound	Conservation activity - YOUTH focus
10/10/2022	Guided Walk: Nature's Resilience - Gungahlin Hill	Guided walk
12/10/2022	Guided Walk: Wildflowers and Wellbeing - Farrer Ridge	Guided walk
12/10/2022	Froggy Fun For All - Farrer Ponds	Guided walk
14/10/2022	Guided Walk: New Beginnings - Fetherston Gardens	Guided walk
17/10/2022	Guided Walk: Nature through the Senses - The English Garden	Guided walk
05/11/2022	Wellbeing Walk: SouthFest - Mt Taylor (Comms@Work)	Guided walk
19/11/2022	Propagation Day - Greening Australia (LGBTQIA+)	Therapeutic Horticulture - Propagation
27/11/2022	Build a Bee Hotel	Conservation activity/workshop
30/11/2022	Community Walk - WCS Women and Non-binary: Fetherston Gardens	Guided walk - Women and Non Binary focus
30/11/2022	Group Gardening Session: Environment, Meditation & Healing Garden	Conservation activity
04/12/2022	Rocky Crossing & Top Naas Dbl Dam Restoration Planting	Conservation activity
06/12/2022	Nature Journaling with NatureArt Lab (morning session)	Conservation activity
06/12/2022	Nature Journaling with NatureArt Lab (afternoon session)	Conservation activity
11/12/2022	Nature Connection Walk & Pine Needle Ornament Making, Yarralumla	Guided walk + workshop/therapeutic horticulture
05/02/2023	World Wetlands Day	Guided walk and info stall (public health campaign)

DETAILED ACTIVITY SUMMARY CONT.

Date	Location	Activity
10/02/2023	Seedling Thinning Party (Greening Australia)	Propagation - Therapeutic Horticulture
14/02/2023	Marion Griffin Planting	Planting - Therapeutic Horticulture - Interfaith
25-26/02/2023	UMDR White Water Skills Training	Conservation: Adventure Based - Youth Focused
22/03/2023	U3A Course Wk 1 - Theoretical Lecture with Rainer Rehwinkel	Ecology Intro Lecture - Rainer Rehwinkel OP Focus
29/03/2023	UMDR Youth Crew - Planning Session via Zoom	Conservation activity - YOUTH focus
02/04/2023	Come and Try Day w Friends of Aranda Bushland	Ecology Intro Lecture - Rainer Rehwinkel OP Focus
05/04/2023	U3A Course Wk 3 - Theoretical Lecture with Rainer Rehwinkel	Guided Walk - OP focus
19/04/2023	U3A Course Wk 2 - Rescheduled Propagation GCG Nursery	Propagation - Conservation - OP focus
22/04/2023	Autumnal Bouquet Workshop	Therapeutic Horticulture
26/04/2023	U3A Course Wk 4 - Guided Walk @ The Pinnacle	Guided walk
03/05/2023	U3A Course Wk 5 - Rescheduled Propagation GCG Nursery	Propagation - Conservation - OP focus
03/05/2023	U3A Course Wk 5 - Propagation GCG Nursery	Propagation - Conservation
10/05/2023	U3A Course Wk 6 - Guided Walk @ Gungahlin Hill	Guided walk
06/05/2023	Flower Press Workshop	Therapeutic Horticulture
13/05/2023	Pride Grows Planting Day - Ginninderry	Conservation activity
28/05/2023	Come and Try Day Oakey Hill	Conservation activity
04/06/2023	Guided Community Walk - Ginninderry to Shepherd's Lookout	Guided walk
15/07/2023	Connecting Nature: Connecting People Community Planting	Conservation activity
07/08/2023	Mindful Monday Meander - Fetherston Gardens	Guided walk
11/08/2023	Environmental Volunteers Conference	Conservation activity - site tours
16/08/2023	Platypus/Rakali Surveys	Conservation activity - monitoring
21/8/2023	Platypus/Rakali Surveys	Conservation activity - monitoring
24/8/2023	Platypus/Rakali Surveys	Conservation activity - monitoring
25/8/2023	Platypus/Rakali Surveys	Conservation activity - monitoring
28/8/2023	Platypus/Rakali Surveys	Conservation activity - monitoring
31/08/2023	Platypus/Rakali Surveys	Conservation activity - monitoring
02/09/2023	Deepening Nature Connection for Wellbeing - Grevillea Park	Therapeutic Horticulture

DETAILED ACTIVITY SUMMARY CONT.

Date	Location	Activity
04/09/2023	Mindful Monday Meander	Guided walk
04/09/2023	Platypus/Rakali Surveys	Conservation activity - monitoring
06/09/2023	Platypus/Rakali Surveys	Conservation activity - monitoring
09/09/2023	Community Day - Canberra Festival of Nature	Guided walk and nature connection activities
15/09/2023	Froggy Fun - Ginninderry (Family Friendly)	Guided walk
22/09/2023	Froggy Fun - Farrer Ponds	Guided walk
06/10/2023	Froggy Fun Up Late - Majura Pond (Adults)	Guided walk
09/10/2023	Mindful Monday Meander - STEP	Guided walk
13/10/2023	Froggy Fun - For Bright Young Things @ Vlley Ponds, Gungahlin	Guided walk
18/10/23	Deepening Nature Connection - Wk 1	Training
22/10/23	Deepening Nature Connection - Face to Face	Guided walk
25/10/23	Deepening Nature Connection - Wk 2	Training
26/10/23	Guided Community Walk - Taylor (Mingle)	Guided walk - Cald
27/10/23	Mental Health Month Walk on Campus - ANU Intrepid	Guided walk - Youth
1/11/2023	Deepening Nature Connection - Wk 3	Training
6/11/23	Mindful Monday Meander Bluetts Block	Guided walk
8/11/23	Deepening Nature Connection - Wk 4	Training
12/11/23	Deepening Nature Connection - Face to Face	Guided walk
15/11/23	Deepening Nature Connection - Wk 4	Training
26/11/23	Urambi Hills - Southfest	Guided walk
04/09/2023	Mindful Monday Meander	Guided walk
04/09/2023	Platypus/Rakali Surveys	Conservation activity - monitoring
06/09/2023	Platypus/Rakali Surveys	Conservation activity - monitoring
09/09/2023	Community Day - Canberra Festival of Nature	Guided walk and nature connection activities
15/09/2023	Froggy Fun - Ginninderry (Family Friendly)	Guided walk
22/09/2023	Froggy Fun - Farrer Ponds	Guided walk
06/10/2023	Froggy Fun Up Late - Majura Pond (Adults)	Guided walk
09/10/2023	Mindful Monday Meander - STEP	Guided walk

PUBLIC HEALTH CAMPAIGN

Date	Location	Activity
08/12/2022	Wellbeing Program Launch	Public Health Campaign
20/01/2022	Wellways Step Up Step Down - Adult	In service info session and taster for staff and clients
20/01/2022	Wellways Step Up Step Down - Youth	In service info session and taster for staff and clients
20/01/2022	Stride Safe Haven	Site visit, info session and taster for staff
14/04/2022	ACT Mental Health Consumer Network	In service info session/presentation
30/04/2022	Diversity ACT Autumn Garden Party	In service info session/presentation
12/05/2022	Info Session WCS	In service info session/presentation
21/06/2022	Youth ACT Coalition Sustainability Sub-Committee Meeting	Meeting/discussion
29/06/2022	Environment Exchange - Wellbeing Economy - Conservation Council	Presentation/panel discussion
02/08/2022	Cultivating a Community of Belonging - Diversity and Inclusion	Training for Landcarers
14/08/2022	Multicultural Expo - Resilience	In service info session/presentation
25/08/2022	ABC Radio Interview Drive with Anna Vidot - Anke Maria	Radio Interview - Public Health Campaign
28/08/2022	Interview with TIMBA for YouTube Channel	Interview - Public Health Campaign
04/09/2022	Radio interview 2CC Frogs by Night series	Interview - Public Health Campaign
12/09/2022	Meeting with ministerial advisors	Public Health Campaign
13/09/2022	Nature Connection for Merici Students	In service info session/presentation - YOUTH focus
13/10/2022	Talk - ANBG	Presentation/Talk/Public Health Campaign
06/11/2022	Env + Meditation and Healing Garden	Social Event - Public Health Campaign
16/11/2022	Wellbeing Filming Day	Public Health Campaign (guided walk as part of)
10/02/2023	Community Sport and Wellbeing Expo (Celebrate Gungahlin)	Public Health Campaign
15/02/2023	ANU Market Day	Public Health Campaign
06/06/2023	Presentation - Canberra First Garden Club	Presentation - Public Health Campaign [Older Persons Focus]
14/06/2023	Presentation to NLN	Presentation
20/06/2023	Presentation to Headspace Canberra YAG	Presentation - Youth Focus

PUBLIC HEALTH CAMPAIGN CONT.

Date	Location	Activity
10/08/2023	Marion Griffin Viewing of Work at National Archives	Presentation
12/08/2023	Environmental Volunteers Conference	Panel Discussions (Nature Connection and Volunteer Magnetism) - Public Health Campaign
12/11/23	Southfest Stall w SACTCG	Community Engagement/Health Campaign
	27 Activities pertaining to community outreach	
	Including presentations, attendance at community festivals, radio interviews etc	

