

Concept Document – Nature Play Week

There's something that we all know, on some level.

Some of us know it for a fact, some of us just know it in their gut. But we all know it:

Kids do better outside.

Physically, mentally, emotionally and socially; kids do better outside.

When children run and play in natural light and fresh air it is not just better for them; it is better for their families, their communities, their society, economy and planet.

But just because we all know it doesn't mean we all do it.

Some of us don't have the confidence. Some of us don't know where to start. Or how.

A lot of us think it is harder than it really is.

So all that's standing in the way of something that benefits everyone is a basic lack of ideas and information. That's easily fixed.

Part One:

Bring together the people who understand the importance of the child/nature connection... and those beginning to suspect.

Share ideas, swap stories, pool resources and join forces.

Stimulate connection and collaboration.

Imagine what we might do next, together.

In short, build a powerful network of change agents.

Part One is well underway: networks are springing up around the world and it is only a matter of time before some of them start linking up, in fact that's already happening... thanks to the efforts of a passionate few. Kids do better outside, change agents do better together.

Building the network is an on-going proposition for people with the patience to form deep and constructive relationships, people with an appetite of collaboration and an instinct for politics.

Which brings us to:

Part Two:

Refine and crystallise the wisdom of that community and share it with a wider audience. In other words, move the knowledge beyond the converted to embrace the convertible.

Showcase and celebrate the work already underway and the lessons learned.

Orchestrate different voices and perspectives into a clear and powerful chorus for change.

Connect the choir to a larger audience.

Part Two is still just an idea: the search for effective opportunities for public promotion and education, be they events, spaces, media or – more likely – a combination of all of the above.

Crafting and producing the public face (and voice) of the Children in Nature ‘movement’ is a task for those with a flair for presentation and communication, people who enjoy the pressure of specific projects and deadlines... the first of which is already known.

‘Active April’ is a State Government initiative, a month-long festival to promote ideas for a healthy outdoor lifestyle to the people of Victoria... and it’s looking for ideas to fill the first week of the festival.

So how about a Nature Play Week?

Nature Play Week can be:

- ❖ A forum for Nature Play leaders and new audiences and partners.
- ❖ A catalyst/launch pad for collaboration.
- ❖ A high-profile showcase of great work in the children-nature movement.
- ❖ Nature Play experiences for children and families.
- ❖ Joint publicity for partner organisations to highlight the wellbeing, community and environmental benefits of nature play, both to target groups and the general public.
- ❖ A powerful display to industry and government of the importance of Nature Play.
- ❖ An inspiring springboard for behaviour change.

A recent meeting with potential contributors to both Parts One and Two yielded these ideas:

Let's invite other interesting individuals/organisations/projects/initiatives:

(Bush) Kinders	Kids Art hubs
Bushwalking Victoria	Health promotion organisations
Environment Groups	Pre-service educators and trainee teachers
Melbourne Water	Residential Outdoor Schools Association
Melbourne's Child magazine	Schools
Municipal Association of Victoria	Scouts
Local councils	Selected 'Wisdom Workers'
Naturalist groups	Teacher networks
Outdoor education groups	The Gould League
Outdoors Victoria and members	Universities
People from the Home School movement	Victoria Walks
Playgroups	YMCA

Let's find/create tools and resources:

An interactive map/calendar of Who's Doing What, Where and When.

And let's fill 'Nature Play Week' with great ideas:

A 'nature spirit' character like Puck	Great Aussie Camp Out
A school's program	Hear the forest wake up. A pre=dawn adventure
Adult-free nature play spaces	Indigenous stories
An anti-adult who says things like 'Touch that! You don't know where it's been.'	Kid's Big Day Out
An evaluation app: personal commitments to Nature Play	Kids teaching kids (and adults)
Barefoot March (just before Active April!)	Make an installation in your local park, photograph it and upload
Bring nature inside 'Don't wipe your feet'	Mass public art piece
Cloud Appreciation Society photo competition: results in the cloud	Nature Play: every place, every time
Cloud spotting flashmobs	Nature Scavenger Hunt: how many species can you find and photograph in a week?
Discover play right where you are	Old world, new eyes
Dreamspace: Get Lost!	Outdoor art and science week
Dress up as your favourite animal/plant for the day	Outside meetings for BlueSky thinking
Empty houses, full parks	Nature play for all ages
Everybody out and connected	Primal movement workshops
Everywhere in nature is a playground	Reconnect adults with the chance to play again
Fed Sq as green space: one of many 'Pop-up parks'	Sand sculpture
Fire under the stars: a night of outdoor storytelling	Song writing competition: we give you the theme, you write and perform the song
Fundraiser: 'CEOs in Nature'	Stick puppets, make your own bio-degradable toys from what you find outside
	Totem poles

What would a NATURE PLAY WEEK look like?

A recent meeting of interested minds wondered how the week might actually play out; so, just to get the ball rolling they started building a calendar of possible events.

We offer it here as a thought starter, an exploration of What Might Be, not a documentation of What Must Be, so feel free to jump in with whatever additions, revisions, corrections or deletions spring to your mind. Enjoy!

3 week run-up	Start the conversation on-line: key issues, stories and questions Nature photography – clouds that look like plants and animals Stick Relay: Olympic Torch style relay through parks and gardens with a stick and celebs CEO nature sleep-out Indigenous storytelling in parks, a 'Welcome to Nature' launch event Teacher development days at Botanical Gardens Sand sculpture to a theme Find and create your own totem Pop-up parks					
	TUES 1	WED 2	THU 3	FRI 4	SAT 5	SUN 6
Early morning	Welcome Launch event	A day at Cranbourne Gardens	Barefoot March	The Bark Variations: tree spotting workshop	Mt Baw Baw Kids Adventure Festival Hot air balloon trips to see and record the finished sculpture from the air	Pre-dawn adventure: experience nature's wake up calls
Late morning	Guest speaker/s	Stare with your ears: a closed-eye rediscovery of nature smells, tastes and sounds		Cloud watching Flashmob		Adult-free play time Kid's Big Day Out
Early afternoon	Stick puppetry: make 'em, perform them.	Primal movement workshops	Creative Nature workshop: see like a bird, think like a snail	Bluesky meetings: thinking outside the office block, possibly with lunch		Adult play space, reconnect with your inner kid
Late afternoon	Fungi discovery workshop	Scavenger hunt: how many species can you find/record?		Natural Innovation: Earth, Mother of invention	Mud pie cook-off	
Evening	Project Wildthing Film screening at Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne	Stargazing	Fireside storytelling	Sky sculpture building on the beach	Party animals: dress up as your favourite creature	
-Outdoor playgroups and mother's groups in the park (Play group Australia and Maternal & Child Nurses) -Discover your local park (local councils/ Parks Victoria/botanic gardens) -50 things to do before you're 18- climbing trees, building a cubby, sleeping under the stars..... - Doctors prescribing 'green time' or 'nature time' as a way to grow healthy, happy kids and as a way to keep mums and dads calm!						

Key messages and concepts

<p>WHY Nature Play?</p> <p>Kids do better outside. We are a country of outdoor people. It's your true nature. Find out who you are. You grew up outside. What happened? Can you think outside the box if you're in one? Are we all left to our own devices? We care for what we connect with. Zombies come alive!</p>	<p>WHAT is Nature Play?</p> <p>Life on the outside. Life on Earth. Time to feel the grass between your toes. Again. Unstructured joy: Everybody gets play. Nobody has to lose. Unadulterated play. Find your childhood where you left it. The nature of childhood. The nature of play.</p>
<p>HOW do you do it?</p> <p>It's child's play Disconnect the screen. Reconnect with life. Lots of ways to play. Think. No box required. Let the child run wild. Let the monsters out. Let the animals out. Let's see if Barbie floats! Play is learning is play. There's always more outside than in. Think you've seen it all? Look outside. Free the Children. The Big Turn-Off: A technology free week.</p>	<p>WHO is it for?</p> <p>Every child, every opportunity Mother Nature is missing the kids. Don't wait to be 'it'. Anyone can get started.</p> <p>WHERE is it?</p> <p>The world is your playground. Look up. Look out. Look around. You're already in it. Just lose the box.</p>
<p>WHEN is it?</p> <p>Green hour. Nature play, every day. An hour a day keeps the zombies away.</p>	<p>We evolved outside but got stuck inside. First Nature, second nature. Can you come out to play? Take your shoes off, we're going outside!</p>

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www.natureplayweek.org.au

www.kidsinnaturenetwork.org.au

Post script – Nature Play Week 2014

Facilitated by the Kids in Nature Network (KINN), the inaugural Nature Play Week took place from 1-6 April 2014. The week was a key part of Premier's Active April 2014, an entire month initiated by Sport and Recreation Victoria (Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure) to get more Victorians more active, more often.

Over 40 activities, events and workshops were staged in the week across metropolitan and rural Victoria. An estimated 2000 people (kids and/or parents) participated.

Participating organisations included Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne, Parks Victoria, Mount Baw Baw Alpine Resort, The Melbourne Zoo, Healesville Sanctuary, five local councils, schools, kinders, community organisations, small education services and businesses and outdoor play groups.

Key events included the launch at Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, The Kids Adventure Festival at Mount Baw Baw and Project Wild Thing film screenings. Speakers at the launch event included Graeme Base, leading creator of picture story books; Prof. Tim Entwisle, Chief Executive Officer Royal Botanic Gardens; Associate Professor Mardie Townsend from Deakin University; Christine Joy, Education Coordinator Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne and Kids in Nature Network Executive; Charles Solomon, Indigenous Program Manager Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne; Dr. Dimity Williams, Kids in Nature Network Co-founder and Health Advisor and Claudia Levey, Young Leader.

Media coverage of the Nature Play Week launch event included:
ABC TV News Breakfast
ABC 774 Radio News
Radio 3AW

For more information, visit www.natureplayweek.org.au or www.kidsinnaturenetwork.org.au or follow us on Facebook or Twitter.





Pictures : Tania Moloney, Emily Barrow and Anna Francis.