

Lobethal Community Kindergarten

Nature Connect Pilot Program 2015

'Bush Kindy'

Background

Since the inception of our outdoor kindy week program in May 2013, we have all been excited to continue to challenge ourselves on the journey of providing a true child led, outdoor, nature based program for our children. The program has been embraced by staff, children, parents and our local community. The enthusiasm of the wider educational community was truly evident as we held our two fully booked conferences in late 2014. It has been apparent since the early stages of the original outdoor kindy program that we wanted to take this even further....

“As appreciative as we are to have the outdoor environment that we do, we know we want more. We want to be able to provide links with the world and community outside our own fences. We access the park next door, but it is limited in its provision of natural resources and challenges.

We will examine our options of providing regular exposure to an authentic bush kindy experience on a regular basis, as an extension to our current program. We will continue to undertake professional development as a staff team to motivate us, challenge us and provides us with fresh perspectives and strategies to continue to provide a quality program that is meeting the needs of our children and community. We will continue to share our successes and challenges in the hope that others are motivated to begin to provide similar experiences in their own environments”

Lobethal Community Kindergarten Blog ... 'Where to now' July 2103

The staffs enthusiasm and willingness to further their knowledge base about nature based education has been evident in not only their participation in our own programs, but in their attendance in many related training sessions and conferences over the past few years.





As well as attending presentations from prominent play based & nature based advocates including Richard Louve, Claire Warden, Nikki Buchan, David Price & Tim Gill, staff have also attended several nature based conferences.

2013 Shoal Bay, NSW. Inspired EC conference, featuring Teacher Tom, Marc Armitage & Nikki Buchan.

2015 Te Anau, New Zealand. Reggio Emilia Aotearoa New Zealand, Connecting Children with the Atelier of Nature Conference

We have also had the chance to reflect on, and share our journey with the wider community through our blog posts, the production of our class movie – ‘Outdoor Kindy – Authentic learning for all’, and the organisation & presentation of our very own ‘Digging Deeper’ conferences. We have immersed ourselves in the outdoor kindy week experience in every kind of weather, taken children off site for forest kindy, beach kindy, and regular bush kindy days, but are yet to integrate a regular off site, bush kindy experience into our program.

As we listened to Clair, the director from the Fiordland Kindergarten in Te Anau, speak about their forest kindy program, we were further inspired and enthused to take our nature program off site and create a true ‘bush kindy’ program to complement and enrich our existing kindy sessions. We are also excited at the prospect of building an ongoing relationship with this kindy and their staff as we embark on this next stage of our journey.

We have also been heavily inspired by the forest school ethos which is prevalent throughout the UK and beginning to immerge as an option in NZ and Australia– *“Forest school embraces the outdoors as an inspirational learning environment focused on the child's learning needs rather than specific outcomes. As the groups explore and experience the natural world, on a regular and sustained basis a Forest School is a unique way of building confidence and self esteem, learn new life skills and promote independence, through hands on learning experiences.”*

http://www.muddyfaces.co.uk/forest_schools.php/#What_is_Forest_School

This has all come together to form the basis of our vision to provide our unique ‘Nature Connect’ pilot program beginning in term 2, 2015. A program which will challenge us all in different ways, while inspiring and extending our learning in authentic and meaningful ways.



Vision Statement

To provide a full day, off site, outdoor, nature based session to each group once a fortnight

To use a local natural bush setting to host this session, and to build a relationship with that place, its history, its indigenous heritage, and its current needs in relation to preservation and conservation.

To build strong links with the children and the natural environment and strengthen reciprocal relationships amongst all stakeholders – staff, children, families, the wider community and the environment both locally and globally.

To strengthen our families links with nature and all of its potential, and promote their ongoing willingness to immerse themselves in nature as part of their everyday lives outside of their kindy experience.

To acknowledge that there are many other educators following our journey as they embark on different stages of their own. To endeavour to share our journey and provide inspiration and support to them whilst still giving 100% to our own children and program.

“Children learn most effectively through play experiences. This is about creating interactions with people and the places where they play, learning to care for nature and the world in which we live. The concept of sustainability is best understood through experiential learning. Being outdoors in a natural setting enables children to develop a connection with the natural world that can lead to long-term environmental awareness, understanding and positive action” <http://owlsotland.org/local-options/forest-kindergarten/>



Projected outcomes for our staff/children/families & community

To build children's independence and self-esteem through meaningful and authentic experiences in nature. We recognising this can only be achieved by providing the opportunity to revisit these experiences on an ongoing basis.

To develop children's skills to take and manage risk, and perform their own dynamic self-motivated risk assessments.

To build resilience in all those involved.

To promote the skills required to learn, practice and transfer a variety of questioning and exploration methods to any time, place or situation.

To support children to be independent lifelong learners.

To foster the relationships our children and their families have with the natural environment. Creating a relationship of respect and nurturing, the culture of sustainability, and the development of an innate desire to help conserve and protect our natural environment.

To encourage staff, children, families and our local community to extend their knowledge about and relationship with our local bush land.

To increase the awareness about the use of the outdoors for learning - discovering, exploring and connecting to the natural world.

To increase opportunities for staff to develop pedagogical skills, and implement pedagogical change to suit the program and encourage depth, breadth and progression in learning outcomes for staff and children.

To explore and increase understanding of the positive impacts of learning outdoors on health, wellbeing and learning outcomes across all curriculum areas.



Evaluation of the program

This pilot program will be reported on and evaluated through several different means.

Regular staff group reflections and evaluations each week.

Childs voice through the collection and recording of comments about their experiences both as they happen and as they reflect on them both at home and at kindy (our FB group will be great for this)

The collection of some baseline data in regards to families current connections with nature based activities.

Parent surveys at the end of the first term of the program and again at the end of the year (also collecting info on the effect of the program in encouraging families to spend more time connecting with nature outside of these sessions)

Staff personal evaluations

Governing council discussion and evaluation guided by the director

Investigate the possibility of an external research group being part of the project to see how our aims/research questions are being met

What we need to do to get started.....

Brainstorm ideas with the whole staff team to produce a pilot program document to introduce the program

Present the pilot program document to Pam and to governing council

Find out all the hoops we need to jump through to get permission and start jumping

Create a Nature Connect philosophy which includes staff, parent and child voice

Set our guidelines re tools, materials etc for bush kindy

Find out about fires etc

Find out how to find out about the indigenous links to the area

Write any specific Nature Connect policies

Create a Nature Connect - bush kindy handbook

Visit the site and do risk assessments etc

Decide on days/dates

Identify and approach potential financial sponsors to cover the costs of a set of waterproof jackets for staff and children for use only at bush kindy; class set of small backpacks; three portable first aid kits to be used at bush kindy.

JUST DO IT ☺