

PRACTITIONER PRESENTATION

Caring for Boodja, building wellbeing: A novel Ecohealth programme in Margaret River.

Suzanne Hicks

Abstract

This paper describes an innovative programme developed to address the educational and mental wellbeing needs of Margaret River Senior High School students. The town has many unique challenges, due to wide disparities in economic and social advantage, and susceptibility to economic hardship in a community dependent on a healthy natural environment for many of its industries.

Students passionate about protecting nature and/or less attracted to in-school learning, are being offered sustained nature-based work experiences and introduced to potential career options in the natural world, via weekly workshops delivered by people involved in environmental work, who discuss their professions as well as aspects of local biodiversity. The programme is embedded in a whole of community approach, calling on the in-kind support of local and regional stakeholders, and government, academic and volunteer organisations, working in the fields of environment and mental health. It sits under the umbrella of the EcoHealth Network, a global organisation supporting initiatives such as this one, which are at the intersection of ecological, human, and soil health, and Mindful Margaret River, a community-based initiative promoting mental wellbeing and resilience. Gondwana Link, a regional ecological regeneration organisation, is a major sponsor.

The traditional owners of the region, the Wadandi, are formal custodians of the project and play a significant role throughout in educating participants about aboriginal lore and sustainable land management practices.

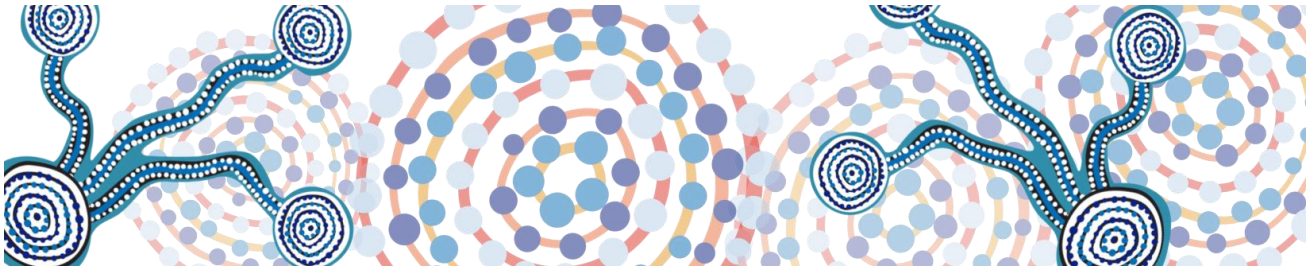
The programme was conceived following anecdotal accounts of the significant mental and physical health improvements of young people involved in ecological regeneration projects in the NE Bioregion of Tasmania. It was surmised that repairing degraded country was a key to these improvements but empirical evidence was lacking. The programme was specifically designed to test this hypothesis, in collaboration with researchers from UWA Psychology department. The research model is described and preliminary outcomes discussed

Acknowledgement

Suzanne Hicks acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet and pays respects to their Elders past and present.

Other acknowledgements:

- Gondwana Link
- Mindful Margaret River
- Margaret River Senior High School



Speaker Profile

Suzanne Hicks

Suzanne Hicks is a retired clinical psychologist with a passion for nature, a concern for ecosystem reparation, and a commitment to fostering emotional resilience in young people. These interests have coalesced in the development of the Ecohealth program. She lives in Margaret River, WA.

Sandra Robertson

Sandra is a community nurse who is committed to improving health and wellbeing outcomes for the families of her community, South West WA. This commitment includes walking the talk that values a healthy lifestyle including the physical and emotional benefits of being in nature and the interrelatedness of health and education.

Website links

