



2015 – 2017  
Summary Report

## **Nature does amazing things for people.**

Conservation SA developed a range of simple, introductory nature-based experiences for people experiencing a range of disadvantages, in order to help improve their wellbeing, participation and quality of life:

- Walking in Belair National Park
- Walking in Deep Creek Conservation Park
- Walking at Morialta Conservation Park
- Walking in Para Wirra Conservation Park
- Coastal walk along the beach from Grange to Tennyson Dunes
- Volunteering in nature with Trees for Life
- Sessions for mothers and children in the Nature Play playground, Tulya Wardli, in Bonython Park
- Visits to community gardens/farms
- Forest Bathing/Shinrin Yoku sessions

Over the two years, we developed relationships with a number of community organisations in order to offer them these experiences:

- Hopes Café/Uniting Communities
- Unity Housing
- Relationships Australia
- Deaf Can:Do
- Zahra Foundation
- Russian Womens Association
- Centacare
- MIFSA
- HYP A
- TAFE SA
- Multicultural Communities Council SA
- Muslim Women's Association SA
- Common Ground.



*Mixed group at  
Deep Creek  
Conservation Park*

Most of the places we went to were accessible by public transport and we provided bus or train tickets to all participants. Those places that were not accessible by public transport we hired a minibus and drove groups to the location.

394 people took part in the activities, covering a range of disadvantaged and marginalised groups including:

- Migrants and refugees (new arrivals)
- Multicultural communities
- Pensioners
- Low income groups
- Mental health
- Domestic violence
- Deaf community
- LGBTI

Countries represented:

1. Australia
2. South Korea
3. Russia
4. Malaysia
5. Chile
6. El Salvador
7. Nigeria
8. Bosnia
9. Serbia
10. Hungary
11. China
12. Tibet
13. Ukraine
14. Afghanistan
15. Iran
16. India
17. Belgium



*Deaf:CanDo members at Para Wirra Conservation Park*

Expected outcomes for the participants:

- develop an appreciation of nature and natural spaces
- build knowledge of activities in natural places that are easy to access
- increase their participation in activities in natural places
- have increased wellbeing through connection to self, others and nature
- develop knowledge, skills and values about caring for nature and themselves

Qualitative feedback via focus groups and feedback forms indicates that these outcomes were more than met. Some examples are provided here for brevity:

*Develop an appreciation of nature and natural spaces*

- 'I learnt that you have to be mindful, you have to see nature as something we have to protect.'
- 'Everything is part of universe. We are part of universe. We should take care about it.'
- 'Beauty of nature, food for the soul.'
- 'it reminded me that all of us are the custodians of nature and to look after it'
- 'We all have a responsibility, is all our responsibility to protect nature and take care of nature.'
- 'for me [it was] a reminder of, like really value and appreciate what is there for us and look after it'
- 'I felt a sense of wonderment and appreciation of nature'
- 'Having time in nature is really good experience.'

*Build knowledge of activities in natural places that are easy to access*

Several participants remarked on how easy it was to access these places by public transport compared to driving, *'the joy of not having to find a car park'*.

Participants commented that the accessibility of the places we visited made it much more likely that they would visit the same places again in the future.

Participants gained knowledge of a variety of different activities such as walking in several different environments, gardening for food production including bush foods, and volunteering for biodiversity conservation such as weed recognition and removal.



*Group of mixed immigrants at Belair National Park.*

### *Increase their participation in activities in natural places*

- 'There is a park across our house, I went there and really addicted to that place, every day I want to go there and sit there and walk there. Actually when I want to go out from house I say maybe half an hour but when I go there I stay two hours. I walk one hours and then I sit down and listen to the birds and ... I become fresh. I like that.'
- 'after the experience, I have been thinking of taking my family. I hope to go to one of these parks with my family just to spend time together.'
- 'I think I'm going to be going to Trees For Life more because I've learnt that I enjoy that sort of work and that I want to, I might even study in that area possibly in the future...It's just so enjoyable, I love it so much I want to do it more often.'
- 'I'm definitely going to head down to Grange by train and do the walk, and I've actually spoken with a number of friends about Tennyson Dunes so we're going to create our own outing.'

### *Have increased wellbeing through connection to self, others and nature*

- 'The air and breeze was cool and fresh. The environment is quiet and still and it is a good place for restoration and reflection.'
- 'I enjoyed being around the people from different nationality and feel very energetic, feel more relax.'
- 'When I am in nature, I feel free, happy, and fresh, I like fresh air. And also I like to be with people.'
- 'It was very great experience about the nature and I felt relax and free.'
- 'Nature is good for our physical and mental health.'
- 'when we were in the bush it was an opportunity for me to really have a feel of the nature'

### *Develop knowledge, skills and values about caring for nature and themselves*

#### Knowledge and skills:

- National park/conservation park rules, e.g. not picking or cutting flowers, leaves, etc. from plants, no pets/keeping dogs on a leash, no feeding the wildlife, not lighting fires, etc.
- Basic information about flora and fauna.
- Weed recognition and techniques for removal of weeds.
- Organic gardening techniques.
- Bush tucker plants.
- Nature based play spaces for children.
- Walking preparation

#### Caring for nature, caring for self:

- Discussion of the impacts of spending time in nature on wellbeing, including feedback from participants on how experiences made them feel.
- Quiet time during activities to appreciate nature through the senses, e.g. sounds such

as birds, wind in the trees, smells, and touch.

- Journal for recording thoughts, writing poetry, and responding to reflective questions.
- Contemplative and reflective exercises: choosing a natural object and spending time in quiet contemplation of it. Sharing thoughts with the group.

Focus group participants mentioned learnings about particular aspects of nature as well as particular behaviours. As previously mentioned one participant was amazed that termite mounds maintain the same temperature all year. Another participant observed a facilitator picking up plastic on the beach and remembers it when shopping at the supermarket, so she now tries to remember to take her own bags as often as she can. Participants were proud to be able to demonstrate their new found knowledge to family and friends.



*Iranian immigrants weeding with Trees For Life*

*Quotes from focus group and feedback forms:*

- 'You said everything you can see on the beach they are maybe shelter for another animal or food, and we don't have to take something from the beach, or nature.'
- "when you are very close to nature... it's an opportunity for you to reflect on things ... it makes you feel good about yourself.'
- 'It was good to learn many things to keep safe the environment.'
- 'to stop and actually listen to each birdsong was for me very uplifting and in fact now that I do daily walks mainly near my home, I do now take the time to listen to the birds'
- 'Nature balances me.'

- 'I reconnect with the glorious world of nature'
- 'My listening has improved as I listen closely to bird calls now'
- 'My senses have become more alive'
- 'Relax, enjoyable, appreciate nature. Stress free!'
- 'It has been a very positive experience and it made me feel very uplifted. Having been doing mindfulness meditation myself, I feel in the nature brings more tranquillity than doing meditation alone does.'
- 'The mind is more calm, away from city life and their constructs'

Many participants indicated that they felt more relaxed after attending activities. One respondent mentioned restoration and reflection. Another mentioned sleeping better after attending activities. Many participants mentioned both physical and mental health benefits from time spent in nature.

Freedom was a recurrent theme. Participants indicated that they felt free while being out in nature, one participant mentioned lack of rules and open horizons. Some of these participants were living in boarding houses/supported accommodation or may have been held in immigration detention. The connection between nature and freedom may have held particular significance for them.

Quotes from focus group and feedback forms:

- 'I felt more aware and more forgiving of myself and others'
- 'I was more relaxed with people as the day went on and normally I get paranoid with people and try to back away. I found I could talk to people and I wasn't so worried with the people I talked to.'
- 'If you start you will become addicted. For me it happened because before I was so busy, most of time I thought I couldn't understand what is the nature, why do people go to the mountain'
- 'I found that a whole weight just lifted ... it was a huge shift ... It was the biggest relief I've found in maybe a year or two. Maybe longer, so I'm going to do it more often.'
- 'I can sense the energy of nature and that's very healing for me'
- 'Being around people who were all interested in the environment and their own health is more supportive.'
- 'I make time to be alone every day and meditate and stuff. And doing that out in nature is important to me.'
- 'I forgot all my worries and was happy'
- 'I was really happy when I came back from that walk, I just thought it was joy, so joyful.'

There was consistently positive feedback that participants felt safe, would do another one of our activities again and would recommend the activities to others.

The simple act of providing transport, safety and a guide gave participants confidence, gave them opportunities for relaxation and social connection, and inspired them to do more.



### **Feedback from partner organisations**

"The CCSA walks have had enormous benefits to many of the Hope's Café people... We will definitely miss your walks and hope we can be part of your re-thinking in terms of how you can explore and develop and importantly get funding for future CCSA walks."

*Hopes Café, Uniting Communities*

"I am sorry to hear that your "Nature For You" program will no longer be available. It was a great initiative and fabulous program which was much enjoyed and appreciated by all participants from our group. I am sure they've learned a lot during your very informative excursions and will always remember them with gratitude."

*Russian Women's Association SA*

"[Our clients] verbally expressed their enjoyment throughout the walk – a good opportunity to connect with nature."

*Relationships Australia*

"They really enjoyed it – it's not something they would do themselves."

*Multicultural Communities Council of SA*

"The [monthly] emails were a good idea and I would often pass them on to my colleagues and tenants."

*Housing SA*