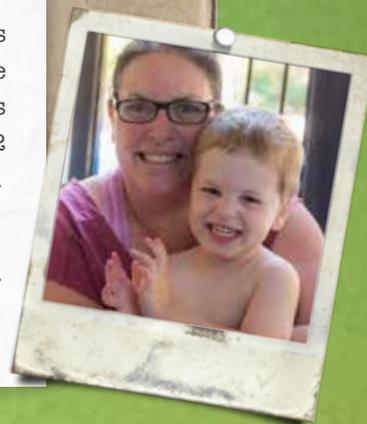


# CASE STUDY 1

## Changing And Enhancing Lives Of Queensland Families

**Parent:** ..... Kyle P Giggins  
**Location:** ..... Forest Lake, Brisbane  
**Age of Children:** ..... 3 and 8 years  
**Number of Children Involved:** ..... 2  
**About the Children:** .....  
3-year-old has autism and 8-year-old has Sensory Processing Disorder  
**Nature Play QLD Involvement:** .....  
Nature Play Passports, 'Things to Do' lists and Nature Play QLD events



### How It Began



Kylie Giggins and her family were introduced to nature play 12 months ago, when they attended the Mud Lark in the Park event run by Nature Play QLD and the Ipswich City Council. Mrs Giggins describes the event as "life changing" for her family.

Their family changed from a no nature play family, to one that now spends more than 50 percent of their time outside, and the overall changes have been quite dramatic.

"It's the place where we see the least anxiety in the kids," says Mrs Giggins, who adds that "our little guy is non-verbal, so he doesn't communicate through speech very much at all, and I struggle really badly with depression and anxiety, and so for us the only thing that has got us through is nature play."

"Our eight-year-old's also got Sensory Processing Disorder and anxiety, but she's highly gifted, so she would rather have her head stuck in technology. We had to look at ways to get them outside to get the sunshine and to get the good mental health," she adds.

### Addressing the obstacles

Kylie was the one who took a while to get her head around nature play, saying that she "thought it was too much effort to go out with the kids, and so I didn't really do a whole lot".

"I need to be getting out there and not worrying about so much in the house, and the housework and actually being amongst it. For me it was the biggest transition out of everyone," she says.

For her three-year-old, it's his happy place. "If he could be outside playing with dirt all day long, he would be," she says.

Her eight-year-old is still coming around to the idea, and is more likely to wonder outside and give it a go when the rest of the family is out there.

To help facilitate this transition into nature, Mrs Giggins has utilised the Nature Play Passports and 'Things to Do' lists, which they put up on the kids' lockers at home.

"When my eight-year-old says "I'm bored!", I can say "Go and have a look at your list,"" says Mrs Giggins, adding that the lists have also made her realise she doesn't have to spend a lot of money for her kids to have fun.



### How The Idea Grew



Kylie and her family began working on their outdoor environment after the mud event. They've since halved their children's material possessions, and have planted four veggie gardens, created a mud play area and installed a sandpit and cubby house.

"Every day we jump in muddy puddles, or we have water fights, or we're watering the veggie garden, or we're picking the tomatoes and playing in the sandpit," she says.

"I think people take it for granted and don't realise how important nature play is."

"Let's go outside, let's get some sunshine, let's go for a walk, let's go on a nature hunt."



## The Immediate Perks

In addition to sunshine and fun, nature play has also encouraged the kids to experiment with new foods.

"My kids hate food. They've always hated food," says Mrs Giggins.

"We've got a policy now where we go out to the veggie garden every so often, and we try something new, or we re-try something new," she says.

The kids are eating better, getting more vitamin D, are happier, healthier and more content.

"We've set up a timeline at home now where you can have your technology, but we're also going to spend time outside, exploring, risk taking and doing crazy stuff as well."



## The Long Term Benefits

Mrs Giggins has noticed a dramatic increase in the health of her children, stating that before they introduced nature play into their lives, their eldest daughter was in and out of hospital very regularly.

"If you look at the research, it's really good for their health. Our eight-year-old was incredibly sick as a baby and that's why we ended up in Queensland. She was in and out of hospital every couple of weeks, and when we started doing the nature play stuff, we saw the benefits of it health-wise as well. The kids haven't been as sick, particularly with our three-year-old. They're calm outside, and are building up on their mental health. I think that kick-started us and gave us more motivation to get out and do it," she says.

"It's not just the kids. For me, when I'm having a really bad day mentally, I need to go outside too. I think we underestimate how good being outside is for our mental health, and not just for the kids but the adults as well," she says.

"The first thing that comes to my mind when I'm thinking 'I'm really struggling mentally' is 'we need to get outside, and we need to do something in the sunshine.' It gets easier and easier, that's for sure."



## Spreading the Nature Play Message

Having two children who have special educational needs, Mrs Giggins regularly has therapists visit her home. She says that the children have taught the professionals "what play means to them".

"It's been really interesting because we have speech pathologists and occupational therapists come out here and they bring all these bags of activities, and we usually end up outside either doing a hunt in the veggie garden, or playing with outdoor play therapy," says Mrs Giggins.

"We might get a piece of cardboard and stick all the different herbs onto it, and we'll label them, smell them, and look at textures and that kind of sensory play stuff," she says.

"It's been really interesting seeing the professionals following the lead of the children, and using that to base their therapies on."



## How to Grow Bigger and Better

Mrs Giggins took part in the recent Nature Play QLD Passport Mission Photo Competition, and thinks it was a great way to encourage people to share pics of nature play at home, which in turn inspires others.

While Mrs Giggins believes the nature play activities that Nature Play QLD promotes are a great way to get people started on this journey, "promoting more of kids doing the nature play activities at home" is essential.

"People think 'Are there any more nature play activities?', and while that's good and well, it's not just about activities being organised and going along, it's about doing it yourself and getting involved, and it doesn't have to be hard," she says.

