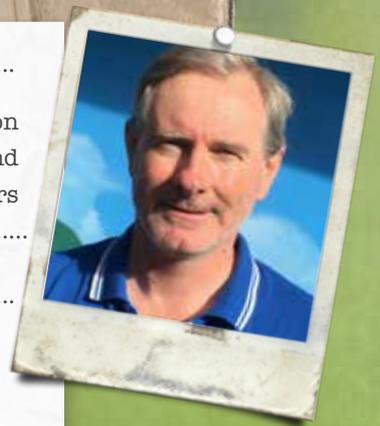


CASE STUDY 13

Nature Play is the Take Home Message

Outdoor Education Centre: Tinaroo Environmental Education Centre
Contact: Phil Harrison
Location: Far North Queensland
Age of Children: 8 to 12 years
Number of Children Involved: 1,500 students per year (under 12)
Nature Play QLD Involvement: Nature Play QLD outdoor play session, Cairns Regional Community Forum and PWT screening, '5 Nature Play Activities Completed at Lake Tinaroo' stamp, Nature Play Passports.



Phil Harrison has inspired and empowered positive connections with nature as a trainer of outdoor educators and working directly with children.

Mr Harrison is one of the more impressive and long-serving outdoor advocates in Queensland, leaving an indelible positive mark on thousands of Queensland children. It would be difficult to quantify the expansive impact Mr Harrison has made both directly and indirectly, in connecting Queensland kids with nature, and keeping kids playing outdoors.

Mr Harrison now works as part of an amazing team of environmental educators in Far North Queensland, delivering quality programs for over 3,000 Queensland children each year, with students from Ingham to Alex Bay, out across the Atherton Tablelands.

Mr Harrison acknowledged the importance of nature play as a community conversation:

"Nature Play QLD gives the community a common language; a name for something that is important, but we have taken for granted, and creates a public dialogue. It also enables acknowledgment of the services and programs that have been advocating and promoting nature play activities for many years."

Mr Harrison first heard about Nature Play QLD through his outdoor recreation networks, and attended the Nature Play QLD launch activities in Cairns, along with the 200 local children, in July 2014. Mr Harrison wanted to experience and observe the Nature Play QLD concept in action, to see if this would be something that could add value to the Lake Tinaroo Environmental Education programs.

The Centre has adopted the Nature Play Passport program as an extension of their environmental programs, and more specifically as part of their wrap-up process with attending students aged 7 to 12. At the conclusion of their program, the teachers engage the students in discussions focused on sustainable practices experienced and learned during their stay at the centre. The Nature Play Passports are used as the take-home message, giving students a practical tool to continue their outdoor play and sustainable practices at home.

"As part of the wrap-up of our programs, we talk to the kids about how they have been living and playing in nature while at our centre, and challenge the children to continue this at home. The Nature Play Passport fits in perfectly with the sequence of these wrap-ups, as [the children] have been doing things in nature, and now [the children] have the ability to do these things at home and go out and enjoy the natural environment."

"Our school motto is 'learning to enjoy and care for our beautiful environment', and the Nature Play Passport fits in well with our motto."

All children 12 years and under are given a Nature Play Passport with a Lake Tinaroo Environmental Education Centre stamp on the first page, listing five nature play activities they have completed, and they are shown how to use it at home to continue their nature play journey.



What could Nature Play QLD Do Better?

Mr Harrison noted that care should be exercised in providing Forest Learning training. Over-professionalising outdoor play may result in marginalising outdoor play to children who have teachers and educators that have completed the training. This may result in reducing outdoor play for children.

"Do you need skills to do nature play, or do you just need permission to do nature play? I am not sure this is a logical enhancement of the Nature Play QLD mission and it may result in creating barriers to participation."

Mr Harrison also noted that Nature Play QLD did not cater for children older than 11 or 12, indicating a need to offer more for kids this age.

"When we discuss the '51 Things to Do Before You're 12' list in the back of the Nature Play Passport, some kids ask, 'What if I am already 12?'. I said that [the child] will need to go to catch-up classes."

