

Creating a bush kindy

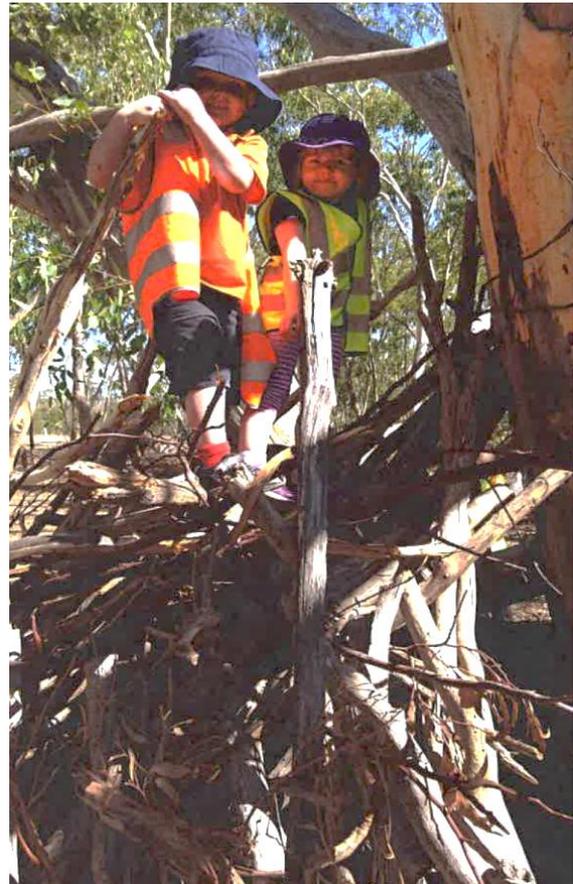
Adams Road Children's Centre is located in Craigmore on the urban fringe of Adelaide's northern metropolitan area. The centre's vision is for all children and educators to engage in a flexible and enriched environment to explore and share lifelong learning. Para Wirra Conservation Park is located approximately 15 kilometres from the centre in the northern Mount Lofty Ranges between the towns of Gawler and Kersbrook.

Why did you want to start a bush kindy as part of your learning program?

We attended the Nature Play SA Conference at the Adelaide Wine Centre in March 2016 and were inspired to recreate what we heard and saw, within our children's centre. We learnt many themes and wanted to apply them to the kindergarten. We didn't have a large park or suitable space we could use that was close to the centre. So we contacted the rangers from Natural Resources Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges to investigate nature playing within Para Wirra Conservation Park. The rangers were really helpful and said they would be happy for us to use the park. We then sent a survey home to parents asking who would be willing to drop off and pick up their kids from Para Wirra one day a week. About 50 per cent of parents were happy to do so. We split the staff and had half the staff and students stay at the centre on Wednesdays; the other half came to Para Wirra for bush kindy. In 2017, all staff and students come to Para Wirra on Wednesdays for a half day of bush kindy.

How did you start the process of setting up a bush kindy?

We initially visited Para Wirra on an excursion, then emailed the rangers. The Head Ranger wrote back and invited us to the Gawler Natural Resources Centre to chat. We spoke about what we hoped to achieve and the rangers helped us with advice regarding potential risks and what to do in the event of an emergency within the park. We then met with the rangers on site to scope the proposed nature play area. We created a presentation and spoke to parents about the benefits of bush kindy and provided supporting documentation. One of the rangers came to the centre and spoke to the



kids about the plants and animals that they could expect to see whilst in Para Wirra.

The rangers connected us with NRM Education and we borrowed their nets, ID charts and beakers to catch and identify bugs in the lake. I didn't know any of the bugs and neither did the kids, we were learning together.

What are some of the benefits for the children of being outside?

The kids are so excited to be outside! They are exploring, touching, smelling and feeling elements in nature. The kids are cubby building and working together to solve problems as well as assessing the



level of risk that they are comfortable with taking. They are doing things like climbing trees, sorting leaves they find on the ground, touching dried emu poo and they're interested in nature and keen to learn and show us what they are seeing and doing. The children are sharing with kids from other kindies too, who share the nature play site with us, so they are increasing their socialisation and making friends.

What were some of the barriers for students and families wanting to attend bush kindy?

Some parents stated that the distance was too far for them to drop their kids at Para Wirra. We do bush kindy on a half day. The students are only here from 9 am – 12 pm. This doesn't work for some families. Some parents don't drive and it doesn't work well for families with child care, due to the half day service.

Safety hasn't been an issue. There haven't been any serious injuries – just a few scratches. All children wear appropriate clothing for the weather and high visibility vests so that they can be seen. The nature play area has boundaries that are communicated to students. Staff are scattered around the boundary and have first aid kits. Staff can also communicate with each other through a radio network and are able to keep an eye on all of the kids.

How has hosting one day of bush kindy impacted the broader community?

Parents are ringing the centre wanting to know if this is THE bush kindy and wanting to enrol their kids. Parents are staying at Para Wirra to support and watch their kids develop, have fun and taking an interest in the environment. Families are visiting the park on the weekend and the kids want to come back on the weekend too. Parents get to know members of staff and other parents better through supporting their children.

How have you and the kids responded to the outdoors and the changing weather?

We started the bush kindy program in Term 2 of last year (2016) and ran it every Wednesday through Term 2, 3 and 4. We only cancelled once for the huge storm that caused the blackout. The children are thinking about the weather and dressing for the conditions. They are learning to dress and prepare for different types of weather, along with forward thinking, planning and reading the weather. In winter kids are wearing jackets, gum boots and we set up tents to shelter in. In summer we come prepared with water, sunscreen and hats. Attendance does dip on the really stormy or rainy days but overall the kids are happy to be outside and aren't too concerned about the weather.

What are you reporting through the EYLF for the benefits and reasons for bush kindy?

Bush Kindy is our banner. It's what we do. The kids learn so much working together. They examine textures, measure the height and width of cubbies and sort. They also take risks, learn how to create structures through cubby building, how to make new friends, and socialise. The kids are curious about the environment and are learning about bugs that live in the lake, and different animals and plants. They are exposed to the weather and are seeing the changing of the seasons. The kids collaborate to create and explore. They are happy in the outdoors and are able to learn real-life experiences that you just can't replicate at the kindy.

More information

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www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges/education/for-educators



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