

Early Childhood Case Study: Take Me Outside NSW

Bush School at Centennial Parklands

Bush School at Centennial Park is a unique nature play program for children aged 2.5 - 5 years. Bush School is offered Monday, Tuesday and Thursday as a 10 week term program. On Friday there is a drop-in session (week to week). Up to 20 children attend per session, with parents and carers staying with their children. A sampler program is also run during school holidays called Taste of Bush School. This is an opportunity for parents and their children to try a Bush School session and experience Nature Play.

Bush School takes place in the Fearnley Grounds Bush School Classroom, located within Centennial Parklands, Sydney. Centennial Parklands sits on Freshwater Country which has been home to a diverse and complex kinship system of many Aboriginal communities including the Bidjigal, Gadigal, D'harawal, Darug, Eora, Gaimaragal, Gundungarra and Guringai peoples.

Why did you start this program?

Bush School aims to reconnect children to the Parklands in a child-centred play environment and to build an appreciation and custodianship for future generations. It is designed to inspire a love for the natural world in children through outdoor games, bushcraft activities and storytelling. It gets children moving, creating and thinking in a stimulating outdoor environment every week, giving them a chance to explore, discover and learn at their own pace. Nature Connection and Nature Play develops children's creativity, confidence, attention and sense of responsibility.

What are 2 challenges that you faced during this program, how have you overcome them?

One of our biggest challenges at the moment is weather, with our grounds often underwater after heavy rain events. The rain events have been above and beyond safe play outdoors, particularly with high winds and extreme flooding. Another challenge is balancing our philosophy with parent and carers perception of what nature play is, and what it is "worth" financially. Our nature play is child-led and unstructured, which is sometimes challenging for parents and carers.

Do you have other organisations involved in the program?

Centennial Parklands is now part of the Greater Sydney Parklands, including Callan Park & Western Sydney Parklands and our programs are expanding. At Centennial Park, we work with individual preschools and community groups providing them an opportunity to use our outdoor spaces or participate in bush school programs for their centres.

What other sustainability initiatives do you have in place?

We have recycling and are working towards other sustainability initiatives, like the promotion of nude lunchboxes, composting and reducing/eliminating plastics.

What advice would you give to other ECCs considering a nature play program?

Centennial Parklands offers professional development training that can assist ECC's to set up nature play programs in their centre and surrounding environments. Be prepared and get started.

