

Kids on Country

What happens when you bring together indigenous elders, kids and scientists on country, and ask the kids what and how they want to learn?

Definition

“Kids” - An MK Member 10 – 25 years

Engaging with young people and inviting them to take part in a co design process is core business for Millennium Kids Inc, a non-government environmental youth organisation, where Kids are boss and adults facilitate a ‘skills for life’ learning process.

What and how do we do it

In 2008 Millennium Kids was invited to work with Goldfields Kids to develop a youth led sustainability initiative for lifelong learning. Three hundred Kids took part. We asked: what do you like about your community, what don’t you like, and what would you change?

The result of this consultation and co design process was ***MK Project Explore*** – a three-year series of fieldtrips to get Kids out of the classroom and create a meaningful, youth led, citizen science program. Kids wanted adventure, a sense of journey, and to go bush. Kids were concerned about climate change, boredom and racism. Over 60% of the Kids in the program hadn’t been into the Woodland, although, by definition, they lived in it.

Kids wanted to know:

- Is climate change real?
- How big is the Woodland?
- What needs protecting?
- What animals live here?
- How did Aboriginals live here?
- Can we tell the world about this place?

Kids used an Inquiry Methodology, exploring the Great Western Woodland, the largest intact temperate Mediterranean Woodland left in the world, to develop their own questions, working alongside scientists and elders.

Answering Kids questions drives the program.

- What is the highest point?
- Where is the fresh water?
- Are there special plants and trees?
- What scat is that?
- How does that tree grow so big with so little water?

To develop a meaningful sense of inquiry we needed to be immersed in the Woodland. Kids went to the highest point, and to fresh water. They interviewed stakeholders, allowing them to fully engage with their questions. Their own areas of interest formed the basis of program planning and development.

The Kids inquiry resulted in:

- Collection of scats sent to Murdoch DNA lab for analysis
- Malleefowl observations sent to BirdLife Australia
- Presentation of their views on Climate Change at the Green Futures Conference Copenhagen
- Assisting DPAW map weed distribution
- Monitoring the impact of cairns on rock outcrop ecology
- Publication of a book, and a photography exhibition highlighting biodiversity in the Woodland.

In 2014, a Ngadju elder invited us to extend the program to the Coolgardie indigenous community.

A picnic was held on country. Fifty-two people came, 90% of who had not been to Cave Hill before. The elders were shocked. Parents involved cited lack of suitable vehicles for bush trips, and no fuel money. The Kids were the poorer for it, stuck in a small town at weekends, with anti social behavior the norm.

We ran a consultation process out there in the dust. Crowded around a fire we asked the same questions. What do you like about your community, what don't you like and what would you change? It was unanimous – weekend fieldtrips, learn from elders, reconnect with country, share stories and build a strong resilient community of Kids who know the landscape and their culture. They didn't want it in school time; they wanted a weekend program, away from the constraints of the classroom.

With support from stakeholders Millennium Kids worked with elders and Kids around a picnic table to design ***Kids on Country*** - a program based around the Kids' desire to learn more about the Woodland, centered on traditional culture.

Kids explored various sites, with real equipment – binoculars, ipads and GPS, painting, writing poetry, managing the barbecue and playing.

While they played in the water and got muddy feet we slipped in skill building workshops based on their questions.

Can we build a fire?

- taught risk management, DPAW fire and firewood protocols

Can we cook on the barbecue?

- learn about food and hygiene protocols

What bird is that?

- use binoculars, cameras and a bird book, learn Ngadju names, hear about Malleefowl Dreaming

Can you eat that plant?

- Share knowledge with scientists and elders.

Why do you need a GPS?

- Real applications– collecting information to help us understand where we live.

Kids were interested in Malleefowl. They had seen them, knew where they crossed the road, and knew their nests. They could lead the program. They blossomed; keen to share their knowledge.

Hey there, Hoopla the circus is in town! Yes, the circus came to town, and the Kids met Chinese circus hands and wanted to take them out on country. The circus moved on, but it gave birth to a new idea. Why not take tourists out – why not share their knowledge?

Kids designed and hosted an international fieldtrip, listed important places, deciding what they wanted to teach their guests, sharing their knowledge with other kids.

They presented their work at a conference in Perth, met with the previous Chief Scientist of WA, and reported to stakeholders.

So what are the benefits?

We are measuring the social impact of the program.

Through these opportunities Kids developed real world skills that have application in the classroom and workforce.

Kids developed communication skills, helped write a book, assisted in the production of a film about Malleefowl and pitched new projects ideas; they

- Want to help control feral cats,
- Are planning a revegetation project,
- Want to collect data on threatened species.

Kids proudly identify with their language group, speaking confidently in public, communicating their project outcomes.

Kids believe that their culture and ideas are important and have a place in the science world.

Kids see mutual respect between elders and scientists.

Indigenous adults have led part of the program, upskilled and found employment.

The team is independently reporting Malleefowl sightings.

In 2017 we continue to listen to the Kids and build on their aspirations for the future.

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