

Intergenerational Volunteering Case Study* Wolston Creek Bushland Group

The Reserve

The Wolston Creek Bushland Reserve occupies approximately 47 hectares of parkland in the south west suburbs of Brisbane. This area of land was formally part of the Wacol Prison Farm, but is now parkland, under the control of the Brisbane City Council. The parcel of land is one and a half kilometres long, having an east/west orientation, with a slope downwards from north to south. The upper third of the parkland consists of mown land under high voltage powerlines, with the remainder of the parkland being remnants of grazing land, several neglected dams and cleared natural wooded vegetation.

The parkland's perimeter is framed by houses on the northern side and Wolston Creek to the south, with entry points to the park at the eastern and western ends. The park occurs on terraces and levees of alluvial soils of the Brisbane River, and on mesozoic sandstone and shales of the Ipswich basin. The parkland is rich with fauna, with large numbers of wallabies seen in the area, and over twenty species of birds. Vegetation includes remnant strands of spotted gum and forest red gum, remnant dry rainforest, mixed dry sclerophyll and grassy pastures. There is a range of flora including five uncommon species of the Greater Brisbane area, and a couple very uncommon to rare.



There are a range of programs in the community that offer opportunities for different generations of individuals to interact. Many organisations facilitate specific intergenerational volunteering programs which can be through one of 3 approaches.

1. Seniors and youth volunteering together
2. Senior volunteer working with youth recipient
3. Youth volunteer working with senior recipient

This case study represents an example of different generations working together.

The Wolston Creek Volunteers

The Wolston Creek Bushland Group is comprised of volunteers who predominantly live in the local area, with many of the volunteers' properties bordering on the park. Some member's of the group originally had been activist's in another group - CRAMP (Concerned Residents Against More Prisons), and had felt driven towards putting the parkland to better use after CRAMP's success in opposing the State Governments plan for the land. These volunteers have worked collaboratively with Habitat Brisbane and the local councillors in establishing a successful and very social bushcare group. This social aspect is important to the group who always finish with a 'cuppa' and a 'sausage sizzle' after each working bee. '

We're a social group and it's important that we have fun every time. We always have a sausage sizzle at the end and stress that everyone has a good time.'



The volunteers range in age from infants and school-aged children to individuals in their late 70's, with many families involved. The actual site is family friendly, and during many working bees the children are included in various activities as well as being kept under the watchful of eye of around a dozen adults. The coordinator encourages families to become part of the bushland group, and ensures that children are most welcome. All the children involved are

accompanied by a parent during the working bees, and are actively involved in a variety of tasks suitable to their level and ability. Although the children initially volunteer alongside their parent, they rapidly become familiar with the group members, relaxing and helping other members of the group.

We always make sure we do the social thing at the end...and definitely don't take it too seriously. We deliberately encourage families to come along'.

The group meets on a monthly basis, having its core members who attend regularly, as well as individuals and families who come along whenever their schedules and commitments permit. As children become older, they are more involved in other activities, particularly sport which means that the families are only able to attend on an episodic basis. In addition, volunteers often work in the parkland at other times, eradicating weeds, caring for the revegetation plot and removing rubbish. However, each volunteer is welcomed warmly, valued and interacts with other volunteers irrespective of their age or attendance history.

'The site is set up for families, and there are real advantages in the social capacity to mix across different ages'.

As the age, lifestyles and personal circumstances of the volunteers vary dramatically, many of the volunteers (apart from the original CRAMP members) would not otherwise have the chance to interact. The natural bushcare environment combined with the inclusive culture of the group is conducive to individuals interacting and forming friendships or acquaintances with others who they might not necessarily have had the chance to. This offers many benefits including increasing tolerance, learning from others and reducing the risks of social isolation.



'It's actually good to relate to people outside their own immediate circle of friends'.

'I haven't actually asked them [the volunteers] how they feel about having the younger ones involved. But by on large, those I speak to casually, really feel the same way I do in that we're lucky to have the younger ones involved'. Coordinator

Many of the volunteers who previously had limited knowledge of environmental care, have attended a range of training provided by Habitat Brisbane to learn more about the care of bushland, revegetation, and the operation of various equipment including brush cutters and sprayers. This extra training has increased the skills and capacity of members to partake in environmental activities regardless of age and existing knowledge.



'There is no real difference in the ability of our volunteers to work, or their capability. Even our oldest volunteer who has had a quadruple bypass works like a demon. In fact all our older volunteers are exceptionally physical and capable. There's no real difference in terms of the work achieved by the younger or older volunteers. Actually, there's no real difference either in terms of expertise... 'cos none of us have any.'

rather than just their parent.

In addition, the volunteers are provided with on-the-job training from Habitat Brisbane officers, as well as support and education from more experienced members of the group. The practice of informal skills transfer between the generations is evident in many of the environmental activities that occur during the working bees, especially as children seem to quite enjoy helping other volunteers in the group

Achievements

Due to the large size of the reserve, the volunteer group has concentrated its efforts at the western fringe, where they have been instrumental in planting and establishing trees, removing noxious weeds and mulching. During the last two years, the volunteers have established a fenced natural experimental revegetation plot, under the guidance of one of the members who has considerable knowledge in this area.

The groups history as 'activists' rather than 'environmentalists' has resulted in them working in conjunction with various stakeholders and obtaining over 3km of mown walking tracks through the reserve and a host of other necessities including:

- water mains
- picnic benches and tables
- a large storage shed
- water tank
- various tools
- wheelbarrows



Community Activities

In addition to working bees on their actual site, volunteers from Wolston Creek are actively involved in other community activities including supporting and collaborating with other community environmental groups in the area and conducting guided walks through the reserve. An example of this is during the 2008 Peaks to Points Festival, a guided walk was conducted through the reserve, designed to raise awareness of the ecological importance and diversity of the catchment areas.



In another example, on the 16th November 2008, Brisbane City Council (2 Million Trees – Our Urban Forest Project) and the Australian Lung Foundation hosted a memorial planting of 7000 trees on a large open expanse of the Wolston Creek Reserve. Volunteers from a range of organisations including Wolston Creek, corporates and other organisations worked extensively to plant massive numbers of trees and shrubs in quite sultry conditions. These commemorative trees signify the numbers of Australians who die each year from lung cancer, and form part of the Council's

commitment to Brisbane's sustainable future.

Testimonials

'We fought against the building of a new prison many years ago, before we had our children. We also have a love of nature and a sense of pride and protection for whatever remnant bushland was left in our local area. We wanted to pass this on to our children. As soon as the children were old enough we joined this bushcare group and were made to feel very welcome right from the beginning and any help we and the children could give was appreciated. We used it also as an opportunity for the children to learn to give of their time to nature and for the benefit of the community. It is also great for them to have the interaction with the older members of our group and to feel a sense of belonging in the community, a sense of accomplishment and achievement in what they do. It is also imperative for the younger members of our community to be involved and hopefully to encourage them to have a longstanding association with bushcare, to carry on this legacy on behalf of the members and this land reserve in the future years'. Di and Steve



Testimonials

'John and I love being part of the Wolston Creek Bushcare Group for lots of reasons.

One is because we fought so hard to stop the Government building on the land over the creek a few years ago and decided we should repay that decision by doing something positive - like planting trees and making the area a nice place to be.

We also love the interaction of the generations that participate, from the babies through to us "oldies" - we all have fun and it is wonderful watching young people becoming aware of the importance of maintaining our beautiful natural heritage. 5 year olds talk to 75 year olds and we all learn from one another.

The camaraderie we experience keeps us young and interested in our community'. Carla and John



'Wonderful to see the number of children from pre-teens to infants being involved in the activities of Wolston Creek Bushcare group for they are the future'. Betty, 76 years

'As one of the older people, I can say it's great that the younger people come along and relate to us and talk to us....and that I'm not cast in the company of silver-haired derelicts.' Warner

Summary

The Wolston Creek Bushland Group offers a classic example of effective intergenerational activities occurring in the local community. The age of the volunteers varies dramatically from infants to seniors with each contributing time, knowledge and skills to enhance a natural community area.

The success of the Wolston Creek Bushland Group can be attributed to many factors including the culture of inclusivity and the social nature of the group. The broad make-up of the volunteer group is reflective of the demographics of the existing neighbourhood and community, with volunteers contributing varying amounts of time and resources depending upon their schedules and availability.

As this case study has highlighted, there are far broader outcomes than just the planting of trees and eradication of weeds. Through the activities and loose structure of a bushcare group, volunteers are able to interact with individuals outside their immediate circle of friends and acquaintances. The outcomes of these intergenerational friendships include feeling of belonging, esteem associated with being a valued member of a community group, increased awareness and understanding of differing ages as well as the transfer of various skills between generations.

Wolston Creek Bushland Group is an example of how individuals of different generations are working together to address community environmental issues. The intergenerational relationships that are formed during these activities are based on common outcomes, shared interests, skills transfer and mutual respect. Ultimately, it is through meaningful intergenerational activities such as those created and experienced by the Wolston Creek volunteers, that communities are able to address issues, meet needs and create a cohesive, less fragmented society.

For further information on Wolston Creek Bushland Group contact:
Warner and Tricia Dakin Ph: 07 3376 7724 E: twdakin@bigpond.net.au
Brisbane City Council's 2 Million Trees Project visit www.greenheartcitysmart.com

This case study was derived from interviews with Warner Dakin, Coordinator, hands-on fieldwork and testimonials generously provided by Wolston Creek Bushland Group volunteers.
Case study written by Leonie Bryen, November 2008

Supported by