

5 October 2022
Media Release
National Outdoor Education Conference 2022

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FULL HOUSE AGREED ON NEXT DIRECTIONS

Attending from all states and territories, Outdoor learning, education and recreation enthusiasts were on the same page when it came to discussing the future of the industry at the National Outdoor Education Conference in Leura this week. All 250 attendees, partners and sponsors commended the organisers on the opportunity to have the hard-hitting discussions and unite with a common voice about what we all need to see as change for the betterment of our next generations.

The benefits of Outdoor Education continue to be better understood and more research and data were revealed at the conference. Pymble Ladies College was one of the case studies discussed at the event and how the 'resilience scale' indicated clear improvement for attendees post the educational program. Whilst a program delivered over 8 weeks across 4 primary schools in Western Australia, had exceptional results in resilience, connection to nature, connection to the outdoors and increased students' collaboration and imagination skills.

So why don't all kids have access to this opportunity?

An overwhelming majority of the attendees at the national conference were from private schools. "It seems that everyone is on the same page... why is it that only the privileged have access to the benefits that outdoor education provides." Says Lori Modde, Event Organiser and CEO of Outdoors NSW & ACT.

Education improvement is on the agenda in most states and territories and there is an answer to many of the challenges they are trying to solve that's right under their nose. "In addition to Outdoor Education let's broaden our thinking to Education in the Outdoors or Outdoor Learning so we get better engagement by teachers in schools. Most learning can be taken into the outdoor classroom where students have the opportunity for improved learning by leveraging all the proven benefits of connecting to a natural environment," says Peter Kent from Birrigai Outdoor School in the ACT.

The Nature School in Port Macquarie NSW has taken this to the next level and adapted a whole child's primary school journey and connected it to nature. So successful that they now have a waiting list and commencing Year 7 in 2023 with the aim to have a Kindergarten through to Year 10 by 2026. "Teachers are breaking under the weight of paperwork and an overcrowded curriculum. I understand when they say they can't fit the outdoors into their already-full timetables, but so much of the curriculum can be taught in nature! It's not an add-on. It's an alternative space alive with learning opportunities". Says Catherine Shaw, Principal of The Nature School.

Catherine was awarded the Outdoor Education Service Award for 2022 and her school was the NSW winner for Program of the Year and a finalist in the National Outdoor Education Program Awards.

In addition to the access to these educational opportunities, the conference highlighted the movement and progression toward gender balance, diversity, equity, aboriginal connection and inclusion.

“Born out of the desire to make a positive difference in the profession in terms of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion, this year an ‘Ignite’ session was introduced”, Tonia Gray, co-convenor and Professor at Western Sydney University explains. The session involved a three-minute time slot for five panellists to throw a metaphorical ‘hand grenade’ into the audience. “Designed to shed light on the injustices or blind spots in the outdoor profession. The session had an impact leaving people and tears and standing ovations. We hope the field moves from complacency to action when we meet in two years for the next National Conference.” Tonia continued.

The content called for diversity and inclusion in the sector, whilst showcasing the experiences of leaders and how they want to help make a path for further improvements by calling out their challenges.

Conference convenors were pleased with the attendance and level of engagement in all topics, but Lori Modde, CEO of Outdoors NSW & ACT and host of this year’s event rendered this one parting thought, “it feels like we are preaching to the converted, and we have a whole nation out there that needs to understand the impacts of outdoor education on our future generations because it’s a solution to many problems in our society and everyone deserves an opportunity to be better”.



The Australian Outdoor Education Awards were announced at the conference and the winners are listed below;

- Outdoor Education Emerging Practitioner
 - Mr Lindsay Blinco, Queensland

- Outdoor Education Practitioner
 - Ms Emma Beveridge, Queensland

- Service to Outdoor Education
 - Jamie Bennett – Western Australia
 - Andrew Boyle – Queensland
 - Carol McIntosh – Queensland
 - James McIntosh – Queensland
 - Graeme Dawes – New South Wales
 - Catherine Shaw – New South Wales
 - Chris Hodgson – South Australia

- Outdoor Education Fellowships
 - Catherine Carpenter – Victoria
 - Steve McMurturie – Victoria
 - John Quay – Victoria
 - Sandy Allen-Craig – Victoria
 - Mark Brackenreg – New South Wales
 - Jon Hodges – Queensland
 - Rob Hogan – South Australia

- Outdoor Education Program
 - Overall Winner – Trinity Anglican School, Queensland

- Finalist from WA, St Mark's
- Finalist from NSW, The Nature School
- Finalist from VIC, Firkbank Grammar School
- Finalist from NT, St Phillips College
- Finalist from TAS, Guilford Young College

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