



Evaluation Case Studies for Green-Adelaide supported programs

2024 - 2025





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Executive Summary

Nature Play SA continues to strengthen connections between people, nature, and community wellbeing through innovative, evidence-informed programs across South Australia. Supported by Green Adelaide, our 2024–25 initiatives have focused on early childhood education, community engagement, and youth wellbeing, among other priority areas, reflecting our broad commitment to fostering a resilient, greener, and inclusive region. This report provides detailed evaluation case studies of select programs within these focus areas.

Our flagship programs: the Go Beyond Bush Kindy Professional Development workshop; the Forest Festival in Kuitpo Forest; and the Birds in Focus student art initiative, have engaged a wide and diverse audience including educators, families, and students. These immersive nature-based experiences nurture ecological literacy, cultural awareness, and holistic wellbeing. Programs are intentionally framed by leading research, including Nicole Miller’s 2017 study identifying barriers to outdoor learning, and informed by Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data to support development domains essential to lifelong environmental stewardship and community resilience.

Evaluation results demonstrate consistently high participant satisfaction, with experiences reported to meet or exceed expectations. Highlights include significant gains in educator confidence and cultural competence through Go Beyond, strong community engagement and sustained visitation at the Forest Festival, and meaningful wellbeing and creative skill development among students in Birds in Focus. Participant feedback emphasizes the success in embedding Aboriginal perspectives and fostering respectful connections to Country.

Constructive feedback has surfaced valuable opportunities to enhance resource availability, cultural inclusion, hands-on learning, and networking, guiding continuous improvement. Nature Play SA is committed to leveraging these insights alongside innovative evaluation approaches in 2025–26 to deepen our impact and support Green Adelaide’s goals for a cooler, greener, and more climate resilient city. While this report highlights key evaluation findings from three flagship programs, Nature Play SA’s work extends across additional domains, including supporting participation for people with disabilities and other community groups. These important areas remain a central part of our broader service offering and ongoing evaluation efforts.

Ngaitalya,
Jason Tyndall





Go Beyond; Establishing a bush kindy

The Go Beyond; Establishing a bush kindy workshop was a full-day immersive professional development program designed to equip early childhood educators with the knowledge, confidence, and practical tools to establish and enhance bush kindergarten programs. Hosted in Belair National Park, the workshop offered educators a unique opportunity to experience learning in a natural, open environment. Led by leading experts in outdoor education, including keynote speaker Doug Fargher, the workshop featured practical insights and case studies from South Australian bush kindergartens.

Objectives

The objectives of the Go Beyond Bush Kindy Teacher PD were to:

- Increase early childhood educators' knowledge and confidence in delivering nature-based learning.
- Develop practical skills and culturally respectful approaches that promote holistic child development through bush kindy programs.

Survey Methodology

Participant feedback was collected through a post-workshop survey capturing both quantitative and qualitative data on workshop effectiveness. The survey explored participant satisfaction, learning outcomes, and future support needs.

Summary of Results

All participants reported that the workshop met or exceeded their expectations. A strong majority, over 90 percent, indicated they were extremely likely to recommend Nature Play SA workshops to others. Core aspects including presenters, content, venue, and catering were rated highly, with the overall experience averaging outstanding on a fourpoint scale.

Every participant reported increased knowledge and confidence in delivering nature-based learning. Over 90 percent found the workshop offered a balanced mix of theory and practical activity, improved their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and provided opportunities to develop pedagogy. 82 percent confirmed that they received practical resources and ideas to enhance learner wellbeing and agency.

Promotional reach through multiple channels including email, social media, and the Nature Play SA website effectively attracted participants. All respondents showed strong interest in receiving free resources with most also keen on further professional development, educational products, and up-to-date research.

100%

Participants reported that the workshop met or exceeded their expectations.

93%

Found the workshop offered a balanced mix of theory and practical activity, improved their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and provided opportunities to develop pedagogy.

82%

Confirmed that they received practical resources and ideas to enhance learner wellbeing and agency.

100%

Participants reported increased knowledge and confidence in delivering nature - based learning.



Addressing Research-informed Barriers

The positive outcomes demonstrated in the survey affirm that Nature Play SA's approach responded effectively to key barriers identified in early childhood outdoor learning research in South Australia, Miller 2017. Challenges such as educator confidence, access to practical, culturally inclusive knowledge, and pedagogical development were directly addressed through the workshop's design and delivery.

Participants reported measurable growth in these areas, reflecting increased confidence, deeper cultural understanding, and enhanced capacity to implement bush kindy programs. By equipping educators to overcome common obstacles, the workshop supported stronger connections between children and nature, laying the groundwork for lifelong learning, resilience, and wellbeing. This closely aligns with Miller's findings on the importance of fostering holistic child development and learner agency through nature-based education.

Achieving Objectives

The outcomes of the Go Beyond workshop demonstrate clear achievement of its two core objectives:

- **Increasing knowledge and confidence in delivering nature-based learning.** All participants reported that the workshop met or exceeded their expectations, and every respondent indicated a marked increase in their knowledge and confidence to deliver nature-based learning experiences. More than 90 percent stated they were extremely likely to recommend Nature Play SA workshops to others, reflecting the workshop's effectiveness in building educator expertise and assurance in this approach.
- **Developing practical skills and culturally respectful approaches for holistic child development.** Over 90 percent of attendees indicated the workshop successfully balanced theory with practical activities and improved their understanding of how to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in their programs. Approximately 82 percent of participants confirmed they received resources and strategies to support children's wellbeing and agency. This feedback shows the program directly strengthened educator capacity to deliver bush kindy programs rooted in both sound pedagogy and cultural respect.

Taken together, participant feedback and strong survey outcomes confirm that the Go Beyond workshop effectively addressed its original objectives, equipping educators with both the confidence and practical, inclusive skills needed to lead high-quality, holistic nature-based learning in early childhood settings.

Recommendations

Participant feedback from the Go Beyond Bush Kindy workshop highlighted strong satisfaction with the experience, while also providing valuable insights for future improvement. The following recommendations are offered to build on current strengths and enhance professional learning opportunities for educators:

- Consider offering additional resources and examples to further support learner wellbeing and agency.
- Build upon the positive feedback for practical activities by providing even more hands-on experiences in future workshops.
- Explore the possibility of extending the workshop duration or offering follow-up sessions to allow participants to engage more deeply with key topics.
- Continue to strengthen the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives, recognising the value of cultural competence for all participants.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for resource sharing and professional support, such as mentoring or networking, to help sustain and build educator capacity.
- Facilitate more interaction and networking among participants, supporting peer learning and professional collaboration.
- Offer further clarification and guidance around pedagogical concepts to empower educators in their teaching practices.

By incorporating these suggestions, we can continue to deliver high-quality professional development that meets the evolving needs of educators, supports holistic child development, and advances the objectives of bush kindy programs across South Australia.

Qualitative Survey Responses

Go Beyond; Establishing a bush kindly



“The workshop provided a wonderful forum to speak openly about both the positive experiences and struggles we all face with a busy kindly program. It was great to meet with such like minded people.” - *Attendee*



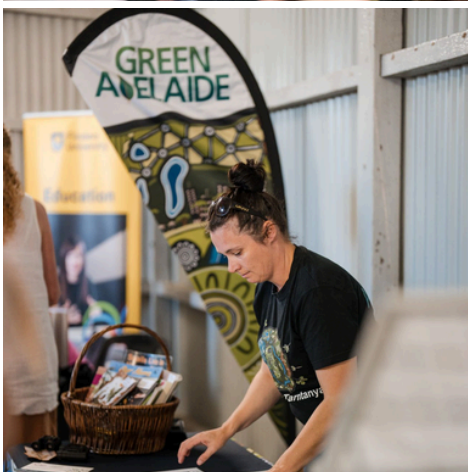
“Nature Play SA have a wonderful focus on cultivating curiosity, awe and wonder which are all so necessary for the world we live in and our future.”
- *Attendee*



“Nature Play SA workshops are always so inspiring, and always in amazing venues! We've come away with lots of inspiration and practical ideas which we can aim for and implement as a site.” - *Attendee*



“The workshop beautifully captured the essence of connection children to nature in a hands-on, meaningful way. It provided perfect balance of practical ideas, insightful theory, and a deep understanding of how to foster children's creativity, curiosity, resilience, and problem-solving for young children which could be incorporated into a variety of 'bush kinder' settings.”
- *Attendee*



Forest Festival



Nature Play SA's Forest Festival, now in its eighth year, is a flagship annual community event held at Kuitpo Wirra Inparri and supported by Green Adelaide and Forestry SA. The festival brings families together to engage in hands-on nature play and cultural experiences. Its continually evolving program reflects participant feedback and community needs, ensuring each year builds on past learnings while fostering connections to nature, cultural inclusion, and community wellbeing through diverse and engaging activities. The 2025 Forest Festival saw 3000 people descend on Kuitpo Forest with stage acts and over 20 different experiences to engage with.

Objectives

The Forest Festival 2025 aimed to:

- Enhance family engagement with the local environment through diverse, hands-on nature play experiences.
- Cultivate sustained community incentive by encouraging families to return and deepen their connection with nature.
- Provide a high-quality inclusive program catering to a broad range of ages and backgrounds with emphasis on holistic child development and cultural inclusion.
- Gather actionable feedback to inform ongoing improvements in event logistics, programming, and overall participant experience.

Survey Methodology

Feedback was provided through detailed post-event surveys capturing quantitative data on participant satisfaction, activity engagement, and logistics alongside rich qualitative reflections. Qualitative feedback was also received via social media and emails, however for the purpose of this evaluation report, we have used the survey feedback.

Summary of Results

The Forest Festival continues to grow its profile as a valued community event, with 100% of participants reporting that the experience met or exceeded their expectations, reflecting exceptional satisfaction and program quality. The festival attracted a strong community base, with 37.5% of attendees being return visitors, demonstrating sustained engagement and deepening community connection.

Participants engaged broadly, with most children attending between three to ten activities, underscoring the event's ability to cater to diverse age groups and interests. Culturally inclusive programming, including strong integration of Aboriginal perspectives, enriched participant learning and fostered meaningful connections.

Qualitative insights confirm the festival's role beyond recreation: it nurtures environmental stewardship, supports holistic wellbeing, and strengthens cultural and community bonds, aligning closely with government priorities around health promotion, cultural respect, and community resilience.

When asked what events like Forest Festival mean to you and your family, connecting with nature featured in 66% of responses with importance of time in nature with their family featuring in 62% of responses.

100%

Participants reported that the experience met or exceeded their expectations.

66%

Qualitative responses cited **connecting with nature** as an important part of the event for their family.

62%

Qualitative responses cited the **importance of time in nature** with their family.

37.5%

of attendees were **return** visitors.



Addressing Challenges and Continuous Improvement

Participants shared constructive suggestions such as expanding food variety, improving queuing systems, increasing shade availability, and broadening age-appropriate activities to ensure an even more inclusive and comfortable experience. Nature Play SA's ongoing commitment to listening and adapting has led to continuous enhancements that strengthen participant experience and operational quality.

Achieving Objectives

- Family engagement was significantly enhanced, drawing diverse families into frequent, hands-on outdoor play, supported by high activity participation and wide age range coverage.
- Sustained community involvement was demonstrated by the notable proportion of return attendees, indicating ongoing value and connection to the event.
- The festival's quality and inclusivity were reinforced by participant appreciation of its cultural programming and community involvement.
- Feedback mechanisms successfully informed responsive improvements, supporting an ongoing cycle of participant-informed event evolution.

Recommendations

Participant feedback from the Forest Festival 2025 demonstrated strong satisfaction with the event while providing valuable insights for ongoing enhancement. The following recommendations are offered to build on current strengths and elevate future festival experiences:

- Consider broadening the diversity of activities, with greater emphasis on cultural depth and intergenerational engagement to reach more participants.
- Continue to improve logistics and facilities, guided by participant feedback, to enhance comfort, accessibility, and overall event flow.
- Strengthen communication and outreach through expanded social media and email channels to engage new families and deepen community connections.
- Explore developing ongoing engagement opportunities, such as resource sharing, post-event networking, or year-round community programs, to sustain participant involvement.
- Enhance food options and shade provisions to improve attendee comfort and satisfaction throughout the event.
- Provide more age-appropriate programming to better support older children and accommodate a wider range of family needs.

By incorporating these recommendations, Nature Play SA can continue to deliver a high-quality, inclusive, and culturally respectful festival that fosters strong community connections, supports holistic child development, and nurtures lifelong engagement with nature across South Australia.



“The festival attracted a strong community base, with 37.5% of attendees being return visitors, demonstrating sustained engagement and deepening community connection”



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Qualitative Survey Responses



Forest Festival



“Always a fun filled day at the Forest Festival, so much so it’s become a family tradition. Watching our children grow up in this space and witnessing their deepening love of nature and the forest will remain a special memory.” - *Attendee*



“It was the perfect day for our kids, starting with a special Welcome to Country and then moving around all of the activities. All the creating, learning, sharing was so beautiful. We loved the nature walk and just everything about the day.” - *Attendee*



“Forest Festival is one of our annual highlights. We have attended the past two years, when my daughter was 9 months, then 21 months. We love all the activities immersed in nature. It is such a enriching, laid back & magical day out in nature and all of its beauty.”
- *Attendee*



“Very precious to see a tween immersing herself so contentedly in creativity and nature. Thank you.” - *Attendee*



Birds in Focus student art program

Introduction

Throughout the school term, students immersed themselves in the world of birds through art in a program titled Birds in Focus run by Nature Play SA. Students explored how their own dispositions—curiosity, creativity, resilience—mirrored the traits of local bird species such as the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, which demonstrates remarkable resilience by adapting to changing environments and persisting despite habitat loss. Using lead pencil, coloured pencil, and watercolour, students experimented with different artistic mediums while observing and learning about birds in their local environment. Creating art outdoors offered additional benefits, including enhanced social connection, emotional regulation, mindfulness, and a sense of pride.

Objectives

The Birds in Focus program aimed to:

- Increase connection to nature by fostering meaningful, lasting bonds between students and the natural world through immersive, creative outdoor experiences focused on local birds.
- Strengthen student wellbeing by integrating nature-based art activities that promote mindfulness, emotional regulation, and social connection.
- Improve understanding and awareness of local birds' diversity, ecology, and conservation, encouraging empathy and stewardship.
- Hone artistic skills through guided observation and experimentation with various artistic mediums, developing confidence and pride in students' creative achievements.

Survey Methodology

Feedback was collected through detailed post-program surveys completed by students, which captured quantitative data on their wellbeing, nature connection, artistic skill development, and engagement. Rich qualitative data was also gathered via observations, recorded student comments, and conversations throughout the program.

Summary of Results

The Birds in Focus program strongly supported wellbeing and nature connection among participating students. Sixtyfive percent reported feeling calm while creating art outdoors, and 43% felt happy, with many also feeling proud, curious, and excited. When asked if the program was good for their wellbeing, 78% responded “yes” and 22% “a little bit.” An overwhelming 91% felt a special connection to a particular bird during the project, demonstrating the program’s success in fostering empathy and deeper connection to nature. Artistic development was significant, with 96% of students reporting improved skills.

96%

of participating students reported improved art skills.

91%

of participating students felt a special connection to a particular bird.

78%

of participating students reported direct benefits to their wellbeing with 22% reporting it had some benefit.

65%

of participating students reported feeling calm while creating art outdoors (other feelings identified were happy, proud, curious, and excited).



New Holland Honeyeater
Aurora, 12 yrs old

Qualitative reflections highlighted how creating art in natural settings promoted mindfulness, relaxation, social bonding, and a sense of freedom to experiment. Students connected personally to birds such as the Eastern Spinebill, Whiteplumed Honeyeater, and Rainbow Lorikeet, and expressed eagerness for deeper learning opportunities such as exploring bird behaviours and habitats more thoroughly.

The program's blend of environmental education, art, and wellbeing aligned closely with holistic educational goals and supported the development of resilient, nature-connected young learners.

Addressing Challenges and Continuous Improvement

While feedback was overwhelmingly positive, suggestions for enhancement included allocating more time for outdoor art creation, offering greater artistic medium variety, and incorporating more in-depth ecological learning experiences. These insights will guide the refinement of future program iterations to maximize student engagement, learning, and wellbeing outcomes.

Achieving Objectives

- Connection to nature was significantly increased as students developed meaningful bonds through direct observation and creative expression centered on local birds.
- Student wellbeing was positively impacted, with strong evidence of mindfulness, emotional regulation, and social connection benefits from the nature-based art activities.
- Awareness and understanding of local birds' ecology and conservation were enhanced, fostering empathy and environmental stewardship.
- Artistic skills were notably improved through guided practice with diverse media, enriching student confidence and creative pride.

Recommendations

- Participant feedback from the Birds in Focus program demonstrated strong satisfaction while highlighting opportunities for enriching the experience. The following recommendations are offered to sustain and grow the program's impact:
- Extend the duration and frequency of outdoor art sessions to deepen creative exploration and connection with nature.
- Broaden the range of artistic mediums and techniques available to students to encourage experimentation and skill development.
- Incorporate more hands-on ecological learning, such as studying bird behaviours, habitats, and conservation challenges alongside artistic activities.
- Facilitate greater opportunities for social interaction and collaborative art projects to strengthen community and peer bonding.
- Develop resources and mentorship to support ongoing artistic and environmental learning beyond the program's duration.

By integrating these recommendations, Nature Play SA can continue to deliver a rich, holistic program that nurtures student wellbeing, artistic growth, and lifelong environmental connection.



Welcome Swallow
Hunter, 9 yrs old

“An overwhelming 91% felt a special connection to a particular bird during the project, demonstrating the program’s success in fostering empathy and deeper connection to nature.”

Qualitative Survey Responses

Birds in Focus student art program



"I loved when I saw one of my birds in real life [rainbow lorikeet]. I feel like I had a connection." - **Student**



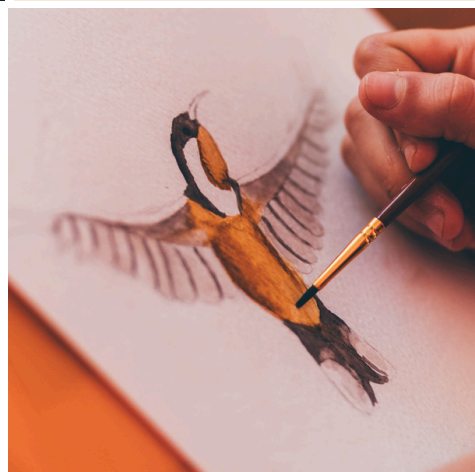
"Because it was calming and helped me think." - **Student**



"We got to spend lots of time in nature and do art where I work best. It was so lovely to get to know everyone in the birds group and it was very nice to see everyone's art work." - **Student**



"The learning was not rushed and allowed for numerous drafts and edits of their artwork. This intrinsic motivation is key to wellbeing and connects with Self Determination Theory where the intertwining of Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness are fundamental to human motivation and wellbeing." - **Educator**



Conclusion



The 2024–25 reporting period reaffirms the positive impact of Nature Play SA’s Green Adelaide-funded programs evaluated in this report in enriching early learning, community engagement, and youth wellbeing through meaningful nature experiences. Our evidence-informed approach effectively addresses key barriers highlighted in outdoor education research, empowers educators and families, and fosters strong environmental and cultural connections that align with Green Adelaide’s strategic vision.

This report focuses on key evaluation findings from select flagship programs, while Nature Play SA’s broader work continues to engage diverse community groups, including people with disabilities, reflecting our comprehensive commitment to inclusive nature connection and wellbeing.

Looking ahead, Nature Play SA aims to build on these achievements by trialling refined evaluation methods and expanding outreach to cultivate future stewards of South Australia’s natural environment.

We sincerely thank Green Adelaide for their ongoing partnership and support, which plays an essential role in creating positive outcomes for communities throughout the region.





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