



# Strategic Plan

2023 — 2028

# Acknowledgement of Country



We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, learn and play. We thank them for sharing their culture and knowledge through stories, language, art and song.

We recognise the important role they have played for thousands of years and continue to play in caring for the land and waterways. We pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future.

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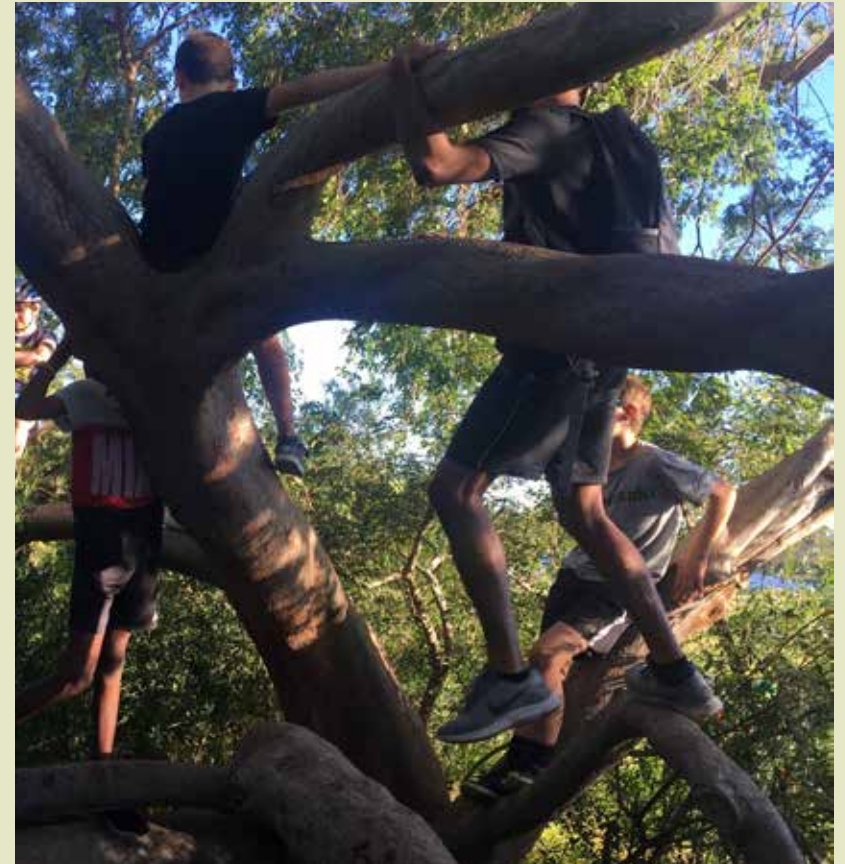
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## OUR STORY

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# From small things, big things grow

Kids In Nature Network (KINN) grew from a shared concern about the growing divide between children and nature. Driven by a desire for change, Dr. Cecile van der Burgh, Dr. Dimity Williams and Sanne de Swart, Centre for Sustainability Leadership fellows, came together with former Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria education coordinator Christine Joy, to imagine a wilder future.

At the time, many people and organisations were working to reconnect children and nature. The problem was that many of these people worked alone. There was little opportunity to share ideas, resources and learn from each other. Victoria needed a network to link and support those connecting children and nature. In 2010 and 2011, 40 diverse Victorian

Imagine a forum where you take off your shoes and socks for a spot of barefoot networking on the soft grass. Then you find yourself building a sandcastle alongside a government minister, a scientist, and a community leader. You chat about your childhood experiences in nature and how they helped shape the person you are now. You leave inspired to help get more children out into nature. This inspiring scenario is a regular occurrence at Kids in Nature Network.

organisations were brought together for a series of strategic planning sessions. The result was the long-term vision, mission and values for Kids in Nature Network.

Over the past ten years, Kids In Nature Network has staged networking events, roundtables, seminars, workshops, art competitions and presented collaborative works at dozens of events and conferences. Our award-

winning annual signature event, Nature Play Week, featured over 150 events in 2019, staged by over 70 groups across Victoria, with 15,000 participants.

We have achieved so much, and there is still much to do.

In 2019, Kids In Nature Network was incorporated to provide stronger foundation for our next phase of growth. Our new

strategic plan is built on many years of collaboration and consultation. We thank everyone that has played a part in shaping our vision, and look forward to working with our community and stakeholders to deliver our exciting plan over the next five years





A network broadly refers to a group of agencies, organisations or individuals that agree to work collaboratively or in partnership to achieve a common goal. Members often come from the same sector or area of interest/expertise, but groups may also involve stakeholders from a seemingly unrelated interest area<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Australian Government Department of Social Services — Families and Children

# We network to get kids in nature

Our name says it all; Kids in Nature Network. We are first, and foremost, a network. We bring together individuals and organisations from all sectors of government, community and industry united by a single goal - to get kids in nature. Their role is to connect kids with nature. Our role is to support them by building a forum to share ideas, experiences, and resources. Together we will strengthen current practice and identify new opportunities to get kids in nature.

## Our vision

All children in Victoria to have every opportunity to experience, love and look after nature.

## Our mission

Kids In Nature Network is a catalyst for connecting our kids with the natural world. We advocate for the benefits of spending time in nature, and link initiatives, individuals and organisations together, to enhance their capacity to engage children in nature.

# Our Values

Our work is guided by a series of core beliefs:

Connecting to nature is essential to children's wellbeing and development

We take an evidence-based approach and value understanding how children learn and grow. We use research to guide our work.

Childhood experiences foster nature stewardship

Time spent in nature during childhood influences our values and attitudes toward nature later in life.

We model respect for nature in all we do

All of our work demonstrates respect for the intrinsic natural and cultural values of places and our environment.

Connection is our strength

We value bringing together diverse sectors, organisations and individuals to share, learn and collaborate to help build the community's capacity to engage children with nature.

Young voices should be heard

We value and create opportunities for young voices in participation and decision making.

We are set-up for success

We have sufficient human and financial capacity and independence to enable our work.

All initiatives, activities and funding partners will align with our values



# Thank you

We would like to acknowledge a range of wonderful people and organisations, who have nurtured and supported Kids in Nature Network over the past ten years.

The Victorian Government for financially supporting Nature Play Week and The State of Nature Play Report

The Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria for their long-term partnership and organisational support.

Our mentors and advisers Mary Crooks AO (Victorian Women's Trust), Kate Auty, Karen Alexander OAM (Women's Environmental Leadership Australia), Maree Davidson AM (Davidson

Consulting), Jason Clarke (Minds at Work) and Jane Martin (Obesity Policy Coalition).

Our facilitators Jason Clark from Minds At Work, David Seignior from Play Think Inc, Kate Nicolazzo from Centre of Sustainability Leadership and Scott Killeen from Kelp Creative.





# Kids do better outside

As a society, and as individuals, we are poorer when we lose our connection with nature. A rich natural environment contributes to the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of individuals and communities; it is the life-blood that sustains rural and coastal communities; and it is fundamental to First Nations people.

Time in nature is also fundamental to children.

Active and self-directed play in nature and the outdoors is essential for healthy development, physical health, mental health and wellbeing for children. When children are outside, they move more, sit less and play longer. These behaviours are associated with improved physical and mental health and improved cognitive and social skills. Children are

more curious about and interested in natural play spaces than pre-fabricated play structures. Children who engage in active outdoor play in natural environments demonstrate resilience, self-regulation and develop skills for dealing with stress later in life.

Put simply, children do better outside.

"Every child has the right to time and space to play in nature. This provides the optimal environment for their growth and development, and for fostering their sense of wonder so essential for learning"

*Nature, Our Medicine — from page 30*

# Children have the right to connect with nature and a healthy environment

In September, 2012, the World Congress of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), meeting in Jeju, South Korea, passed a resolution declaring that children have a human right to experience the natural world. Dutch human rights lawyer Annelies Henstra, the IUCN's Keith Wheeler and Cheryl Charles, co-founder of the Children & Nature Network in the USA, and

others made the case to the Congress — attended by more than 10,000 people representing the governments of 150 nations and more than 1,000 non-governmental organizations.

The resolution, "the Child's Right to Connect with Nature and to a healthy Environment," calls on IUCN's membership this includes Australian federal and state government departments to prompt the

inclusion of this right within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The resolution recognises "concern about the increasing disconnection of people and especially children from nature, and the adverse consequences for both healthy child development ('nature deficit disorder') as well as responsible stewardship for

nature and the environment in the future." And it recognizes that: "...children... not only have the right to a healthy environment, but also to a connection with nature and to the gifts of nature for their physical and psychological health and ability to learn and create, and that until they have these rights, they will not bear responsibility for nature and the environment..." According to the IUCN

World Congress resolution, the World Congress is also convinced that growing up in a healthy environment and connecting children with nature is of such a fundamental importance for both children and the future of the conservation of nature and the protection of the environment, that it should be recognized and codified internationally as a human right for children."

# Future nature lovers

United Nations recognises 'that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.' To meet this challenge, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development plan has been developed. This plan contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are an urgent call for action and provide a blueprint for the global community to work together to create a more sustainable future.

Kids in Nature Network is also answering this call for action. Research shows that

early experience in nature shapes our attitudes towards biodiversity conservation. By empowering individuals and organisations to connect children with nature, we can help foster our future nature lovers and contribute to the following United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals:



# Sharpening our focus

The next five years will build on our past successes. Instead of diversifying our priorities, we will sharpen our focus. We will continue to put support where it is needed most - building a thriving network that enhances our community's capacity to engage kids with nature. Three strategic priorities will guide our growth and development through to 2025.



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## Nature play advocates

*Helping the community value the role of nature (play) in kids' lives.*



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## Thriving network

*Empowering the community to connect kids with nature.*



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## Visible and sustainable organisation

*Delivering our vision through sustainable operations*

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## Nature play advocates

*Helping the community value the role of nature (play) in kids' lives.*

# Nature play advocates

Can we expect our community to prioritise kids spending time in nature, if they don't value its significance? We don't believe so. A big barrier to connecting kids with nature is our community's understanding of the important role of nature in kids' lives. We ensure our community has access to

the latest information and research on the benefits of nature for our kids, at home and at school. We will gather and disseminate the latest research and information, and advocating for the benefits nature provides our kids at all levels of government, industry and our community.

## Goal

## 5-year Actions

Our community has access to information about the important role of nature in kid's wellbeing and development

- Develop a community media campaign that promotes the value of nature.
- Encourage the health profession to prescribe 'time spent in nature' as a preventative and therapeutic measure for common health problems.
- Link family-based organisations with nature-confident organisations to build their understanding the value of children's interactions with nature

Nature play in Victorian is informed by current research and best-practice approaches

- Connect with international campaigns #nature4all

Nature play is embedded in Council urban planning in recognition of its vital community role

- Develop a planning resource for play centres, child care centres and schools that defines 'nature play', and encourages the use of outdoor areas as nature-inspired spaces for learning and healing

Learning outdoors is a valued part of every day, at every school.

- Develop a professional development program for teachers and wellbeing coordinators on the benefits of nature play, and time spent in nature.
- Advocate for the inclusion of nature play in Victoria Curriculum from Pre-school to Year 12.

First Nations perspectives on the value of nature are embedded in all that we do

- Develop a Kids in Nature Network Reconciliation Action Plan that includes a collaboration process to foster partnerships with First Nations across key areas of Victoria
- Run a series of annual events that put First Nations People in charge



## Thriving network

*Empowering the community to connect kids with nature.*

# Thriving network

We believe the best way to get kids to spend more time engaging with nature, is by supporting, linking and inspiring the people who help kids engage with nature. We will expand our network and connect people from diverse sectors including health, education, environment,

urban planning, outdoor recreation, community, government, business and the arts. Together we will collaborate and share research, ideas and knowledge and enhance the capacity of our community to deliver nature experiences for kids and young people.

## Goal

## 5-year Actions

Our network connects diverse nature providers

- Consolidate the organisations currently listed with KINN, research leads for new organisations and identify gaps and further opportunities to expand the network across sectors
- Increase the number of education and schools in the network through targeted programs such as a 'Nature Schools' program that identifies and celebrates schools that actively engage in nature play and outdoor learning
- Engage conservation organisations by holding a 'youth in conservation summit' that identifies current opportunities and future opportunities to involve youth in conservation

We connect nature providers and community through an online portal

- Redevelop the website to enable a layered, resource-rich and searchable, 'nature hub'.
- Develop a 'Nature is Nearby' map that helps community find local nature-based programs and nature-rich locations.

Kids have a voice when engaging with nature

- Establish a KINN youth advisory group
- Our partner organisations seek input and collaboration from children and youth



## Visible and sustainable organisation

*Delivering our vision through sustainable operations*

# Visible and sustainable organisation

In order to achieve our vision and help the community value the role of nature (play) in kids' lives and connect kids with nature, we must be known and respected for the work we do. Our visible and public programs and activities will position us as

the 'go to' for nature play in Victoria. Our organisation will be financial and environmentally sustainable, and underpinned by a robust organisational structure, ensuring we have the long-term capacity to deliver our vision.

## Goal

## 5-year Actions

Kids in Nature Network is recognised as a leading body for nature play in Victoria

- We are known for our extensive network and year-long calendar of public activities and events
- Our signature event Nature Play Week is highly public, well attended and engages diverse families, schools and early childhood groups
- Develop a social marketing plan to promote and increase community knowledge of KINN

Our operational capacity aligns with our vision

- Identify and implement an organisational structure that enables our organisational growth
- Develop a 5-year business plan to build financial sustainability
- Achieve charity status, and identify suitable grants and philanthropic opportunities
- Explore and revise worldwide frameworks as an alternative to United Nations 17 sustainable development goals

