

DEVELOPING WELLBEING

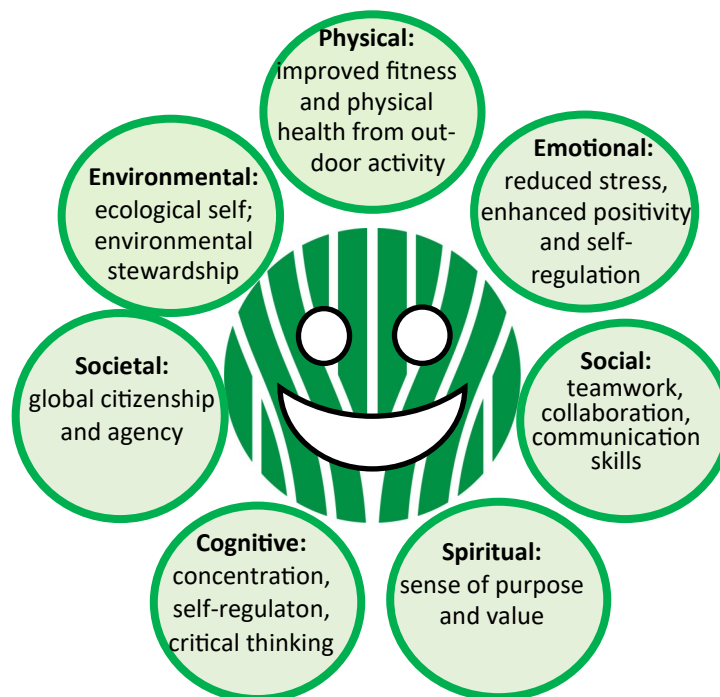
at The Forktree Project



THE
FORKTREE
PROJECT

The wellbeing vision of The Forktree Project is built on a belief in the benefits to self, society and planet of purposeful and fulfilled living (Seligman, 2004). Enhancing an individual's wellness allows them to maximise their potential to make lifelong positive contributions (Compton & Hoffmann, 2013).

Wellbeing is dynamic and multi-faceted. The Forktree Project takes a holistic view of wellbeing, recognising its numerous dimensions, including cognitive, social, emotional, physical and environmental, all of which allow an individual to flourish (Hettler, 2012; Albrecht, 2020). Engagement in the rewilding work of The Forktree Project has the potential to enhance all these wellbeing dimensions, and more.



The Forktree Project has the following **student wellbeing objectives**:

- to enable students to develop a **greater connection with the natural world**;
- to help students develop a sense of **stewardship of the environment** that will encourage them to be responsible global citizens both now and in adulthood;
- to help students develop enhanced qualities of **purposeful leadership, collaboration and cooperation, greater self-confidence, self-worth and engagement**;
- to encourage raised levels of **wellbeing** among students and wider school communities through engagement in service learning;
- to promote an awareness of the **benefits to learning and academic achievement** offered by experiences in nature and enhanced wellbeing.

Wellbeing Values and Principles of THE FORKTREE PROJECT



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A number of core pedagogical and wellbeing-related principles and values are central to the vision of The Forktree Project:



Nature-based environmental education is important not just for the individual but for society and the planet. Experiential learning in nature encourages a greater appreciation of and connection with the natural environment, a key component in wellness (Armstrong, 1995; Rozak, 1992). A wealth of evidence indicates that “nature is essential for human health” (Brymer, 2012), reducing stress levels and mental fatigue, and increasing positivity and overall emotional wellbeing (Maller et al., 2008). Time spent in nature also increases the chances of young people becoming responsible stewards of the environment in adulthood (Mayer et al. 2009).

Engagement in constructive, sustainable action enhances wellbeing and reduces eco-anxiety (Buzzell, 2008). While raising awareness of the seriousness of the climate crisis is necessary, we believe it is imperative that young people learn through personal experience that positive action can make a difference. Instead of overloading them with “dystopic, post-apocalyptic images” of the future, we need to provide an alternative set of images of a sustainable, “nature-rich” future (Louv, 2014) towards which we can strive.



Engagement in meaningful, contextual learning activities and service learning can enhance social wellbeing. Tasks that require teamwork, cooperation and critical thinking can improve self-confidence and communication skills. When undertaken in new environments, meaningful experiential learning tasks can offer individuals new ways to shine. For those students who find it hard to function confidently in a traditional classroom setting, the mindful and sensory nature of involvement in nature-based activities provides both physical and mental space that may help them manage sensory overload. Service learning allows students to experience what Aristotle referred to as *eudaimonia* – the fulfilment that comes from striving for something bigger than oneself (Huppert & So, 2013).



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Prevention is preferable to cure. Proactive and preventative whole-school approaches to wellbeing minimise the need for targeted interventions for at-risk students. (COAG, 2014, 2017). Involvement of whole classes or year-level cohorts in the affirming act of rewilding has a huge contribution to make in this regard.

Time spent in nature can improve concentration, cognitive abilities, behaviour and self-regulation in students. Wide-ranging studies have indicated that environment-based or place-based learning has a positive impact on students' concentration levels, self-regulation, engagement in and enjoyment of learning, with the improvements cascading into subsequent classroom-based learning (Kuo & Faber Taylor, 2009).

Engagement in environment-based service learning offers wellbeing benefits to all involved.

The wellbeing benefits of engagement in meaningful activities such as rewilding are not the province of students alone: the experience enhances the wellbeing of representatives of the project, school staff and even the families and communities of members of the school group. Numerous experts including Hattie et al. (2009) identify positive teacher-student relationships as key to optimal learning and student behaviour; therefore the shared experience by students and teachers of positive service learning such as rewilding, wherein the teacher is seen as a "partner in learning" (Scott & Colquhoun, 2013), may offer significant relationship benefits for school communities.



Program sustainability is required in order for wellbeing benefits to be realised.

Wellbeing is not a static condition; it is a dynamic process towards an increasingly fulfilled life (Brymer et al., 2014). From a pedagogical perspective, this means that repeated opportunities to enhance student wellbeing should be created. The Forktree Project offers the opportunity for bespoke wellbeing programs that are sustainable and sustained, offering opportunities for ongoing awareness, education and growth for all involved (Travis & Ryan, 2004).



Wellbeing outcomes are most effectively achieved when embedded in meaningful, curriculum-linked activities. School involvement in The Forktree Project offers a wealth of curriculum-linked learning opportunities, ranging from science and economics to humanities and the arts. The wellbeing benefits of The Forktree Project are delivered alongside curriculum-based learning outcomes (from the Australian Curriculum, the SACE and IB curricula) so as to offer schools the best possible holistic experiences for their students.

All Forktree Project service learning experiences are underpinned by:

- Respect for all students regardless of ability or experience, and gratitude for their involvement in the project
- A belief in the power of experiential environmental learning
- A belief in the wellbeing potential of Doing and Contributing
- A focus on the development of a growth mindset
- A focus on the development of the ecological self
- A focus on the development of agency and self-confidence
- An adherence to the principles of Positive Psychology
- Links to the Australian Curriculum Cross-Curriculum Priorities and General Capabilities
- Clear links to agreed learning areas within the curriculum



Modes of delivery are agreed with individual schools and can include: excursions to The Forktree Project site to engage in service learning activities; incursions to schools with presentations, workshops, etc; individual reflection work including journaling, etc.

All incursions and excursions are framed with discussion, reflection and evaluation activities led by Forktree Project leaders and educators to consolidate wellbeing and learning outcomes.



The Forktree Project offers a positive and inspiring package of wellbeing and learning, combining the stimulation of learning about rewilding with the mindful benefits of immersion in nature and the wellbeing benefits of service – an empowering blend of Learning, Being and Doing.

Just as the trees of The Forktree Project grow, so, we hope, will the project's power to inspire young people to live purposeful lives and thereby flourish.

To find out more, please contact us on hello@theforktreeproject.com.

www.theforktreeproject.com

The Forktree Project acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land which it is rewilding, and recognises their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.