

WILD4 (2016) in Licola

Why is it so difficult to find suitable candidates of disengaging boys or those who are obviously at an increased risk of disengaging in some potentially harmful way, particularly when we all know someone that fits the definition? Well, it just is! 41 external organisations were actively engaged with us here in Licola in an attempt to bring youths to this year's Wild4 Program held between the 10th and 19th of December. These included many schools and YRO's (Police Community Youth Resource Officers) - 27 boys were spoken to about the program. 14 showed up on Day 1. This was less than we had hoped to bring to us with three lads dropping out the day before but that, absolutely, is the "nature of the beast". Boys who are disengaged are exactly that – I believe I have 18 seconds from the moment the boys lay eyes on me to get their trust and get them interested in coming on the program. In many cases even getting the boys to turn up to meet me proves impossible. In other cases lads will say whatever is necessary to avoid a commitment and even when that commitment is made; it isn't always really "*made*". Whilst it was difficult in the extreme to forget about those boys who desperately needed a program like this and were not with us, a positive spin off became apparent. With fewer participants, our highly trained instructor facilitators were able to spend a greater level of focus on each of their charges' particular and unique needs.

Again participants were sourced from a broad geographical areas from south of Geelong to Sale. Each were met one on one with 3 boys even returning for a second time as "student mentors" both in an assistant role to the adult instructors but also as part of their own ongoing development. All three of these boys had a significant need to be out with us again, back in touch with nature, and to have a chance to explore what is really important and how to make better/ "*right*" decisions as they approach adulthood. Each of them took the opportunity without hesitation.

Many of the participants again have experienced extreme trauma in their early years and some obvious scars were apparent. Listening to their "*what is said on the bus, stays on the bus*" conversation on Day 1 from Traralgon to Licola when the boys chose to share their experiences with each other was a real eye opener for Rob, our new Camp Manager. It is great to report that all 14 starting participants completed the course this year although there were times during the long days when that seemed far from likely. One of these boys was another returner from last year who only made it to Day 3 in 2015. He returned to us this year still getting into lots of trouble at school, still struggling to manage his emotions and temper, but we found him to be a really nice lad who was never in any doubt to getting through the full 10 days this time. I am proud of him and his efforts.

4 out of 4 instructors returned from last year with Rob switching from instructor to working 'back up' with me, we also had another truly excellent facilitator join the ranks. This was an old colleague at Outward Bound from more than a decade ago. He has committed to working on the program again in 2017. Fiona Sherar (Fish) came out to assist with all food needs – one of her fortes. Another volunteer instructor came on board to help with numbers and to gain experience in the "youth at risk" field. Shaun Riley, CFA trainer, also joined the boys again during expedition to help with discussions centered on "life's choices" and a qualified counselor who was booked to volunteer for the 10 days unfortunately had to cancel with a knee injury. Fortunately we had less extreme cases this year and so less need for a trained counselor role. Parks Victoria have committed to their ongoing annual support and again led two "service" days – one with each group on the Wellington River.

Particular thanks must go the Wild4 sponsors who collectively raised all funds necessary to run the program this year. The LC of Lara, LC of Geelong Corio Bay, LC of Traralgon, LC of Box Hill, LC of Heyfield, LC of Trafalgar, LC of Wheelers Hill, LC of Simpson & District, and the Rotary Club of Sale Central. THANK YOU. It is always difficult to measure the true impact of any time spent with another person and that is true of time we have spent with these boys on Wild4 (2016). We only ever hope to plant enough seeds to make a positive difference in their lives. I can tell you that many of these boys have suffered greatly at the hands of others, for which no blame can be laid at their doors. They are good boys trying to make sense of what has happened in their past and what the future might bring. They have challenged us as we have challenged them, but for some at least, I know that they have a bright future and for some, we must have faith that *that* future is partly as a result of their time on Wild4 thanks to you.

I will continue to monitor their progress into the coming months and for some, longer. It is good to know that from Wild4 (2015) one lad in particular with the very, very worst of childhood trauma, who seemed to **hate** the expedition with a passion, departed at the end and immediately joined the army cadets, who he still participates with one year on.

We all continue to learn whilst working with these boys and changes will again be made to this ever evolving program to make it better each year. The Program will run again in December 2017.

Adam Wake

Licola Wilderness Village – Wild4