



## Northey Street City Farm Earth Kids Volunteer Information

*Thank you for your interest in volunteering on the Northey Street City Farm Earth Kids program!*

### About the Earth Kids Program

The overarching goal of the Earth Kids program is about supporting kids to become 'nature smart' – to have the knowledge, understandings and skills to engage in creating a more sustainable world – in a fun and interactive way. We also aim to support the children to develop a love of place and the animals and plants that live in this bioregion. It is an experiential week of outdoor discovery in which children learn about the animals and plants at the Farm through observation and supported questioning, explore Indigenous knowledge, experiment with Earth Arts and bushcraft skills, and put permaculture into practice.



Each Earth Kids program differs according to the seasons and to include a diversity of activities. Some of the activities are:

Gardening – planting, harvesting, composting, bush tucker and learning about seasonal changes;

Bushcraft – building shelters, making string, making fires, knife skills;

Earth Arts – creativity using natural materials;

Indigenous understanding – storytelling and cultural sharing;

Earth connection – daily 'magic spots', mapping, wandering and other activities to support understanding of the web of life and the elements that all life is made of.

Children are expected to participate in the activities, though there is always an option for them to take time out in the quiet area to read, write, draw or lie down. Several afternoon sessions will have a few different activity options for the children to choose from, and there are some unstructured play sessions scheduled.

The Earth Kids program is informed by permaculture ethics, principles and practice, with the core ethics of 'people care', 'earth care' and 'fair share' being our foundations. Through the program we weave in ways that people can live more sustainably and care for the earth, so practices like composting and being mindful of water use will be integrated into the week. A plan for each Earth Kids is available at least 2 weeks before the program commences.

The teaching approach that we use on is based in the premise that nature is our best teacher, and is inspired by the 'coyote mentoring' approach as documented by Jon Young, Ellen Haas and Evan McGowan in the book 'Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature'<sup>1</sup>. See <http://coyotesguide.com/>. More information about coyote mentoring is in the last section of this document.

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<sup>1</sup> Young, J., Haas, E., & McGowan, E. (2010). *Coyote's guide to connecting with nature, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. Shelton, Wash: OWLLink Media.

## **Volunteering**

Volunteers may volunteer for 2 to 3 days of the program. Non-parent volunteers require a current blue card (working with children check). The hours are 8.15am to 3.45pm each day, and the Youth Education Coordinator (Emma) will confirm the days you will be volunteering.

Responsibilities of volunteers include: assisting with set up and pack down of the site; supervising children in an activity being taught by one of the staff members or in the free play sessions; and for those who are comfortable, working with a small group for the 'magic spots' (see later section), for morning check-in activities or for explorations of the farm.

If you have any questions or concerns at any time, please approach one of the staff members.

If you are going to be absent, please inform Emma by texting 0411 084 727 as soon as you can.

## **Our Earth Kids Team**

Our Earth Kids team consists of a group of people who are experienced in working with children here at the farm and have undertaken training in nature awareness, permaculture and/or bushcraft. We also have special guests visit to offer experiences relating to Indigenous culture, bushcraft and other topics. Staff members have experience in working with children who visit the farm for school excursions and running activities like composting, worm farming, planting, propagation and Earth Arts with these groups.

## **Child Protection**

NSCF regards its role in the protection of children in our care as of the utmost importance. NSCF has a range of policies and procedures to keep children and young people safe. Details of these policies are available on request along with how you can report child safety concerns.

All staff have been made aware of and trained in the NSCF Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy.

There will be at least 2 staff members with the children at all times regardless of the number of children attending. All staff and non-parent volunteers working with the children are required to have current blue cards (working with children check). At least one staff member present will hold a current approved first aid qualification, including emergency anaphylaxis and asthma management training. Only staff members are to administer first aid.

We have a quiet area for any children who are feeling overwhelmed and / or needing time out to themselves.

## **Site safety issues**

NSCF endeavours to create a safe, secure environment where children feel welcome and at ease.

Some important safety issues relating to the site include:

- \* There is no fencing at farm, - there are a couple of quiet roads and a creek bounding the farm. Children cannot cross the road without a staff member or volunteer accompanying them.
- \* There are European honeybee hives on site. If any child is known to be allergic to bee stings, we will let you know.
- \* We allow children who are confident climbing trees to do so. However, we only allow them to climb trees that we have checked thoroughly for safety.

## **About Coyote Mentoring**

'Coyote mentoring' (or perhaps 'dingo mentoring as some have suggested we call it in Australia) involves people connecting to nature in a way in which growth and learning happen gradually and almost invisibly. It happens through experience, honing senses and observing the natural world. It is an approach that Jon Young, author of the 'Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature' learnt from his mentor, Tom Brown, although he did not even know for years that Tom was using a teaching or mentoring approach with him, such is the nature of coyote mentoring. In the Coyote's Guide, Jon elaborates: "The approach draws people to the edge of their knowledge and experience and guides them into new territory. This repeats through a cyclical pattern of

visits, explorations and relationship-building that allows for real connection to occur in its own organic way. In previous centuries, this connection happened naturally as families in a community depended on natural resources and the ingenuity to know when, where, and how to hunt, trap, fish and gather what they needed, while they cared of the natural world at the same time.” (Coyote’s Guide, p. xxvii).

### **Core routines of nature connection**

Through the NSCF Earth Kids program, we introduce some of the core routines of nature connection as described in the Coyote’s Guide. “The Core Routines of nature connection are things people do to learn nature’s ways. They aren’t lessons. They aren’t knowledge. They are learning habits” (Coyote’s Guide 2<sup>nd</sup> ed p35). Some of these core routines include sit spots (or ‘magic spots’ as we call them), story of the day, bird language, expanding our senses, exploring field guides and mapping. Some of these core routines are learnt by playing games that make the core routines fun and easy to learn.

### **Magic spots**

The magic spot (or ‘sit spot’) is the keystone nature connection core routine, and for this reason, we practice it at each NSCF Earth Kids program. As described in the Coyote’s Guide, “The idea is simple: guide people to a special place in nature where they will be comfortable with just being there, still and quiet. In this place, the lessons of nature will seep in. Sit Spot will become personal because it feels private and intimate; the place where they feel wonder; the place where they get eye to eye with a diversity of life forms and weather patterns; the place where they face their fears – of bugs, of being alone, of the dark – and grow past them; and the place where they meet nature as their home.” (Coyote’s Guide, p37)

In the wild and at home, we encourage children (and adults!) to have magic spots that are away from other people. On the Earth Kids program, as it is important to supervise the children, they need to be fairly close together. However, as magic spots are an opportunity to have special solo time in nature, we suggest that the children’s magic spots be a minimum of 5 metres away from each other. Children may choose to make some noise at times, for example, to be imitating bird sounds that they are hearing.

Children go to their magic spot where they sit and observe - for about 5 minutes on the first day, going to 15 minutes later in the program. The end of each magic spot period is marked by a ‘coowee’. After that each mob (of up to 10 children) gather in a central spot in their area where they have the chance to draw, write about and share some observations. Occasionally we may sub-divide the group if the volunteers feel comfortable to lead a small group of up to 5 in this. The idea is to draw out from children what they have seen by asking questions. We can sometimes build a ‘story’ of what went on by piecing the children’s observations together. Eg. If one child sees a duck in the creek you might first ask what it was doing... and if it moved away from the area. Then you could ask if any of the other children saw the duck... again what it was doing, where it was going etc... After their magic spots on one of the earlier days, we sometimes invite the children to come up with questions they don’t know the answer to but that they are curious about, and later in the program the group can return to these questions to see if they have discovered any answers through observation.

From experience, children come to love their magic spots and towards the end of the program some of them are bound to be asking “when will be doing our magic spots today?”, with a feeling of excitement and anticipation. It is fostering this love and excitement to be in nature that Earth Kids is all about.

***Thank you for your interest in volunteering on the Earth Kids program.  
We hope to share in Earth Care and Connection with you!***