

## WILD4 (2017) in Licola

### Pre-camp

In response to last year's low turnout, effort was made to improve numbers. Thirty external organisations were actively engaged in seeking to place children on this year's program. The referral system has been formalised with an official form, seeking to gain not just permission but an insight into the Young Person (YP) before the initial meeting. Participants were each met one on one (when possible with families) in the months leading up to December across the State from Orbost to Geelong.

The evening before the first round of get togethers, I received a phone call from YP1 (a participant from 2015). He just wanted to say "**thanks**", and that he has "**a job**" and that "**yes, I did complete Year 10**". YP1 had been a participant on the first Wild4 Program and returned the following year as student mentor. At that time, he was close to dropping out of school. It was a boost to receive a call like this the evening before meeting the new potential participants. I have since heard that YP1 has now been offered work in Canada as a snow board instructor and is currently living entirely on his own wage "**paying rent and all my own food etc...**".

Twenty-two places were offered out for the 20 available places this year. 20 to new participants and 2 to previous Wild4 participants to return as mentors. Despite a handful of the boys missing trains, 19 finally got to the meeting point on Day 1 representing a 95% turnout against target numbers. This is remarkable. All boys that turned up were already well out of their comfort zone. This was a big commitment and at this point it was hitting home.

### Ten days in Licola

Responding to last year's leader feedback, we altered the program so that groups were dropped 60km by road from Licola and they made their way back, all the way back, to Licola. This was via Mt. Wellington, Tali Karng, The Valley of Destruction, the Wellington River and Mt. Eliza, mostly on foot but some mountain biking as well. A total distance of around 80km.

The reason for this was to reduce the amount of time on base (in Licola) as well as to limit external contact. Unfortunately, on Day 1, one group's lead instructor injured himself and without enough slack in the system I went out on expedition instead. This gave me an increased understanding into the energy and effort that the instructors must give this program, given the demographic. I think it was Rudyard Kipling who said, "*IF you can fill the unforgiving minute, With sixty seconds' worth of distance run*" ... well every minute with these boys feels like 60 seconds well filled – from personal experience, I can honestly say that instructors earn their money!

My highlight from expedition was not just seeing the boys act like kids having real, healthy, outdoor adventure and fun, jumping off rocks into Tali Karng or the Wellington River, but also standing on the Sentinel looking down on a truly incredible sight. To see the camp site, Nyimba, to the North East (that evening's target camp ground), Tali Karng to the North (the next day's lunch stop), and the Valley of Destruction, way below and to the West (several days of hiking) is a truly incredible experience. To show this to the boys on the map in 2D then in front, in real world orientation, was brilliant.

One participant did not make it to the end of the program instead exiting on Day 8. He was pushed to his limits and it was finally agreed that it was to his and everyone's benefit to accept the decision to facilitate an exit. He had some big wins and I believe took some learnings home with him.

In addition to expedition and managing all expedition needs, boys all took part in, or were offered the opportunity to complete, an overnight solo experience, canoeing, climbing and Quick Jump, and a 1-day service project.

Program partner, Parks Victoria sent the following message about the service project;

***"We had a great time working with the boys up on the Wellington camps getting some much-needed work done before the busy school holiday period. We asked the boys what their ideas on safety in the bush were, prompting them to think deeper on the activities planned for the day. This gave us the opportunity to get the point about safety across without overloading the group with OH&S. Soon after we began digging out fire pits, picking up rubbish and learning about the natural environment in the area.***

***The boys responded well to our direction and had more interactive questions than I expected regarding Park management, we even found a way to get volunteers to clean toilets by using the fire hose as a motivator for the activity.***

***Wild4 is such an important program for the boys giving them the opportunity to spend an extended amount of time in the outdoors, which they might not have been able to do before. The program links in well with Parks Victoria's Strategic direction, "Providing Benefits Beyond Park Boundaries", and our initiative "Learning in Nature". I hope the boys will find***

***value in the program and pass on their positive experiences to others, encouraging their friends and family to get out into Park.”***

### Feedback & Follow Up

At the end of the 10 days in Licola an informal report is put together on each participant written by the instructors. These are shared as required with the various referral bodies to assist in their understanding of the boys and to use to their benefit where possible.

After Wild4-2017 I received an email from a care worker about one of the boys who attended the camp (YP2). During the program it was impossible to assess if anything was being taken on board by this participant. In the group environment, YP2 was very difficult to manage but was better in one on one situations. The feedback received stated;

***“After the Wild 4 program I noticed that he was more grown up in his rationalising situations, and he wasn’t seeking a reaction out of me anymore. He was also a lot more grown up in his attitude towards his peers.***

***Prior to the program he liked to hang around with peers who smoked marijuana. When I last spoke to him he no longer saw the point in this. It wasn’t worth the friendship - getting stoned or the likely life chances. His overall goal now is to get a job, which is great.”***

Previous Wild4, participants and families have also contacted Licola this year;

- YP3 (another participant from 2015) rang just to say hello and that he had gone back to school.
- The mother of YP4 got in touch about her son (who came in 2015 and again in 2016) as he had lost his apprenticeship and had not been able to get back in school. At her request we got together and set up a new contact at the school. YP4 has now found work and seemingly going well.
- Another mother rang to say that she hoped Wild4 was just as successful for her youngest son as for her oldest son (who came in 2016). She said it ***“really improved their relationship with each other”***.
- A mum of a boy that came in 2015 emailed this about her son;  
***“(YP5) has really grown in confidence and is now very chatty around strangers, which is great as he’s always been fairly quiet around strangers. He’s still in cadets – and he got their highest award last week at their end of year parade, very proud of himself. He is heading into year 11 next year and is very serious about his studies now, which is fantastic as he used to talk about joining the army at 17. He often wears the Wild4 hoodie – even to work – (which he has kept immaculate by the way!) – he gets all wistful and says what a great camp it was – he also really loved the bush/wilderness up there and often talks about the bush at Licola and that he can still recall the smells and trees of the bush there. Remember, teenage boys will not show much appreciation, but it’s later on that they sing your praises.”***

In April 2017 we invited one participant from Wild4-2016 to join one of our Lions Sponsored Camps, for eight to 11-year olds, as a “junior leader”. At the end of the 5-day camp he walked to the front of the dining hall, to receive his certificate of recognition, when over 100 kids chanted his name; he later told me that it was the best week of his life.

I will continue to monitor progress of the boys in the coming months.

### Post course

Another first this year is a goal defined water ski day. Each participant has been advised that if they achieve one of their goals – self set during program – by early to mid-February, they will be invited to join us again at Lake Glenmaggie for a day’s water skiing in March this year. They will leave with a Frog-stick (USB) of high definition photos to remind them of their day and as an additional reminder of the goals they set and hopefully achieved both during and after Wild4. Program partners, the LC of Maffra and Frog Water-ski Adventures, have teamed up to make this possible and I look forward to the day.

Wild4-2017 would not have been possible without specific funding received from the estate of the late Lion Dudley Barton Adams, the Paul Family Foundation, the LC of Traralgon, the LC of Box Hill, the LC of Rye, the LC of Geelong & Corio Bay, Carol Kavanagh fund raising, the LC of Wheelers Hill and the LC of Vermont. It is impossible to say the importance of the program and the long-term impact on these boys, but you must know that if we don’t try, some of these boys are lost. Thank you. Thanks also to Glenfalloch Station (the Paul Family) and Rob Gilder for access to their private properties.

The Program will run again in December 2018.

Adam Wake  
Licola Wilderness Village – Wild4