

From little things, big things grow

Jane Goodall's visionary program for empowering young people to get involved in making their community and their environment a better place for all has taken root in Australia.

In the bigger scheme of things, Sandy the bearded dragon at first looks very small. But to the students at Marree Aboriginal School, Sandy is their link to a global movement aimed at young people, called Roots & Shoots.

The Roots & Shoots program was established by world-renowned primatologist, Dr Jane Goodall, in 1991. Today, it is a network of tens of thousands of young people and adults in 8000 groups across 100 countries undertaking community based activities centred on the Roots & Shoots philosophy of 'knowledge, compassion and action'.

For former schoolteacher Campbell Whalley – who came out of retirement to set up a Roots & Shoots program at the Marree school – it is all about connecting the 30 schoolchildren and many of the adults in the tiny outback community to the world around them through a process of 'dialogue and do'.

Under Campbell's guidance – and with Sandy in the class vivarium as a focus – the youngest students at the Marree school have undertaken reptile studies, storytelling (in indigenous Arabunna as well as English), painting, and even a trip to the Adelaide and Monarto zoos to pursue their now-passionate interest in reptiles.

'A year ago, if someone up here saw a lizard on the road, they'd go out of their way to run over it,' said Campbell. 'Today, if you've got a Marree student in the vehicle, they just wouldn't let you do it.'

Campbell has also encouraged older primary school students to establish a community vegetable garden, while secondary students have been studying how to design and install a solar water heater. Each week, every student at the school is involved with a Roots & Shoots activity.

Teaching core values

Dr Goodall set up the Roots & Shoots program in Tanzania after 16 local

teenagers came to her Dar es Salaam home to discuss their concerns about urban pollution, deforestation, inhumane treatment of animals and the future of wild animals including chimpanzees.

Today, the global Roots & Shoots program is administered by the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI), headquartered in the US.

Unlike most environmental grassroots organisations, Roots & Shoots encompasses three areas – the community (local and global), the environment and animals – and emphasises 'the inter-relatedness of all living things'.

In Australia, Roots & Shoots has blossomed since Dr Goodall's visit here in July last year, when she made her famous TV appearance on the ABC's *Enough Rope*.

From a handful of groups pre-July 2006, the number has grown to 70, based in and around schools, universities, clubs, workplaces, neighbourhoods and family homes.

Now, JGI is setting up an Australian branch office in Victoria, involving participants from four states, and Dr Goodall is planning another visit to Australia in 2008.

Providing an alternative

Ecos contacted Dr Goodall to find out why she thinks the Roots & Shoots movement is so important for young people in Australia and elsewhere.

'Young people absolutely have the power to rise and meet the environmental challenges we face,' said Dr Goodall.

'With their energy, creativity and indomitable spirit, they have the ability to make the choices and find the solutions necessary to save our planet.'

'The impact of community and media messages about the state of our planet is taking a toll on our youth. It makes them feel hopeless, helpless, disempowered and discouraged.'

'That's where Roots & Shoots makes such a difference. It is simple and easy to



follow, anyone can participate and the whole point is that every action counts, every action makes a difference.

'So we encourage kids to start small and simple, because these little steps add up.'

'This in fact empowers young people to take action. They feel better about themselves and about their contribution to their community – both local and global – and about their impact on the environment and all that lives within it. Their motivation grows from these simple beginnings.'

'Some of our groups progress to undertaking major campaigns that have much larger impacts in their environment and community.'

Better choices

Alicia Kennedy, the Australian Coordinator of JGI Australia, is a vet who registered her family as a Roots & Shoots group after reading Dr Goodall's book *Reason for Hope*.

'Generally, we've established a culture in our family that the choices we make can make a difference,' Kennedy says. Her daughters, aged 6, 10 and 12, are involved



Top left: Each week, every student at Marree Aboriginal School is involved in a Roots & Shoots activity. JGI Australia

Top right: Ten-year-old Samara Nicolson has been demonstrating how to make backyard frog ponds. Mardi Nicolson

Bottom left: Andrew Denton's 2006 TV interview with Jane Goodall – seen here holding Mr H, a toy chimpanzee who carries her peace message to kids around the world – boosted interest in Roots & Shoots in Australia. ABC TV

Bottom right: Steve Smith from Victoria's Department of Sustainability & Environment shows the *Mission Phascogale* students a live *Antechinus spp.* Fern Hames

with household recycling, composting and maintenance of a vegetable garden, as well as a range of community activities from visiting the elderly to participating in several charities.

'Roots & Shoots inspires and empowers kids that the small actions and choices they make actually add up to make a huge difference on a global scale,' she added. 'And they can have fun along the way, and develop themselves, create opportunities and follow their dreams.'

'Kids can do as they wish, within the commitment that every year, they undertake an activity or project that covers each of the areas: caring for animals, caring for environment and caring for communities.'

Mission Phascogale

Leadership and empowerment are recurring themes at Roots & Shoots. Young people are encouraged to research problems, brainstorm solutions, select activities and implement them, with the help of manuals and activity ideas from JGI and Roots & Shoots newsletters and websites.

For example, after seeing Dr Goodall on *Enough Rope* last year, 10-year-old Samara Nicolson in Townsville went straight to the Roots & Shoots website and ended up organising a seed-planting project in her neighbourhood the following weekend. In August this year, Samara helped run a stall at the Townsville Cultural Festival with her local Frog Club to show people how easy it is to build a backyard frog pond.

One of the largest Roots & Shoots projects in Australia was organised by Fern Hames, a biologist who works for the state Department of Sustainability & Environment (DSE).

Hames established one of the first Australian Roots & Shoots groups four years ago at Alexandra in Victoria and in 2005 initiated 'Mission Phascogale', a scientific expedition for schoolchildren.

Over an eight-day period, 24 students from schools across the Murrindindi Shire camped out in Lake Eildon National Park, collecting data for scientific programs by the DSE, the state Department of Primary Industries and Parks Victoria.

The students identified a new population of leafy greenhood orchids and carried out surveys of local wildlife, including powerful owls and phascogales.

The results were compiled into a *Mission Phascogale* report presented to Dr Goodall when she visited the area last year. Dr Goodall formally handed the report to representatives from the three state agencies, who undertook to use the information in managing the region.

Hames plans to run another expedition in central Australia in 2008, linking up with other groups to research threatened species in an arid recovery zone and rock wallaby populations in the APY lands (Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara).

A powerful force

With the establishment of JGI Australia, Alicia Kennedy has high hopes for Roots & Shoots in this country. 'We see Roots & Shoots as eventually being a part of the school curriculum for its potential application in science and service learning.'

For Jane Goodall, the flourishing of Roots & Shoots in Australia is cause for optimism. 'Through linking Roots & Shoots youth across the world we are connecting that powerful force of energy that can bring about dramatic change on a national and global scale.'

'Ultimately, Roots & Shoots is a program of hope in a world where hope is needed.'

● **Mary-Lou Considine**

More information:

Roots & Shoots, www.rootsandshoots.org

JGI Australia, www.janegoodall.org.au