



2025 OUTDOOR LEARNING MINI CONFERENCE

BIRRIGAI OUTDOOR SCHOOL

THARWA ACT

26-28 September 2025



YEARS OF ADVOCACY

ABOUT OUTDOORS NSW & ACT

Our organisation exists to lead a thriving sustainable outdoor industry.

Outdoors NSW & ACT is the peak body supporting the Outdoor Recreation, Education, Adventure Tourism and Outdoor Events and Therapy sectors that connect the community to nature for their health, development, skill-building, and wellbeing.

We provide our industry with a larger voice, opportunities, and leadership. Members receive business and activity support, marketing, and opportunities that build their capacity to remain a sustainable entity.

ABOUT THE MINI CONFERENCE

The Outdoor Learning Mini-Conference is a compact and dynamic professional development gathering tailored for educators, carers, and facilitators eager to deepen their engagement with outdoor learning. The event features a casual welcome event on Friday evening, followed by a full day of sessions on Saturday (9:00 am–5:00 pm) and a morning half-day on Sunday (9:00 am–12:30 pm). Accommodation options are available for attendees.

This mini-conference emphasizes practical learning and peer collaboration, offering a platform for outdoor education professionals to exchange ideas, explore best practices, and enhance their confidence in integrating outdoor experiences into their curricula. Key themes covered include risk management, overcoming obstacles to outdoor learning, effectively bringing all aspects of the curriculum outdoors, and more.

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PROGRAM

SATURDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2025

8.30am	Registration opens		
9.00am	Welcome & What is Birrigai Outdoor School?		Peter Kent
9.30am	Keynote Address - Provocation		Professor Tonia Gray
10.15am	Learning Without Limits: 20 Convincing Reasons to Get Outside		Dr Fran Hughes, Dr Amanda Lloyd & Dr Sue Elliott
10.45am	MORNING TEA		
11:15am - 12:00pm WORKSHOP SESSION 1			
Cultural Integrity Workshop by Michelle Allen & Lisa Ison		Nature Journalling - Wellbeing activities in the Outdoors by Christian Eckardt & Dr Amanda Lloyd	Benefits vs Risk by Fiona Robbé, David Eager & Dr Tonia Gray
12:05pm - 1:00pm WORKSHOP SESSION 2			
Seeing the Unseen by Peter Kent		Storying Your Landscape by Tania Moloney	Nature's Loose Parts Play by Bec Burch
1.00pm	LUNCH		
2.00pm	Pedagogy Popcorn - 8 min case studies to get the creative juices flowing		
2:50pm - 3:20pm WORKSHOP SESSION 3			
Researching the mountain: Learning Journeys informed by place-based pedagogy by Jack Fitzpatrick		Pedagogical Metamorphosis: Advancing outdoor learning in school settings by Lisa Frances	Thriving With Risky Play: An Australian Position Statement by Sue Elliott

PROGRAM CONT.

SATURDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2025		
3:25pm - 3:55pm WORKSHOP SESSION 4		
Outdoor Learning Workshop by Tim Knowles	Expanding Inclusivity with Bushcraft by Dakota Klein	The Lore of Young Children. What can Children teach us about Outdoor Learning? by Meredith Regan
3.55pm	AFTERNOON TEA	
4.15pm	Sharing the Stories of What Works	
5.15pm	Close	

SUNDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2025		
9.00am	Recap on Day 1	Peter Kent
9:10am	Keynote - Gadhungal Marring	
9.50am - 10.50am WORKSHOP SESSION 5		
Secrets of Sequencing by Lizzy Pugh & Liza	The Fire Pit Classroom by Charlotte Carpenter	Storytelling by Art Lidbetter & Jeremy Whyte-Hemson
10.50am	MORNING TEA	
11.15am	What Now, Whats next?	
12.15pm	Close & Lunch Served	

Friday Evening (26/9) - Cultural Burn

All invited (weather permitting)

*Program Subject to Change

SPEAKERS

Dr Amanda Lloyd is an educator with extensive experience in outdoor and place-based learning. Her work has been recognised through awards and scholarships, reflecting her contribution to strengthening connections between education and the natural world. Amanda has worked across a range of roles including teaching, research, consultancy, professional development facilitation, leadership, and advocacy. Her PhD explored the benefits of outdoor learning for primary school students, and she has gone on to publish and present widely in this field.

She is currently the Educational Consultant for Greater Sydney Parklands, where she draws on her academic and practical experience to embed nature-based learning opportunities across public spaces. Her approach values the significance of place and recognises the cultures and knowledge of the First Peoples. Most days you'll find Amanda outside — She has recently completed the Shoalhaven 100 Beach Challenge with her five year old, and decided to extend it from Wollongong to Batemans Bay, just because why not. These shared adventures are full of curiosity, play, and learning, and reflect her belief in the value of everyday time in nature.

Art Lidbetter brings over 30 years of experience in Outdoor Education and youth work, with a career spanning therapeutic wilderness programs, mainstream and boarding schools, TAFEs, detention centres, and work with refugees. He founded and led the Triple Care Farm Wilderness Program for a decade before joining The Outdoor Experience (TOE)—Australia's longest-running outdoor therapeutic program. After a stint in an office-based role, Art returned to his roots in a residential Outdoor Education school setting.

A skilled storyteller, Art weaves narrative through all aspects of his work to build connection, foster growth, and support healing. His practice bridges diverse settings—from youth justice to corporate experiential learning—always grounded in the power of story and the outdoors.

Bec Burch is a passionate early childhood educator and nature pedagogy specialist, dedicated to connecting children with the natural world through play. She leads Cottonwood Learning, a Gold Coast-based nature immersion program that takes children into bush and beach environments to explore, learn, and thrive in all weather.

With a strong background in teaching and leadership, Bec also mentors and trains educators across Australia through Bush Kindy Australia. Whether coaching, training, or delivering professional development, Bec is passionate about empowering educators to elevate their practice and deepen their connection to nature-based learning.

An active member of national nature play networks, Bec is a vocal advocate for the sector. She believes that nature is essential to holistic development and overall wellbeing, and that immersion in the natural world builds resilience, confidence, ecological literacy, and life skills in both children and educators alike.

Charlotte Carpenter is a passionate educator and behaviour specialist at Greater Sydney Parklands, where she leads programs in nature play and nature connection. With 13 years of experience working with neurodivergent children, Charlotte designs and delivers child-led, play-based learning experiences that prioritise holistic wellbeing through connection with nature and community. A mother of two, Charlotte brings both professional expertise and personal insight to her work. Charlotte holds a qualification in Autism Studies from Griffith University and completed a Bachelor of Liberal Arts and Science (Psychology) at the University of Sydney. Her work is grounded in evidence-based practice and a deep commitment to equity and access in outdoor education.



SPEAKERS

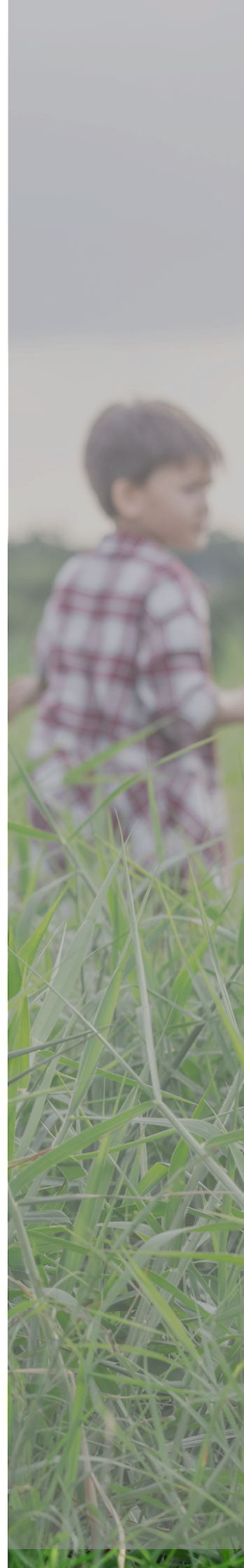
Christian Eckardt is the Manager of Education and Community Programs at Greater Sydney Parklands, where he develops and delivers hands-on nature education across four of Sydney's largest parklands. Originally from Germany, he draws on international experience in outdoor learning and is strongly influenced by forest school models and place-based education. Since 2017, Christian and his team have created and grown a suite of programs that reach more than 50,000 participants each year — including nature play, bush school, youth volunteering, professional learning, and culturally grounded wellbeing programs. His work centres on connection: to self, to others, and to the environment. Christian works closely with First Nations educators and community leaders to ensure that Aboriginal culture and knowledge are respected and embedded in the parks' education programs. He holds three master's degrees, is a 500hrs yoga teacher, and integrates movement, journaling, and ritual into his private practice focusing on men's wellbeing and nature connection. His approach blends thoughtful pedagogy with grounded, sensory-based experiences that support belonging, reflection, and care for Country. Whether walking barefoot with a group of preschoolers or holding space for a men's circle in the bush, Christian's work is about helping people feel present, curious, and connected to the living world.

Prof David Eager is the Professor of Risk Management and Injury Prevention at UTS. David is an internationally recognised expert on the safety aspects of trampolines, playgrounds, play surfacing, sports and recreation equipment, and amusement rides and devices. He is a Fellow of Engineers Australia, a Chartered Professional Engineer and on the National Professional Engineers Register. He is also a Fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. He is the

chairperson of numerous Australian Standards committees where he has represented Engineers Australia for almost three decades. He is an Honorary Life Member of Play Australia and Sports and Play Industry Association. He was on the Board of Kidsafe for 12 years. He was the Standards Australia National Meritorious Contribution Award recipient in 2020 and recognised as a Centenary Standards Hero in 2022 for more than 25 years of dedication to standards development. In 2024 he was honoured by Engineers Australia when they awarded him with the AGM Mitchell Medal for services to Mechanical Engineering.

Dr Fran Hughes is an experienced consultant and Early Childhood Education lecturer. She convenes the NSW Early Years Nature Connections group and has published a text, Early Years Learning in Australian Natural Environments in 2022. Her current research and teaching interests include early childhood education for sustainability (ECEfS), a nature sustainability nexus and new pedagogies for nature play. She is currently engaged in research projects and writing focused on natural outdoor settings in the early years.

Fiona Robbé FAILA is the Director of Fiona Robbé Landscape Architects. Her company specialises in the design of outdoor spaces for children and young people, which includes public spaces, schools, childcare centres, zoos, churches, museums – anywhere children play and learn outside! Fiona is a passionate advocate for inclusive play spaces, with a focus on naturalness and conviviality. Fiona is a member of the Australian Standards CS-005 Playground Equipment Committee.



SPEAKERS

Jack Fitzpatrick is an assistant classroom Director for Blue Gum Community School, which is an independent school in the ACT. He worked in the Outdoor Education sector for many years, as both Program Coordinator and freelancer, before making the leap into the classroom. He has assisted in the running of the Schools Outdoor Programme for several years including camps from Kindergarten through to Year 10. I am currently working towards completing my Bachelor's of Primary Education degree. He has a passion for Outdoor Learning and a fascination with how people connect with nature in our modern world.

When **Jeremy Whyte-Hemson** was a young teenager his father took him on a hiking, white water rafting, and cultural experience in Nepal. This experience not only challenged him physically and mentally, it also left him with a sense of wonder, a new perspective on life and living, and a burning desire to get out there in the world and learn as much as possible. Since then, travel and adventure have dominated his life. Pushing his boundaries and taking opportunities as they came, he found himself in all kinds of interesting situations. An entertainment host on cruise ships in the Caribbean, survived a mountaineering accident in New Zealand, surfed perfect waves at Uluwatu Bali, driven go carts through the streets of Tokyo, and the list goes on. These days he works with young people, growing their confidence, building their resilience, and inspiring them, to go on to live healthy happy lives, in the same way his father did for him all those years ago. He truly believes, that life begins at the end of your comfort zone.

Dr Lisa Frances is an experienced Australian primary school teacher and outdoor learning advocate. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of New England, where her research focused on the integration of outdoor

learning into primary school contexts, with particular emphasis on the transition from preschool to school. As a teacher Lisa led outdoor learning initiatives, and as a consultant she now supports educators to establish and enhance their outdoor learning practices. Her vision is for both students and teachers to experience outdoor learning every day.

Lisa Ison has been an Educator in the ACT Directorate for 28 years. During this time she taught Kindy to Year 6, was a Music Specialist Teacher for six years and has also been a School Leader on the Executive Team. After finishing her 'Master of Education' in 2020, she won a teaching role at Birrigai Outdoor School in the ACT and started there in July 2021. This unique outdoor classroom gives her the opportunity to teach students from Preschool to College a variety of programs including High Ropes Courses, First Nations Cultural lessons and On Country Learning.

Lizzy Pugh is an educator & facilitator. With 17 years of experience in Outdoor Education, Lizzy brings both depth and heart to every program she leads. She began her journey in the U.S. camp world, where she discovered that every activity—no matter how small—can be a powerful conduit for learning and growth. Lizzy is a dedicated people leader known for her energy, insight, and uncanny ability to run a game at the drop of a hat. When she's not facilitating team development or shaping the next generation of outdoor educators, she's busy wrangling two energetic toddlers—adding "chief negotiator" to her impressive skill set.

Meredith Regan is an Early Childhood trained teacher who comes to outdoor learning with a wealth of passion and experience. Before entering the teaching profession, she spent twenty years working in the Community Sector in a range of areas including youth work, drug and alcohol counselling, women's refuges,



SPEAKERS

domestic violence, and parent education. She has taught for nearly 20 years and helped establish highly successful bush schools in Nature Reserves for several primary schools across the ACT. She is a published author in educational journals and most recently, has been instrumental in developing a suite of highly regarded early childhood Aboriginal perspectives programs at her current school, Birrigai Outdoor School.

Mich Allen is a passionate advocate for outdoor learning, Mich is both a National and State award winning primary school teacher of 35 years experience in mainstream and outdoor education settings. Also a qualified Forest Therapy guide, she has been privileged to teach and be in a leadership role at Birrigai Outdoor School in the ACT since mid 2017. For Mich, supporting other educators to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives and gain confidence to take learning outside is a true 'bucket filling' component of her current work.

Tania Moloney is the Founder of Nurture in Nature Australia, where she helps educators to grow their knowledge and skills, so they feel confident and supported in their nature-inspired teaching and learning practice. She presents regularly at national and international conferences; runs innovative nature programs for kids and communities; travels around in her mobile classroom, The Nature Bus; leads engaging professional development programs, including an annual in-person Campference Teacher Nature Conference; and leads an online professional learning community, Treehouse Educators. She's also the Award-Winning Children's Book Author of 'Nature Ninja Saves the Natural World' and is on a mission to help children and their adults care for the planet in their own backyards, balconies, and neighbourhoods.

Tim Knowles has educated young people in a range of learning environments including: the ski fields and back country wilderness of Canada; residential outdoor education centres; boarding schools; flexible and vocational focussed programs; and mainstream schools in both the State and Independent Education systems, in NSW and Victoria. Stepping into the senior leadership roles of Principal and Head of School in recent years, has provided multiple opportunities to draw upon his diverse career experiences. He has built high performing teams and has designed and facilitated teaching and learning environments which support students to achieve to their potential, and experience success.

Tintin (Nitin Bangalore) has spent the last decade facilitating learning in outdoor education, leadership, and coaching spaces. He has worked with students, teams, and educators across countries and contexts. Currently, he is the Training and Development Coordinator at Outdoors NSW & ACT, where he facilitates professional development programs to strengthen the sector.

His journey began with a Diploma in Experiential Education and Practices and has since evolved through diverse leadership roles, including staffing and program management. Along the way, he completed an Advanced Diploma in Personal Leadership and Executive Coaching, deepening his ability to support others through reflective, purpose-driven dialogue.

Whether he is training facilitators, leading professional development sessions, or coaching one-on-one, he approaches every interaction with clarity, intentionality, and human-centred awareness.



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