



2018 NATIONAL LANDCARE AWARDS

11 October
Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre

Nominee: The Armidale High School Black Creek BushCare Group, NSW

Category: Woolworths Junior Landcare Team Award

The Armidale High School Black Creek BushCare Group (BC2) was formed and officially registered as a member group of Southern New England Landcare Ltd (SNEL) in 2016. Working collaboratively with SNEL schools coordinator Sara Schmude, the group's first project was to conduct baseline biodiversity surveys to identify weed and native vegetation within the school grounds. Since then the group has undertaken numerous Bushcare activities, including working with the local community to revegetate local native remnant vegetation site "Manna Gums".

Each year, students from Armidale High School study sustainable agricultural practices as part of the curriculum. The formation of BC2 has given the students the opportunity to take the knowledge they have learned in these lessons and apply them to real-life situations. Students are now able to meaningfully engage with the curriculum, using the lessons they've learned from beyond the classroom.

Through bush plantings on the school grounds, group members and fellow students have seen the benefits to the local fauna first-hand, auditing the school's biodiversity before and after plantings. The group has also learned that for a project to be successful you need effective planning and the ability to work together as a team and involve members of the community be they school mates, parents, friends and neighbours. They have also developed skills to identify and classify the health of native bushland and the various weeds that threaten these ecological communities.

A thirst for knowledge, and a general concern for the health of a local remnant vegetation site, enticed the group to commit to restoring the Manna Gums nature reserve. In just under a year, BC2 – with the support of local community groups – has successfully conducted a number of working bees at the site, centred on community engagement, weed removal and revegetation. In addition, the group has planted over 4000 trees in the Armidale Urban Forest, 1000 trees at Black Gully and 1200 trees for koala habitat at the Frog Dreaming gathering, with the help of family and friends.

Each year BC2 takes part in the National Tree Day, playing a fundamental role in planning and preparation. The students have planted approximately 300 trees in previous National Tree Day events and are currently in the process of engaging the school community to plant 2000 trees on the school grounds as part of the One Child One Tree Project. In 2016, as part of the school's annual Grounded Day – an initiative to address mental wellbeing in youth – BC2 ran a Bushcare activity with students from all year groups, to weed the school's wetland area.

BC2 have played an active role in teaching Landcare skills to other students; showing them how to plant trees correctly and how to manage revegetation and wetlands in the school. The group is also involved in the Frog Dreaming Youth Conference every year, attending and participating as mentors and student leaders of the tribal groups. Frog Dreaming is a two-day environmental conference for youth, aimed at empowering young people to be actively involved in environmental projects in their local communities. As mentors, the group plays an active leadership and support role for the younger participants.

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BC2 has benefited greatly under the guidance of many mentors. In particular, Armidale High School's agricultural teacher Rebecca Smith has motivated the group to rise to the various challenges it faces and find solutions. The group has developed a strong partnership with SNEL, working closely with Sara on many of their initiatives. SNEL have been particularly helpful in providing educational resources to the group, including native vegetation and weed identification booklets and charts. More recently, BC2 has been collaborating with scientists from the University of New England and former CSIRO soil ecologist Dr Maarten Stapper, conducting experiments into controlling Chilean needle grass on the school's sporting field.

The growth in youth volunteerism, and a devotion to environmental works, has been heartening to the stalwarts in established local Bushcare and Rivercare groups. However, funding is an ongoing issue for BC2. Whilst the school has been supported with donations of labour, materials and advice, larger projects cannot occur without ongoing funding. To overcome these issues, BC2 has utilised its networks such as SNEL, New England Weeds Authority, University of New England and Armidale Tree Group, and partnered with the local community.

Landcare is a grassroots movement that harnesses individuals and groups to protect, restore and sustainably manage Australia's natural environment and its productivity. Groups that fall under the Landcare umbrella work on a diverse range of environmental projects and include farmers embracing sustainable farm management and any community group that partakes in volunteer environmental activities. To find out how you can become a Landcare volunteer and for full details on all 2016 National Landcare finalists, visit www.landcareaustralia.org.au

Ends

For further information, photographs or interviews contact:

Naomi Straw
Landcare Australia
naomi.straw@landcareaustralia.com.au
02 8440 8823

Sara Schmude
SNEL Landcare
sara.schmude@snelandcare.org.au
0419 697 651

Web Summary

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