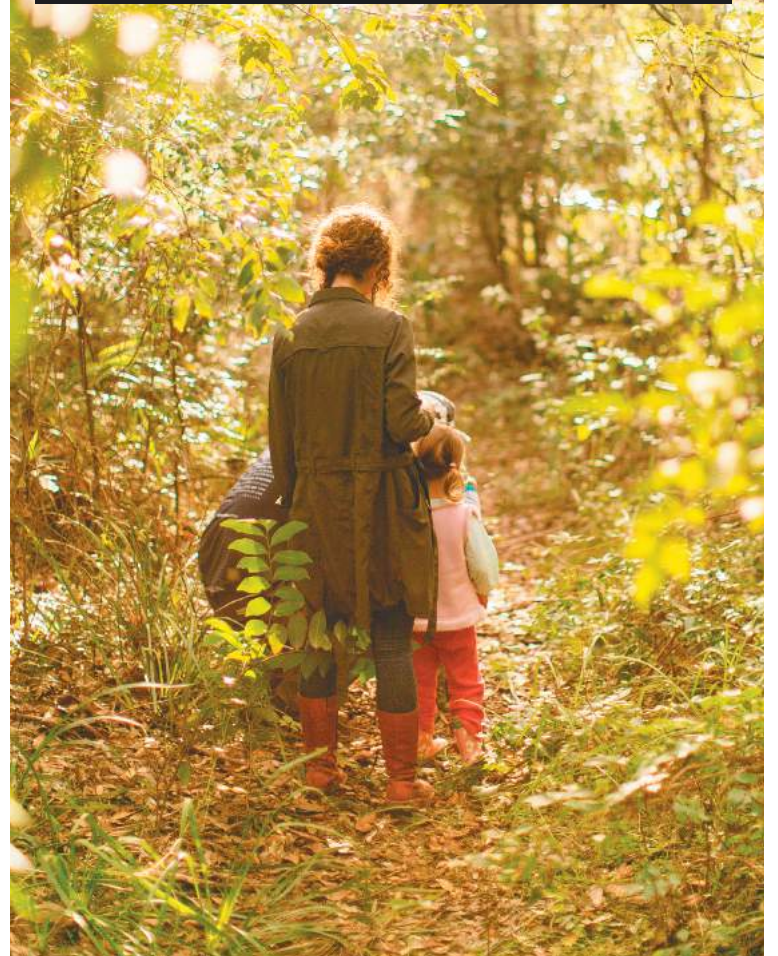




# the nature School Inc.

*If you think your youngsters spend too much time in front of a screen these days, Jodie Feeney, Lloyd Godson and Sybil Juzwiak Doyle offer an alternative ... Why not encourage your kids to reconnect with the great outdoors, with The Nature School Inc. set to run an eight-week pilot programme from July 14 ...*



**L**loyd, many of our readers would remember you from your previous interview with FOCUS, when you were about to embark upon the deep sea exploration vessel, Nautilus. You've just returned from a second season aboard this ship - how would you sum up your experiences?

Lloyd: It was a dream come true when I found out I had been selected for a Science Communication Fellowship on Nautilus. I was absolutely thrilled to be able to share my experiences with the next generation of explorers using telepresence technology. We were able to offer the public a rare opportunity to watch scientists do deep sea research in real time on board a ship operating tens to hundreds of kilometres off shore!

This season I was part of a team researching the long-term effects of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill on coral communities in the Gulf of Mexico.

**Jodie, Sybil, Lloyd ... how did you three**

**meet and get to know one another?**

Sybil: I met Jodie in community consultations for the start of the Port Macquarie Community Garden and then met Lloyd through mutual friends at a picnic BBQ at Shelly Beach.

Jodie: I met Lloyd and his beautiful wife, Carolina, through our two boys (Ollie-Blue and Ollie-Green) - although it turns out that I passed Lloyd in the University of QLD corridors and on the bike paths in Melbourne, but we didn't know it at the time!

Sybil and I met through another fantastic community organisation - "The Lost Plot" community garden.

**Please explain how the concept of The Nature School Inc. developed ... where did the idea spring from?**

Lloyd: It sprang from a common passion

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for the preservation of the natural environment and a desire to get our children back outdoors and in touch with the natural world.

Unfortunately, children have moved from playing primarily outdoors to being inside, with screen time replacing outside activities and experiences. A recent survey by Planet Ark found kids

today spend far less time climbing trees, exploring reserves and playing in the street than their parents did when they were young.

Sybil: We were also inspired by the extensive experience of Forest Schools in Europe where, for over 50 years, children as young as two have spent their preschool years playing outside in rain, hail or shine! The idea really came to life at a picnic, on the beach, with our dearest friends. We thought if they can do this in Northern Europe, why not here in Port Macquarie with our amazing climate.

**The Nature School Inc. is a not for profit organisation. What are the aims of the school?**

Jodie: Our primary aim is to help children, regardless of their needs, abilities and backgrounds, develop a deeper and more regular connection with nature. We plan to lay the foundations for a socially cohesive and sustainable future by nurturing creative, independent, healthy, resilient and environmentally aware children.

**You're about to launch an eight-week pilot programme for the school. What are the dates and location of this programme?**

Sybil: The pilot programme will run for eight weeks during Term 3 - starting from the 14th July. Two sessions are on offer; Tuesday (9am - 3pm), and Friday (9am - 12pm). We plan to make further days available in Term 4 and during the school holidays. Dates and times for all of our upcoming sessions will be announced on our website and FaceBook page.

For our pilot programme, we are working in partnership with the Port Macquarie-Hastings





Council, who are permitting The Nature School to use a piece of Council managed bushland in town. We are truly grateful for their support. We look forward to watching the children develop a real sense of ownership of the space. **Why is this school different to any other type of education children may have received previously? What subjects/themes will you explore?**

Lloyd: Our daily outdoor nature play sessions are between three and six hours long and are hands-on, experiential, learner-led and largely unstructured. By heading into the bush with no play equipment or organised games, children drive their own learning.

With the supervision of experienced Nature School educators who oversee, rather than take charge, children are given the opportunity to learn how to manage risks, use their unending imagination and creativity, build respect for one another, and for the natural environment.

By engaging and supporting the children where appropriate, the educators encourage

teamwork and collaborative play. Extensive research has shown that the benefits of nature play for children are far reaching. They develop more confidence and greater social, physical and language skills, have less chance of being overweight, have better learning experiences and more imaginative play.

**What age limit applies to children who attend The Nature School Inc.?**

Sybil: While The Nature School experience would potentially be suitable to any group of people at any age, our pilot project will cater for children aged 3 - 6 years old. The Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) specifically identifies children's connection with the natural world as an important outcome of early education.

**Once the pilot programme is completed,**

**what comes next? Are there any plans in place for future classes?**

Sybil: Our vision is a world in which all children learn from and within nature. To realise our vision in the Port Macquarie region, we're currently preparing a School Holiday Programme, which will cater for children aged up to 12 years old.

We're also planning a playgroup, where parents will attend with their younger children. Our other plans include Science Workshops, camping adventures and more - the sky is the limit!

**Have you received any support from the community?**

Jodie: We are so very grateful for all the support thus far. We were successful in securing grant funding from The Port

Macquarie-Hastings Council, as part of their Community Grants Programme, from The Australian Geographic Society as part of their Sponsorship Programme, and from a private donor, Kristina Georges, who generously donated two large canvas bell tents for our base camp! Ken Little's Quality Fruit and Veg has also donated fruit for morning tea.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our supporters for helping us get more children "back to nature". As a not for profit organisation, this generosity is essential to our success.

**Where can people sign up, or find out more information?**

Lloyd: If you would like more information about our programme, or would like to enrol your child, please email us: info@thenatureschool.org.au - you can also keep up to date with our work via thenatureschool.org.au

**Thanks everyone.**  
**Interview by Jo Atkins.**

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