

Presentation to the World Parks Congress

Improving wellbeing through environmental volunteering on Kangaroo Island, South Australia

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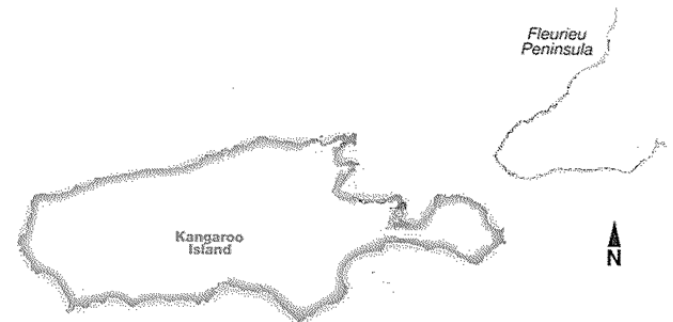
This project is funded by the Government of South Australia through a NRM Community Grant, Skills for All in the Region and Kangaroo Island Health Service
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Natural Resources
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Background

- environmental volunteering (EV) can improve wellbeing
- but not everyone has access to EV
- only a few studies have demonstrated benefits
- important info for env departments
- EV provides opportunity to improve stewardship and wellbeing
- Kangaroo Island- off South Australian coast- pop. 4,500



Objective

To improve wellbeing and environmental stewardship through environmental volunteering on Kangaroo Island

1. Health benefits- wellbeing, social connectedness, social inclusion
2. Environmental benefits- stewardship through nrm projects
3. Other benefits- skills, employment, training



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How

- **Joint project-** key groups/agencies
- **Three “*Get dirty feel good*” programs-** 9-10 weeks duration, one day/wk, 10-12 people/program
- **Mixed methods-** qualitative (questionnaires), quantitative (emotional state scale, general wellbeing scale)





Results

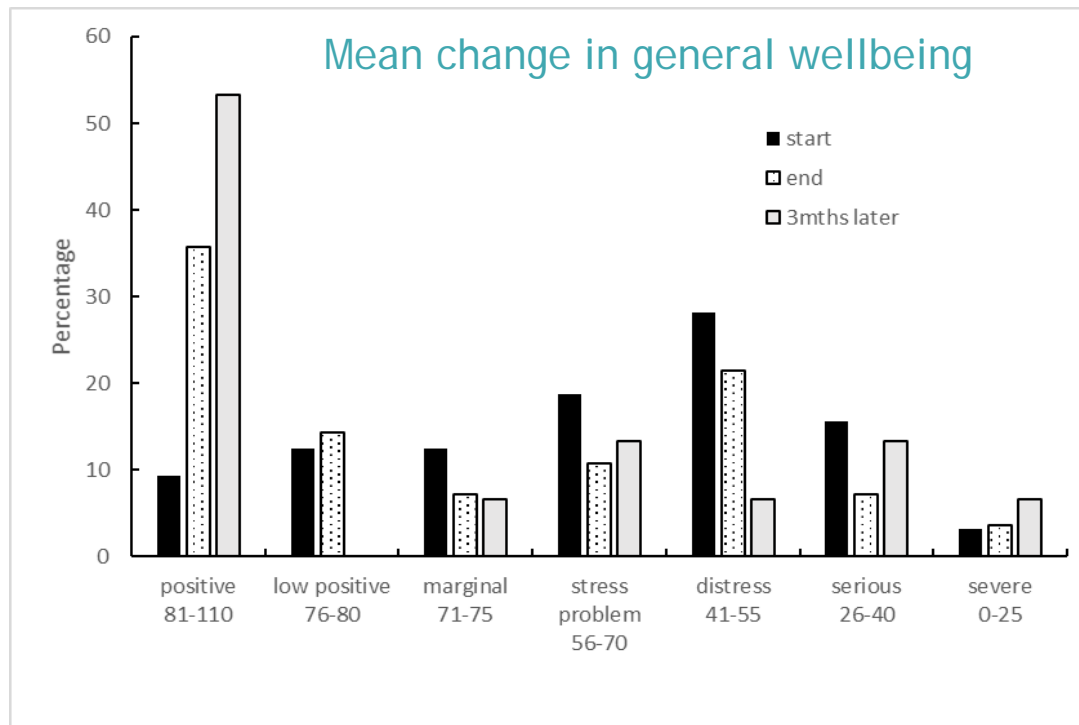
- 32 participants (28 completed) –78% marginalised- average age 42, range 14-71, 53% male
- 1,015 hrs volunteering (520hrs EV)
- Did the program improve awareness and stewardship?

Mean 4.44 (where 5 is a great deal and 0 is not at all)



Results- wellbeing

- positive shift- overall >60% of parameters improved each week
- much variation- no sig diff indoor/outdoor- group dynamics appeared to be a driver
- sig improvement at end but not 3 mths later



Results- human health benefits

What were the benefits? Social aspect (61%) and learning about the env (36%) were of most benefit

- *it showed me that even though I haven't got lots of skills I can contribute*
- *confidence & self esteem*
- *I feel more comfortable being out in public as I feel like I've contributed*
- *was fed up with nothing to do and then realised so much on*
- *more understanding of nature and how much one person can have a difference*
- *better awareness of our environment and how delicate it is*
- *learning little bits was brilliant as you go home and think about it*



Results- other benefits

- 43% joined a group at end of program (of which 25% was EV) cf 9% at start
- 31% obtained work a further 31% did further training





Success factors

- joint project with key agencies
- diversity- participants, activities etc
- taster sessions
- group facilitator and structured
- environment as external focus brought group together



Challenges

- keeping people engaged after the program ends
- measuring change in environmental awareness and stewardship
- understanding drivers of changes in mood state



Future potential of volunteering programs

- This study supports ecological and human health benefits of environmental volunteering.
- Part-time volunteer coordinator for KI community- all types of volunteering- also market in the tourism sector.
- “Refresher” sessions to re-engage previous participants.
- Maintain unique partnership



Questions?



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