



HEALTHY PARKS, HEALTHY PEOPLE



THERE IS CONSIDERABLE EVIDENCE WORLDWIDE THAT LINKS PARKS AND HEALTH. MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CAN BE IMPROVED BY ACCESSING NATURAL OPEN SPACES. BY SIMPLY VIEWING NATURE, CONCENTRATION GOES UP AND STRESS GOES DOWN. BEING IN NATURE CAN EVEN BOOST PHYSICAL RECOVERY. TO HELP COMMUNITIES REALISE, RESPOND AND RE-CONNECT WITH NATURE, PARKS VICTORIA HAS DEVELOPED A PROGRAM TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION AND CONNECTION THROUGH ENGAGEMENT. **JACQUI DEKIEVIT** EXPLAINS WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT.

The state of Victoria in Australia is comparable in size to Denmark, and Parks Victoria manages 16% of the land. That is, over four million hectares of parks, gardens, coasts and waterways. These diverse areas attract 66 million visits per year, and are surrounded by a multitude of communities. Not just communities based on where people live, such as suburbs or towns near parks, but communities sharing common interests such as nature preservation or sporting associations, and communities of similar identities such as those based on culture, age or lifestyle.

A sustainable future for Parks Victoria is reliant on its relevance to the needs and expectations of these communities. Developing and fostering networks and partnerships is one of the critical steps in supporting communities. Encouraging involvement in the community is the key.

The findings of a literature search commissioned by Parks Victoria and carried out by Deakin University indicates that providing access to nature parks plays a vital role in human health, wellbeing and development. In terms of health, research shows that parks can reduce crime, foster psychological wellbeing, boost immunity, enhance productivity and promote healing.

As park managers we know parks meet psychological, emotional and spiritual needs that are difficult to satisfy by other means. But does the community?

People often need encouragement to discover even the easiest of options that will contribute to their wellbeing.

Parks Victoria's Healthy Parks Healthy People campaign seeks to develop a broader community understanding of the value of parks and the health of the parks to their personal health and the health of the community. The clear and simple slogan Healthy Parks Healthy People implies that the environmental health of parks correlates with the health of people.

Healthy Parks Healthy People was launched with a vibrant visual advertising campaign. This was used to create initial awareness of the variety of parks and the health benefits they can provide.

Health messages and Healthy Parks Healthy People branding is integrated into all existing promotional material including brochures, signage and displays, media articles, uniforms, vehicle decals, interpretation and education programs. These are all used to build value and connection with the community.

Fresh innovative images and messages are used to inspire and remind people of the value of natural settings, which are places where we can escape from the stress of daily life, and the millions of commercial messages that can sometimes overwhelm us.

Partnerships with peak health bodies have been a significant contributor to the success of the campaign. Expanding the reach of





the Healthy Parks Healthy People messages, these partners enable Parks Victoria to target particular groups with health industry support and knowledge. Graded walks in parks are assessed by asthma and arthritis sufferers with findings published in industry newsletters. Joint partnership messaging has been developed and is disseminated through general practitioners surgeries, hospitals and clinics to confirm the 'healthy' benefits. New mums are encouraged to participate in the annual 'The World's Greatest Pram Stroll' to raise awareness of social isolation and post natal depression and the use of parks in prevention of these. Subsequently this has grown from an event held in one metropolitan park to six venues promoting the benefits of 'Pram Strolling' across regional Victoria.

Additionally, an initiative is currently underway to develop an event day where school children and their families are encouraged to ride their bikes along bike trails and discover the magnificent network of trails within Melbourne. Partnerships include Bicycle Victoria, the Department of Education, local councils, SunSmart, and the Asthma Foundation.

Joining together we have a stronger voice to build on the message of the value of parks in the community, encouraging more Australians to recognise and benefit from our wonderful park system and support the extensive management of them.

Providing collaborative, meaningful, and rewarding opportunities for community participation, and encouraging communities to value parks, enables us to demonstrate that parks are an important part of a healthy community. Friends groups and volunteers programs, school visits, educational and interpretive activities, park planning forums and activities offered by tour operators in our parks are all part of the growing opportunity for the community to engage in the management and enjoyment of the parks system.

Parks Victoria's Healthy Parks Healthy People encourages Victorians to interact and take advantage of the myriad opportunities to improve their physical and mental health in some of the most beautiful places in the world. Through the Healthy Parks Healthy People campaign, more people are becoming aware of the opportunities and benefits of parks. They place a higher value on parks making the campaign a worthwhile component of our management strategy.

By promoting the connection, internally and externally, between a healthy parks system and the health of the community, Parks Victoria is demonstrating the role of parks in supporting a truly civic society.

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