**2019 South Australian Landcare Conference**

**28th – 30th October 2019**

**Unearthing Aspects of Change**

*“Don’t bother with an environmental career - there are no jobs and no money, so best get a teaching degree and become a science teacher”.* That was the advice I was given from a few graduates as I was mid-way through my environmental degree.

Unfortunately, they weren’t completely wrong. But fortunately, there is still an upcoming generation of environmentalists who refuse to be swayed by an industry of funding cuts and an over-competitive job market.

I am relatively new to South Australia, and overall have been really impressed with what I have seen happening in the South East. Many townships are incorporating sustainability initiatives, and alongside a range of active environmental groups such as Landcare and Friends of Parks, is a positive rise of environmental education in schools.

**ISSUES**

One of the biggest challenges we face, from a local to global level, is encouraging and invigorating the interest of the upcoming generations - our future drivers of change. Already I see many examples of the rise in environmental awareness and education in schools, and therefore believe the foundations for this process have already begun.

However, there is a gap forming in our environmental engagement. Outside of school, and even tertiary studies, there is a lack of young people engaging with the environment and limited avenues for them to direct their interest towards.

Our existing volunteer groups contain an immense wealth of knowledge and experience. They are also largely made up of the working, semi-retired and retired population, and one of their challenges is attracting a regular flow of new and younger members to share and learn from this knowledge and carry on their legacy.

So what is contributing to this gap?

* In my opinion, communities, particularly in rural and regional areas, are facing increasing disconnect with the transition to a moving population that shifts away in search of study and work.
* There is the financial instability of young people trying to forge a pathway into employment, or into the instability of the environmental industry.
* Loss of interest, experience, confidence and motivation are all factors creating barriers for school-leavers and graduates to seek out existing volunteer groups.
* And maybe the ways in which young people want to, and are able to volunteer is different, and therefore we are lacking locally-based platforms that cater for the interests of the upcoming generations.

Dave New from Natural Resources South East and I, started up the Young Enviro Volunteers Group last year to attempt to fill this gap by targeting 16 – 30 year olds to encourage involvement in the environment. We had small wins, but perhaps without quite the right structure, and for me as someone also trying to find both paid work, and my feet in the industry, we struggled to maintain momentum. Despite this, what I learnt was there was definitely interest from the youth, community and various organisations to pursue this movement, and that the key to moving forward, was less about leadership, and more about partnership.

**SOLUTIONS**

One of my favourite examples of partnership is the joining of Natural Resources, Friends of Parks and Headspace, to create the “Nature in Mind” program that encouraged young adults to get out in, and experience nature. The other is Yahl Primary School collaborating with the elderly Rainbow Club and the Nature Glenelg Trust to encourage intergenerational bonding and learning within conservation.

Through partnerships like this, we can build on the foundations and relationships that already exist within our communities, and create new and supported spaces for upcoming generations to combine their passion and innovation with the existing wealth of knowledge and experience.

We can continue to motivate and encourage involvement with the environment, assist in the transition from interest to industry and support creating change from the ground up.

Our environment is changing rapidly, and with it, so must how we participate and engage with society and the environment. Although the upcoming generations represent the future, I do believe Landcare has the ability to unite our shared passion, and support creating change for the future.

**Lu-Wei Spinks**