Walking with refugees: an educational field trip to Rocky Creek Dam

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Report

Walking with refugees: an educational field trip to Rocky Creek Dam

Southern Cross University
North Coast Settlement Services
Rous Water

Prepared for the regional Director of St Vincent de Paul
Mr Michael Timbrell
July 2013

Prepared by:
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Executive Summary

Walking with Refugees: an education field trip to Rocky Creek Dam was devised and conducted by Leandro Mendes of North Coast Settlement Services in collaboration with Southern Cross University researchers, Angela Coco, Brad Shipway and Robert Lingard, and Barb Jensen from Rous Water. The event was funded by the St Vincent de Paul Society and took place on 29 June, 2013. Settlers (previously refugees), members of the organising groups and experienced students participated in this social and educational outing.

Sixty-one participants travelled by bus from the Lismore CBD to the Dam. A further 11 people used private transport. The day’s program included an educational presentation regarding the Indigenous and later white settler history of the site, an educational tour along the dam wall and into the native bushland, games (including soccer and water relay), morning tea and a barbeque lunch.

Overall the Field Trip achieved its aims to foster cross-cultural interactions and provide an educational and leisurely experience in the Australian environment. Most participants reported that they enjoyed being in nature, learning where our drinking water comes from and playing games, particularly soccer. Many liked ‘the walking’ (the guided tour) and learning more about Australian plants and animals.

All participants who responded to evaluative questions said they would like to participate in other similar social events. Attractions would be to see more animals, include more activities and games like basketball and perhaps visit rainforest again or go to the beach.

The following recommendations are made for the information of any community group or service provider who may be considering ways of providing leisure activities that incorporate an educational element for Settlers:

1. Make family field trips a regular event on the settlers’ calendars
2. Provide a combination of activities to suit all age groups and include people to lead them
3. Make the educational element incidental to the day’s activities (not a chore or workshop)
4. Be relevant to people’s living situations and interests
5. Include walking and conversing.
Walking with refugees: an educational field trip to Rocky Creek Dam

Southern Cross University, North Coast Settlement Services and Rous Water

Introduction
This document reports on the Field Trip to Rocky Creek Dam that was funded by the St Vincent de Paul Society and conducted on 29 June, 2013. Settlers (previously refugees), members of the organising groups and experienced students participated in an enjoyable social and educational outing in which there was a good flow of cross-cultural interactions and sharing of experiences. We report briefly on the conduct of the day, document the dispersal of funds and provide an analysis of the evaluative questionnaire that was conducted towards the end of the event.

Background
Researchers and service providers recognise that refugee settlers and established communities need to work together to foster cross-cultural knowledge and understanding. Further, local settlers have identified a need for more leisure oriented activities that will broaden their horizons and provide opportunities for interacting with non-settlers. The Walking with Refugees Project (henceforward the Project) came about as a result of discussions between representatives from Southern Cross University (SCU), settlers (previously refugees) who are members of a Settler Reference Group (SRG), North Coast Settlement Services (NCSS) and Rous Water (RW). SCU and NCSS submitted a proposal to St Vincent de Paul Society (SVDP) and were successful in acquiring sufficient funds to conduct the event. This included hiring buses, purchasing food for lunch and related incidentals.

All organising groups provided a good deal of in-kind support. SCU prepared participant Programs and evaluation questionnaires (copies in Appendix A & C), provided flip cameras and notebooks for participants to take photos, and managed the administrative and organisational aspects of the day. The SRG and NCSS networked and connected with settlers and disseminated and collected participation forms which were circulated with Flyers advertising the event (copy in Appendix B). RW organised and provided educational input and games throughout the day.

Conduct of the day
Though it rained in the Northern Rivers for most of June, on Saturday 29, the day dawned sunnily. Spirits were high and 61 people arrived to board the buses. A further 11 people travelled by private transport. All were provided with a Program of the day’s events (copy in Appendix A).

The Program included transport to Rocky Creek Dam, educational talks, morning tea and lunch and a dam wall guided tour. These events were interspersed with games and free time. Originally, a Widjubal elder was scheduled to join the event but was detained by a family death and related bereavement activities. All organisers managed their respective responsibilities for the conduct of the day which flowed smoothly with only one or two scratches and a few leeches needing to be removed. The food supply turned out to be well calculated with just two bowls of salad left over. These were offered to, and taken by settlers.
Dispersal of Funds
Our original proposal to SVDP put forward a budget request for $1175 to cover the costs of engaging Widjubal elders, bus hire for 2 full size buses and meat and bread rolls to lighten the load each family will need to bring along with them. This also would free parents to enjoy a more leisurely trip.

There were variations in the dispersal of funds from that proposed in the original budget. As the Widjubal elder was unable to attend, an extra $150 was available for any other necessity. As only 61 people travelled on buses (compared with 90-100 originally budgeted for), we hired one large bus and one 12-seater which was much cheaper. Also, it became apparent to Mr Mendes (NCSS) that most people would not bring food to go with a BBQ even though this was suggested on the Flyers. Therefore some funds were used to purchase salads and incidentals for serving food. Table 1 gives a breakdown of funds dispersal

Table 1: Dispersal of funds for Walking with Refugees Field Trip, 29 June 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>$1175.00</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Widjubal elder</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 buses rental for 6 hours on a Saturday: Quotation 2 X $440</td>
<td>572.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steak and sausages</td>
<td>136.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salads, bread rolls etc</td>
<td>177.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onions, incidentals</td>
<td>22.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DISPERSED</strong></td>
<td><strong>908.45</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Table 1, the event was conducted well within the approved budget. We extend our sincere appreciation to the St Vincent de Paul Society for making these funds available through North Coast Settlement Services. All funds and invoices were managed by Mr Mendes.

Evaluation of the Field Trip
Towards the end of the event, experienced student research assistants conducted short conversational interviews with participants about their perceptions of the day. They were also asked if they would like to see further events and to suggest ideas for future activities. (A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix C).

Approximately 25 children and young people (less than 18 years) and 24 adults, who were previously refugees, participated in the Field Trip. Of these, six adults, seven young people and three people who did not give their age, conveyed their ideas to researchers.

What people enjoyed most about the Field Trip
Participants mostly enjoyed being in nature and learning where our drinking water comes from (7 people mentioned this) and playing games, particularly soccer (8 people). Four participants liked meeting new people, ‘hanging out with other people instead of staying at home’. Another six people mentioned that they liked ‘the walking’, which was the guided tour led by education officer, Barb
Jensen. Notably, two participants enjoyed watching children having fun, one said, ‘kids having fun, watching everyone laugh, (you) can’t fake laughing’.

Five participants said that during the field trip they learned more about plants and animals, particularly ‘seeing different snakes and seeing if they are dangerous or not’ and six others highlighted their new knowledge about ‘where water in Lismore and Byron Bay comes from and what happens to the overflow of excess water’. Social learning was also important for three people who talked about ‘playing in a group’, ‘sticking together’ and ‘playing with another team’.

**Things that could be improved**

Organisers noted that the iPads that were provided were insufficient to allow everyone interested to take photos of their day. They were passed around amongst the children and young people and one of the adults mentioned that the women would have liked to use the iPads too. This is noted for any potential future events.

A situation occurred when one participant suggested we take a ‘group photo’ as a memory of the day. Participants generally did not welcome this idea and only white people and one settler posed for the photo. Being aware of the kinds of ramifications that emerge for settlers if they can be identified in photos, organisers had determined not to take photos except for a few distance shots of groups taken by Angela Coco in which no-one could be identified. These photos were simply for research records but may have caused concern. In future the issue of photos, even ones in which no-one can be identified, will be discussed with participants beforehand.

**Suggestions for future events**

All 16 respondents said they would like to participate in other similar social events. Attractions would be to see more animals (two mentioned at a zoo) and to include more activities and games like basketball. Other suggestions were to visit rainforest again or ‘go to the beach next time’. ‘More free food like chocolates, and a two night sleepover’ were also suggested.

**Recommendations**

Overall the Field Trip achieved its aims to foster cross-cultural interactions and provide an educational and leisurely experience in the Australian environment. An important feature of the day is that it was a family event and the complementary skills of organisers were deployed competently to keep people of all ages engaged in games, tours, using iPads or just relaxing and conversing. The following recommendations are made for the information of any community group or service provider who may be considering ways of providing leisure activities that incorporate an educational element for settlers:

1. Make family field trips a regular event on the settlers’ calendars
2. Provide a combination of activities to suit all age groups and people to lead them
3. Make the educational element incidental to the day’s activities (not a chore or workshop)
4. Be relevant to people’s living situations and interests
5. Include walking and conversing.
TRIP TO ROCKY CREEK DAM
Saturday 29 June, 2013
9am till 2.30pm

We invite refugee settlers to join us on this Field Trip to have fun in our local environment.

- Travel to and from Rocky Creek Dam by bus
- Free BBQ
- Bring a picnic lunch to share
- Talk to Indigenous Widjabil people of the Bunjalung Nation.
- Discover where our drinking water comes from.
- See and hear about the Australian bush and some of its plants and animals.
- This outing will be accompanied by Leandro Mendes (St Vincent de Paul Society), Barb Jensen (Rous Water), Angela Coco and students from Southern Cross University.

Meet the bus in front of the Library in Magellan street at 8.45 am.

Please complete this form and return to Mr Leandro Mendes
St Vincent de Paul Office, by 17 June.

YES, we will be attending the Trip to Rocky Creek Dam on June 29th, 2013.

FAMILY NAME: ___________________________ PHONE: ___________________________

Names of adults who are coming: _______________________________________________

Names of children who are coming: _____________________________________________
APPENDIX B

PROGRAM – FIELD TRIP TO ROCKY CREEK DAM

June 29, 2013

1. 9.00 am leave on bus from front of Library in Majellan Street (Angela & Brad)

2. 10.00-10.15 – Arrive (Leandro)
   a. Gather in picnic area, at tables and/or on rugs
   b. Ask questions with Sheldon Harrington who is a descendent of the Widjubal people

3. 10.30-11.00 - Cup of tea
   a. Welcome to country with Sheldon Harrington
   b. Safety talk; snakes, water, rules of the day, any special needs, contacts for emergencies, order of the day (Leandro)
   c. Hand out ipads & flip cameras etc, explain followup workshop (Brad)

4. 11.00 – 12.00 Walk (Barb & Sheldon)
   a. Rainforest/ dam wall – you can do a long or short walk

5. 12.00 – Team activities (Sheldon & Barb)
   a. Water relay game
   b. Art activity with Sheldon

6. 12.30 – 1.30 LUNCH – PICNIC

7. 1.30 – 2.00 Free time
   a. Go for another walk (Barb explains options)
   b. Play more games, e.g. soccer (Leandro)
   c. Time alone
   d. Tell us what you think about the day (some of us will come around and ask you about it)

8. 2.00 Packing and getting ready to go (All organisers – head count & help out- Angela oversee).

9. On Bus – Discuss followup workshop & organise a date/time/place (Brad)

WET WEATHER PLAN: Cancel by mid-day previous day and communicate with settler reps. (Leandro)

Want to know more?
You can contact Angela Coco on angela.coco@scu.edu.au, 02 66203038 about future events.
The ethical aspects of this project have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The Approval Number is ECN-13-143
Complaints about the ethical conduct of this research should be addressed in writing to the following:
Ethics Complaints Officer - HREC
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore, NSW, 2480
Email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au
All complaints are investigated fully and according to due process under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and this University. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.
**APPENDIX C**

**Field Trip Evaluation Questionnaire**

**Walking with refugees: a field trip to foster relationships and explore understandings of identity and place.**

**29 June 2013 – Rocky Creek Dam**

This questionnaire to be completed by SCU students & researchers in conversation with participants on the Field Trip

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What have you enjoyed most about the Field Trip?</th>
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</table>

1. Have you learned new things today? If so ask person to elaborate (don’t ask if already answered in Q1.) | Y N |

Write here:

2. Did you bring children with you today? (don’t ask if implicit in previous answers or the person is clearly too young) | Y N |

3. Would you come here yourself for a family outing? Why? | Y N |

Write any reasons offered here:

4. Have you been able to talk with Widjubal people before? (don’t ask if already mentioned) | Y N |

5. Would you like to see other events like this? What sorts of things would you like to do? | Y N |

List here:

6. Gender |
            F M |

7. Year of birth |

8. What you like us to contact you if there are other events like this? If yes: | Y N |

Record Contact details, e.g. Name, Phone, email etc. *separately from this Form*