



EMBARGOED UNTIL Wednesday 27 June 2012

Media Release

## **Aussie parents unaware green time can help kids perform better at school**

*A growing body of research reveals contact with nature has academic benefits for children*

While the vast majority (89%) of Australians who regularly care for children agree that contact with nature is good for kids' wellbeing and development, they don't know that green time can significantly improve the academic performance of their children.

This is just one of the key findings of an independent study commissioned by Planet Ark and sponsored by Toyota, titled *Planting Trees – Just What the Doctor Ordered*, which focuses on the benefits of interaction with nature for children's health, wellbeing and development. The report raises awareness of National Tree Day on Sunday 29 July 2012 and builds on a 2011 study commissioned by Planet Ark that showed a dramatic and worrying shift in childhood activity in Australia from outdoor play to indoor activity.

A growing body of local and international research links childhood contact with nature to a range of health and wellbeing benefits, such as reduced stress levels, reduced depression, increased confidence and self-esteem, reduced risks of obesity and myopia, improved academic performance, a reduction in the symptoms of ADHD and a stronger sense of concern and care for the environment in later life.

Planet Ark's Nature and Children's Health Survey shows that despite strong evidence linking contact with nature to intellectual development and academic achievement, 'green time' is not a priority among Aussie parents and carers as a means of supporting children academically. In fact, only 7% of respondents chose it as one of the top three ways they can improve their child's academic performance.

Aussie parents rate a healthy diet and nutrition, strong family and social networks and extra academic tutoring as the three interventions or influencers they think are most effective in improving children's academic achievement.

International expert Dr Mardie Townsend of Deakin University believes contact with nature is just as important and is urging Aussie parents to introduce a few simple and free nature-based activities into their child's day-to-day routine to help give them a head start at learning.

"Just 30 minutes of green time daily can level the playing field for children who aren't naturally good at book learning by having a positive impact on their higher order cognitive skills," Dr Townsend said. "Doing nature-based activities can boost self-esteem for kids who struggle to learn the traditional way and natural settings can help restore kids' ability to concentrate and reduce stress by providing a soothing atmosphere."

Further results from the survey showed that while the majority of carers know that contact with nature is important for children, they don't know what the benefits are.

Only 33% of carers consider regular contact with nature to be one of the top three ways of reducing stress, just 24% recognise it as one of the top three ways to reduce the symptoms of depression and barely 13% consider contact with nature a top method of improving confidence and self-esteem. A mere 16% of carers think contact with nature is one of the three most effective ways of reducing the symptoms of ADHD.

Over 86% of respondents agree that kids are not spending enough time in nature, 75% believe that most kids have never planted a tree and 76% agree that most kids could not identify common Australian trees like the wattle and bottlebrush.

The last 20 years have seen dramatic shifts in lifestyle trends, such as the nature of houses and gardens, urban design, the working hours of parents, the use of childcare, time pressures on families, increased uptake of electronic entertainment and increased consumerism.

The well-documented shift from outdoor to indoor play over recent decades has seen a growing diversity of sedentary activities, such as television and electronic games. Researchers say these activities 'squeeze out' time for more active pursuits.

The study showed that most people (85%) agree that nature-based events or activities such as Planet Ark's National Tree Day are a good way for kids to connect with and value nature.

"Getting children out into nature has always been great for their creativity and imagination, but now we know there are direct health benefits too," says Planet Ark Spokesperson Rebecca Gilling.

"Planet Ark is encouraging Australian families to do something for their health and the health of the environment by getting involved in National Tree Day, Australia's biggest tree planting and nature-based event."

For more information and to find your nearest Tree Day site, please visit [treeday.planetark.org](http://treeday.planetark.org) or call the National Tree Day Hotline on **1300 55 8000**.

National Tree Day is organised by **Planet Ark** in partnership with **Toyota** and its dealer Network, which provide on-the-ground support at local and community tree-planting sites Australia wide.

#### ENDS

*Planting Trees – Just What the Doctor Ordered*, is an independent study commissioned by Planet Ark, and sponsored by Toyota Australia, in May 2012. It was conducted by Pollinate, a specialist communications research company, to provide an insight into how Australians perceive the link between nature and children's health, wellbeing and development. A review of current local and international academic research into the intellectual, psychological, physical and mental health benefits of contact with nature for children was also conducted by environmental communication specialist Tanya Ha as part of the report. To view the full report, visit: <http://treeday.planetark.org/plantingtrees>

#### **For media information, images, or to interview spokespeople, please contact:**

Sara McGregor  
PR and Media Manager  
Planet Ark  
P: 02 8484 7205  
M: 0424 591 241  
E: [sara@planetark.org](mailto:sara@planetark.org)

Jess McCallum  
PR and Media Officer  
Planet Ark  
P: 02 8484 7204  
M: 0421 431 016  
E: [jess@planetark.org](mailto:jess@planetark.org)

National Tree Day <<http://treeday.planetark.org>>

Facebook.com/NationalTreeDay <<http://www.facebook.com/planetark#!/NationalTreeDay>>

Twitter.com/Planetark <<http://twitter/com/#!/PlanetArk>>