

Leonora Bush Rangers

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Any school-based program that combines plenty of outdoor activity such as camping and orienteering with practical lessons in bush survival and environmental care is bound to be popular with students, and the Leonora Bush Rangers Program is no exception.

As part of the Bush Rangers WA program coordinated by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), this highly interactive, voluntary program gives high-school students an opportunity to develop leadership and teamwork skills while learning about conservation and land management.

The in-school program is overseen by local DEC bush rangers and designed to help foster a spirit of community service and responsibility among participants through a range of locally-based environmental projects.

The Program includes a mix of activities both in and out of school hours and is offered to students aged 12 to 17 on the basis of a firm, year-long commitment. It attracts boys and girls of all ages who pledge to uphold the program values of teamwork, discipline and care for the environment – a pledge they wrote themselves.

High school Coordinator, Daniel Wheeler, said one of the Program's main aims is to increase local aesthetic appeal through large area revegetation, much of which is done through propagation of native flora. One of the program's ongoing projects involves participants working with Council to re-landscape the town gateway with local plant species. In addition to helping decrease topsoil erosion and airborne dust particles, the project is intended to act as a tourist attraction through vibrant display of local flora. These planting projects also help create a sense of community pride and ownership of the local environment and townscape among students.

Other projects have included various clean-up days of local landmarks such as Malcolm Dam, native flora propagation for mine site rehabilitation and a range of revegetation activities to help attract fauna, improve town aesthetics and increase biodiversity.

Students have also enjoyed the teamwork challenge of creating a bush shelter using wood, rope and tarp and a number of other activities involving bushcraft and navigational exercises – all designed to help develop initiative, practical life skills and an appreciation for the value of teamwork.

Sponsored by BHP Billiton Nickel West, the 12-month program is endorsed by the WA Curriculum Council and successful achievement through the program is recorded on students' WA Certificate of Education. It also acts as a launching pad for students keen to pursue a bush ranger traineeship after high school.

The Bush Ranger program is part of an ongoing relationship with the Leonora District High School through which Nickel West has previously supported the school's Business Enterprise Program.

Nickel West's contribution has covered the cost of the participants' swags, shade sails and a range of vital camping supplies and equipment.

Although still in its infancy, Mr Wheeler said the response has been very positive, with many in the community expressing appreciation for the students' enthusiasm in taking responsibility for the town's aesthetic appeal and environmental health. The students are also enjoying the opportunities provided through the Program, and according to Mr Wheeler, are teaching him as much as he's teaching them.