



**go  
slow  
for a  
mo'**

**“It’s more than a learning and teaching campus. It’s a place that actively supercharges student and staff wellbeing!”**

Associate Professor Kate Lloyd,  
Macquarie University

## **Living Lab Program**

The Living Lab Go Slow for a Mo’ trail research program at Macquarie University continues to design, test and evaluate trail exercises working with students and staff across all faculties. Additionally, the research team is conducting a national survey and interview program to better understand how people use and value their outdoor places while exploring the applications of the trail for medical ‘green and social scripts’ within a local context.

The Go Slow for a Mo’ program also tracks the latest empirical interdisciplinary research emerging from around the world showing that meaningful connections with nature improves:

- Attention, focus, mood, and creativity
- Blood pressure, pain control, immune function, diabetes mitigation
- Stress levels, depression, anxiety, sleep, and resilience
- Respect and appreciation for the natural environment (and ‘place’)
- Behaviours in addressing climate change and sustainability
- Greater overall happiness, wellbeing and life satisfaction
- Feelings of gratitude and care for oneself and their community

**The Macquarie University Living Lab Go Slow trail has been designed to target mental restoration and repair. This digital trail takes students and staff through six rejuvenation stations aimed at increasing positive mood, emotional regulation, attention restoration and support greater resilience to anxiety and stress.**



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<- trail rejuvenation  
exercise stations

## Backed by research

A body of research too large to ignore<sup>1 2</sup> is confirming what we have all known for a long time; nature has a profound effect on our resilience and wellbeing. However, the types of activities we do in nature matter more than the amount of time spent. The latest science shows that the more meaningful the engagement is the more profound the benefits.

### Living Lab Trail Rejuvenation Station - 6 short sensory exercises

- |                    |                   |                      |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| (1) Breathe Easy   | (2) Listen Up!    | (3) Relax the Eyes   |
| (4) Sensory Switch | (5) The Tree & Me | (6) Beautiful Things |



Rejuvenation Exercise Benefits	Nature Contact Benefits
<b>Breathe Easy:</b> Abdominal breathing exercise to increase pleasantness, vigour, alertness, and reduces symptoms of anxiety, depression, anger and confusion. <sup>3</sup>	Inhaling negative ions from running water and sunlight improves relaxation, boosts immunity and metabolism. <sup>4</sup>
<b>Listen Up!:</b> This listening exercise breaks sensory habits to increase connection with nature and also includes a placemaking element.	Listening to nature sounds restores attention and reduces muscle tension faster and more effectively than listening to urban sounds. <sup>5 6</sup>
<b>Relax The Eyes:</b> MRI and EEG scans show that peripheral vision stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system leading to feelings, mindfulness and calm awareness. <sup>7</sup> Using peripheral vision in nature creates feelings of awe.	Using peripheral vision in nature enhances stress reduction and restoration through 'soft fascination' a key component of attention restoration theory. <sup>8</sup> Experiencing awe of nature increases wellbeing and community spirit. <sup>9</sup>
<b>Sensory Switch:</b> This exercise uses sensory experiences to create moments for pausing, stopping and noticing nature in difference ways.	Sensory engagement with nature has well documented beneficial effects on connection mental restoration, calm and creativity. <sup>10</sup>
<b>The Tree &amp; Me:</b> This mimicry exercise is used to trigger mirror neurons to creates empathy and compassion. This exercise helps to create a stronger connection between the person and the place.	Standing near trees increases access to phytoncides, adiponectin and anti cancer T-cells. <sup>11</sup> Looking up and out on nature has a range of neurological benefits. <sup>12</sup>
<b>Beautiful Things:</b> This exercise helps individuals to notice and enjoy beautiful things.	Noticing the beauty of nature has a particular effect on increasing pro-community behaviours such as agreeableness, friendship and helping behaviours <sup>13</sup> ; it is also a driver of nature connection which is linked to overall increases in life satisfaction. <sup>14</sup>

**“I came away with an increased appreciation of the incredible power that nature can have on my wellbeing - lowering my stress levels, increasing relaxation. It had a profound effect on me.”**

Eleni Gorgas, Medical Student  
Macquarie University

## Increasing Nature Connectedness: Early results with students



Self-evaluation using validated nature-connectedness scale. 1=low connection, 7=very high connection



Average scores increased 34.04% (to the right) after doing the nature wellness exercises. Students also showed a significant increase in pre-post trail completion for:

1. Vitality scale ( $p = .034$ )
2. PANAS - Positive subscale - positive affectivity (emotions and feeling  $p = .016$ )
3. Nature related affect scale ( $p = .008$ )

This includes significant increases in specific states for ‘Relaxed’, ‘Awe’, ‘Alert’, and ‘Awake’. These states have a strong association with depression and anxiety.

## Why is this important?

Increasing nature connectedness – ‘tuning nature in’ helps to:

1. Tune anxiety and depression out<sup>15</sup>
2. Increases overall life satisfaction (4 x greater than an increase in socio economic status).<sup>16</sup>
3. Increase actions on climate change and conservation behaviours.<sup>17 18</sup>
4. Increase the care for others and the community.<sup>13</sup>
5. Support a greater resilience to disasters and faster disaster recovery.<sup>19</sup>

Disaster Recovery: An ongoing longitudinal study after the 2009 black Sunday fires stated that many people found watching the bush recover helpful for their own wellbeing and that nature attachment had a protective effect in terms of health, resilience, and post traumatic growth.

## Listen to our stories:

Hear what student participants are saying about the trails:  
[www.vimeo.com/527611875](http://www.vimeo.com/527611875)

## Learn more:

[www.goslowforamo.com](http://www.goslowforamo.com)  
[waminda@theconnective.co](mailto:waminda@theconnective.co)  
[miles@theconnective.co](mailto:miles@theconnective.co)



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