

MEDIA RELEASE

25 November 2014

A (re)generation of young people at the World Parks Congress

When Sydney hosted the World Parks Congress, a once-in-a-decade international event, at Sydney Olympic Park last week, it was a very different event to those of the past. The difference was the energy and engagement of young people. Among over 6000 delegates were 27 young people from across NSW who form part of *The (re)Generation*, a new project to inspire youth to enjoy and care for nature.

A key focus of the Congress was 'Inspiring a New Generation', following the plea from Nelson Mandela, who, at the 2003 World Parks Congress in Durban, urged young people, the world's future leaders, to be part of the conversation around international environmental concerns. His great grandson, Luvuyo Mandela, was in Sydney to hand over the responsibility for being a voice for young people.

The (re)Generation project was launched earlier in the year by Macquarie University, in partnership with OzGREEN and supported by the NSW Environment Trust, to address the growing disconnect between urbanised young people and the natural environment, as the shift towards busy and virtually connected lives grows. The young people from *The (re)Generation* have been selected based on their creative ideas to motivate fellow young people and to stimulate interest in exploring nature, falling in love with it and looking after it.

Twelve projects developed by 15-25 year olds, including film, social media campaigns, urban design, art, social events and music, were selected and representatives attended workshops with mentors as well the Congress. They will begin putting their ideas into practice over the next six months. At the Congress *The (re)Generation* team were inspired by the wealth of ideas, discussion and cases.

Wendy Goldstein, leader of the project and lecturer of Sustainable Development at Macquarie University, believes the best way to get young people engaged in nature is to ask them how they think it should be done. Her research will examine what motivates them and how to re-inspire more young people into getting involved and fall in love with nature.

"Visiting natural areas has been shown to improve our emotional, mental and physical state and there is evidence that if young people develop a relationship with nature early in life they are more likely to care for nature and protect it as adults. We are putting power into the hands of the young to regenerate this interest and love for nature," Ms Goldstein said.

'Inspiring a New Generation' provided the platform at the Congress for the voices of young people from around the world to be heard including those from *The (re)Generation*, alongside key players in the conservation community, corporate and social leaders and educators. During these discussions over five days they shared their experiences, perspectives and knowledge and worked toward the vision of connecting a new generation to nature and supporting young people as leaders and partners.

As a result, a series of recommendations and commitments were developed to ensure young people are included so they can play a role in educating and inspiring younger generations.

"*The (re)Generation* is excited to be involved and we hope to be able to contribute in stimulating a movement amongst young people that inspires others to engage with nature," Ms Goldstein said.

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For information on *The (re)Generation*: [facebook.com/theregeneration.inspirenature](https://www.facebook.com/theregeneration.inspirenature)

For information on the Congress: <http://worldparkscongress.org/>

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