Stepping Stones for home educators

Summer 2012

A path through our homeschool village
HEA Membership

HEA membership can be purchased at $50 for one year and $90 for two years. A first time registration also incurs a $10 registration fee.

**HEA membership gives you:**
Access to the latest news, event discounts, event organisers’ insurance, resource discounts, work experience insurance, newsletters, subscription discounts, phone and email support, venue discounts, access to the members only area of the HEA website and a quarterly PDF version of *Stepping Stones for Home Educators* magazine.

**Your membership fee helps:**
Fund the HEA operations, website, advertising, publications, phone and email support, insurance, news and magazines. It also helps us to raise awareness in the community in order to help parents make an informed choice on educating their kids.

REGISTRATION AND SUPPORT
Visit our website at www.hea.edu.au. Look under ‘GET STARTED’ and ‘SUPPORT’ for details of local and online support groups. Here are some web links that will take you directly to the relevant details for your state.


HEA COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The HEA committee meets via teleconference on the second Thursday of each month at 7.30 pm GMT + 10 (Sydney time). All HEA members are welcome to attend and participate in the meetings. To join our meetings email secretary@hea.edu.au for more details.
Welcome to the village

It has been said “it takes a village to raise a child”. Stepping Stones for Home Educators is the ‘village’ to which all the members of the Home Education Association of Australia belong.

Welcome to our village! At the heart of our village are our homes. Rich in resources and skills these homes create a vibrant community in which our children are born, grow and thrive. Together our homes form a wonderful village, full of opportunities and support for everyone!

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From the Editor…

This issue took a path of its own. The plan had been to focus on homeschool cooperatives and we received some excellent responses to our requests for articles on that topic. Yet, when we started looking at the articles we had received, most were about teen groups. Two parents also submitted articles about choices made by their teenage homeschoolers. As the direction of the issue seemed to have been determined in this way and as that age group is of particular interest to me, I added another article to the list.

In our next issue we’ll focus on another age group (8 to 12 years). That does not mean we won’t be placing articles of interest to parents of all age groups. Please keep those contributions coming.

At no other time of year do days rush past quite as fast as in the last quarter. Navigating one’s way between end-of-year performances, finalising the term’s homeschool work, preparing for family celebrations and seeing friends one last time before they scatter for the holidays take up so much time that soon 2012 will be upon us and we’ll be left with a long list of uncompleted tasks. Even if you feel that way, try to relax a little to rejuvenate before jumping into 2012, ready to take on the world.

All the best for the New Year!

Elsa Raubenheimer
Magazine Editor
magazines@hea.edu.au

At Home With the HEA

2012 is just around the corner and it’s got many of us thinking about what next year will bring with it. I’m confident that 2012 will bring with it a mix of educational and family challenges, excitement and rewards. My oldest daughter will become a secondary level home educated student which is both exciting and a little scary all at the same time. With the new year heading towards us like an out of control freight train, I wonder what plans you have in mind for your home educating journey next year.

The home education community is a continually evolving and changing place with new home educators regularly popping up. The challenge before the HEA is to get it balanced so that we can accommodate existing, experienced home educators whilst also helping to make it easy and inviting for new home educators to get started. You, our valued members, play a very influential role in welcoming and supporting new home educators. The new year will certainly bring about an influx of people looking for support from HEA and from local groups. The HEA committee appreciates your help and support. As local home educators you have the ability to reach out and touch the lives of other families looking to get comfortable in what is often both the single most rewarding and confronting experience that parents will embark upon as part of raising their children.

I would like to thank all of the people that volunteered in 2011 to help support the HEA and home educators in Australia. I invite you to contribute what you can to help strengthen the home education community.

Guy Tebbutt
HEA President
president@hea.edu.au
Dear editor
I saw your magazine at a friend's house and asked to borrow it as I am considering homeschooling my daughter. I looked for a "how to start homeschooling" page and was disappointed. Where can I find such information?

Regards
Jessica, NSW

Editor's reply:
Thank you for your email. As this is the HEA's members' magazine we assume our readers have already taken the big step and don't publish a special section on 'how to start homeschooling'.

We do, however publish direct links to our website in the magazine that give you direct access to the answers on the HEA website. You can find these in the contacts page under 'Registration and Support'. These details are inside the front cover of the Spring 2011 issue and the Summer 2012 issue. It is planned to publish these details in the same location in all future issues of Stepping Stones.

The information is also readily accessible from our website at http://www.hea.edu.au by hovering over the 'Get Started' link in the top navigation bar and then choosing the 'state by state' option from the drop-down menu, as regulations for home education registration differ depending on your location.

Most of your questions should get answers from the website. If not, just ask if you want more information. You can also post on the HEA discussion forum which is available under 'support' on the website.

Hi
We're wondering if other homeschool families feel awkward about being out and about during school hours. Is it OK to be out there or could we get in trouble with the authorities?

It seems such a silly question that I am using a fake name!

Cara, QLD

Editor's reply:
That is not a silly question at all. I suspect many of our members have been wondering about the same thing. As far as I understand it, there are no restrictions or guidelines regarding where you homeschool your children. The person who is shown on the registration certificate to be responsible for the child's homeschooling can make that call.

If one spends all day at the local shopping centre, one might get suspicious glances and even comments from those regarding themselves as "concerned citizens". Yet, if the representative from the relevant homeschool authority in your area is satisfied with a student's progress you have no reason to be concerned as you are acting within the regulations.

So enjoy your excursions into the community during school hours.

Submission deadlines:
Mid-January 2012 for the Autumn 2012 issue.

All submissions to Elsa at magazines@hea.edu.au
Until my children were in their teens our home looked a lot like a kindergarten or preschool, with plenty of open storage, lots of cushions, display shelves and the artefacts of learning littering walls, windows and tables. Life was busy and comfortable, with an emphasis on easy access to materials and resources to encourage motivation and independence.

Your home doesn’t have to look like a classroom, but it does help to have areas set aside for working, for craft projects, for art explorations and for quiet study or comfortable shared reading. We used our dining room table for most of our ‘lessons’ and it wasn’t until our children were in their teens that they decided to use their personal desks for study purposes. We found our open plan house perfect for homeschooling. Most families report that the family room becomes the learning hub of the house. However, homeschooling spills into every room, the garden, the community and the environment every day – unlike school it isn’t restricted to one place.

Below are some ideas for setting up your homeschool as a place where learning happens naturally and easily. (*See end of article for source.)

**Resource** | **Use**
---|---
low shelves | Allow easy access for children and leave walls free open for displaying art work, etc
upboards | For storing materials and games not in constant use
large rug | Comfortable areas encourage activity - children are definitely rug-rats!
bean bags and floor cushions | For cosy shared reading and for your comfort when playing on the floor with the children; can be used as game props
labelled storage containers | These help children find resources quickly and encourage independence; use pictures and colour coding for labels
lots of wall space | To display framed or unframed artwork – nothing encourages creative activity more than genuine appreciation
desk or table to work on | For study or lessons, craft activities or science experiments
a shelf or small table | For displaying finished projects; temporary storage for on-going activities or unfinished projects
display shelf | For the artefacts of learning… you may need more than one, or even a display cabinet – children collect everything, from rocks to rubber balls! Rotate collections regularly. Seasonal displays or natural history collections are always popular.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>access to the kitchen</td>
<td>There are zillions of interesting things in a kitchen to inspire a young learner, or budding chef – make the kitchen an attractive place to hang out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>private areas for each child</td>
<td>Solitude and privacy is essential to the healthy development of self esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>book shelves</td>
<td>For fiction and reference books, art and craft resources, science equipment, maths manipulatives, games, storage and display…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>play equipment with soft fall mulch under</td>
<td>This needn’t be expensive or elaborate – a plank on bricks, a crate for climbing on or in, a tyre swing hanging from a tree…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paved area outside</td>
<td>Great for chalking on; space for big science experiments, sunny day art projects, woodwork projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grassy area</td>
<td>For ball games, group games, picnics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children’s garden</td>
<td>Every child needs a garden of their own! See Society and Environment section for more details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vegetable garden</td>
<td>Growing food offers unlimited learning in just about every curriculum area!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desk diary and or calendar</td>
<td>Staying organised; learning months and days, seasons, holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>musical instruments</td>
<td>See Arts section for more details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>travel games</td>
<td>There are zillions of absorbing activities you can do in the car to relieve boredom and extend learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>board and card games</td>
<td>An incredible amount of learning in every area of the curriculum occurs during play, especially with structured games; play with your children for double the fun and learning outcomes!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer and peripherals</td>
<td>Not absolutely essential but becoming an integral part of life and society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer games and learning programs</td>
<td>There are many educational programs and games but don’t underestimate the learning inherent in all games; avoid ‘addiction’ by setting strict time limits for all computer activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Internet</td>
<td>Gateway to learning – huge learning resource; publish own websites; stay in touch and make new friends with email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library cards for each child</td>
<td>Absolutely essential! Make going to the library a weekly – without fail – routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>typewriter or computer</td>
<td>Takes the tedium out of writing for some writers; learn how to present writing and projects to a publishable standard; improve spelling and grammar with checking function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books, books and more books – your own personal library!</td>
<td>You can’t really have enough; books in every room on every imaginable subject! Forget about text books, buy accessible books written by or about people working in the field you are interested in; nothing beats having your own library for finding elusive answers to intriguing questions…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how-to books</td>
<td>Available in every area of life: look for illustrated books with clear directions and instructions. Get busy doing – it’s the fastest and most efficient way to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reference books</td>
<td>Encyclopaedias, thesaurus, dictionaries, atlases, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>newspapers, newsletters and magazines</td>
<td>Have regular read aloud sessions; encourage participation – letters, submissions, etc; subscribe to quality children’s magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audio-visual equipment</td>
<td>VCR, slide projector, cameras, stereo, several cassette/CD players</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You’ll have more questions than you can ever find answers for and will rely on your own and others’ experience more than those from the ‘experts’, but it’s reassuring to have a few books to guide you now and then. There are some brilliant authors who write solely on the topic of home education, most of whom taught their own children at home. And there are excellent books about facilitating the learning process at home and in the classroom: learning styles, multiple intelligences, how to study, etc. Don’t forget books about different educational approaches, like Steiner, Montessori, Charlotte Mason, natural learning, etc.

Provide an insight into how institutionalised education is set up – great for learning edu-speak for those times you have to deal with the educational authority in your state. Most are designed to reflect universally accepted stages of child development, and therefore offer some useful content. Usually ‘outcomes’ oriented, with examples of learning.

Favourite movies, educational documentaries, home made videos

Keep accessible to encourage independence – see Language section for more details

Rulers, calculators, calendars, watches, clocks, scales – see Mathematics section for more details

Blocks, LEGO, etc – see Maths section for details

Sporting, Scouts, Landcare & Environmental groups, historical societies, bushwalking, etc

Not absolutely essential but a few of these never go astray; most families concentrate on reading, writing and arithmetic to cover the ‘basics’. Select quality student work books and text books and remember to chat to other homeschooling parents about their experiences. There is a good chance you’ll be able to pick up used books in good condition for a fraction of new price. Some children love using text and work books while others find them tedious and some children actually find they hamper the learning process. Get to know what kind of learner you have – explore and discover their unique learning styles and you’ll save money in the long run.

There are many homeschooling businesses supplying quality educational text books, student work books, online lessons and computer programs tailored to the unique needs of the homeschool learning environment. These are much better in many instances than learning materials written for classroom teachers.

I did this for many years and used them to brainstorm games and activities for my children, creating our own worksheets and games, often from recycled materials.

As per personal preference

This handy piece of home equipment links you to the world – call an expert, an information service, a group, company: use the information that’s out there in the community...

Resources: This section is an excerpt from Learning Materials for the Homeschool, available from www.alwayslearningbooks.com.au.
This week’s assignment: emotional development
by Dora Sumegi

In the small town of Mission Beach there lives a very special lady by the name of Jacque Jarrett. Among lots of other things (for example living on a farm and looking after three children, a big garden and several animals with the help of her partner, thus giving their offspring the opportunity to grow up as ‘free range’ as possible) there is one thing she does that reaches much further, and influences far more people than just her family.

What does she do? She makes Steiner-inspired toys; but that is not all. It started with small things: tiny angels, small animals, imitations of cupcakes and donuts (love the donuts!). They were great for decorating a shop shelf and selling to people looking for souvenirs for children of family and friends. Excellent toys to set off any child’s imagination and inspire them to say ‘oh, mummy, I want one’, or to cause adults to say ‘oh, this is so cute, it would be great for my niece’.

Some years back, she made a couple of dolls for her own children and last year she decided to explore that avenue again. She made one doll, then another, and more followed.

When my daughter saw them, she ‘had to have one’. Visiting friends (children between the ages of 8 and 12) saw them and begged for one with puppy eyes. They didn’t want the doll as a gift already made; all wanted to be part of the making process and pick out their own material for clothes and hair for the doll. Some of them were even willing to pay for it with their pocket money. Most of them, not knowing how to sew, ‘only’ helped by putting in the pieces of hair bit by bit, making up their own style. The joy they have experienced through this was priceless.

Then something magical happened, beyond imagination. The dolls started to look more and
more like their owners! This was an unbelievable sensation, because it had by no means been the intention to copy the physical features of each child. Nevertheless in this way the dolls seemed to come to life in the making.

It was almost as if these children had transferred something of themselves into the dolls – something otherwise invisible to the naked eye. As Jacque says, ‘a custom-made doll allows a young teenager to create in the doll an image that they aspire to in some way’.

She also says, that ‘... being handmade with love and care and good intention, these dolls are energetically charged with good feeling. These qualities seem to arouse feelings of love and care in the hearts of children and adults’. Remarkably, one of her customers found her inner child reflected in one of these dolls and had to buy it straight away. For her, it was a healing tool.

These dolls have ignited something in our children too, something that is great for their emotional development. And now they have a special bond with their dolls, which also created an opportunity for them to connect with each other through a common interest. Last year, for example, we had a little get-together with some of the dolls and had a tea party at the park.

Our small circle of home educating families here is extremely lucky to have been able to witness how far one’s passion could reach and influence others. Jacque has a special eye for detail and her dolls have attracted the attention of a wide range of customers.

The world needs more Jacque Jarretts in all areas of life, to give children an example to follow and a lesson to teach us about how important it is to live our passion. Doing so will not only fulfil our own desires, it will also touch other people’s lives.

Jacque holds no lessons and gives no lectures. She just does what she does best: she inspires us all. What more do our children need on their path of learning?

**About the author:** Dora Sumegi is a single mum from Far North Queensland, who has been homeschooling her daughter for five years with the support of some wonderful friends. Dora works part time and is fortunate to have a job she can take her daughter to and which allows her to do some work at home. Their approach is informal learning.

Benjamin showed talent for music at a young age and decided fairly early that this was what he wanted to do as a career. He started learning the piano at the age of six, the violin at the age of seven and the clarinet at the age of nine. Since then he has participated in music competitions on the piano and the clarinet every year, regularly winning prizes. He also completed music exams, achieving AMusA on the clarinet in 2010 and AMEB seventh grade on the piano in 2008. He started studying clarinet at UWA this year and decided not to participate in any competitions or exams due to his workload there.

After his primary years at the West Coast Steiner School, even though he received a violin scholarship to Churchlands Senior High School, we decided to homeschool him. I think the most important aspect of educating children is to discover their strength and passion, and provide the best pathways for them to achieve their goals. For some children going to school for the final high school years and doing the TEE may be best, especially if they are interested in science or want to study courses, like law or medicine which are more difficult to get into without a school certificate. In Benjamin’s case homeschooling gave him the flexibility and the time he needed to achieve his goals in music.

Benjamin really enjoyed his primary school years, and originally wanted to go on to the Perth Waldorf School for high school. He liked other subjects, like maths, drama, craft and English, but he knew he wanted to pursue music more seriously. Unfortunately, schools didn’t allow the flexibility he wanted. He was discouraged from taking on three instruments, and would have had to choose just one. It was because he was not ready to do that just then that he declined the scholarship offer. He still plays all three instruments even though his focus is on the clarinet. During his high school years Benjamin was interested in other subjects, including science, geography, languages (grammar and linguistics) and maths (especially algebra and geometry), and was very involved in surf life saving. For music he attended private lessons for three instruments (clarinet, piano and violin) as well as two musicianship classes and sometimes a music theory lesson. He also had weekly orchestra and band rehearsals, on top of 8-10 surf life saving ironman training sessions.

Benjamin has won scholarships to the UWA “Exhibition Programme” for talented secondary students twice, and participated in a similar privately run program in 2010. He has twice participated in the “Keyed Up! for Summer” piano program at UWA. At fifteen he was a runner-up winner in the Musica Viva “So You Think You Can Write?” music review writing competition for adults. Musica Viva profiled him in the “Strung Out – March 2010” newsletter.

After four years of homeschooling Benjamin applied to WAAPA and UWA for admission to a Bachelor of Music degree. He was accepted into both, and chose UWA, where he had to apply through a special entry, ‘Access UWA’, which is basically ‘probation’ for one semester. Based on the results, people can be accepted ‘properly’ into the bachelor course from the second semester onwards and get credit for the first semester.

It would take up too much space to explain this system in detail, but it is important to mention its availability, because not even all administrators at university know about it. Benjamin started studying there at the beginning of this year and did really well in the first semester, with three high distinctions and one distinction for the four units he had to do, and now he is fully accepted into the course.

He still has other interests, like languages, linguistics and surf life saving. He is fluent in Hungarian and has achieved a high standard in Latin, studying 3rd year Latin in his first year at UWA. He is also studying ancient Greek there, and learnt some German and Russian while homeschooled.

Benjamin is a volunteer surf life saver with the City of Perth Surf Life Saving Club, does regular patrols there and trains in the surf life saving sport. He has been teaching piano at Sykes...
Music since 2010, and he also did some work experience with a piano tuner, which he had to abandon due to university studies.

He plays clarinet in the WAYO Philharmonic Orchestra and the WA Youth Symphonic Band as well as in the UWA orchestra and band. This year he also played violin in the WAYO July season, and the WAYS 21st Anniversary concert, and has recently started playing violin in the Fremantle Symphony Orchestra.

On top of his university studies, at the beginning of the second semester he participated in the four-week-long WASO Orchestral Training Program as the only clarinettist. He was also accepted in the AYO "National Music Camp" and in the AYO "Young Symphonists" for next year.

Benjamin has no problems fitting into university life, and he enjoys his studies very much. He was ready to move on from homeschool life and university is giving him the opportunities and challenges he wanted.

I think homeschoolers have a more mature attitude towards learning and they can relate well to all age groups, including their lecturers. Now that we are back in the 'system', I realise again how easy homeschooling was.

We enjoyed this experience and would do it again. I even considered doing it instead of university, but university provides opportunities that would be difficult to provide otherwise. Forming friendships and connections with musicians and arts administrators is very important at this stage.

Benjamin would like to study overseas after he finishes the course here, and would like to become a clarinet soloist and play in a professional symphony orchestra.

**About the author:**
Agnes is a textile artist and ex-homeschool mother.

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**FAQ**

"Has anyone ever educated a friend or relative's children, along with your own, at home, short term or long term?"

**by Beverley Paine**

I have always advised home educating parents against home educating other people's children. If it was very short term - say a week while mum was in hospital, then that would be okay. But a long term arrangement? Or an arrangement that starts off short term but is then extended, and then maybe extended again? I don't think it is a good idea.

I was asked once if I would homeschool a friend's child and we thought about it long and hard. The kid was my son's best friend and the small alternative class he was attending looked like being shut down. I'd been homeschooling for about a decade so felt confident in my ability and had volunteered for four years as a teacher's aide and had taught kids in the classroom, so knew I was up to the job. However in that situation I wasn't responsible for the education of the children - the education department was responsible. If I taught the child at home as a home educated student, even if I could get approval to do so (registration) then I would be responsible, possibly legally responsible, for the education of that child.

What would happen if after happily homeschooling the child for a period of time the parents became very disappointed with the child's 'progress'? It would have to be a really good friendship with that family to survive that. Most homeschooling families I know have trouble being assertive about homeschooling their own children when relatives start nit-picking or being critical. And no one knows what will happen down the track. I like to keep my horizons as clear of potential trouble as possible. We have already seen cases of students suing schools for failing to educate them, both here and overseas (though I'm not sure about the outcomes).

The intrusion into family life would bug me too. I wouldn't want to impose that on my children without them fully understanding the implications. What if, a few months in, one my children says she doesn't like this other child, doesn't want him to come anymore? What if, after doing everything we can think of to remedy the situation she is still adamant and wants the homeschooling arrangement to stop? Do I meet her needs, or the needs of this other child and his family? Would I feel pressured by the family to continue (particularly if they have really good reasons for being unable to homeschool the child, or are my very best friends, etc)? As a family day care provider I faced this kind of pressure by two mums when I gave notice that after the birth of my youngest I wouldn't be able to look after their children. One kept badgering me for months after the birth of my youngest - every time I saw her. Being assertive wasn't enough.

The other thing is that as experienced home educators we know that learning isn't simply about school lessons. It's a holistic whole-of-life experience. Most people don't realise this - they still think that learning/education is something that happens when a kid goes to school, does schoolwork and lessons. We teach our children all day, every day, even when they aren't studying or doing lessons. Even with clearly defined expectations, thought-through boundaries and careful planning, as well as open and honest discussion, I can foresee problems arising through homeschooling other people's children - problems that could potentially destroy friendships.
Teenagers often get a raw deal in today’s society. Some decades ago the choices were limited and when a young person reached the teen years she had to take on gainful employment to assist in meeting the family’s needs. At an age when we still regard teenagers as children, they would have entered into marriage and would have been expected to deal with the realities of survival and parenthood.

I am by no means suggesting that we should encourage teen parenthood, yet I find it strange that collective society is surprised at issues surfacing when children reach their teens. How do we, and I’ll include myself reluctantly, treat teens? What do we expect of them and what responsibilities do we give them? Do we stop our knee-jerk reactions to some of their behaviour and consider how it felt to be that age and in their situation?

The teen brain is wired for change and is working at a dazzling rate. Yes, listen to all the studies saying the average teenager needs ten hours sleep a night and believe it! So much is happening that ten hours is hardly enough to allow a peaceful break to recharge. Young males grow at an alarming rate and fuelling that growth will show in your grocery bill. Hormones cause changes that take them by surprise and make them feel awkward in their own skin.

They are ready to go out and conquer something or take on big responsibility, yet society confines them to a classroom filled with tens of others with the same urges. Is it any wonder that aggression becomes an issue? Is it surprising that teen boys engage in “risk behaviour”? Yet the stormy male teen years are no worse than what girls go through.

At an age when only the most self-confident of girls avoid body image distortions, dietary changes (coinciding with what can only be described as “hormonal cyclones”) cause disruptions in what could previously have been a trouble-free journey. Iron deficiency is a major issue for teenage girls and that brings fatigue and depression. Often harsh peer pressure emphasises the hostility they experience in a fast-changing world.

Imagine dealing with the most rapid and tumultuous changes in yourself you’ll ever experience while still being expected to be the same carefree child you were a few months ago. It is not easy and it takes understanding from all sides to ensure this journey has a safe and satisfactory outcome.

Leaving the physical challenges aside, the teen brain is ready for responsibility, if sometimes unprepared for what that entails. We are all wired to want some independence. If not we’d all be living with our parents... who would still be living with their parents.

It might seem unthinkable that your teen could live on his own one day but that is the healthy reality. He will have to move out and start an independent life, despite some parents and some teens delaying that moment as long as possible.

This brings me to my reason for homeschooling teens. There is little opportunity for creativity in a typical secondary school setting. There is even less real work being done. Yes, students are kept so busy that they suffer through lack of sleep and have no time for healthy relaxation. But what is the point of all this ‘important’ work? There is seldom a point to it. The work is mostly busy work or cramming information the teen will most likely never need.

My message is positive… give your teen the responsibility she craves and watch her blossom. Give him challenges and give him real work. In a homeschool situation teens have the time and opportunities to pursue their interests and we learn at our best when self-motivated - in other words, when the need is there to learn something. So allow your teen that freedom of choice and allow her to take the responsibility that comes with that freedom. Then watch her grow into a confident and valuable member of the community. Teens can make a difference in society and they are eager to do so. This is just another brilliant reason to homeschool right through high school!

About the author:

Elsa is an ex-secondary teacher who believes that school does not work for many teens. With the help of her husband, she homeschools her teenage daughter and provides a safe learning environment for homeschooled Perth teenagers. She also offers online classes, runs a small business, tutors Open University students and is the editor of this magazine.
As our intelligent 15-year-old son approaches Year 11 next year I worry about doing the right thing for him and his future. Our four-year adventure through homeschooling, which started in Year 7, enters a new chapter next year as the Board of Studies has stricter registration criteria for Stage 6 schooling in NSW, especially now that students have to be in school until they are 17! And so, we have had to consider our options for next year:

1. Reapply for him to redo Year 10 until he is 17, when he no longer needs BOS approval to be homeschooled. This was the option suggested by the BOS inspector. While a valid option and one that does not put a greater onus on us, as a family, to prove we can cover the Stage 5 syllabus as rigorously as the Stage 6, I don’t feel this is a viable option. My son skipped a grade at school in Year 4 because of his academic ability and to repeat a year – in effect – could only serve to affect his self esteem. What should he say when his friends ask him, “What year are you in?” He could say he was in Year 11 but he would know that that was a lie and officially he was really only in Year 10 (that would always be his answer).

2. Stop homeschooling, put him back into school for Years 11 and 12 and officially gain the NSW Higher School Certificate. Again, not a viable option. Since removing him from the antisocial school environment where he knew only bullying every day of his life (except when we lived in the USA for a year!) he has become a well-adjusted young man who is starting to make friends and make positive social interactions. The thought of returning to school brings him (and us) out in a cold sweat. We know the difficulties he had in the past. Would these difficulties re-emerge? Would the bullying start again? Would we, as his parents, again need to spend so much time and energy (both emotionally and physically) fighting a school system that does not provide for him academically or socially?

3. Put him into TAFE to complete the HSC there. I tried ringing the local TAFE to find out if this was a viable option. Upon learning he was “only” 15, they were reluctant to accept him, saying they needed to “give priority to the older students”. I was told I could argue my case but that, while there was no bullying, they would be “reluctant to put someone so young with 18-year-olds”. That rang warning bells, so I shut that door before it was even open.

4. Fully implement a full regime of Stage 6 subjects at home. For this I will need to prove that I can satisfy every letter of the Stage 6 syllabus so that my son will be as fully educated as any other HSC student. I find this a strange option because, although my son will be as prepared (if not better prepared) for the HSC, he will be ineligible to sit the final exam. If the BOS requires students in Stage 6 to be so rigorously taught, they should make the HSC available to them at an external venue. (Why not a nearby school?) Then they could have the possibility of achieving an HSC and ATAR and thus potentially access university courses. At the very least, they would have an indication of how their homeschool studies have placed them vis-à-vis their schooled peers. I wonder why the BOS does not do this. Perhaps it is the “inability” of homeschools to provide the moderated, “reliable” assessment data that makes up 50% of the final HSC mark and ATAR. Or perhaps it is another reason about which a cynic can only speculate.

5. Enter Open University, which anyone can access from age 14 as long as certain prerequisites are complied...
with. This is what we are already doing. He is currently completing a prerequisite course in senior mathematics (equivalent to Maths Extension 1 for the HSC). While his peers will complete this course over 2 years, he will complete it in 12 months with assessments and a final, invigilated exam. Once he has this course under his belt he will have access to Chemistry, Physics and higher Open University Mathematics courses. In time, he could complete a degree through the Open University. At the very least, he will have a University transcript.

We intend to do a mixture of options 4 and 5. I have started getting my head around the Stage 6 syllabi in Standard English, Maths Ext 1 & 2, Physics, Chemistry and Economics. Being a former Electrical Engineer who has studied Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics at University and having been a Maths Ext 2 tutor, Maths Ext 1 teacher, Senior Physics teacher and Junior Chemistry teacher I feel confident we can fulfil the stricter BOS guidelines in these subjects. But what about Economics and English? – the former I never studied and I was very weak at the latter.

My husband studied Economics for the HSC under the guru of Economics, Ian Moore, who now has an excellent textbook on the store shelves. With this book and my husband’s expertise we should cover this subject quite well.

English may be trickier as the Stage 6 syllabus looks very different from when I was at school. But I am now an author who has mentored English Ext 2 students with their major works. There are many excellent resources out there on the shelves that well and truly cover what we need and we know a plethora of HSC students who will be glad to inflict their pain of “Journeys” and “Belongings” on another, unsuspecting Stage 6 student. We’ll muddle through.

All the while, we will hook into the Open University courses in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry and hopefully, just maybe, this will be enough to send my intelligent 15-year-old on his way to whatever it is he chooses to do with his life.

But what we will have gained through this uncertainty and this unorthodox approach towards Year 12 is so much more: a self-confident young man who is self-directed in his learning. He will be able to work at his own pace in a comfortable and safe environment while also avoiding the extreme stress and pressure of the school HSC atmosphere. He will be able to have a real life, more akin to what he should be able to enjoy through his future working life. He will be able to indulge his passion for learning; delving deeper into subjects that interest him while just covering the other stuff as required (but probably still deeper than his schooled cohorts). And he will have an appreciation for the fact that the Higher School Certificate is not the be-all and end-all of education; that it does not dictate the rest of his life; and that not having it will not be a barrier to doing whatever he wants to do with his life. He will understand that there are many pathways to achievement. Most of all, I hope that he will be a young man who knows that learning is not a means to an end but a lifelong journey to be enjoyed. As Cold Chisel once sang: “The motion is its own reward”.

About the author:

Lynda Calder is a compulsive volunteer, former teacher, engineer and emerging author with a very supportive and understanding husband, Andrew. The family lives in suburban Sydney and has homeschooled their oldest teen for four years utilising the BOS syllabus and textbooks. Their younger son is a talented cricketer and is about to graduate from primary to a sports high school. Lynda’s only current pay is love.
by Beverley Paine

There are many advantages to belonging to a homeschooling support group. The most obvious is the opportunity for children to benefit from contact with other children and to help them cope with being different. Because, no matter how we look at it, home educated children are different from schoolchildren and can feel this keenly. Children need contact with other children to grow and develop socially. I am not talking specifically here about socialisation but about learning social skills, learning how to communicate and express themselves confidently and assertively. This is first learned in the home but as children grow they need others to practise on and to refine their skills in wider social settings. Homeschooling support groups offer a safe environment to allow this to happen.

Another important advantage of a support group is the confidence it brings to the homeschooling parent. Groups allow the opportunity to share experiences, ideas and resources. Often parents are the ones who feel most different from their peers and shut off from many of the usual avenues of support available in the community, especially if there are specific health or learning problems in the family. Just hanging out with like-minded others and realising that we all share the same trials, tribulations and joyful and insightful experiences, ideas and resources.

Homeschooling support groups get together for a variety of reasons, the most popular being simple social groups. Anything can bring people together - a regular sporting or cultural activity, a regular picnic, chat session, shared educational activity. The activity is often the least important aspect of the support group. People need contact with others with similar concerns, commitments and goals in order to support and affirm one another.

Often groups are formed to work together to promote a more favourable climate for homeschooling in the local and wider community.

Such groups involve a commitment to working toward a common goal, but this goal and commitment bind people together, which often results in the formation of long and lasting friendships. Networks exist to disseminate information and organise activities such as devising promotional displays for touring libraries and shopping centres, producing regular informative newsletters, legal information gathering and support or annual conferences or workshops. Such networks come in really handy during times of adversity, such as when regulations that restrict homeschooling opportunity, freedom and rights are proposed by authorities.

One of the outcomes of regular attendance with a support group is growing self-reliance and confidence. Over time the group will rely on the abilities, experience, commitment and history of its members and not on outside experts. As a result, everyone becomes better educated. An offshoot of this is the fact that authorities and other people in the community treat homeschoolers with more respect - responding to the growing assertiveness expressed by the individual members of the support group. Having other people support our views, sharing a common vision and practice, gives us strength to protect our rights and demand a fair go whenever we need to.

Most groups are set up primarily for children, with activities planned in advance, such as educational excursions, arts and crafts, games, sports and guest speakers. Some may emphasise parental interests, such as legal issues or alternative approaches to learning, or they might provide opportunities to share experiences and concerns. Others publish a newsletter. A phone tree makes communication rapid and effective and helps to share responsibility.

Few support groups last more than a couple of years and it seems that burnout and moving on are the principal causes. A few groups have lasted many years, the secret of success being in the underlying organisation of the group. It is important for any group to include as many people in leadership roles as possible, rotating important roles so that everyone becomes skilled in them. Then if one member of the group drops out for any reason the group can survive.

Having clear expectations and roles within the group is also essential. If people are expected to do something they need to know beforehand! Clear and effective communication is essential. The group doesn't have to take on a formal organisational structure, but all members do have to be aware of the 'ropes' and to respect each other. New people coming into the group will have to be informed about how the group operates and shown how things are done, without being overwhelmed. At first it is hard just coping with the social assimilation, let alone assuming responsibilities for organising activities, newsletters, etc. If there is ever any conflict or doubt people should be encouraged to voice their concerns in whatever way feels safe for them, and for more experienced members to take up the cause and help everyone find solutions.

To assess whether a support group is actually functioning as a support group for you there are some questions you can ask, as well as relying on 'gut' feeling:

1. Are you getting accurate and complete information concerning issues or do you feel left out about important matters?
2. Do you feel empowered through your contact with the group?
3. Has participation helped you obtain the opportunity, resources and encouragement to do something that made a difference?
4. Does the group encourage people to work from self-confidence and positive purposes or does it rely on fear and insecurities?
5. How many of these reflections, if responded to in the negative, are your responsibility?

Many homeschooling families don't realise they actually have many support groups around them they can draw on. Promoting homeschooling in the community is one way of making sure these families are given the opportunity to find out about support groups in their area. All of us belong to a huge support group - the vast collection of home educating families steadily expanding both here and in the US, the UK and other areas in the world. I started the Fleurieu group for a purely selfish reason - I wanted to find a like-minded homeschooling family with a male child about the same age as Thomas. Well, on our first gathering we found one! But I didn't stop my activities organising our group... I wanted other people to know the satisfaction of contact with other families and having their needs met in the same way.

The newsletters I started grew out of a need to keep families scattered over a very large geographical area informed about events. The Fleurieu Home Based Learners Network was primarily set up to facilitate fortnightly gatherings. Camps and excursions were a hope and a dream, and a few eventuated. The future will see the formation of new homeschooling support groups, as individuals band together to work on ensuring that the message that home education is viable and successful is enshrined in law. A key factor in this process will be ongoing publicity, promoting home education to the general public and highlighting the positives, both to home educating families and to society at large. Will you play a part? And what part will it be? Of course, quietly staying at home and busily home educating your children is a very important role and is appreciated, at least by me. But if you do get time, even if you don't want to be involved in activities, please let others know you appreciate the work they do. A short letter to your local homeschooling newsletter will help to lift someone's spirits, somewhere!

This article first appeared on http://homeschoolaus.com/ and is published here (with a couple of updates) with the permission of the author.

SUPPORT

Getting support from the HEA

The HEA is primarily founded upon the premise that parents are the people best equipped to teach their kids. We are here to support you in your home education journey.

If you need advice and support on how to get started with home education or if you're already home educating and would like to make contact with someone that can give you a little moral support to get you over the bump of today's home educating challenges, you can post in our discussion forums, ring our volunteer support line on 1300729991 or contact our support team through the form on our website www.heau.edu.au.

Our website has lots of information that might be helpful to you. Please be sure to have a look around in the articles section, support contacts listings, our online shop and the state-by-state information on how to get started.

Remember, we're here to support you - there are thousands of home educators in Australia. If you need support, please contact our team of volunteers.

Discussion forums

Getting local support from groups

ACT

NSW

NT

QLD

SA

TAS

WA

VIC

Add your support group or update your group’s details on our website
We all have those moments late at night. The house is quiet, the kids are sleeping, our bodies are resting...but our minds are galloping! It was during such a moment that the idea of the Blue Mountains Homeschool Market Day/Picnic to celebrate Home Education Week 2010 was conceived.

I took the idea to three other homeschool mums and a committee was born. These dynamic ladies and I worked hard to organise a special and memorable day for all. Over a few months we organised stalls for the sale of second-hand educational supplies, a teen table to let everyone know what the kids were up to, a roving circus troupe for colour and fun entertainment, various workshops for the kids, homeschool kids manning their own food stalls, a charity for cancer awareness stall, a raffle with 15 wonderful prizes donated to us by local businesses, kids selling their own items off blankets and music performances.

We advertised using posters, word of mouth, newspapers, websites and email. Over 300 people came and shared in a wonderful celebration of the homeschool way of life and our famous raffle raised some good funds. The whole event was covered by the local media.

Another committee meeting hatched the idea of a Library Donation Scheme. I'm sure we have all experienced the lack of variety in the literature available to homeschoolers at our local libraries, while the variety available online can often be costly, confusing and overwhelming. Our committee consisted of moderators from our Yahoo website www.bmhen.org (Blue Mountains Home Education Network) and I was elected as spokesperson (bm for big mouth!) to approach the library with our idea.

I found the contact details for BM Council Library and Customer Service, sent off an email requesting a meeting and very quickly received an invitation to chat. I was quite excited about the meeting and my fellow Homeschool Teen Group Co-ordinator, Jane Shellshear, and I sat down and worked out a battle plan! Whilst I was in the office why not investigate our other potential ideas? You really have to grab every opportunity by the scruff of the neck and give it a good shake!

The Library and Customer Service Officer was a lovely, welcoming woman named Vicki Edmunds. Our idea was to donate an HEA subscription along with $80 worth of homeschool books of our choice. We hoped the library would be generous enough to match our donation. Not only did Vicki agree to match the donation, so we would end up with $200 worth of valuable homeschool education resources, but she also offered for the library to both source and purchase the chosen books because the library’s purchasing power was far greater than our own. Simply fantastic!

I sent word out on the BMHEN website for book recommendations and together we built a list. The books cover a range of styles and approaches ranging from those of Charlotte Mason, Montessori, John Holt, Steiner and Natural Learning to Unschooling. Included are a couple of wonderful Australian books. Each donated book will have a label on the inside cover explaining by whom it was donated and all the relevant homeschool contact details to help make a homeschooler’s journey a little easier!

All these books will be available or can be reserved from any library in the Blue Mountains. We have since organised an official handover to Springwood Library by the Teen Homeschool Group. This will be held during Home Education Week in November followed by a morning tea. During our meeting we also discussed the possibility of the teens undertaking work experience through the Blue Mountains Council, trying everything from Tourism to Engineering. A meeting room for the teens within the new library complex was volunteered, giving them a safe place to come together, study, socialise and enjoy free WiFi!

The Blue Mountains Teens are also involved in a community reading program with Hazelbrook Public School where they spend a couple of hours every week tutoring Years K and 1 in reading, speaking and listening skills. (Ed’s note; More about that elsewhere in this issue.)

At the end of last term the girls were presented with the Principal’s Award which they were proud to receive although they have told me their reward lies in watching “their” kids progress through the levels to eventually reading on their own. In 2012, in partnership with the school, we hope to begin a work experience program for the girls which they are very excited about.

The teens have been studying Japanese for over a year now, enjoying various excursions to the Japan...
Filling a Niche for Teen Homeschoolers

We started the Hub as we could not find classes in many of these subjects elsewhere in Perth and most certainly not in one place. Other parents clearly had the same problem. We decided to provide a safe learning environment for homeschooled teens and to offer classes in: psychology, English literature, art, French, history, geography and Greek, over one and a half days a week.

During 2011 we hosted the classes at our home and we charged only tuition fees without taking commission on the classes. During class time an extra teacher was always available in case of an emergency. On Tuesdays my husband taught psychology, I taught French and English Literature (and used to teach Media Studies as well). In the afternoons an art teacher provided a two-hour art session. On Fridays a sought-after homeschool teacher taught history, geography and Greek.

Our classes have been full except for French and Greek in which we did not take new students as it would have been too hard to catch up. We have had considerable waiting lists for all other classes and I get weekly emails from people trying to get in.

Apart from the loss of privacy in our home, what I have found hardest to deal with is feeling that a few people disregard the fact that we are hosting the Hub in our home. The group has been growing and that has meant an increase in the workload. Organising a twice-weekly activity for 25 people (not all in the same class, but overall) becomes quite an operation. Just dealing with basic communication, email enquiries, maintaining the waiting list and chasing up fees take a few hours a week. I pay the other teachers in advance, so don’t appreciate having to chase up payment. Of course, most of the parents are fantastic and pay before I’ve even send out an email saying fees are due!

We have decided to move the Hub to a hall in 2012. It would take the strain off the family home and should take some of the strain off us. It would still require a fair bit of administration.

Running the Hub has been an overall positive experience so far with some definite negatives emerging. All things being equal, we’ll run the Hub for another year but don’t want to commit to any longer than that!

For those considering such an exercise, I’m listing the pros and cons below, from the perspective of the organiser.

Pros: Fills a clear niche; very popular. Provides high academic standards. Covers most learning areas. Reduces workload on parents. Provides an opportunity for social interaction. Offers a controlled, safe environment.

Cons: Cuts into our work time. Requires a lot of administration and chasing of fees.

Elsa Raubenheimer, Perth Learning Hub
www.hshighschool.com
Our centre is a collection of Scout buildings set in three to four acres of parkland about 15 minutes’ drive north of Toowoomba. It is available to homeschooling families three days a week - more if necessary. This nicely complements the Scouts’ occasional weekend usage.

About 25 families have, at one time or another, been registered at the centre since 2008, with 10 to 13 families using the centre on a regular basis at the moment. From time to time the group organises a special day and up to 35 families have come to these.

Our funding comes from parent contributions (see website) and from donations and grants (many submissions, a few successes!).

At this stage I think it best if some of the parents talk to you about the centre:

R (mother of child diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome): “Our centre offers the kids the opportunity to be themselves and the kids are pretty tolerant of each other. If there is a challenge it can be dealt with by parents. You can talk to other parents and support them. That’s what I like about it - the presence of parents. The kids can have all that adult support. It’s a real community.”

B (mother of three aged 5 -9): "I like the support it provides for parents regardless of how they want to educate their children. It’s an outlet for parents and children - a space where they can get out of their own home. I don’t know how my family would have gone long term without this support. Using each other as a resource is great. Having the physical environment is fantastic. A new parent would get a great network of support and the children get to make friends and use the grounds. It’s big enough for them to run around and make a mess - things they sometimes can’t do at home."

A (father of a child with Asperger’s syndrome): "Wirraglen is a great testament to unschooling. If you are in doubt whether it will work or not there are families here who can reassure you. You don’t necessarily have to follow a curriculum.”

T (mother of five aged 5-17): "It’s a place to get support for yourself. There are quality teachers to help you and the kids can interact and initiate games. Here the parents can talk on a whole range of things - not just on education."

P (mother): "We get to be with other children, which is positive - the right number of people for contact for an Asperger’s child."

M (mother of two): "There is the opportunity for kids to do things they don’t do at home. There is social interaction - particularly for smaller families. And it’s a nice, quiet setting."

The centre offers indoor and outdoor resources (games, sporting gear, books for children and parents, including homeschooling classics) and a recently upgraded activity room, kitchen and toilet facilities. Two volunteers (registered teachers with homeschool experience) coordinate the centre. The support group offers help to any who want it, irrespective of learning or religious preferences. We are a not-for-profit incorporated group and registered charity.

For more information contact Ken or Suesie on 0438769524 or visit our website www.wirraglensupportgroup.org.au. Happy home educating!
Kirinari Community School trialled a new homeschool program late last year which got into full swing for 2011. The workshop is now run weekly on Thursdays when primary level homeschool children can attend the school for the day in a dedicated class, giving the children some social and group work opportunities and the parents a well-earned break or chance to work/study. Two teachers, Catherine and Penny, each takes the groups on a fortnightly basis and they look at topics such as literacy, maths, drama, art and science.

Since its inception the homeschool workshop has had waiting lists validating its necessity. Part-time schooling is not yet a legal option here in South Australia; however, the brave steps to create something similar for homeschool families by Kirinari Community have not gone unnoticed. It fills a gap, for sure.

Kirinari is a very small school of only 45 students in Unley just south of the Adelaide CBD. Its current market is families looking for an alternative to DECS, Catholic or high-fee private schools and, although the teaching style is very different, falls in the same league as Montessori and Steiner schools. The school focuses on play for learning, particularly with the younger children, and proudly flies the Progressive Education banner.


If any Adelaide-based homeschoolers would like to have a tour of the school, please contact the office on (08) 8271506 or to speak with a homeschooler involved with the school please call Nina Ward on 0405484339. School details: Kirinari Community School, 18 Trimmer Tc, Unley SA 5061, www.kirinari.sa.edu.au.

Don’t take democracy for granted!

There are many things that we tend to take for granted. One of these is our Australian system of government. Not only has it been there a long time, but politics is often irritating or just plain boring. When you switch on the news and it is about yet another mind-numbing media battle between political parties, sometimes it can feel as if a dictatorship would be a lot simpler!

Don’t be fooled. Our democratic system is essential to our way of life. Losing it would be catastrophic.

But what does democracy mean? What makes it better than other systems? The answer is that it is the system of government that gives the ultimate power to the people of a country – including the power to change the government. It does this in different ways.

In a democracy, free and fair elections are held regularly, at which ordinary people decide who will hold the reins of government. In Australia this regularly results in a change in the party running the government. Therefore governments must try hard to persuade people to vote for them next time around.

Secondly, democracy does not give all power to the government. Power is divided among the government, the parliament and the courts. The task of the government is to set national policy and run the country. The Parliament, representing all the people, oversees the government and is the only body with the power to pass laws. Without the support of the Parliament, a government cannot govern. The law courts are independent of both government and parliament, and they interpret the laws passed by Parliament. These three “arms” of the state balance each other out.

This broad system is repeated, with variations, at the three different levels or “tiers” of government – the federal level, which runs the whole country, the state or territory level, and the local or municipal level.

So democracy means that what the government does is open to close scrutiny by the people, as represented by their parliament. It means that a government is not all-powerful, and that it can be changed. In a dictatorship, on the other hand, one power group controls everything, including the flow of information, and there is no system that can eject those in the seats of power.

So democracy is vital in giving people a say in how they are governed. Remember: It is not laws that ensure democracy, rather it is support for the ideals of democracy in the hearts of each citizen. No politician will try to undermine democracy in the knowledge that people will not stand for it. So, please: Don’t take democracy for granted!

About the author: Peter Lilienfeld is a specialist in parliamentary procedure who has worked in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste, Cambodia, Vietnam, the Seychelles, South Africa and other countries. He is also a proofreader for Stepping Stones.
by David Blissett

Do you have a hero? Or maybe you have more than one? Perhaps it is a sport star or a singer? Maybe mum or dad? Maybe a friend? I grew up with some heroes. I thought over the next few editions of Stepping Stones, I might share some with you, and together we might look at what they taught the world about nature and the environment. These are David’s “eco-heroes”.

In this edition, we’ll meet my first eco-hero. He is the man they once called the Father of the Lions or the Lion Man of Africa: George Adamson.

Have you seen the You Tube video called “Christian the Lion”? Millions of people have. It features two young Australians named Ace and John. In the 1960’s these two friends brought a pet lion cub called Christian from a shop in London and kept him in their house until he grew too big. In the video, we see the men meeting Christian again, after he has grown up and been returned to the wild in Africa. The footage of a huge lion jumping into the arms of his human friends touched hearts everywhere. It is an Internet hit! However, look closely near the end of the video and you will see a small man with white hair and green shorts. This is the man who actually released Christian into the wild. This is George Adamson.

George Adamson was born in India in 1906, but spent most of his life in the northern parts of Kenya in East Africa. George worked on farms and was a big game hunter, before he eventually became a park ranger. But George shot to international fame in 1960 when his wife Joy released her amazing book called Born Free. It told the true story of an orphan lion cub called Elsa, who was supposed to be sent to a zoo in Europe, before the Adamsons decided to try and release her back into the wild. They succeeded. Elsa lived as a wild lioness, but never forgot her human friends. Born Free became a best-selling book and was made into an Oscar-winning movie. And it was the Born Free movie that launched George Adamson into work that would occupy the rest of his life. For the next twenty years George Adamson introduced dozens of former orphan, zoo or pet lions back into the wild, including the lions used in the Born Free movie and Christian, the lion in the You Tube video.

George Adamson spent his life fighting for lions and other wild animals. He fought against land clearing and dangerous poachers and tried to warn the world about the threat to Africa’s unique animals. His words came true. Today, in 2011, many of these same animals are endangered, including the once common African Lion.

George himself was shot and killed by poachers in 1989, aged eighty three, but his legacy lives on. The George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust works to help animals and people across East Africa.

The Trust supports wildlife, promotes education and helps people living in areas near to national parks and reserves. The goal is to help local people to live in harmony with wildlife as well as allowing them to share the money that wildlife tourism brings to their regions. I think that is something that would have made George Adamson very happy!

To read more about George Adamson and his Trust, to visit a special children’s page called Dotty the Rhino and to see some amazing pictures of African wildlife, including George and his lions, go to http://www.georgeadamson.org/

You can watch many versions of the “Christian the Lion” video on You Tube, but one of the best is at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=md2CW4qp9e8
The homeschooling plan for our six-year-old son had included “local and national parks and reserves to allow an intimate experience with nature” as means of education. Further, we had set out to: “Keep a nature diary of the backyard throughout one year observing changes and record them in drawings, collecting specimens such as leaves, and taking photos or writing short notes. This diary [...] was meant to] include observations from other areas as we might do excursions. [And k]eeping the diary [...] would make Karl more aware of his surrounding environment and also help him practise his writing skills”. The diary was also supposed to draw on numerous books such as *Scribbly Gum Nature Diary*, *Rock and Fossil Hunter* and *Close Encounters with Wildlife in Australia*. I thought this was a very good outline for nature studies when I submitted our plan to the Board of Studies in September last year. Little did I realise then that we might not encounter what the books told us about nor did I consider that our son might simply not be interested in writing, let alone in keeping a diary at this stage of his development.

On a three-day trip to Newcastle, staying at youth hostels, we could not find any fossils despite walking for kilometres along the beach, nor could we identify most of the marine animals we found in the waterholes. I was starting to feel discouraged, leafing through the books while trying to “progress” on “our” nature study road. Karl got increasingly disinterested in “our studies” and started to amuse himself while I was trying to find my bearings.

At some point, I was looking up from a desperate search through our “seashore spotters cards” trying to find out just what kind of sea slug we were (or rather, I was) looking at. And what did I see? Karl was running from waterhole to waterhole looking in delight at all the different little fish, crabs and colourful seaweed, waving at the seagulls above us in the sky and pointing out to me that there were rain clouds far out at the sea and wondering if it was very windy out there as the clouds seemed to move very fast. He did not care in the slightest what the exact name of that sea slug was; nor did he care which type of sea snail he was looking at. He thought it was hilarious that sea snails were gastropods, i.e. stomach-footed molluscs, and imagined people walking on their stomachs. But that...
was about the extent of his interest in animal classification at that point.

I realised that the way I had set out on “our” nature studies course had all been about my own and not really about our son’s learning. I decided to rejoin him on our excursion. We spent a wonderful time exploring the seashore and discovering many interesting natural phenomena. All this while having fun playing on the beach, bushwalking and watching animals in Blackbutt Reserve, and considering a little history on a tram tour and at Fort Scratchley.

This experience changed my general view on schooling our son. I read about the Charlotte Manson approach in one of the HEA magazines and found the idea of mainly reading, instead of “teaching” to your child, fascinating. In my search for living books, I found Nuri Mass’ “Wonderland of Nature” available from Down Under Literature* (and also ordered the associated journal for a time when Karl will be ready for it). Bedtime reading now comprised one or more sections of this wonderful Australian nature book. I cannot say how much our whole family enjoyed reading its informative and exciting stories about all things nature; most of which can easily be observed in one’s own backyard. How often Karl called out “Yes, I have seen that before in the backyard/on the fence/in the park ...” made me realise how much he was learning all by himself by “just” playing in the backyard for hours and observing his surroundings.

Lately, we have added the Sydney Olympic Park to our repertoire of nature study areas. A calendar published by the Olympic Park Authority has a “This month in the Park” section about interesting nature observations to be expected during this time. We did our first excursion in September 2011, when we were hoping for glimpses of waterbird chicks at the Northern Water Feature. Taking our bicycles on the train to Concord West, we made our way up to Haslams Pier at the Northern Water Feature, where we saw no waterbird chicks but plenty of adult waterbirds including black swans. We walked around the pond to have a closer look at the birds. Then we bicycled along a service trail that turned out to be a dead end and, after back-tracking the entire trail, had lunch at the Wentworth Common. There are playgrounds with equipment enjoyed by both children and adults. On the way back to the train station we stopped at the shipwreck viewing platform and walked through the mangroves watching plenty of crabs running from hole to hole along the muddy ground. We must have bicycled at least 10km and what a great day we had. For October, we are planning to watch the arrival of Bar-tailed Godwits at the waterbird refuge and breeding bush birds in Narrawang Wetland.

Karl is also taking his own initiatives: an old tomato paste jar is now the home of two worms so that he can see how long they will take to mix a sand and a soil layer. A plant is growing in a shoe box, the plant needing to take a windy path through a maze out of cardboards to reach the light at the top opening of the box**. It is amazing to watch him learn! In the end, we are achieving some of the main objectives of our plan, namely to “encourage a love for (independent) learning and support Karl’s quest to understand the world, [...] and] to foster creativity”.

Homeschooling is a rewarding experience for both parents and child. I am learning more than I had ever bargained for. Letting your child roam through your backyard or local park for hours on end will do more for the child’s understanding of natural processes than studying books and filling out work sheets. I am not trying to say that books and worksheets should not be used. They certainly do have a role, but it should be second to the actual observation of nature.

About the author: Jane Brennan is homeschooling her six year old son Karl with the help of her husband Luke, and an au pair who looks after Karl when Jane works as a lecturer for two and a half days a week. They all live in Sydney.

Resources:
* The Wonderland of Nature by Nuri Mass can be found at http://www.homeschoolingdownunder.com/.
Interview With an HEA Volunteer

Our interviewee:

Rebecca Stanford – NSW

How many children do you have? I have 4 children but if you don't include the husband it is only 3.

How long have you been home educating your children? Like many others I think I have always been home educating but without any help from the government it has been just over 3 years now. Wow, where does the time go? Sometimes it feels like we have just started.

How do you approach home education? I would like to say I'm super organised, a super mum who can do all things, but that is nowhere near reality. I was just looking at the 2-year plan I supplied to the Board of Studies of what I was planning to teach and hardly anything on that list has been covered. I really am a “go with the flow” type home educator, which really surprises me. I once was a very structured person, but now I really can’t tell you what we will be studying from one week to the next. Most times it is walking into the library and seeing what takes our fancy and that is what we look at. Having said that, I do have some structure in that we do follow a set Maths Curriculum. Everything else is open for discussion.

Why did you start home educating? My husband and I had always talked about homeschooling, but it never seemed right at the time. Then as our kids were getting older, we looked into it for high school. I don’t have fond memories of high school. I completed up to Year 9 and not going further never hindered me from getting a job or continuing with further studies. So I asked myself why one would go through all the stress and have to study things one is not interested in. Also in the small town we lived in at the time in Victoria the local high school did not have a great name and most of our friends sent their older children to a private school 34 km away. We didn’t have the funds to do that. My two school-going children were in grades 6 and 3 when my husband was offered a job in Nowra on the south coast of NSW. Moving in late August, I thought it was a good chance to trial homeschooling for the last term of school and let us settle in and find ourselves before doing the school hunt. So I registered for 6 months. In January of the following year we had settled into our new home and I asked the kids if they wanted to go look at the schools that we were zoned for. The answer was “No” as everyone was happy at home. So I re-registered with the board of studies and here we are, still going after 3 years.

What motivates you to continue home educating? The thought of having to watch the clock all the time. Homeschooling allows us to start and end when we want without watching the clock. We can come and go as we please without having to write the notes to explain our reasons for wanting to take our own children and do things with them. We also enjoy holidaying in the cheaper times of the year, which we normally don't count as holidays as they always end up being very educational times for us all.

What are the highlights of your home education journey? This may sound crazy but one of my first highlights was getting the results back from the NAPLAN testing. I got the kids to do this about 8 months into our homeschool journey. I was going through the whole “we aren't doing enough” and “I am ruining my child’s future” stage. You know, the thoughts that cross every parent’s mind during those first
couple of months into homeschooling. I think it was getting those results that changed my outlook to the “go with the flow” attitude I was talking about before. My kids had done very well, better than when at school. That meant to me that we must have been doing something right. They hadn’t stopped learning at all, which is what I had thought might happen, but had continued and done better than the results of past years when they had been at school. I had the proof that it was working and we didn’t have to spend 6 hours a day poring over textbooks to do it either. We have also had some really great exploring times together as a family. I love sightseeing and going to new places. Homeschooling allows us to do this.

**How long have you been volunteering your time for HEA?** I think it has been from about the end of 2009, when I took on the assistant treasurer’s role. I was doing the behind-the-scenes bookkeeping. I also started to help organise homeschool meetings for the local homeschoolers.

**What do you do for HEA?** Today I am treasurer and on the committee, not so much behind the scenes anymore.

**Why did you volunteer?** I think the only way you really know what is going on is to be involved. Plus I figured that should I want to go back to work at some stage, being the treasurer of HEA would look good on the résumé and keep up my skills.

**What benefits do you get from volunteering?** I have met some really great like-minded people. I feel empowered to help people. It’s great being part of something bigger than just your town or area.

**Zoe - 14 years**

1) *Do you like being home educated?* Yes, it is better than school.

2) *What do you like about being home educated?* We get to go out to lots of different places.

3) *What’s the most exciting thing you’ve done since you started being home educated?* Going to the old Dubbo Gaol.

**Jesse - 13 years**

1) *Do you like being home educated?* Yeah.

2) *What do you like about being home educated?* There is a lot of free time.

3) *What’s the most exciting thing you’ve done since you started being home educated?* Going to a clay animation workshop and learning how to make clay movies.

**Eliana - 6 years**

1) *Do you like being home educated?* Yes, but I would like to go to school to make more friends and then mum can teach me when I come home.

2) *What do you like about being home educated?* Our family trips.

3) *What’s the most exciting thing you’ve done since you started being home educated?* Learning how to swim.
History Adventures - Part 2

Reading Living Books

by Marianne Vanderkolk

Reading living books brings history alive for our children and, through the endearing, warm, noble characters of history, they learn to love the stories and desire to know and read more. This means that our task as parents is to make careful and wise choices of literature.

Reading a living book as opposed to a textbook also helps us to remember history: the stories, the joys, the injustice, the wars, and the godly heroes - those which can be models for our children. These do not come to life in a text. Only as you walk with the characters, feel their pain and see their struggles do you participate in their culture.

When we study history as a family, we always read an historical fiction novel from that time period. I spend at least an hour a day reading this novel to all of my children. The novels we read are varied. Some well-known classic series books are the Landmark Books and G A Henty books. I usually read this novel for an hour or so, a few times per week. When the children were younger, dad would sometimes read a different book in the evenings.

Homeschool Favourites in Australia, stocks a wide range of living books to teach history according to time periods.

Depending on the age and ability of the children, I require that they also read about that time period or character or event in their own reading time. For non-readers, I would read from other books like the Usborne books to give the context for the historical fiction novel. Sometimes I find it is helpful to use a spine book to teach history. Some of the spine books we have used are the Greenleaf Famous Men Series, The Story of the World and others which keep us on track. We read from it, go on all sorts of diversions and return to it when ready and read the next chapter.

Either using the spine book or the living book, I would ask the younger children from time to time, to narrate (tell back to me what they have learned) from that passage or chapter. If they are able to, they can write their narrations. Otherwise, I would write their narrations for them and they can draw a picture underneath or alongside it.

The main focus for younger children (primary school years), I believe, is for them to develop a knowledge base: to hear the stories, meet the important characters of history, place them in a context and to have a basic grasp of some important dates (to build up a mental grid or timeline) to know what came before and what came next.

The older children are given specific reading and writing assignments depending on their age and ability. Reading and writing are part of important history skills which are developed in a natural way in the context of teaching history.

Writings can include reports, book reviews and essay writing in a variety of styles: persuasive (arguing a point), compare and contrast essays, expository essays, research writing, letters to the editor, and creative writing in the forms of poetry, short stories, plays and narratives. I believe the main focus, for children aged thirteen to fifteen, is to make connections between the actions of men and women and consequences that come from their decisions. This age group could begin to evaluate men’s actions against scripture; understand cause and effect; measure the culture against Biblical standards; and make links between trends, philosophies and the art, music and culture of the time. As children mature from sixteen onwards, they would continue to make these connections and logically argue for or against issues in the past and how it relates to our lives today. From sixteen onwards, we would be focussing on writing and presenting logical, well-documented arguments.

About the author: Marianne and Gerald Vanderkolk have been home educating their six children since their eldest was born in 1990. The eldest two are now enjoying their work and the other four are still being actively homeschooled. Marianne enjoys writing about homeschooling and you can visit her site at www.design-your-homeschool.com. The website provides a step-by-step systematic guide which will help you plan and create the homeschool that suits the needs of your family and is in keeping with your goals, subject choice and preferred methodology.
**PLASTIC PURSES**

1. For each purse take one plastic carrier bag, cut off the handles and cut the bag open down the sides. Place two layers of bag together between sheets of baking parchment on an ironing board. Gently iron on a medium heat for a few seconds until the bags fuse together. It’s a good idea to practise on a small area first. Leave to cool. You should end up with a stiff but flexible sheet of plastic ‘fabric’. You may need to add more layers depending on the thickness of your bags.

2. Cut out a long rectangle from the plastic and fold the ends over to form a purse or wallet. Style the opening flap as shown in the picture above. Iron the edges together as before.

3. Add decorative shapes and fuse onto the flap. Secure the flap by using Velcro® hook and loop dots.

**ANIMAL PUPPETS**

1. Take a large brown paper bag and either fold the top two corners onto the front of the bag or make a double fold so they appear behind. Also fold in the sides to create a face shape. Secure with pieces of sticky tape, leaving room for your hand.

2. Take a black marker pen and draw on features for your animal including eyes, the inside of the ears and a mouth.

3. To add extra decoration to your puppets, stick on large pom poms for noses, some googly eyes and pipe cleaners for whiskers.

**LACED PARTY BAGS**

1. This is a sweet idea if you are holding a party or special event for your children. Take some natural or white kraft bags and lay them flat on a table.

2. With a single hole punch tool, punch holes through the two layers of the bag. Make sure the holes are evenly spaced out. You can have as many holes as you like, but the more holes you have, the more ribbon threading you will have to do!

3. Take lengths of thin ribbon and lace them through the holes making sure both ends finish at the front of the bag. Tie the ends in a bow to complete. The bags could also be decorated with stickers.

**FUNKY COASTERS**

1. Take a patterned carrier bag, cut off the handles and open up the sides as in Step 1 for ‘Plastic Purses’. If it is a large bag, cut it into sections and place each section on top of one another. Fuse together as in Step 1 for ‘Plastic Purses’.

2. When you have your plastic fabric, cut out some shapes to make your coasters. We made some flowers but you could make any shapes you want.

3. Mount your plastic fabric shapes onto pieces of foam. We found our foam flower shapes in HobbyCraft but you can cut your own shapes from sheets of foam. Attach the plastic shapes onto the foam with pieces of double-sided tape.
Celebrating Reading Week
by Madi Martin

My name is Madi Martin and I am part of the Blue Mountains Teen Group. I wanted to share some news with everyone about the group’s recent involvement in the Paint the Blue Read scheme to celebrate reading week.

"Paint" was organised a couple of years ago to encourage reading, storytelling and an interest in books for primary school kids. The kids visit a town in the mountains, travelling on the big red bus and being entertained by Billy Booksey, pictured here with my sister Lilee!

The group of children would visit various stores and have a story read to them by different people - a baking story in a bakery, shoe story in a shoe store, moving house story in a real estate office etc.

Some of the other teens and I volunteered to be the readers for two of the days, first in Leura then in Blackheath. We had a fabulous time reading to the kids. Watching their interest and enthusiasm made us all feel very good about what we were doing. It was fun to be a part of Paint the Blue Read this year and to help younger kids discover the joy and fun inside a great book!
RECIPE

Lunch Wraps

You’ll need:
- Flat bread (also known as pita or Lebanese bread)
- Cream cheese
- Cucumber, tomato, lettuce
- Carrot, cut into strips
- Cheese
- Salt and pepper
- Fresh herbs (optional)
- Ham or cooked chicken fillets
- Sweet chilli sauce or mayonnaise

Method:
Spread flat bread (as many as the number of people to feed) with cream cheese. Lay a few washed and drained lettuce leaves on top of the cream cheese. Don’t take the filling right to the edge or you won’t be able to eat the wrap without things falling out. Then add a row of tomato slices down the middle and on top of that a row of cucumber slices. Sprinkle with salt, pepper and washed, chopped herbs. Add one cooked chicken fillet or a couple of slices of ham, some thin slices of cheese and add a drizzle of sauce. With the fillings in a vertical row in front of you, fold over the bottom of the flat bread about one quarter. Then start rolling the flat bread from one side till it forms a roll. Enjoy!

CRAFT

Friendship Bracelet

You will need:
- 75 cm per colour embroidery floss (we used 4 x 75 cm)
- Scissors
- Masking or other sticky tape

Method:
1. Pick 4 colours for your bracelet. Cut pieces of floss to the correct length (75 cm each) and tie all four pieces with one knot, leaving 7.5 cm above the knot to tie the bracelet later.
2. Anchor the top of this bundle of floss to the table with tape.
3. Follow the picture instructions provided. Explaining it in words makes it sound impossible, but I’ll try!
4. Bring thread on the left (red A) across one to its right (light blue B), tuck underneath, back to the left and through the hole.
5. Repeat - so make two of these knots onto B.
6. Now use the same thread (red A) and tie in the same way to the third thread to the left (dark blue C).
7. Continue knotting the same thread to the last thread on the right (green D).
8. Restart the same process, this time using the thread that is now hanging on the left (light blue B), and work your way to the right.
9. Continue until you have made a bracelet long enough to fit around your friend’s arm.
10. Knot the threads together in one knot (as you did at the start) leaving at least 7.5 cm before cutting the remaining threads.
11. Tie it to your friend’s arm, but make sure it is not too tight.

A lovely bracelet to remind a friend you are always with him/her in spirit!