

Sue E. Smith and Larry Walsh

Yan Yan Willem – Boys learning Aboriginal Way

Yan Yan Willem (young man's camp in the local Woiwurrung language) is an outdoor experiential program delivered to Year 9 boys from Christian Brothers schools in Victoria.

The program, delivered by Aboriginal men, is based on two important tenets of Aboriginal lore:

1. By feeling at home in your country you feel at home in your self
2. To become a man a boy must be strong enough to be able to take care of the people, animals, plants land and water in his country.

Through a series of distinct but sequential activities, where learning is through observation and direct application and allows boys freedom to move around, learning in an Aboriginal way utilises much of what is considered best practice in boys' education.

Activities begin and conclude at the sacred fire. The boys make damper and cook kangaroo, paint and learn to play the didgeridoo. They walk in the bush and learn to identify bush tucker and different uses of plants. They plant new trees to regenerate eroded hillsides. The boys also have time to sit by the river and consider people and places that are special to them. Through shared experiences and empathy comes Reconciliation. Quite a different day for city dudes!