

// We're leaving behind
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and wonder and
becoming risk-averse. //

Rebuilding a connection with nature was the driving force behind her career as an outdoor educator and mentor to young people, she said.

Her passion for the outdoors began on her parents' 80-acre property in country Victoria, where she grew up with her twin sister and two younger siblings.

She said her future was decided when family friends asked if their daughter and six teenage friends could come up for a farm stay experience.

"We organised all the activities from horse riding, camping and egg collecting and paid mum to cater.

"That was the beginning. I knew that was what I wanted to do."

At 17 she became the youngest student accepted into the Outdoor Education undergraduate course at Bendigo's La Trobe University.

"The head of the school expected me to resign by Easter. I thought, 'Just watch and see.'"

She studied for three years while working for a local youth service organising monthly camps.

After later achieving a Masters of Outdoor Education degree at Queensland's Griffith University, she opted against studying for a PhD, preferring instead to put her ideas and ambitions to work. She said she struggled to find a position to cater for her qualifications at first. It took a teaching degree to change her fortunes.

She stressed the importance of centres like Kindilan to exist to help combat the rise of childhood obesity, depression and behavioural



The Kindilan team, from left, Kerryn Rolley, Amy Harris, Jemma Laurie, Rebecca Fox, Ros Rideout, Jessica Ash and Yolandi Sur.

disorders, which were often linked to a lack of nature-based play and growing computer use.

"We're leaving behind a sense of adventure and wonder and becoming risk-averse.

"We dare not walk through bushland because of the creepy crawlies or climb a tree. But all these

activities build resilience and sound judgements as adults," she said.

She remembered fondly the freedoms of her own childhood in the bush and having to be called inside by her mother when it got dark.

She urged parents to "foster what we did as

kids" and engage with their children in outside play this summer.

"Go to the park, plant a herb garden, put the black board outside, turn the sprinkler on for some water play and get to know your neighbours."

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