

Ten-year-old Olivia Thomas enjoyed some unstructured play time at Kent Street Weir with her friend Edith as part of the Muddy Hands Festival. Each year, the City of Canning runs the festival, and Nature Play WA brings the muddy fun to help encourage children and families to enjoy playing outdoors and being in nature.

by Olivia Thomas

On Saturday 18th November I went to the Muddy Hands Festival at Kent Street Weir with my friend, Edith. I knew the festival involved getting messy in nature, but I didn't know what to expect.

When we got there, we first went to the Nature Play WA stand, and we chose a conversation card. The card asked, "What do you do to de-stress?" So, Edith, my mum and I talked about our answers—I like to colour in, and Edith likes to play with her dog.

The Eco Faeries were at the festival, which made sense because they are all about bringing nature to children through the magic of fairies. At their tent we made a boat with bark from a tree, a skewer stick, a piece of fabric for the flag and some plasticine to hold the flag in place.

We tested our boats in some water. Mine floated, but Edith's sunk because her bark had a crack in it. At the bottom of the water there were insects and stones to touch.

We also made some fairy potions. Each colour had a different meaning, but we used all the colours and mixed them around. When we were finished, we had our photo taken with one of the Eco Faeries.

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Above Splashing, having fun in the mud pit.

Below Getting muddy in a puddle.
Photos – Claire Thomas

MUDDY HANDS

happy hearts





GETTING HANDS ON

We walked over to where we saw lots of different shelters. We decided to make one ourselves using nine wooden sticks, rope and three bamboo sticks for the roof. Some of the wooden sticks kept falling because they weren't evenly in place.

We worked together to tighten the knots in the rope and after we fixed the problems, we got some fabric and pegs. There was a lot of fabric to choose from, but we finally came to a decision—we used a tarpaulin for the roof because it kept the sun out. When the cubby was finished, we sat in it, and it looked really cool!

Over at the wildlife tent, we first looked at some animal poo in jars and

learned that wombat poo is shaped in a cube, similar to kangaroo poo. We touched some very long snakeskin, which felt rough and scaly. There were some Australian animal finger puppets and I played with the kangaroo, wombat and koala.

We used all our senses and a magnifying glass to explore some seeds that were in a basket. I smelled one of the seeds, but it didn't have a smell. There were some pinecones, some that looked like corn, seed pots and a bull banksia (*Banksia grandis*).

It was finally our turn to touch the animals. First, we touched a non-venomous snake called Ninja, which I thought would feel rough but was very smooth. After that, we stroked a sleeping koala with the back of our hands.

Next were the western blue tongue lizards (*Tiliqua occipitalis*) and bobtails (*Tiliqua rugosa*). They were very hard and scaly and looked really cool. One of

them kept sticking out its tongue. Last, we touched another snake that was curled around a post, and we couldn't find its head. My favourite animal to touch was definitely the koala.

At the City of Canning tent there was kinetic sand to touch and create sculptures using the molds. There were also some bubbles, and I used a love-heart shaped bubble wand. We spun a wheel and won a prize. We both chose a blue sensory ball.

TIME TO GET MESSY

Finally, it was mud pit time. Edith and I splashed around in the puddles of mud and got filthy! We sat in the mud, putting dirt on our arms and legs. It was so sloppy! Some other kids were throwing mud all over each other. I loved putting my hands in the mud, lifting them up and watching the gooey mud drip down all over my legs. We got sprayed off with water but still had mud all over us. It was so fun getting covered in mud!

Above The festival sign is a big drawcard for photo opportunities.
Photo – City of Canning



Messy fun

Muddy Hands Festival invites children and families to revel in the joy of unbridled, messy outdoor play. This unique event celebrates the myriad benefits of letting kids get their hands dirty, like fostering a deeper connection with the environment, encouraging a sense of creativity and adventure, and building resilience.



It was a hot day, so we sat in the shade and created a sculpture out of clay. Edith and I decided to make turtles. Edith's was very skinny, so I called hers the baby and mine was much bigger, so I called it the mummy. After I made my sculpture, I painted it with grey clay. I had clay all over my hands, so I washed them off in a bucket of water. Down at the bottom there was so much sloppy clay and it felt nice and calming to touch.

After all the fun we had, we were so hungry. We walked to the food vans to get lunch. We sat in the shade to eat and watched an ant carry a crumb twice its size. After lunch we wanted to run on the bike track. We ran the red track twice, which was super challenging. We then ran the blue track, which was much easier.

Finally, we took a photo of us all muddy in front of the Muddy Hands Festival sign. It was the best day because I got to spend time in nature with my

friend. We took our time and enjoyed each activity without having to rush.

I loved using all my senses to create a boat, shelter, clay sculpture, fairy potion and most of all, play in the mud! I will definitely go back again and next time I will take my whole family.

Top left Finding joy in getting messy.
Photo – City of Canning

Top right Olivia and Edith with one of the Eco Faeries.

Above left Learning about snakes.

Above middle Making turtle sculptures out of clay.

Above right Up close observing native plants and introduced pines.
Photos – Claire Thomas

Do it yourself

Where is it? Muddy Hands Festival is held at the Kent Street Weir in Canning River Regional Park.

When is it? The festival is held in November each year, visit canning.wa.org.au for specific details.

Things to do Mud kitchens, mud pits, mud sculpting, ochre face painting with Educated by Nature, loose parts play, cubby building, high ropes course, sporting activities and workshops, recycling and sustainability education, craft workshops, plant giveaways, stage shows and roving entertainment.



Olivia Thomas is ten years old and lives in the Perth Hills where her home and school are surrounded by bush. She is a talented cross country runner and loves spending time in nature with her family and friends.