

What is Weed Warriors?

Weed Warriors is an innovative national community engagement and empowerment program that is focused on fostering increased community awareness of, and involvement in, local weed issues.

The Weed Warriors program recognises children as the land managers of the near future and seeks to empower and engage them in weed issues through an on-going program of classroom and field-based activities. The activities are designed to take the program participants beyond knowledge to action and help to encourage a sense of connection to, and responsibility for, their natural environment. The program also focuses on linking stakeholders involved in weed management with the community.

What does the program involve?

As Weed Warriors, students become actively involved in the management of a local weed problem when they join with land managers and community groups to implement a biological control program for a target weed (biological control is the management of a weed using natural enemies from the weed's country of origin). The weed species targeted reflects weed problems that occur in the local area.

Through the program, students are given the unique opportunity to undertake real-life weed research at school. The students take on the role of weed scientists and their classroom becomes a mini research institute as they breed biological control agents to help control the target weed.

The breeding phase of the Weed Warriors program generally lasts four to six weeks. Throughout this time students are taught the skills needed to breed the biological control agents through the provision of resource material and through active participation in the process. Students, in collaboration with local land managers and community groups, then release their biological control agents at a weed infestation local to the school, playing an active role in bringing about a solution to a weed problem in the local community.

Mentor program

An important aspect of the Weed Warriors program is the establishment of mentor-student relationships; linking schools with key people that play a role in weed management, conservation or natural resource management in their local area.

The aim of the Weed Warriors mentor program is to help increase the quality of the learning experience for students and teachers and to develop in the students a sense of connection to, and responsibility for, weed issues in their local area. The mentor's involvement in the program helps to create a real-world experience for the students and assists them in developing a thirst for environmental knowledge.

Benefits of the Weed Warriors mentor-student relationship

Engages the community in weed management.

Helps build the capacity of the community to deal with weed issues.

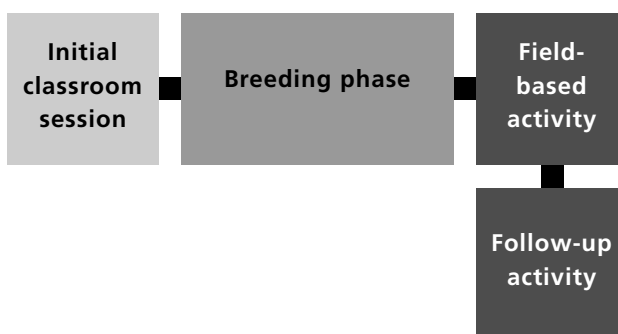
Helps recognise and support the weed management efforts of local people.

Helps develop in the community a sense of connection to, and responsibility, for local places.

Helps reduce the impact of weeds.

Helps develop effective partnerships between people with responsibility for the management of weeds.

How is the program structured?



Initial classroom session

Usually forty minutes duration

The initial classroom session is aimed at increasing the student's knowledge of weed-related issues, linked both to their local community and a wider context. Students are also introduced to biological control and the basic concepts behind it. Students are then taught the skills needed to breed the biological control agent for the target weed. The session is interactive and supported by visits from members of the local community and those who act as mentors to the students.

The breeding phase of the program

At least four weeks duration

During this time students become responsible for the breeding of the biological control agents and making basic observations about the biological control agent's life cycle and its impact on the target weed. Duties include watering and providing quantities of the weed to act as a food source. The biological control agents chosen for the program are highly visible in their impact and students are encouraged to measure their observable impact and report on what they find.

Field-based activity

Usually two hours duration

The field-based activity centres on the release of the classroom-reared biological control agents at a suitable weed infestation local to the school. Media attendance at the event is encouraged as is attendance by parents and other interested parties. Through participating in the release event, students are given an opportunity to relate their classroom-based learning to a real-world experience.

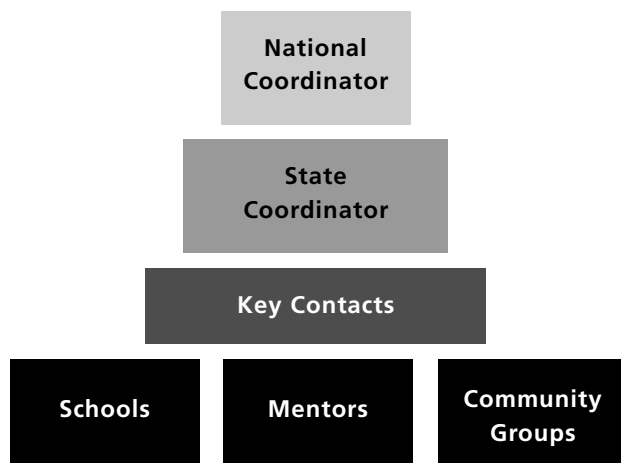
Follow-up activity

Monitoring the establishment and spread of the biological control agents at the release site six or twelve months after their release is an important follow-up activity to the release event. There are two ways the students can be involved in monitoring the release site:

- Through active participation in another organised visit to the release site, or
- The Weed Warriors Key Contact monitors the site and reports findings back to the students in the classroom.

How is the program administered?

Weed Warriors is a national program administered by a National Coordinator, a State/Territory Coordinator and supported by a network of Key Contacts, mentors, community groups and schools.



Roles and Responsibilities

National Coordinator

The role of the National Coordinator is to oversee the Weed Warriors program across Australia, administer the national Weed Warriors website, registration and accreditation scheme and help to link Weed Warriors program participants nationally.

State/Territory Coordinator

The role of the State/Territory Coordinator is to provide a link between the National Coordinator and on-ground programs and to provide support and assistance to the Weed Warriors Key Contacts, mentors and community groups.

Key Contact

The role of the Key Contact is central to the success of the program. The Key Contact is the person who organises, coordinates and implements the Weed Warriors program within a local area. The Key Contact is also someone who will become a driver for continuing and expanding the program within the region.

Mentors/community groups

The role of the mentors and community groups within the program are to help in connecting participating students to environmental issues within their local community. The mentors maintain this connection with students within, and beyond, the program. A Weed Warriors mentor is generally a person from the local community who has knowledge and a commitment to local weed issues and who will strive to engage the participating students in addressing other local environmental challenges.

Weed Warriors for mentors



Weed Warriors mentor

One of the most important responsibilities of the Weed Warriors mentor is to establish initial contact with the students and to ensure on-going contact occurs beyond the structured breeding phase of the Weed Warriors program.

Who can be a Weed Warriors mentor?

A Weed Warriors mentor may come from a broad range of experience and expertise. For example, local weeds or environmental officers, park ranger, community group member or group facilitator, conservationist and conservation volunteers, to name just a few possibilities.

Land managers who are responsible for managing the infestation where students will release their biological control agents also make suitable mentors.

Regardless, Weed Warriors mentors must be:

- Prepared to commit time to developing a mentor relationship,
- Enthusiastic and experienced in local weed, conservation or natural resource management issues, and
- Committed to engaging the Weed Warriors on an ongoing basis.

Local community groups will also benefit from being involved in the Weed Warriors program. Weed Warriors may be important additions to friends groups, junior ranger programs or as helping hands at working bees. These linkages will help support community initiatives and foster in the next generation of land managers a sense of connection to, and responsibility for, the local environment.

Can the Key Contact be the students' mentor?

Absolutely!

Role of the mentor

In a broad sense, a mentor is someone who takes a special interest in helping another develop.

The major tasks expected of a mentor are to:

- Act as a provider of information,
- Share knowledge and experiences,
- Show initiative and commitment to nurturing the interests of the students, and
- Encourage and facilitate action.

What level of involvement is required as a Weed Warriors mentor?

The time commitment a Weed Warriors mentor must give to the program depends on how involved they choose to be.

The basic level of involvement required of a Weed Warriors mentor is as follows:

During the program

- Forty minutes at the beginning of the program for the initial classroom session.
- Two hours at the completion of the program for the release event at which the students will release their classroom-reared biological control agents.

Beyond the program

- The time given by a Weed Warriors mentor beyond the structured program is at the discretion of the individual.

During the main body of the program the Weed Warriors mentor should also be available to support the teacher and students should they need any assistance with the program.

The type of assistance that the teacher or students may require is help with locating and collection of the target weed to feed the biological control agents, identification of local and regional weeds, provision of supporting extension material and answering other questions that may arise.



Responsibilities of the mentor

Minimum requirement during the program

- Attend the initial classroom session and give a short presentation on their involvement in weed management and weed issues in the local area.
- Assist the Key Contact, if necessary, in locating a suitable biological control release site.
- Attend the release event at the end of the program to discuss local weed issues with the students through practical field-based identification, and provide further opportunities to become involved in weed management.

Beyond the program

It is hoped that the Weed Warriors mentor will wish to engage the students beyond the structured Weed Warriors program by working with the teachers/principals to help incorporate regular conservation activities and environmental learning into the curriculum. Activities may include the following:

- Organise regular visits to the school/class to discuss environmental issues and to receive feedback on student activities within this period,
- Help link students with local community groups, support them in becoming a junior chapter of these groups, such as junior Landcare, and encourage regular activities,
- Help the students take ownership of the area where they released their biological control agents and involve them in regular activities at the release site, such as weed identification or weed mapping,
- Help students communicate their experiences with the program to people within and beyond the school community. A mentor may help them to prepare news articles for the local media, radio or newsletters, and
- Organise a Weedbuster Week activity where the students can showcase their artwork, such as at the local library or shopping centre.

What support is available for a Weed Warriors mentor?

A whole network of people within and beyond the Weed Warriors program exists to support all mentors. These include the National and State/Territory Weed Warriors Coordinators and the Weed Warriors Key Contact.

The next step

If you are interested in becoming a Weed Warriors mentor, reply to your Weed Warriors Key Contact, who is the person who approached you about being involved.

For more information

For more information please contact the State or National Weed Warriors Coordinator. Please refer to the Weeds Warriors website www.weedwarriors.net.au for contact details.

