

The West Australian

Great Southern Herald | Great Southern

Activate the Wheatbelt volunteers to bring ‘people power’ to Dumbleyung for tree planting festival

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Thu, 9 July 2020 2:17PM



Volunteers join in the Active the Wheatbelt event in Gabbin. Credit: Mike Cormack

About 40,000 seedlings will be planted across Dumbleyung next weekend when 150 volunteers set off on a music and art-filled community tree-planting mission.

Celebrating its 20th year, members of volunteer organisation Activate the Wheatbelt will descend on Dumbleyung from July 17 to 19, to help local farmers plant thousands of native seedlings.

The youth-focused, family-friendly event aims to bridge the gap between the city and rural communities by providing a space for young people wanting to make a difference and get their hands dirty.



Volunteers Angelo Royal and Decima Jugen at an Activate the Wheatbelt tree planting event. Credit: Mike Cormack

The weekends are a celebration of people power with planting set to a backdrop of art, music, games and informative workshops.

This year, the group decided to host its two biggest events yet, the first of the year held in Gabbin last weekend, with tickets to both selling out within 48 hours.

Activate the Wheatbelt volunteer Michael Cormack said volunteer weekends were getting bigger and better each year.

Mr Cormack said sheer “people power” was the recipe for planting success.

“We have a great deal of fun and high spirits. What makes Activate the Wheatbelt really unique is that we are entirely volunteer led,” he said,

“Everyone is doing it for the love of the organisation, the environment and the Wheatbelt itself.”

Pairs of volunteers or families use Pottiputki to hand-plant the seedlings.

The Finnish-designed appliances consist of a metre-long tube which is stuck into the earth to deliver seedlings to an ideal depth without volunteers having to continually bend down.



Volunteers join in the Active the Wheatbelt event in Gabbin. Credit: Mike Cormack/Mike Cormack

Mr Cormack said the focus on art, music and celebration was what made Activate the Wheatbelt planting events so unique.

“We’ve built a DJ booth into a box trailer which will ride around the paddock, farm or environment in which we are planting to pump out some really fun tunes and get people planting in a rhythm,” he said.

“On the Saturday night between the two planting days we have a bit of a party to blow off some steam, get to know each other and kick off our work boots.”

Mr Cormack said the group worked with farmers and the community to decide which plants were best suited to each planting site with a focus on endemic species.



Kids enjoy the Activate the Wheatbelt event in Gabbin. Credit: Mike Cormack

“One of the key things that we are doing throughout the year before the events is liaising with farmers and landowners who can see the benefit in having trees on the property,” he said

“It could be for controlling water or wind erosion, salinity, water table movement and just simple things like wind break and shade.

“The reason we try to go back to the same areas is so we can produce hopefully one long, unbroken, natural bushland corridor, that is the goal so we can have as much natural habitat installed as possible.”

Mr Cormack said although spots on this year’s planting weekend were filled, the community was encouraged to keep an eye out on how they could get involved next time.



The DJ booth at the planting weekend. Credit: Mike Cormack

Dumbleyung Landcare manager Claudia Hadlow said the community was pleased to welcome the volunteers to help farmers and landholders.

Ms Hadlow said the seedlings would enhance existing animal and bird habitats or create new habitats to link to natural bush areas.

“The two large planting sites with a combined total of 36,600 seedlings have been especially selected to control the rising water table on the valley floor and control the encroaching salinity issue,” she said.

“The other sites are planting seedlings in recharge country which controls the flow of water through the landscape and causing salinity issues on the valley floor.

“Planting a variety of seedlings across the landscape will achieve both water control and increase the area of vegetation in the landscape.”

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