



## Junior Herbalist Club Training Christine Thomas' Testimony



### 1. Can you introduce yourself and tell us a little about your background in naturopathy?

*I forged an interest in herbs as a young girl while growing up on a cotton farm in outback Queensland, Australia. My late father Ian knew that to be a good farmer you needed to be an environmentalist. That if you look after your land, it will look after you. He was a powerful influence and I followed him around in his home herb and vegetable garden where I began experimenting with plants to make natural skincare potions.*

*On leaving school in 1989 I followed my love of writing and became a graded newspaper journalist. In 1999, after teaching English in Istanbul, Turkey for a year, I decided to chase my first love and began formally studying herbal medicine. While studying in the garden of renowned New Zealand herbalist Isla Burgess I learnt from the plants themselves and witnessed them growing throughout the seasons. This was when I became an advocate for traditional herbal medicine. Isla sold her school, so I spent a year teaching English in Osaka, Japan before completing my studies with the godfather of herbal medicine in Australia, Denis Stewart.*

*I have worked as a clinical herbalist in private practice, and as a practitioner consultant and sales manager in the herbal medicine manufacturing industry. In 2013 I was able to combine my knowledge of herbs with my writing skills and became a technical writer and researcher.*

### 2. What inspired you to join the Junior Herbalist Club training program?

*I heard about the Junior Herbalist Club from Gill Stannard at the NHA Herbal Medicine Summit at the end of May in 2022. She had heard about it from Sue Evans. It sparked something in me as I had been feeling like I wanted to be more hands on with the herbs after many years behind a screen writing about them and feeling like a brown bottle herbalist. There's a craving for more grass roots herbalism here in Australia and I felt this could be a way to get herbalists, young and old, back in touch with the herbs.*

*So after the conference I contacted the founder Mel Hornby to ask her about the possibility of doing the Junior Herbalist Club in Australia. Her story about how it evolved, and how it continues to grow and support communities around the UK, was so inspiring and stirred something inside me. We spent the next year conducting Zoom calls. The NHA became involved and at the end of October 2023 Mel flew over and we had the first JHC leader training in Australia.*

### 3. How were you supported during the training to implement your program in the community?

*Mel adapted the program, with the help of Sonya from the NHAA, to Australian guidelines. During the five days of intensive leader training time was dedicated to how to advertise your JHC and how to market the JHC including suggested promotions and how to market to schools. We also have a WhatsApp group with all the leaders which helps with ideas and advice from everyone and what has worked for them.*

**4. How has the Junior Herbalist Club program influenced your naturopathy practice and business?**

*I am now a lot more connected to the plants themselves and aware of where they grow in my neighbourhood. It has made me more creative in my practice of herbal medicine and reminded me of interesting facts I had forgotten. I have also learnt so much myself about the plants and their medicinal virtues. I look at them through the eyes of children a lot more now.*

**5. In what ways has the program helped you expand your business and reach new clients?**

*I am not currently a clinical naturopath but I have met a whole new community of naturopaths and herbalists with the same passion for herbs.*

**6. How many students have you enrolled in your JHC program?**

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**And how many do you need to enrol to cover the training investment?**

*That doesn't apply to me as I was generously gifted the training by Mel because I assisted her. I charged \$350 per student as an introductory offer for friends and I might make approximately \$500 from the club by the end of the year once all my costs are covered including membership fees, first aid training etc. I will charge more next year to make it viable plus now I have bought most of the materials there will be less costs next year.*

**7. In what ways has the Junior Herbalist Club training program benefited you personally?**

*While it takes me out of my comfort zone I have a great sense of achievement. Sharing the magic of herbs with children lights me up because this continuation of knowledge is so important for our kids' future and the future of herbal medicine.*

**8. Can you share a success story or a memorable moment from implementing the program with kids?**

*I love the children's gasps, like they're watching a magic trick, when the purple lavender lemonade turns pink and when we did the acid/alkali red cabbage chemical reaction. They feel so empowered to be able to go home and perform their own "magic tricks".*

**9. What were the initial barriers you encountered when you started the Junior Herbalist Club, and how did you address them?**

*Because the club starts in February in Australia I found it a bit difficult to invest time into getting it started because the training finished just before the summer school holidays. I bit the bullet in January, and put the word out, and ended up having my first class in March after signing everyone one up. This meant I had to have two classes in March to catch. It took a while for some of the parents to return consent forms and payment so next year I will definitely start promoting it earlier. My first class has been my children and their friends which has been a great way to get a feel for program in real time and iron out any problems. I imagine it will be a different experience with people I don't know and with younger children.*

**10. Have there been any unexpected or surprising benefits come from your participation in the Junior Herbalist Club program**

*I have found myself making more potions in my spare time now I have more resources on hand. For example my friend's mother was in hospital and my children and I whipped up a lavender bag, like the ones we made in the first class, to gift her which she loved. I have also planted more herbs in my garden so that I can have the plants growing to supply my classes. Now I have something to do with all the jars I have collected in my cupboard. (😊) When my daughters have friends over we have more ideas for creative things to do with their friends, such as making bath bombs.*

**11. Would you recommend the Junior Herbalist Club training program to other naturopaths, and why?**

*100% As custodians of this knowledge we have a responsibility to share it.*

**12. What feedback have you received from the kids and their parents about the program?**

*The kids absolutely love the hands-on part of the program and having potions to take home after every class that they have made themselves. They also like being out in nature (away from screens).*

**13. What advice would you give to other practitioners who are considering joining the Junior Herbalist Club training program?**

*I would strongly recommend it as it is not only a second income stream, if managed well, it is also uplifting and if you're a clinical herbalist it is something fun to offset the seriousness of having patients.*

**14. In what way do you think the Junior Herbalist Club influences the profession longer term?**

*The more people that understand the plants, the more herbalists there will be.*