

Write it up!

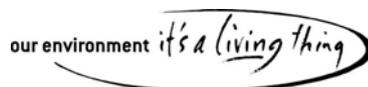
**Case studies of sustainability education projects
from around NSW**

Beauty: a topic that brings people together

Workshops in Natural Skin Care

Although an unlikely match with sustainability education, beauty is a powerful and engaging topic that many people can readily relate to.

By Rowena Cunningham, Fairfield City Council, 2008.



The project

Although an unlikely match with sustainability education, beauty is a powerful and engaging topic that many people can readily relate to.

The development and delivery of a workshop that not only incorporates aspects of beauty but is applicable to all ages and cultures, can be easily translated into different languages, and compels community members to become more aware of their environmental impact is a challenge.

Beauty, however, is a topic that every language and culture has dealt with. Most people, especially women, will at some point in life be interested in beauty. This topic is therefore an effective 'hook' with which to engage members of the community who perhaps may not otherwise be interested in issues of sustainability.



Fairfield City Council applied this concept to the development of a new 'Natural Skin Care' workshop. 'Natural Skin Care' is partnered with 'Natural Cleaning', a workshop aimed at reducing chemicals within the household. These workshops are primarily aimed at women; however many men have also been involved with both workshops. Other workshops in Council's workshop series include 'Composting and Worm Farming', 'Green Thumbs', 'Eco-Energy' and 'Waste Water Watts'.

Aims

The aims of this project are:

- To address the growing need for sustainability education in the Fairfield community; and
- To reach members of the community – particularly women from a range of cultural backgrounds - who may not ordinarily be aware of or interested in sustainability issues.

Key issues

Communicating and engaging with different cultures living within one community can be challenging, particularly when there are language barriers to be overcome.

Women in particular tend to be primarily concerned with the home, family and personal life, and perhaps some immediately significant local issues. Sustainability is a very broad topic that needs to be connected with things that concern them personally, if it is to have a significant and lasting impact.

The Natural Skin Care workshop was designed to reach a broad cultural audience by focusing on beauty - a topic of personal relevance to many - and using this as a means of introducing concepts of sustainability, such as product mileage, pollution, organic versus chemical, homemade versus commercial, waste and landfill, and behavioural change.

Stakeholders

The main stakeholders for this project are:

- Women of all ages and cultural backgrounds who live within the Fairfield City Council local government area
- Fairfield City Council employees
- Mt Pritchard Community Centre
- Mt Pritchard Community Centre's Spanish Group

This project is still young and in the making and there are a variety of avenues for it to develop into. For example, there is potential for future partnerships with:

- The Migrant Resource Centre
- The Ethnic Communities' Council
- Local schools and parenting groups
- The Immigrants Women's Health Centre
- Community First Step.

Project activities

Developing the workshop

The workshop was developed over a two-month period, beginning with research into the safest ingredients for natural skin care and products that had the least impact on the environment to produce. Research into both the oldest remedies and the latest combination of natural products was completed through the internet and by e-mailing natural skin care groups.

Recipes were decided on using a number of criteria.

1. Simple to make – recipes must be able to be made within one hour.
2. Low in cost – due to the low socio-economic area in which the workshops are to be run, all products must be at a lower cost to the chemical alternative.
3. Meet the requirements of natural skin care - no harmful chemicals are to be added in the process.
4. Meet the sustainability objectives - no large amounts of packaging to be wasted in the process.

Once recipes were decided, all ingredients were sourced and prepared for the workshop series to begin.

Developing partnerships

Developing partnerships and engaging with various community groups is essential to making the project available to all members of the community. Local groups were engaged through current active partnerships between Council, schools, volunteer, community groups and local businesses. Promotional material was sent to these known groups advising of the upcoming workshops.



The broader community was engaged through the promotion of the workshop through the local media, Council's residential newsletter and at other events and activities where appropriate. A number of tools and reference documents were utilised to ensure successful communication to appropriate groups. These included:

1. A Guide for Engaging Communities in Environmental Planning and Decision Making, 2006, NSW Department Environment and Conservation.
2. Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System, 2003, Department of Planning NSW, Elton Consulting.
3. Working with Ethnic Communities to Sustain our Environment 2005, NSW Department Environment and Conservation.
4. From Words to Action - The Stakeholder Engagement Manual Vol. 1: The Guide to Practitioners' Perspectives on Stakeholder Engagement, 2005, Stakeholder Research Associates Canada.
5. From Words to Action - The Stakeholder Engagement Manual Vol. 2: The Practitioner's Handbook on Stakeholder Engagement 2005, Stakeholder Research Associates Canada.
6. Involving Community Centre Management Groups
7. Council's Sustainability Committee

Delivering the workshops

The first community group to participate in a workshop was the Mount Pritchard Community Centre's Spanish group. The workshop, which was translated into Spanish, was attended not only by women but also by many men who enjoyed participating in the hands on activities.

The second trial workshop was made open to any member of the community who registered to attend. Both workshops were popular and each was attended by more than the normal participation and registration number of fifteen. Additional bookings were taken for future workshops.

A third trial workshop is planned for the near future and will be run for Council employees.

Good practice principles

This project demonstrates good practice in education for sustainability (EfS) through application of a number of important EfS principles. First and foremost, the project is values-driven. The workshop is designed to help members of the public become more aware of sustainability and to address environmental issues that they may feel overwhelmed by, unsure of, confused about or unaware of.

The project incorporates the EfS principle of critical thinking and problem solving. Participants are encouraged to reflect on their personal lifestyles and how they impact on the environment, together with how they can change things to reduce their personal environmental impacts.

The project is also locally relevant. Fairfield Council's community includes people from a variety of cultures and ethnic backgrounds and the workshop aims to bring these people together by dealing with a topic of broad appeal. The need for Natural Skin Care to address cultural bounds is an important aspect that is addressed through the scope of the recipes, the topics discussed, and the manner in which environmental topics are spoken about.

Results and outcomes

Important outcomes of the project have included:

- Successfully engaging with sectors of the community that would perhaps not otherwise be interested in issues of sustainability;
- Developing partnerships with community organisations; and
- Developing a workshop that can be implemented by other sustainability educators, as well as community members and volunteers.

Lessons learned

Through this project, a number of important lessons have been learned about engaging with community groups. The need to speak to people in their own language and to build a bridging topic for community members who are not normally engaged in environmental issues were both highlighted.

Additionally, respect and the understanding that people make changes to their lifestyles based on their own personal needs and motivations is another lesson highlighted through this project.

Contact

Cheryl Hounslow

Supervisor Waste Projects and Education

Fairfield City Council

Phone: (02) 97250 828

Fax: (02) 9609 3257

Mobile: 0417 265 177

e-mail: chounslow@fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au