

Water Education Case Studies

Project Title: Living Smart Community Sustainability Education Program
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Abstract

The Living Smart Community Sustainability Education Program is based on a successful model developed by the Meeting Place Community Centre, City of Fremantle, Murdoch University and Southern Metropolitan Regional Council in Western Australia. It has been adapted for use by Randwick Council and builds on the success of previous community education programs.

The model is underpinned by a foundation of community connectedness and engagement and encourages participants to set goals for actions and develop supportive community relationships. Participants in the project work through a series of ten topics on sustainable living where big picture issues are contextualised with practical actions and social settings in which to take them. Water is a key theme throughout the program and is embedded into many of the key topics to demonstrate the inherent and embodied water in many every day products.

By utilising a systems approach to learning and empowering participants to become connected with their communities through action, this program is building the capacity of participants to become future connectors or change agents. Future iterations of the project will be based on a thorough independent evaluation and analysis of this trial and may include revised content and a possible training package targeting sustainability educators in other areas wishing to use the model.

The Challenge

What need was being addressed?

The Living Smart course is designed for a deeper level of engagement than some other traditional skill share workshops. Participants are asked to challenge their world views on a range of sustainability issues and to make a firm commitment to action by setting personal goals and reviewing progress towards them with their peers. The Living Smart program was developed with these aims:

- raise knowledge of sustainability issues,
- Creating positive behaviour change in participants
- Develop a sense of community and empower participants to actively participate in their community.

Previous education programs focused on skills development and information sharing but neglected to embed the outcomes into a framework for action. A central component of Living Smart is the framework for stimulating participant behaviour change and action (see Project Steps for more).

Water was a key theme for the Living Smart course and information about how water is used, how it contributes to the products and services we consume and where 'water miles' are embedded into our surroundings was central. By weaving themes together, this project engages a systems approach to learning and in addition to water introduces 10 central areas of learning including; sustainability in the home, transport, waste, energy, biodiversity, healthy eating and exercise, community relationships and general sustainability concepts.

Stakeholders

Who participated in the project?

The project is based on a successful model developed by **the Meeting Place Community Centre, City of Fremantle, Murdoch University and Southern Metropolitan Regional Council**. It is administered by **Randwick City Council** and advertised through the **local press**, the **mayoral column** and through the **Eastern Suburbs Community College** guide.

Community groups and selected **environmental and sustainability specialists** are invited to participate in the course and to speak on a range of topics related to key themes in the project. Participants are encouraged to join their local community groups or networks as part of their commitment actions for the project.



Project Steps

What methods and tools were used?

Instigating actual changes in behaviour was a key imperative of this program. Goal-setting techniques were incorporated as a principal element and are taught as a life skill. The Living Smart Project is taught in a multi-week course and provides participants with the practical knowledge and skills to take action in their own homes and around the community. The model of engagement supports working with peers over 20 hours of course work and this extended engagement makes for a very supporting learning environment and increased sense of achievement and enthusiasm from the group. The course assists participants in designing a framework for change and demonstrates not only the interconnectedness of many key sustainability issues but also the importance of connected communities and interaction. Through goal setting tasks participants are asked to address their own personal needs and link these to global sustainability issues. Interconnectedness is critical to the success of the course and core themes of an integrated systems approach is re-visited and re-enforced through all the course chapters.

The Living Smart Program is administered by Randwick Council under license agreement from the developers. As part of this project, materials were substantively updated and the participant action guide book expanded to include up to date and relevant facts and figures for an eastern seaboard audience. Currently, the coursework is taught by Fiona Campbell, the Sustainability Educator from Council. There is a need for additional trained facilitators to implement future program rollouts.

By linking project participants with local community groups and supporting them to become active, the Living Smart program encourages the development of future connectors. In this way there are some similarities to previous capacity building education programs like Earthworks. As participants continue their engagement in a range of community activities, there is longevity in the realms of impact of this project.

Project Outcomes

How persuasive was the project in addressing the need?

This is the first time the Living Smart Program has been trialed in NSW. Participation in the first round of the project has been very strong with 30 people attending. The spread of participants also indicates a good cross section from the community with some culturally and linguistically diverse communities and social housing residents being represented as well as some participants with a well developed general knowledge of sustainability issues amongst the group. Initial feedback about the project has been very positive and the trial is being independently evaluated. The results will feed in to the adaptive management approach and support future iterations of the project.

Real and potentially lasting connections have been made between some participants and existing local community groups. It is expected that these relationships will persist beyond the life of the course and result in future action and engagement. Some participants also became community connectors, in one example a participant took a box of *No Advertising Mail* stickers and shower timers around her apartment building and spoke to all her neighbours. This action highlights the impact and connectedness of both sustainability and community outcomes.

Reflections

What lessons were learned?

Currently, there is some limitation about who is able to teach the Living Smart course. To be deemed a suitable teacher you must meet a range of eligibility criteria including; completion of a train the trainer course, be a previous Living Smart course participant, and be implementing the project principles in practice. There is some limitation in this structure given the difficulty in participating in Living Smart courses outside Western Australia where it was developed. Additionally, most train the trainer coursework available is within a workplace context and this is considerably different from the skill set needed for community sustainability education. The current trial is exploring how the program can continue to be developed under licenses and support the development of a network of facilitators. There is potential if a potential grant could be found to trial a train-the-trainer style course for sustainability educators specifically combined with the Living Smart program, which could build the capacity of these educators to deliver the program in their own regions. This is likely to also involve the development of a suite of tools and resources for facilitators as well.

Preliminary feedback from participants also indicates a desire for new content as part of the course materials specifically relating to more detailed information for renters and people living in multi unit dwellings. Future courses may include chapters on indigenous heritage, food and local sustainability economies.

The Early Childhood Environmental Education Network (ECEEN) is considering how the core elements and delivery techniques of this model might be adapted for use in the early childhood sector. Specifically they will examine the setting approach and how it might support development of curriculum already underway.

Information from the independent evaluation from this trial will be fed back to the course designers and integrated into future program roll outs. This type of adaptive revision will ensure changing community attitudes and emerging sustainability issues are included in the materials and the program continues to engage and harness individual drivers and encourage action. A pertinent example of this is that some participants from the Western Australian trial have become involved in the Transition movement and organised film nights and other events. This demonstrates how the project is contributing to increased advocacy and action beyond the life of the course.

