

Project Title: Parramatta's 20 Litre Challenge
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Abstract

Parramatta's 20 Litre Challenge encouraged both residents across the Parramatta local government area and staff of Parramatta City Council to survive for twenty-four hours on no more than 20 Litres of water. As part of a bigger global campaign linked to World Water Day on March 22 this project highlighted key actions individuals could take to significantly reduce their water footprint. Australians are amongst the highest per capital water users on the planet and this project engaged participants in a range of monitoring and behaviour change activities that highlighted where and how water is used on a regular basis and challenged participants to consider ways to reduce their use.


Participants in the challenge were supported during the week long challenge by receiving daily tips and recommendations (also put up on the Council website). They were also able to invite friends, family and colleagues to sponsor their efforts with proceeds from sponsorship being donated to CARE Australia.

Lower than anticipated participation limited the project's impact. Future roll outs of the program may include a more targeted approach to a specific sector within the community such as a school or existing community group.

The Challenge

What need was being addressed?

This project sought to link a global water education campaign with a targeted action plan for residents and employees in Parramatta. The program was informed by a range of materials, including from the United Nations, University of New South Wales, the *Our Water Mark* publication and *New Internationalist* magazine. Australians are amongst the highest per capita water users and this project was successful in putting personal water use into a global context while at the same time offering participants assistance to adopt more water conscious behaviours.



Parramatta's 20 Litre Challenge was developed by environment staff at Parramatta City Council on the recommendation of a staff member who had come across the idea on the internet. The major driver for this project was engaging staff and community in behaviour changing actions over the course of a day to highlight typical consumption patterns. By challenging participants to address water use over a focused time period, in this case 1 day, Parramatta's 20 Litre Challenge was able to deliver a high level of individual support and information in the lead-up to the event.

Stakeholders

Who participated in the project?

Staff from **Parramatta City Council**, and members of the residential and business community were the principal participants for this project. People were able to sponsor participants through the community fundraising site, **Everyday Hero**, to raise money for **CARE Australia's Water Safe programs**. These provide clean water, sanitation, irrigation and training to families in need.

Project Steps

What methods and tools were used?

Parramatta's 20 Litre Challenge was promoted widely on the Parramatta City Council's webpage as well as in the staff newsletter and intranet and through a media release. To encourage staff to participate in the project, a water conservation workshop was organised for members of the Parramatta City Council's 'green team' during which the Challenge project was introduced. Community members were encouraged to register their participation in the project through Council's website.

In the lead up to the Challenge day (Sunday March 22nd) project participants received regular e-mails containing information about water use and conservation opportunities in the home, as well as tips on surviving the Challenge. This cued them up to think about how they could save water on the actual Challenge day but also to begin thinking about how they used water during the course of the week leading up to the Challenge day. In at least one example, a participant from the project forwarded the daily tips on to her colleagues in the workplace in the lead up to the 20 Litre Challenge and became a water champion for the week of the project.

On the day of the Challenge participants were asked to self monitor their water use for the day and try to use no more than 20 litres of water in a 24 hour period. To reflect on how this happened in practice individuals were encouraged to write down their experiences and reflections in 200 words, with the best entry winning a prize of water-saving cleaning cloths. In many cases these reflections highlighted the importance of engaging in the project and 'having a go' rather than calculating the actual litre of water saved in the 24 hour period.

Project Outcomes

How persuasive was the project in addressing the need?

While information and feedback from participants was generally positive, and the concept popular (with both local newspapers picking up the story, one as a half-page feature) Parramatta's 20 Litre Challenge did not achieve the level of publicity and engagement that was anticipated. One factor was Council's inability to undertake all planned engagement activities owing to insufficient staff resources. It is also likely that a significant barrier to widespread adoption was the relatively lower profile of World Water Day compared to some other major environmental awareness raising campaigns such as Earth Hour, Clean Up Australia Day etc. Whilst any future roll outs of the 20 Litre Challenge would be held each year on World Water Day, other activities to highlight water consumption and that possibly complement the 20 Litre Challenge, will be held during National Water Week.. Participants from the 2009 challenge will be approached as critical friends to inform future project development and asked to share their reflections on the positive outcomes and limitations of the first round of the Challenge.

For those who participated in the 20 Litre Challenge the feedback and reflection on the project has been positive. The level of support in the lead up to the Challenge day was a strong motivator to taking action and gave many participants the tools and information they needed to try actions and modify behaviours. Feedback also indicates a desire on the part of participants for opportunities to come together as a community and interact with each other and support future actions. This type of gathering may be achieved through the development of celebration events at the conclusion of a future Challenge.

Reflections

What lessons were learned?

While there was significant interest in the 20 Litre Challenge from staff and community participants, in the end only 18 people signed up to participate in 2009. It is likely that a far greater number of people received the tips and information about the project than actually participated and there was some difficulty in harnessing people's interest into action. A future roll out of this project may include more structures or targeted marketing to groups such as schools, staff teams or community groups who could all work together and support each other in the lead up to the Challenge.

The model is adaptable for use with a broad range of groups and tailored information and tips could be prepared to meet the needs and expectations of a variety of audiences. It is also recommended that, where used for student groups, the hints and tips on water use and conservation be developed by the students rather than being provided by a central source. There are a number of other groups also developing and implementing similar water challenge events including World Vision and Water Aid Australia. Future rollouts may also benefit from developing partnerships with these groups and linking the challenge to a broader campaign around global water issues, however, it may be difficult to achieve this owing to the present disparity between the charities.