

NORTH COAST ECO-FRIENDLY YOUTH PROJECT

overview of the project

The North East Waste Forum on behalf of its member councils (Ballina Shire, Byron Shire, Clarence Valley, Richmond Valley and Lismore City) in conjunction with its project partners (Byron Youth Centre, Rous Water, North Coast Water, Country Energy and young people) has designed and implemented an awarding winning program (Local Government and Shires Association Excellence in Environmental Education Award) to encourage and support youth service providers on the North Coast to become more sustainable. This region has a high proportion of young people between the ages of 15–24, and youth unemployment in the region is higher than the NSW average.

Youth centres and youth organisations fulfil a vital role in servicing and supporting the youth of the North Coast, providing access to education, mentoring, work opportunities and general assistance. Through this project the youth centres and youth workers gained the skills to also act as a central learning point for young people to become more environmentally aware and empowered with knowledge about how to reduce their impact on the environment. The program was initially trialled at Byron Youth Services, prior to being rolled out at three youth centres on the North Coast.



Eco-friendly launch celebration

how the project was carried out

The Eco-friendly Youth project assisted youth service providers in the North Coast region to become more sustainable by integrating waste reduction and energy and water conservation practices into activities, programs and centre management through a six step program.

The six steps were:

1. generating commitment to the environment within the youth centre/organisation by developing a simple Environmental Commitment Statement to reduce waste, and water and energy use
2. listening to young people — finding out what young people think and how they act in relation to environmental issues
3. investigating the environmental impact of the youth centre by conducting waste, water and energy audits
4. taking actions to reduce the waste, water and energy impacts as identified in Step 3
5. integrating environmental activities into centre programs to ensure that there is longevity in the actions and that youth are aware and involved in the centres achievements
6. celebration — celebrate the achievements of the centre and showcase them to young people and the community.

Ownership for implementation of the program is reliant on youth centre management and staff. To assist staff with the skills required to put the 6 step program into practice training sessions were provided on environmental issues, auditing and how to develop and implement an environmental management policy and plan.

outcomes now and in the future

The six steps have been developed into a toolkit for youth centres which allow centres across Australia to use and adapt it to their own needs. The toolkit contains an interactive CD with the six step

process, a poster and a DVD of youth attitudes, awareness and practices in relation to the environment (the DVD was produced in conjunction with young people in Byron Bay).

This program resulted in increased environmental awareness of youth workers, youth and community members involved with youth centres on the North Coast. It shows how they can work together to identify ways they can live and work more sustainably.



Eco-friendly sourcing for hospitality course

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

Youth centres are able to access and provide relevant information about environmental issues to young people in a place where they feel relaxed and heard. By providing an example of how to be eco-friendly through the centres, and incorporating environmental activities into the day to day running of a centre, they have been able to influence how young people view and contribute to positive environmental activities.

Many youth centres in the North Coast region were interested in becoming more sustainable, but their capacity to dedicate time and resources to environmental issue is difficult given the high needs and crisis nature of many of the clientele of the centres. External barriers also exist to the implementation of sustainable practice, such as a lack of support infrastructure, including recycling bin collection and money available to implement change. Despite some of the issues this program has increased the understanding of environmental issues and the interconnectedness of these issues socially and economically.