

BIODIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

overview of the project

This was an environmental education program developed for the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community of Bankstown. The program aimed to educate members of the Arabic, Vietnamese and Chinese speaking communities about the benefits that native plants and animals can bring to the urban environment. It sought to show residents how to encourage wildlife to their gardens by creating native plant habitats.

The program was assessed as being a huge success, with community members enthusiastically embracing the opportunity to learn more about the environment. Using a series of workshops, ecotours and animal displays, the program reached 524 CALD community members with many showing interest in future activities. A set of 4 brochures on urban fauna were printed in the three languages, increasing the project coverage to thousands.



'Backyard Buddies' frogs in Arabic

how the project was carried out

Implementation of the project occurred over several stages. Bilingual facilitators from the Ethnic Communities Council were given training to help them deliver the workshops and ecotours. A series of four Backyard Buddies brochures previously produced by the Department of Environment and Conservation were re-released with a print run of 5,000 each. The brochures were translated into Arabic, Vietnamese and Chinese and were structured to stress the benefits of having native animals in the garden, as well as helping to dispel any fears that residents might have about native animals.

Group activities included workshops, ecotours and animal shows. The ecotours took groups from each language community to a native nursery and on bushwalks at local reserves. These tours provided information about native plants and techniques for planting and allowed them to plant a tree, which some of the community members had never done before. The animal displays allowed participants to interact with native animals that they might see in their gardens. Finally, an evaluation of the project was conducted through written surveys and face-to-face focus groups.



Learning about possums at a program workshop

outcomes now and in the future

The most valuable outcome was the success in engaging people from the CALD community. The program was so well received that one group is eager to start Bankstown's first CALD bush care team. The ecotours were particularly well attended and many participants were previously unaware of the natural

environment that exists so close to home. The Backyard Buddy brochures were also popular and have been distributed further afield, with ten other councils obtaining copies.

The face to face evaluation yielded some helpful results. Participants suggested a number of resources that would be useful for the future, including a DVD or video on biodiversity structured for the CALD community and a detailed list of local native plants. Participants would also like additional workshops on native animals and practical demonstrations on how to create habitats to attract animals. The council is committed to continuing work with the CALD community and has an Education Officer to run ongoing programs. Provision of the extra resources, however, will depend on future funding priorities in the council.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

Many CALD community members were originally from highly urbanised environments and had never been aware of the concept of ecology and the interrelationship of plants and animals. This program enabled them to understand these concepts and encouraged many to learn more. There were challenges, however, in reinforcing all the messages. There was in general a greater desire to learn about birds and plants than animals such as possums. There is still a perception among some groups that these animals are dangerous or undesirable. Future work will need to place even more emphasis on positive messages about native fauna. Finally, the methods of evaluating future programs need to be chosen carefully; the focus groups were far more successful with the CALD community, who were reluctant to respond to the written surveys.