

# LIVING IN NSW, GREEK COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROJECT

## overview of the project

In this project the Greek Welfare Centre developed and implemented an environmental education program for the Greek community in New South Wales. The aim was to raise awareness of environmental issues and promote responsible attitudes and behaviours in everyday activities. A series of workshops covered the three topics of water conservation, climate change and energy conservation, and household pesticides and chemicals. These workshops were held in 25 community venues and were estimated to have reached around 700 people. Four radio programs were produced in Greek, with the addition of a topic on native flora and fauna.

Members of the Greek speaking community, particularly the elderly, are frequently isolated from mainstream information and there is often limited understanding of environmental issues. The project reached a wide audience and was well received, revealing a need in the Greek community for a well-structured environmental education program. The program was easily accessible, delivered in the Greek language, and provided useful and practical tips for environmentally sound behaviour.

## how the project was carried out

Organisers carried out background research to determine the level of knowledge and the values and attitudes of the target community. A questionnaire made up of 13 questions was distributed and the responses formed the basis for nine focus groups to determine the community needs and to help plan the program. The results indicated that there was a low level of awareness of our native animals and plants, and of the issues surrounding greenhouse gases and water and energy conservation.

Four radio programs were designed to address these needs. The programs were delivered in Greek on SBS radio and were publicised in a Greek Welfare Centre pamphlet. The workshops gave people the chance to explore the issues in greater depth using a variety of discussion tools. The sessions focussed on achievable actions and personal benefits such as family health and finances. They were designed to help people realise that they can act to achieve useful results without relying on action at a higher level.

## outcomes now and in the future

The workshops were successfully delivered to 25 community groups in Sydney, Wollongong and Newcastle. Lively discussions were encouraged, with people offering practical ideas and sharing their experiences. Participants were especially interested in learning about practical solutions for 'green' cleaning and energy-efficient products. The radio programs provoked much positive feedback, and follow-up comments were aired on SBS radio after the broadcasts from as far away as Melbourne. SBS also reported many requests for further information.

The Greek Welfare Centre is committed to continuing its environmental education work and the program is part of an



*Greek Welfare Centre training session*

ongoing process. Based on the outcomes of this project, the group have developed a kit to use as a training tool in further community programs. Future plans might give community members the chance to be more closely involved in developing and implementing the programs. The workshops showed that Greek community members are very willing to take action, despite earlier indications that they felt that action was someone else's responsibility.

## benefits, challenges & lessons learned

This project achieved its objective of delivering a well-received educational program for the Greek community in NSW. The radio programs stimulated great interest and SBS reported many requests for further information. Clearly, there is a need for environmental education and the Greek community has welcomed the opportunity to be engaged with this program.

There were no major problems in delivering this project. There were, however, areas where the organisers felt that knowledge levels were still low. Awareness of Australian native animals and plants is an example. The program made progress in this area but future programs may need to spend more time on these topics.