

Ethnic Communities Sustainable Living Project

Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW)
and Ethnic Communities Council

CASE STUDY

Project Description

The Ethnic Communities Sustainable Living Project (ECSLP) is a joint initiative of the former NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and Resource NSW (RNSW), now part of the Sustainability Programs Division of the Department of Environment and Conservation NSW (DEC). The primary objective of the project is to work with a range of targeted communities to develop and implement culturally appropriate environmental education programs. These communities are Arabic, Chinese (both Cantonese and Mandarin speaking), Greek, Italian, Korean, Macedonian, Spanish and Vietnamese. The project is based at the Ethnic Communities Council of NSW (ECC), which is a partner in this program.

Overall, the project aims to encourage people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to learn about and take care of their local environments at home, work and leisure, with a particular focus on leading sustainable lifestyles through stormwater pollution prevention, waste avoidance, water and energy conservation and resource recovery. Objectives of the project are:

1. To promote awareness, knowledge and understanding about ways to live more sustainably at home, leisure and work.
2. To facilitate behavioural change by promoting simple, practical ways for people to live sustainably.
3. To encourage deeper involvement in sustainability issues through promoting community development activities about living sustainably.

4. To build capacity of councils (metro and regional) to deliver environmental education to ethnic communities in their local government areas by:
 - Running training workshops;
 - Working on specific partnership initiatives;
 - Providing resources to assist councils to run programs with the ethnic communities in LGA.

Project rationale

People from a non-English speaking background (NESB) have reduced access to environmental information and education in these languages. As an important part of the Department of Environment and Conservation's Ethnic Affairs Policy, the Sustainable Living Project provides an on-the-ground education project to support NESB people to make choices in their actions and behaviours that are more sustainable.

The targeted language groups for this project represent 62% of all people in NSW who speak a language other than English at home. The total number of people in these eight (8) language groups in NSW is 712,192, of which almost a quarter (23%) does not speak English well or at all. This represents 71% of all people in NSW with low levels of English language proficiency.

Project funding

The project is funded by the Department of Environment and Conservation NSW, (previously jointly funded by the NSW Environment Protection Authority and Resource NSW).



Project stakeholders

- Ethnic Communities Council
- Local government, especially councils with a high NESB population
- Ethnic community organisations
- State government agencies
- Ethnic media outlets.

Project targets

The project works with and within eight ethnic communities in NSW and the bilingual educators and program coordinators:

- Deliver education sessions through already established groups, making contact initially with the group coordinator; or
- conduct education at community events;
- conduct education through mass media, community language radio and newspapers;
- support local government to deliver effective education and provide training for local government staff.

Project methods

To achieve the project objectives, several initiatives have been undertaken and/or are currently in progress

- Employment, training and support to a team of fifteen (15) bilingual educators to assist in the development and delivery of programs to their communities;
- Conduct of a range of community development activities including information sessions, participation in community festivals and coordination of environmental arts projects;
- The development of a number of culturally relevant resources in community languages;
- Capacity-building of local Council to undertake NESB program delivery;
- Participation in the development of media campaigns specifically for NES audiences;
- Social research on environmental knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices of the ethnic communities on particular topics/issues;
- Development of a strategic framework for determining the direction and selection and evaluation of NESB education activities.

The bilingual educators have been trained on a range of environmental issues including waste

avoidance, resource recovery, composting, natural cleaning, water and energy conservation and sustainable gardening — all with the underlying theme of sustainability. The bilingual educators have also been trained in facilitation skills to engage the participants in their education sessions as well as draw out previous awareness / practices their participants may already have both in their home-countries and/or in Australia. The bilingual educators deliver these education sessions through a variety of community-based networks and groups, including Migrant Resource Centres, ethno-specific organisations, social groups, Churches, Temples, Mosques and other religious organisations, Community Language Schools, Neighbourhood and Community Centres and Health Centres and support groups.

The project works closely with local government to build the capacity of Council waste officers to develop and implement culturally appropriate waste education programs for their ethnic communities. A needs analysis was undertaken with Councils by surveying and consulting with officers and managers in the Sydney region who had a high proportion of NESB community living in their area. The analysis showed that there was a need for specific training on 2 key issues:

1. How to involve ethnic communities in protecting their local environment;
2. How to plan and deliver education programs for ethnic communities on specific environmental issues.

Project resources

Many resources have been produced by this project. These support all the targeted language groups and include:

- Face to face education sessions;
- Calico bag design projects (Greek, Italian, Spanish and Korean, with another currently being developed for the Chinese community through the Tzu Chi Buddhist Foundation);
- A Greek T-shirt design project;
- A Spanish 'arpillera' project, where a group of women designed a woven piece that depicted the local environment in Botany Bay;
- Print material in all languages including posters, brochures etc.

- A wide array of other events including visits to landfill sites, Bicentennial Park, wetlands and community gardens.
- Training courses for local government staff and staff of Migrant resource centres and an array of other organisations.

How the project was evaluated

Cultural Perspectives evaluated the project in early 2004 with the following objectives.

1. Assess the effectiveness of ECSLP in reaching its target audience;
2. Assess the extent to which the ECSLP has achieved its objectives (see above);
3. To provide information to help set the strategic direction for the ECSLP in future.

Project outcomes

Community Activity: Reach of Project

The following table indicates the broad reach of the project into the targeted communities

	Number of groups	% of all groups	Total number of people participating in groups	% of all who attended group	Average (excludes groups with >100 people)	Average (includes groups with >100 people)
Arabic	48	14%	551	7%	16	16
Chinese	86	25%	1989	25%	20	25
Greek	18	5%	571	7%	20	34
Italian	11	3%	309	4%	28	28
Korean	85	24%	2944	38%	33	41
Macedonian	3	1%	43	1%	14	14
Spanish	42	12%	473	6%	12	12
Vietnamese	48	14%	548	7%	13	13
Various	5	1%	380	5%	95	95
Not identified	1	0%	20	0%	20	20
Total	347	100%	7828	100%	20	25

Community Activity: Impact of Project

The evaluation indicates that the model of bilingual educators has been extremely successful as a method of information delivery.

This is illustrated by:

- A team of trained and experienced bilingual 'issues experts' in environmental education;
- The increased number of delivering environmental education to people from a non-English speaking background—especially given the lack of experience of those organisations in the environmental area;
- The delivery of a consistent set of messages across a range of issues, made culturally appropriate by the individual experts representing each of the target communities. These issues reflected the priority topic areas outlined in the ECSLP Work Plan;
- The geographic reach of the project is not locality specific and can go to where the target population is.

The results from the focus groups with attendees of the environmental education sessions, and the feedback from the bilingual educators, indicate that for participants, ECSLP has been effective in facilitating behavioural change by promoting simple, practical ways for people to live sustainably. In all groups participants were able to nominate a range of behaviours that they had modified in their daily life as a direct result of attending a session. The vast majority indicated that they would recommend the sessions to friends/family, and many had heard about the sessions through others. This is indicative of both a growing community interest in the target issues and a perceived value in the information provided.

Council Activity

Two council workshops [and a significant level of face-to-face and telephone support] were conducted to assist council staff to work more effectively with non-English speaking people within their own local government areas and to showcase examples of successful council environment programs with ethnic communities. More than 90 Council officers in total attended these two workshops (representing more than 22 Councils in the Sydney area) and representatives from Sydney Water, Department of Agriculture and Nature Conservation Council of NSW also attended. Feedback from both the workshops highlighted both the need and the relevance of this information to the Council officers.

Evaluation of the workshops:

- indicated satisfaction that the objectives of the workshops were met;
- indicated that their knowledge about identifying and working with their local ethnic communities increased;
- indicated that the workshop provided them with practical ideas and approaches for working with their ethnic communities on environmental initiatives;
- acknowledged the value of training for local government.

How will the outcomes/ learning be maintained/reinforced?

Continuation of this project and extension of activity for people from a non-English speaking background. The provision of ongoing support for local government in how to work effectively with their non-English speaking residents.

For more information

Geoff Young,

Phone: 02 9995 5363

email:

geoff.young@environment.nsw.gov.au

Department of Environment
and Conservation (NSW)
Sustainability Programs Division

Level 2, 1 Fitzwilliam St

Parramatta NSW 2150

Phone: 02 88376000

Fax: 02 8837 6099

info@environment.nsw.gov.au

www.environment.nsw.gov.au

Disclaimer

The Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) has developed this fact sheet for educational purposes and has made all reasonable endeavours to ensure that the contents of this fact sheet are factual and free of error. The Department shall not be liable for any damage or loss, which may occur in relation to any person taking action or not on the basis of this fact sheet.

our environment *it's a living thing*