

TOPIC TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

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The environment is a big deal. Australians and people throughout the rest of the world have used the Earth's resources for centuries without always considering the effect this may have in the future. If children are to enjoy a rich and varied natural environment when they grow up, action needs to be taken now. Using our resources in a sustainable way is considered by many to be a priority.

PROTECTING THE PLANET

DEFINING WORDS

So what is sustainability? Sustainability may be just one word but it is estimated that there are more than 300 definitions for it. To sustain something means to maintain it for a period of time. A sustainable environment means an environment that will continue for a long time in a similar state to how it is now. One commonly accepted definition is that sustainability is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Environmental sustainability refers to the impact of our actions on the environment. In being more sustainable, we are trying to reduce our ecological footprint — the effect our activities have on the Earth. Some of the ways in which we can do this are to reduce the amount of resources we use and buy and to reduce the amount of waste and carbon emissions we produce. Environmental sustainability will mean changes in the way we live and the way we think about our environment.



WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?

"Anybody, somebody and everybody knew there was a job to be done. Anybody could do it and everybody thought that someone should do it. In the end, nobody did it." (paraphrased from a poem)

This saying is fitting for the environment. Unfortunately, sustainability and the problems of the environment can be talked about forever.

What we really need is action. Action has to be the responsibility of everyone — those of us living on the planet now need to make sure there is a planet left for those who are born later.

Some changes are already taking place, with people co-operating at a local level on a wide variety of projects, such as catchment groups which work to look after our rivers. At State, national and international levels, there are also many groups, such as government organisations, Greenpeace, Landcare and the United Nations, which are working together, not only on environmental issues, but social and economic as well, in order for us to have a sustainable planet.

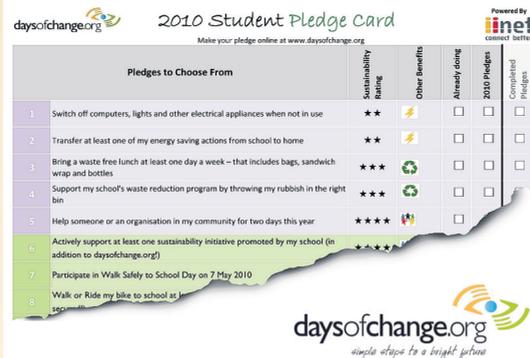
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SHOW YOU CARE

There are many actions that people can take to contribute positively to caring for our environment. For example:

- Use energy and resources efficiently. Use alternatives to cars such as bikes and walking, take shorter showers, choose energy-efficient appliances and wash clothes with cold water, dry clothes on a clothes line rather than a dryer, switch off appliances at the wall and turn lights off when they are not being used.
- Reduce the waste you produce. Separate your rubbish and recycle where possible, buy products

- FURTHER INFORMATION:**
- Days of Change: daysofchange.org/
 - Millennium Kids: www.millenniumkids.com.au
 - United Nations Environment Program, Year of Biodiversity: www.unep.org/iyb/
 - Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts: www.environment.gov.au/



MAKE A CHANGE

One of the local groups taking action and encouraging others to do so is Days of Change. This group feels strongly that our planet, Earth, needs our help and that we are using up many of our world's natural resources to maintain our modern lifestyle. Most of us love electronics and cars, use lots of paper and plastic, and turn on our air-conditioners in the heat of summer, but the result is that our world is suffering and we are pushing many species to extinction.

The good news is that it isn't too late to change; but we all need to work together.

That's why the people at Days of Change are asking for your help. Next week will see the launch of a massive program that will inspire and encourage people right across the State to commit to helping our planet. After May 1, you too can do a little something to help care for our world by filling out one of the pledge cards online (see sample above).

For example, you can pledge always to turn off the lights when you leave a room, or say no to plastic one day a week. It's up to you how many pledges you make and how you do them.

To add to the fun, your whole class can participate. Together, you can start up a class recycling program or work out how much energy all the appliances in your classroom use and try to decrease your class' energy output as much as you can. Why not have a competition with another class to see which one can decrease their energy use the most?

Remember, every little bit adds up to a whole lot when we all take part. Together, we can make a change. Will you?

- Check out the website for all the details: www.daysofchange.org.

with less packaging, use your own bag when you go shopping, compost garden and kitchen waste or have a worm farm, and use paper wisely.

- Conserve our biodiversity. Plant native species in your garden, use pesticides and herbicides sparingly, and care for the bush when you go camping by putting out fires and taking your rubbish with you.
- Protect our water bodies. Conserve water, be careful what is put down the drain, use environmentally friendly cleaning products and wash your car on the lawn to stop detergents from getting into waterways.

TAKING CHARGE

Throughout WA, students at schools in the city and the country are taking charge of their future by making changes that will lead to a more sustainable environment.

York District High School and the town of York, 100km east of Perth, were chosen as the pilot for the Days of Change program that aims to help people find ways to live and work more sustainably.

"Days of Change came along at just the right time for the school," said deputy principal Mike Mount-Bryson. "Our focus on environmental responsibility was just beginning to emerge when Days of Change presented us with another vehicle to promote positive habits."

"It was easy to do because it was small steps to a big change," explains Year 6 student Kyle Hewitt. "We need to stop polluting and make positive changes so people of the future have an Earth."

One of the student activities, as part of the program, included a lights-out policy encouraging the school community to be aware of reducing energy use. The fact that this had become a habit, Mr Mount-Bryson said, became evident in York principal Alan Smith's own home when he went to make a cup of coffee in the morning only to discover his son had turned off all appliances at the wall.

It is small changes like this that are critical in developing a sustainable future.

"We had the solar panels, the compost bins and the water tanks already and the environment was a school priority but creating positive sustainable habits in the students and, as a result the community, is what introducing the Days of Change program really did," Mr Mount-Bryson said. "Across the school, students are involved and interested in different but equally important areas."

"No waste Wednesdays", which encourages students to bring their lunch to school with no wrappings or packaging that will need to be binned, is one initiative at York that involves the whole school. York's environmental pledges through the Days of Change program have so far resulted in a decrease in carbon emissions of 544 tonnes or the equivalent of taking about 100,000 cars off the road.

The program has extended beyond students and teachers at the school with partnerships between the school and local community groups in York. The Country Women's Association, for example, is involved with the school's "waste-wise" garden.



"No-waste Wednesdays" at York District High School.

Students at Rosalie Primary School are proud of their contribution to the environment by raising chickens at school.



SALTIER THAN THE SEA

It's not only in schools where you'll find kids working on the environment. Millennium Kids is a not-for-profit organisation run by young people aged between 10 and 25 who are concerned about the environment and want to take action. Millennium Kids listens to young people's concerns and then develops projects that raise awareness about topics such as air, water, waste and native animals. The programs are supported by the United Nations Environment Program Agenda 21 declaration. This document says that governments should "pay more attention to the opinions and concerns of children regarding the environment".

Lake Ninan, near Wongan Hills, is one project Millennium Kids is working on because it is concerned about the plight of the water in the lake. Lake Ninan was once a freshwater system that fed the town until the 1960s. The lake is now six times saltier than the sea.

Twenty-four young people from Perth and Yilgarn spent four days researching the river catchment to look at the issues it faced and work out how they could help. Millennium Kids, working with the Centre for Water Research at the University of WA, decided to hold a river catchment conference in the area to help city kids understand what was happening in order to develop an action plan for change.

More than \$5000 has been raised for the project and the kids have presented their findings to the State Government. Last month, Millennium Kids also visited Calingiri to run workshops with the Year 5, 6 and 7 students. Since then, kids have created mini-documentaries on the problems, to try to find out what is going on with Lake Ninan now and what can be done in the future.

FROM Paddock TO PLATE

"Food miles" refer to the distance that food travels from where it is produced until it reaches the person who is going to eat it — or, put another way, from paddock to plate.

In terms of the environment, this issue is of great concern. Some people believe that increases in globalisation have resulted in food travelling longer and longer distances as people demand food that cannot always be produced near where they live. Some estimates put food miles at an average of 4000km every time it is delivered to the consumer. In turn, this greatly increases carbon emissions.

Food miles are significantly reduced if people are able to grow their own food through kitchen gardens or buy food that is produced locally. Rosalie Primary School is one school that is reducing its carbon footprint by keeping chickens. As part of the school's overall environmental focus, students in Year 3 care for the chickens and the school community is then able to eat the eggs the chickens produce.

In a positive environmental cycle, the chicken poo is then recycled to provide fertiliser for the school's gardens. Students at Rosalie say they enjoy their contribution to the environment by raising chickens at school and that they are learning new skills. "I know now that chooks like to be in a free-range environment and they need certain types of food to stay healthy. They love to be given fruit left over from the pre-primary classes," explained Rosanna, one of the students.



Millennium Kids members discovered that Lake Ninan is now a salt pan but in the past it was used for drinking water.