

Growing Skills for Sustainable Living

In order to 'grow skills' we should use an approach of wisdom and compassion. Wisdom because working together, using the experience and expertise of the world community, will bring greater knowledge. Compassion, because, we need tolerance and understanding of each other and our different experiences and perspectives to travel on this journey towards sustainable living.

Close your eyes and clear your mind as the music, Wisdom and Compassion, begins.

Imagine ... What a sustainable world would look like to you .. ? What are the key aspects to this world..... ?

When the music has finished take some paper and textas and draw a picture of your world.... Choose 5 words that identify key aspects. Discuss with other. Share with others.

"We cannot build a future we cannot imagine. A first requirement, then is to create for ourselves a realistic, compelling and engaging vision of the future that can be simply told." Elgin 1991 Creating a Sustainable Future p77

Sustainability is an issue that we all need to reflect on and consider ...what does sustainable living mean for you and/or your organisation?

Sustainable development has been defined as:

'Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'
(World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p8)

We need to generate an innate consideration for the well being of the Earth and see ourselves as part of a global community.

What are your current understandings?

What changes can you make to your daily practices to support young children of all ages to develop positive connections to the natural world ?

How can you use a rubric to look at where you are now and plan where you want to go?

At Waite Campus Childrens Centre our journey towards sustainable living has been helped by some dedicated professionals and we would now like to share our journey with others to show them that it is possible.

Our presentation has 3 key goals for participants:

- To reflect on and clarify what sustainable living means
- To explore strategies for introducing sustainable living practices to families, staff and children.
- To review where you are now and where you want to go

At Waite Campus Childrens Centre we have aimed to take a whole centre approach in developing practices for sustainable living.

We realised from our earliest discussions that we required a specific working group to plan and support our journey. Our Sustainable Futures for Children Committee (SFCC) was established in April 2007 by invitation to families and staff. Some of the Parent Advisory Group members chose to join this new group together with parents not yet actively involved in the Centre. We were keen for families to have a bigger role than staff so have had two staff representatives, the director and 4-7 parents involved.

Our strategic plan was drafted by a parent and distributed to all committee members for comments. It has a bold vision:

'To operate a childcare centre that is self sufficient in as many energy requirements as possible, is self sufficient in its water requirements [excepting drinking water], has environmental education embedded within all programs and operating procedures where relevant, and fulfills an active leading role in the environmental education of children, their families and the general community'

We have reviewed and evaluated this strategic plan every 6 months. The membership of our Sustainable Futures for Children Committee has fluctuated and the demands of operating a busy long day care service have impacted on each stage of our journey. However the goal of sustainability is always there. It is becoming a part of what we do part, part of what we are. It is included in our budget process, our policies and practices, staff development and training, the resources we purchase, our children's programs daily and long term.

We are on the sustainable living journey and learning every day. Our sustainable living policy sits with our philosophy as a key guide.

Our sustainable futures strategic plan has seven goals:

- Financing for infrastructure and programs
- Education for sustainable living
- Environmentally aware staff operating procedures
- Environmentally sustainable use of energy
- Environmentally sustainable use of water
- Social justice and equity-connecting to the local and global community
- Regular review

Financing:

We explored several different ways to implement a sustainability fund in order to ensure a budgeted commitment for implementing our strategic plan. While a majority of families supported a weekly levy of their fees we chose to incorporate sustainability into our budget. Since July 2007 we have had a budgeted commitment to becoming a sustainable service. This is supplemented by funding from small grants. In November 2007 we were successful in winning a Community Water Grant and have several small grant

applications in progress to support the development of an 'outdoor classroom'.

Family involvement and learning has been encouraged through the parent-staff committee, articles and 'green' tips in our monthly newsletter, and an extensive library of books on being 'green'. We also have a 'green' notice board in our hallway where we display our growing sustainable futures fund, information on local sustainable living events and information on our sponsorships.

Early childhood educators are the key to early learning and development programs that foster respect for our world. Professional development of staff is therefore central to the sustainable living journey. Training and development requires a range of strategies to help staff explore sustainability at their own level. Change requires conversation so sustainable living sits as a standing agenda on monthly staff meetings. Changes to staff operating practices with respect to cleaning and energy efficiency were implemented over several months with discussion and review at staff meetings. This discussion and review continues.

We are building a library of resources, including DVD's videos and books on early childhood education for the environment. We have invited speakers e.g. from KESAB to staff planning days and all staff are attending professional development at the Bureau of meteorology on climate change.

Achievement of the goal of environmentally sustainable use of water begins with reducing water usage through awareness of better practice. A federal Government Community Water Grant will allow us to install tanks to harvest and store rain water for use in the laundry and toilets, a water efficient washing machine, retro fitting taps and toilets to improve water efficiency and for some rain water harvesting from the sandpit pergola roof for children's education. The grant funding is being supplemented by our sustainable futures fund.

Environmentally sustainable use of energy also begins with developing awareness of better practice by using natural light and passive heating as much as possible and reducing use of high energy appliances such as dryers. Small businesses in SA are currently unable to purchase 'green power'. We have chosen to offset our greenhouse gas emissions through the purchase of renewable energy carbon credits.

We are also exploring options for purchasing solar hot water and /or installing photovoltaic cells.

We were already working with a strong sense of social justice and equity with cultural awareness and inclusion embedded into Centre programs. We are now working to extend this and, with consideration of the need for developmental appropriateness, to include a more global perspective.

We sponsor a Port River dolphin through the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and Oxfam through the Aware Program. The Centre is also a member of Trees for Life. Families, staff and the Centre are growing

seedlings for our planned 'outdoor classroom' and butterfly garden. We are also consulting with the traditional owners of our area the Kaurna through the elders group, the Kaurna Warra Pintyandi, to give an Indigenous Aboriginal name to our garden.

At the beginning of 2008 we introduced a Mandarin Immersion Program for 3-5 year olds. This program allows children to learn a second language contextually in the same way that they learn their primary language; that is by hearing it spoken on a regular basis. It enhances children's awareness and understanding of Chinese culture, supporting the development of a positive attitude to non-native languages and foreign cultures.

10 steps in teaching children sustainable living concepts

Bring nature inside

There are many things that can be incorporated at an early childhood/educational site that brings different aspects of the natural environment inside. There are many simple things that can be done in an instant and there are some that need thought and organisation. It is also important to involve the children in this process, so there is ownership and understanding.

These things can include having natural materials such as rocks, shells, seedpods, pine cones, etc available for children to use in their pretend play, having pot plants around the room, displaying different pictures and posters of different aspects of the natural environment, caring for animals such as hermit crabs, stick insects and also having books- both fact and fiction that children are able to explore by themselves or with a staff member.

Avoid

There is a great deal of unnecessary packaging that can be avoided, so it is important to choose wisely when purchasing equipment, foods and other items. Plastic containers, toys, etc may look attractive but there are many other options. Look for wooden toys and equipment, and sturdy cardboard boxes make great storage containers. Harmful and poisonous chemicals should also be avoided not only as it is good for the environment but for the children and staff as well. There are many environmentally friendly products available for use. Sending rubbish to landfill should be avoided as much as possible before throwing it in the bin, ask yourself if it can be reused or recycled.

Reduce

Many resources can be easily reduced and these can include water use, electricity use and rubbish. Simple language can be used with children of all ages to help with the reduction of these resources. It is also important for staff to role model this behaviour.

Reuse

Reusing resources and equipment is a valuable part of the process. Water can be reused on plants, boxes, containers, tins, etc. Can be used for creative play, scrap paper for drawing and painting and old calendars make wonderful posters. Fabric and other material can be used in children's pretend play,

plastic bags can be used to store children's soiled clothing and washable cleaning cloths can be used again and again, rather than throwing them out.

Recycle

Many types of materials can be recycled and these include paper, plastic, glass, tins and other things including bread tags. Recycled paper can be made with the children to show them and involve them in the process of recycling. Playing recycling games with children also is a fun way to develop their understandings of the difference between non-recyclable items and recyclable items.

Involve children in planting

Vegetables, herbs, fruit and native gardens can all be planted with the children. It is important to involve children in the process and it helps to provide ownership and develop responsibility. Involving children in plantings also helps to develop understandings about lifecycles.

Provide an inviting and adventurous outdoor play space

The outdoor play space at an early childhood setting is just as important as the indoor space. Research shows that there are many advantages of having a quality outdoor play space where children are able to have direct contact with natural materials. Without this contact with the natural environment, children are at risk of developing nature deficit disorder and miss out on valuable learning experiences that can only occur in the outdoors. It is therefore important to offer an outdoor play space that has well defined play spaces, different sized areas and allows for flexibility and different types of play. Lots of plants, trees, shrubs and real grass should also be present and there outdoor play space should appeal to all of the senses.

Investigate different concepts of sustainability

There are many concepts and areas of sustainability that can be explored and some of these can include water, weather, energy, the natural environment, composting and worm farms. These experiences can be planned or being aware of the natural surroundings on a daily basis can lead to many valuable learning experiences.

Make a 'happy' and 'sad' world

The idea of a 'happy' and 'sad' world is to support children in exploring the visual difference between a world with no water, trees, animals, lots of rubbish and pollution and full of unhappy people and therefore entitled a 'sad' world and a world with lots of trees, plants, animals, water in the rivers and dams, rain water tanks and environmentally friendly energy is entitled a 'happy' world and therefore the desirable world to live in. Discussions about the differences of a 'happy' and 'sad' world can include aspects of water, animals, plants and people and behaviours.

Allowing children to use the 'worlds' for pretend play also further develops their understandings and thinkings.

Enjoy being in touch with nature and taking the sustainable living journey

The journey along the sustainability road is long and fulfilling but there is a need to aim for a whole site approach and motivate staff through professional development, discussions and providing relevant resources. Valuing spontaneity is also important as all learning experiences cannot be planned. Using related sustainable lifestyles language everyday and interacting and connecting with the natural environment everyday are also part of taking the sustainable living journey.

Planning and evaluating progress using a rubric

A rubric is a set of criteria for assessing knowledge, or performance and for giving feedback. It can be used to identify objectives and name the evidence you will use to determine your success. This means that you will also be quickly able to assess achievements supporting you to acknowledge your success and move onto the next phase. Rubrics are also a way to focus your planning for change and to ensure you involve staff, families and children in the process.

We have used a rubric as the evaluation tool for planning and evaluating your/your service's growing skills for sustainable living.

Two different rubrics are presented. These can be adapted and modified to suit the individual needs of each service. They can be used for individual planning and evaluation, for service planning or for different areas of development.

Every step makes a difference.

We believe that every early childhood service can begin a journey towards sustainable living.

“Education for sustainable living fosters both an intellectual understanding of ecology and emotional bonds with nature that make it more likely that our children will grow into responsible citizens who truly care about sustaining life, and develop a passion for applying their ecological understandings to the fundamental redesign of our technologies and social institutions, so as to bridge the gap between human design and ecologically sustainable systems of nature.” (Capra, 2005)

Capra, F (Preface) 2005, *Ecological Literacy, Educating our Children for a Sustainable World*, Edited by MK Stone, Z Barlow, Sierra Books

Elgin, D (1991) Creating a Sustainable Future p77
World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p8

Waite Campus Childrens Centre is a long day care centre catering for children 3mths to school age, located on the Waite Campus, University of Adelaide, Urrbrae SA.