



LITTLE GREEN STEPS

Sustainability Education for Childcare Centres

In Your Childcare Centre



This project is funded by the NSW Government's environmental Trust

This case study will help you bring sustainable habits and education into your childcare centre.

What is Little Green Steps?

Little Green Steps brings sustainability to children's centres through curricula, staff/community workshops and retrofits of centres' physical space. This 'whole of centre' approach includes:

- Engaging staff in the vision of early childhood 'education for sustainability'
- Environmental audits and action plans
- Workshops for teachers and centre community
- Resources kits and funding to support environmental education and actions
- Implementation of educational, infrastructural, and management initiatives.

In 2009/10, Sydney Little Green Steps worked with children's centres run by Canterbury, Hurstville, Leichhardt, Waverley and Woollahra councils for one year. The project achieved behavioural and infrastructural changes reducing energy, water, waste, toxins and general consumption. Centre staff received professional development and resource kits to support their continued work. Children learnt through hands-on education, observation and participation. Families were involved through meetings, workshops, newsletters and displays.

Why Do Little Green Steps?

The Little Green Steps project provides a way for sustainability to be integrated into the workplaces of childcare centres, inspiring and empowering children, parents and childcare workers to initiate and achieve tangible sustainability.



Comments from Participants...

"THE WORKSHOP HELD AT WOOLLAHRA PRESCHOOL WAS INSPIRING. IT IS ALWAYS GOOD TO MEET WITH OTHER PEOPLE IN OUR FIELD AND SHARE IDEAS AND PRACTICES."

"(WE GOT) A WORM FARM AT THE CENTRE AND IT IS STILL WORKING!"

"THE RESOURCES DEVELOPED BY PROJECT OFFICER ARE FANTASTIC. THEY MAKE OUR JOB EASIER."

"LITTLE GREEN STEPS HAS PROVIDED THE CENTRE WITH MUCH-NEEDED RESOURCES TO EDUCATE STAFF AND CHILDREN ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT. IT HAS ALSO PROMOTED AWARENESS OF AND MADE SMALL CHANGES TO THE CENTRE PHYSICALLY. IT IS GREAT TO SEE UPPER MANAGEMENT AND OTHER AREAS OF COUNCIL BEING MADE AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS ISSUE, AND IT HAS BEEN GREAT TO HAVE THEIR SUPPORT AND INPUT."

"(WE DID) HANDS-ON THINGS WITH THE CHILDREN, ESTABLISHING OUR GARDENS AND MAINTAINING GOOD PRACTICES."

"LITTLE GREEN STEPS GALVANIZED THOSE MEMBERS OF THE TEAM WHO WERE RELUCTANT TO TAKE UP SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES. IT MADE THOSE IDEAS MORE TANGIBLE AND GAVE US CONSTRUCTIVE WAYS TO IMPLEMENT THESE IDEAS IN A CHILD-FOCUSED WAY."

"SUSTAINABILITY WILL NOW BE AN ONGOING ISSUE TO ADDRESS - VERY VALUABLE EDUCATION FOR OUR FUTURE."

"WHEN THE PROJECT BEGAN, THERE WAS QUITE A LOT OF ENTHUSIASM. I FELT THIS, AND BEGAN A LOT OF MY OWN INITIATIVES WITHIN THE CLASSROOM. GAUGING THE CHILDREN'S RESPONSES AND INTERESTS AND RESPONDING TO THESE HAS BEEN VERY ENJOYABLE."

"LITTLE GREEN STEPS GAVE US SUPPORT AND MOTIVATED OUR STAFF TO DO MORE IN THE WAY OF SUSTAINABILITY."



Participant Survey Results

- 100% of surveyed participants said Little Green Steps helped them develop professionally to deliver environmental education.
- 100% of surveyed participants said Little Green Steps helped them develop professionally to run a more sustainable childcare centre.
- 100% of surveyed participants said since starting Little Green Steps they had delivered more environmental education.
- 100% of surveyed participants said since starting Little Green Steps their centre had operated more sustainably.
- 100% of surveyed participants said Little Green Steps made them more likely to contact parents / council staff / or other networks for support, resource and knowledge sharing on environmental issues.
- 100% of surveyed participants said they would continue initiatives for sustainability after the Little Green Steps program.

How Can I Do Little Green Steps?

Even if you don't have a grant, you can still do Little Green Steps in your centre. It just takes 3 steps!

Step 1

Talk to the staff in your childcare centre.

Cover three points...

- do they want to provide a healthy environment for future generations, with good water, soil, air, climate, biodiversity etc?
- does this mean we need a society that values nature and resources respectfully?
- if early childhood is when such core values are established, how can early childhood teachers help build a healthy society and planet?

Step 2

As a group, look through the lists of actions Little Green Steps participants have completed below. As you read...

- celebrate the actions you are already doing
- choose actions you would like to do
- tailor and imagine actions for your own centre's needs and philosophies
- collate and commit to actions that are realistic in your centre and that people are motivated about. You've just made your very own action plan. It's that easy!

Step 3

Do your actions in whatever order suits you. Remember to seek support and celebrate as you go!



Actions that Little Green Steps Participants have Completed Previously

Use these ideas as a springboard to compile your own lists of actions.

Nature...

Check Box	Initiative
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hold a 'backyard blitz'.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Purchased plants with help from children on excursion to a nursery.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Extra potted plants for indoors and out. Chosen to be hardy and safe. (Check Kidsafe publication 'Plants for Play Spaces'). Staff informed of watering, light and feeding needs for each plant (little label on pot).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Constructed children's gardens through parents, children and staff working bees; during the day with kids, or as part of workshops for staff and parents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vege/Kitchen garden - Fairy garden - Mexican-themed garden - No dig garden - Sensory herb and flower garden for colour, smell and texture - Raised garden with Perspex section for viewing roots. Note Always use lots of perennials to ensure low maintenance and long- term growth, yet leave spaces for shorter-term children's projects around the edges, like growing carrots, lettuce, peas, beans etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tepee cubby house constructed from bamboo grown at the centre. Covered with hessian or vines.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Soil quality in struggling garden beds improved by regular use of worm juice, Seasol, compost and mulching with leaves (previously sent to landfill) with help from children.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Major renovation of yard. Much soft fall replaced with terraced gardens and textured sensory paths etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Increased prominence of worm farm by moving it to a more central but shaded location, and incorporating it into the children's daily routine, with pictorial signage of what does and doesn't go in etc.

Water...

Check Box	Action	Savings (KL/year)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Half-flush conversion on student toilets integrated into educational opportunities with the kids.	Large
<input type="checkbox"/>	Converted staff toilets to half-flush.	Small
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bed sheets labeled so they can be reused for the same child on consecutive days. Sheets in batches twice a week instead of every day. Other loads consolidation also.	Large
<input type="checkbox"/>	Taps-off lessons.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Put mechanical timers on youngest kids' taps.	Large
<input type="checkbox"/>	Repaired leaks.	Large
<input type="checkbox"/>	Installed full-sized water tank incorporating any planned extensions/building works.	If plumbed into laundry/toilets, large savings, otherwise small
<input type="checkbox"/>	Increased mulching of gardens to reduce watering needs.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fixed rain-water tank. Water play and gardening water are now used from the tank and not from drinking water.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Garden watered using rain-water tank.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	(Tank was there previously but not used.)	

Waste...

Check Box	Action
<input type="checkbox"/>	Purchasing less paper due to conversion to electronic journals, newsletters, billing etc and general reuse of one-sided paper.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Purchasing less cardboard due to increase in reuse and resourcefulness.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Purchase only recycled paper towels and recycled toilet paper.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The centre has increased reuse of its own useful materials such as cardboard boxes, one-sided paper and shredded paper from the office, bottle tops from the kitchen etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Green trays set up in each craft area to facilitate reuse of one-sided paper. Kids trained to use them for one-sided paper.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Increased creative, resourceful reuse of materials from home in art projects.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Organised regular supply of one-sided paper and other craft materials from parents, local businesses, library or council. Exploring paper production and recycling through highly kinaesthetic learning.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Paper-making activity with kids using shredded office paper and other paper unsuitable for reuse in other ways.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Excursion to reverse garbage to purchase craft supplies and investigate Reduce Reuse Recycle with kids.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Excursions to Cooks River to clean up litter, which was then used to make art.

Check Box	Action
<input type="checkbox"/>	Set up consistent recycling and reuse system throughout centre: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • craft/reuse boxes in each children's room where children can put in and take out materials such as containers and cardboard for reusing as craft. Each room has set up a tray for one-sided paper. • Small, colour-coded recycling bins in each room or in a central location. • Make sure one-sided paper and recycling bins are set up in staff and office rooms also (walk the talk!). • Two food scrap containers on every meal trolley, one for compostable and one for non-compostable. Children assist in putting scraps into the correct containers after each meal. Children involved in emptying the compostable container into the compost bin. • Children are introduced to the system with a game where they choose where different example items must go. Children will then be responsible for using the system in an ongoing way, deciding where to get/put items they work with. • Worked with cooks and cleaners to make sure they participate in the system.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Request council to supply 'Green Bin' for garden organics (fronds, prunings, leaves) previously going to landfill.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Started worm farm under cover in courtyard.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Capacity of compost system increased by purchase and use of compost turner (cork-screw style).
<input type="checkbox"/>	New compost receptacle for the kitchen to collect scraps. Chef puts in and kids empty into compost.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Purchase and use Aero Compost Bin. Set up a container in the kitchen for raw fruit and vegie off-cuts. These were put into the compost bin along with compostable left-overs from meals daily, with involvement from some children. An equal quantity of dry matter to be added each time food is added, such as swept leaves or shredded newspaper. Aero Compost Bins are more expensive but can be lower maintainence.

Energy...

Check Box	Action	Savings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Using washing line rather than clothes dryer in all but wet weather. Use small, fold-up laundry racks so children can hang out smaller items while staff hang out bigger items.	18,900 KWh saved per year
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consolidated laundry loads to two less loads of laundry per day.	106 KWh saved per year
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bed sheets have been labeled so they can be reused for the same child on consecutive days. Sheets in batches twice a week instead of every day. Other loads consolidation also	53.4 KWh saved per year (assuming laundry already being hung on line)
<input type="checkbox"/>	One less load in dryer per day	1057.7 KWh saved per year
<input type="checkbox"/>	New efforts to turn off lights and air-conditioning when not in use, and use natural light and ventilation when adequate (both are used less and the centre is less stuffy now).	512 KWh saved per year
<input type="checkbox"/>	Separate the lighting circuit for the nursery, change room and main children's room, so each needs only be on when necessary.	135 KWh saved per year
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure all computers, printers, photocopier, air cons, and lights are off at the end of every day.	Big savings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Switch to compact, efficient light globes.	131.25KW saved per year

Check Box	Action	Savings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue and improve efficient use of air conditioner, e.g. 21° in winter, 25° in summer; only on when natural ventilation is inadequate; closing doors and windows when on.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Making sure kids are appropriately dressed, thus requiring less artificial heating/cooling.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Children to act as Energy Experts, noting lights left on, proper use of heating and cooling, appliances left on, etc. A badge or similar can be made for the designated Energy Expert to wear each day. The children then become the driver of sustainable behavior change.	

Toxins...

Check Box	Action
<input type="checkbox"/>	Switched to more environmentally friendly products.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Replaced use of 'Germex' on general surfaces and nappy change areas with hot soapy water and colour-coded micro-fibre cloths.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kids can now help with general surface wipe-down as toxic chemicals are no longer used. This assists with supervision ratios and has educational benefits. Will also substantially decrease paper towel use.

Educational Activities with Kids...

Check Box	Action
<input type="checkbox"/>	Six children helped construct vegetable and Mexican-themed gardens at working bee.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involved kids in hanging out small items such as washers on fence as much as was practical.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Presentation/discussion with children based on Little Green Steps water activities. (See Further Reading and Resources section.)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stuck up sequence cards for turning off tap when hand-washing.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kids (and more staff) participating in worm farm (previously run by one staff member).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff very engaged in planting plants and germinating seedlings with kids. Staff members doing it in different ways and learning from each other. Originally germinating in glass jars but moving towards making their own paper pulp bio pots.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Relocated clothes line to a more convenient location.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Added a lower line or separate rack in same area so that accompanying children can hang out smaller items alongside teacher (also saving some electricity through slight reduction in dryer use, but minimal).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Made collage with natural materials such as leaves, dirt and sticks.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nature exploration table set up with plants, shells etc.

Check Box	Action
<input type="checkbox"/>	Seed-sprouting activities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bring in a sheep and shear it. Spin, dye and weave the wool to demonstrate where materials come from.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have a lamb at the centre.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Felting activities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Making paints from bark.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Making pictures from glue and leaves etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Children and staff to tip children's left-over play and drinking water onto potted plants.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Buy two more small portable clothes lines which include lower levels for children to use too.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A waste-sorting game was played in each room to help children use the recycle boxes. A reuse section of the game was included e.g. children were asked, "If I needed some _____ for making a _____ where would I find it?" children then get cardboard roll etc. out of reuse/recycling container to use.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Worm farm set up in enclosed washing area under shade of plants. Container for kitchen scraps set up in kitchen with prompts and education on what can go in. Children participated in the worm farm.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Old enough children are regularly designated 'Water Savers' for the day, wearing water drop medallion, they are responsible for noticing taps left on and any other wasted water.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Old enough children are regularly designated 'Energy Savers', wearing light bulb medallion, they are responsible for noticing lights, fans and other appliances left on unused and any other wasted energy.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reuse and Recycling boxes set up in every children's room. Children put recyclables in recycle boxes, and also take materials out of recycling boxes and 'Useful Boxes'.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Collecting and exploring natural objects, and using them in craft and imaginative play.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The 3-5 age group had an ongoing 'environment project' or long-running emergent curriculum integrating their work with recycling, nature, water and energy.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Children participated in Clean up Australia Day.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Standard routines of kids sweeping up leaves and putting onto garden and into garden waste bin rather than landfill.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Left-over water from drinks and water play to be used on the garden by children.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dolphins (older kids) to act as Energy Monitors noting lights left on, proper use of heating and cooling, appliances left on, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Buy new books with environmental content for centre.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Talk about landfill and Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Activities with kids using things that can be found in the garden, e.g. craft with sticks, leaves, stones, bark, flowers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Children introduced to the centre's new waste systems with a waste sorting game. Children now responsible for using the system in an ongoing way, deciding where to get/put items they work with
<input type="checkbox"/>	Allow kids to use the rain water tank.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Left-over water from water play is now used to water the garden and veggies.

Check Box	Action
<input type="checkbox"/>	Educational activities with kids on wise water use, including why water is precious, turning of taps etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ducks for term 1
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bush Tucker Planting and Water Source excursion with local indigenous expert.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Excursion to nursery to buy indoor plants
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reduce Reuse Recycle workshop by Mic Conway.

Management and Policy...

Check Box	Initiatives
<input type="checkbox"/>	Little Green Steps Action Plan (the list of actions you are coming up with now) has been integrated into the centre's annual goals. Uncompleted and ongoing goals will roll over into future years' goals that drive the centre's operations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	'Environmental Issues and Little Green Steps' on staff meeting agenda every week.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Include Sustainability as a standing item in all staff meeting agendas similar to OH&S.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Include a regular environmental section in each newsletter, detailing an action the centre has done, an educational experience with the children, or an event/opportunity for parents.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Teacher designated as Environmental Champion and spokesperson.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rewrote Sustainability curriculum policy.
<input type="checkbox"/>	"Maintaining Little Green Steps" put in operational plan for Council Children's Services.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sustainability and outcomes of Little Green Steps integrated into 'Parent Orientation Manual' for all Waverley Council Children's Services. Establishing these as new standard practice for the centres.

Further Reading and Resources

Sydney Little Green Steps Teachers' Resource Kits

Four amazing teachers' resource kits are available on CD. They contain hundreds of activities you can do with kids. Water, Waste, Nature and Energy Kits are all available. Contact environmental officers in Canterbury, Hurstville, Leichardt, Waverley or Woollahra councils to obtain a copy.

Gosford/Wyong Little Green Steps

The first Little Green Steps was held in Gosford and Wyong Councils. They developed a detailed manual on how to run a Little Green Steps program. This manual called 'Climbing the Little Green Steps' is more at a management and philosophy level. It complements this shorter, more hands-on case study very well. It is available at... <http://www.livingthing.net.au/rc/PP/ClimbLittleGreenSteps.pdf> or <http://www.gosford.nsw.gov.au/environment/education/documents/climbing-the-little-green-steps.pdf/view>

NSW Early Childhood Environmental Education Network

The Early Childhood Environmental Education Network (ECEEN) is a community of educators, families and children striving to create living and learning spaces within our communities that reflect and encourage sustainable practises. You can become a member of this not-for-profit organisation to share resources and information at <http://www.eceen.org.au/>

Lady Gowrie Child Centre - Sydney

Support quality childcare in all areas, but are also strong in Early Childhood Environmental Education. They have resources and can offer advice. Call (02) 8594 4259, (02) 8345 7601 or check <http://www.eceen.org.au/>

Your Local Council

Give them a call! They have specialised Environment, Environmental Education, and Waste Education staff to help you with sustainability in your centre, hold workshops for staff, parents and possibly kids and answer any questions. They are also a great point of contact for local places of interest, local volunteer environment groups, special events and grants etc. in your area.

Local Community Gardens and Bushcare Groups

Look them up through your local council. They can be a great visit. Get someone who spends time restoring and protecting nature in your local area to talk to the kids, and show them what they do and why. Volunteers may be able to show kids how to plant. You might even be able to get a patch at a garden for your centre, or take your kitchen scraps there for composting if you can't compost on site.

Local Indigenous Elders

Contact through your local Land Council. A representative might be able to come to the centre and talk to the kids about Aboriginal culture, bush tucker, local heritage etc.