



Ethnic Communities Sustainable Living Project

Working with
Ethnic Communities
to Sustain our Environment





New South Wales is rich in people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. The Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) is working with these communities across our State to care for the environment and to help people live more sustainably at home, work and play.

The Ethnic Communities Sustainable Living Project (ECSLP) works with and within the Chinese, Greek, Arabic, Italian, Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean and Macedonian communities to deliver environmental education programs in community languages. At the core of ECSLP is a team of bilingual community educators who work within their own communities. The project is an example of the Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) (DEC) commitment to improving the access of everyone in NSW to innovative and high quality environmental education programs.

The ECSLP is based at the Ethnic Communities Council of NSW, allowing DEC to:

- work effectively with a range of non-government stakeholders
- form close relationships with key ethnic organisations
- help CALD communities to feel that they 'own' the project.

Government and non-government environmental educators can make arrangements with DEC to use the services provided by the ECSLP to communicate and interact with ethnic communities.

What is ECSLP?

ECSLP is a project that aims to encourage people from culturally diverse backgrounds to learn about, and take care of, their local environments at home, work and play, with a particular focus on leading sustainable lifestyles.

The objectives of the project are:

- to **promote awareness, knowledge and understanding** among specific ethnic communities about ways to live more sustainably at home, work and play.
- to **run education sessions** in community languages to promote simple, practical ways for people from ethnic communities to change their behaviour towards living sustainably.
- to **get people more deeply involved** in sustainability issues by promoting community development activities for sustainable living to interested ethnic groups.
- to **develop a greater understanding** of the motivations, knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices of ethnic communities in relation to the environment.
- to **help build the capacity of councils** to develop and deliver environmental education to ethnic communities in their local government areas (LGAs).





ECSLP has developed over a number of years. It is based on research conducted into the environmental attitudes, knowledge and behaviours of six CALD communities in 1997 and eight in 2004. The project has been evaluated a number of times and further developed in response to the recommendations made in these evaluations.

To increase the reach and effectiveness of the project, the ECSLP project officer liaises with community agencies that are committed to working with CALD communities. The officer encourages these agencies to include sustainable living in their programs and also works with other environmental education agencies to encourage, inform and support them in working with CALD communities.

Program information about the environment is distributed to all ethnic media, and translated information is published. To distribute this information and reinforce messages about living sustainably, ECSLP employs bilingual educators from the targeted CALD communities; these educators are involved in a wide range of education activities.

Bilingual environmental educators

The ECSLP team of experienced bilingual environmental educators works with the **Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Greek, Italian, Macedonian, Spanish and Vietnamese** communities in NSW, encouraging them to adopt simple, practical ways to live more sustainably. They advise DEC on the most effective environmental education methods for their communities. Methods include workshops, field trips, festivals and other cultural events, arts projects and media communications.

'This work is important. We need to keep a healthy environment for our grandchildren.' Lila Ibrahim, Arabic educator.

'I have a responsibility to my community – to help them to understand how to do the right thing, how to recycle properly and how to compost, in our own language.' Soon Yong Yoo, Korean educator.





Workshops

The bilingual educators offer face-to-face learning opportunities to their own communities in health and community centres, churches, mosques and temples – wherever communities meet. People who attend these sessions are encouraged to participate actively through discussions and critical thinking; often they have valuable knowledge that they have brought with them from their home countries or have gained in Australia.

The workshops include:

Sustainable living – reducing consumption, preventing pollution, and helping to protect your local environment for future generations

Water conservation – saving money on your water bill by saving water around the house and garden, and learning about current water restrictions

Composting and worm farming – ways to nourish the garden by learning to compost or build a worm farm and reducing organic household waste at the same time

Recycling and reducing waste – waste and what can be done to avoid, reduce, reuse and recycle it

Stormwater – keeping our waterways clean for our future by preventing stormwater pollution and protecting our rivers and oceans

Green cleaning – using non-toxic alternatives to chemicals to clean the home and learning how to dispose of unwanted chemical products

Protecting biodiversity – native plants and animals, how to attract birds and butterflies to the garden, and tips for more sustainable gardening

Saving energy – saving money on electricity bills and reducing greenhouse gases with simple energy saving tips

Workshops run for between 1 and 2 hours, depending on the group's requirements. The bilingual educators design workshops to suit the needs of the group; they may focus on just one issue, or a couple of issues, depending on the time available.

Field trips

Direct experience is a good way of encouraging understanding about environmental issues, and the educators regularly take groups on field trips. This helps to increase people's understanding of their own impact on their local environment. They see environmental systems at work and learn how these compare with examples from their own cultural backgrounds.

Field trips include visits to recycling centres and landfills, national or district parks, or waterways. Here, groups can observe such things as biodiversity and stormwater pollutants and ways to manage and sustain the environment.

'The participants really enjoyed the outing. They got a full picture of the processes and links to what we had discussed during the sessions. They are more conscious of recycling properly and will share the experience with others. It consolidated my knowledge as well as the participants.' Gladys Pineda, Spanish-speaking educator.





Festivals and cultural events

The educators also coordinate stalls, demonstrations and performances at cultural festivals and other community events. Being at these events enables the educators to talk with large numbers of people from their communities and distribute printed materials in their language.



'People's experiences in Vietnam are very different to here, and I like to encourage people in the group to share their stories and participate in the group discussions. This is how we can all learn and benefit from other people's experiences and understanding' Tim Huynh, Vietnamese educator.

Arts Projects

Some community groups take on environmental arts projects. These projects usually result in visual representations of the sustainable living message for other members of the community. Some of the artworks have been placed in halls or foyers of community meeting places to attract the wider community's attention to the environmental message. Another effective use of artwork is to design and print a message on a calico bag or t-shirt. The educators work with CALD groups to develop a design with a culturally appropriate environmental message in the community language.

When specific language groups get involved in the design and development of these artworks, each community receives a strong message of ownership of a culturally specific product that has an important environmental message.

'Throughout this project we have learnt to make positive changes in our daily lives for a better world for our children, grandchildren and ourselves.'

'This project gave us the opportunity to share and learn a new art and to think and manifest throughout this apillera what really matters about the environment.' Participants in environmental arts project.





Media communications

DEC's social research indicates that most non-English speakers prefer to receive information in their own languages. The bilingual educators issue media releases, give interviews, and participate in programs in community languages on ethnic community, commercial and SBS radio on a variety of environmental topics. Communications in ethnic media are effective in reaching large numbers of people with environmental messages.

Other ways DEC works with ethnic communities

As well as running the ECSLP, DEC has other ways of supporting environmental educators working with ethnic communities in NSW. These include:

- a social research series on *The Environment and Ethnic Communities*
- guidelines for planning, implementing and evaluating education programs for ethnic communities
- professional development training to help educators address the needs of their ethnic communities
- a range of resources in community languages, including stormwater resources, *Chemical Clean Out Guides* and *Easy Guides on Recycling, Worm Farming, Composting, Mulching and Chemical Free Cleaning*.

How to get involved

If you would like support in working with your CALD community, ECSLP can provide:

- information about research into CALD communities
- broad advice about planning a project for CALD communities and specific advice about individual communities and their related organisations
- advice about the effective use of the ethnic media
- access to bilingual educators who can help you to:
 - plan a culturally specific project
 - develop culturally appropriate translated materials
 - run face-to-face sessions
 - access a specific community
 - design an evaluation plan using culturally appropriate methods of monitoring.



To access this support or to find out more information, contact the ECSLP Project Officer at the Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) on **131 555**.

The Ethnic Communities Sustainable Living Project is delivered in partnership between the Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) and the Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW. It is funded through the NSW Government's *Our Environment: It's a Living Thing* program. Visit www.livingthing.net.au for more information.



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