

OzGREEN

igniting passion, developing skills and instilling commitment to drive environmental change

What better way to create a generation of environmental caretakers than to engage, inspire and empower the next wave while they're still young. It's a fine concept in theory. Putting it into practice is something OzGREEN has perfected over the past 16 years and is now building further via its newer adults program.

OzGREEN is a non-profit organisation working to harness the energy and interest of our young people to tackle critical environmental sustainability challenges such as climate change and water. It has an impressive track record of success with its programs consistently turning out individuals who, on discovering that their core value sets include a real desire for a cleaner, safer world, have gone on to introduce positive environmental change not only in their own lives, but in the lives of those around them.

One participant started his own non-profit organisation to give effect to his 'green goals' within his local community. Another, armed with modern tools for righting environmental wrongs, has blended his knowledge with the more traditional approaches of elders to introduce change in his indigenous community.

These are important initiatives in a country responsible for producing the world's highest per capita levels of greenhouse gas emissions, which are large contributors to the earth's rising temperature and resulting changed climate conditions. Further, the amount of land required to sustain a lifestyle in Australia – our ecological, or carbon, footprint – is an average 7.7ha per person here compared to a global sustainable average of 1.6ha.

When it was set up in 1992, OzGREEN focused initially on preserving our nation's water resources.

But it broadened its brief in recent years to encompass a range of challenges that drive the issue of global sustainability. Its focus on young people has been the key to its success in creating a series of proactive networks with profound community roots driving ongoing climate change. That success is now being converted into programs for adults and corporations.

Today OzGREEN is a leading Australian provider of environmental awareness and education programs promoting positive social change towards the climate. Using a unique approach to education that incorporates philosophies of environment, leadership and personal development, it delivers five key programs Australia wide. They are:

- *Youth LEAD*: young people (aged 15 to 25) are skilled and motivated to lead the way to a sustainable future.
- *Leading with the HEART*: adults participate in a sustainability leadership program.
- *MYRiveR*: students assess water quality and develop action plans and a vision for their catchments.
- *Living Communities*: workplaces and local 'eco-teams' build sustainable communities.
- *WaterSavers*: primary-school students are trained to be leaders in saving water at school and at home.

WHY SVA BACKS OZGREEN

SVA supports this venture as OzGREEN has developed a strong community engagement model educating individuals and groups to take action to support the environment. SVA has supported OzGREEN through mentoring, portfolio management and organisation capacity building and scaling of key programs that have potential for larger impact.

GROWTH

Since inception, OzGREEN has worked with more than 400 schools and 500 businesses and many thousands of individuals. As the urgency for environmental action increases, so does activity at OzGREEN. Today the organisation has more than 500 members and supporters. It reaches more than 5000 participants every six months from which growing numbers move on to leadership activities and train as facilitators.

With the MYRiveR program, within which OzGREEN has made a 10-year commitment to the Murray Darling, it has already worked with more than 1800 young people from 40 regional communities and 90 schools in 'taking the pulse' of the Murrumbidgee, Darling and Murray River catchment areas. This has involved undertaking community surveys, detailed environmental assessments of 450 sites and developing youth voice, vision and action plans to care for their waterways.

OzGREEN also has an international presence, with its programs reaching people of all ages in communities in East Timor, Papua New Guinea, India and Pakistan.

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

OzGREEN's programs have been recognised as best practice examples of how to make a difference in the environment. Its headline Youth LEAD project, for example, features as a case study in best practice Learning for Sustainability by the Australian Association for Environmental Education (2006). Independent evaluation conducted in 2007 by Matrix on Board, found the Youth LEAD program met all of its objectives, was

a significant life-changing experience for most participants and provided long-lasting positive outcomes for the individual, their community and, ultimately, the planet.

Its combined efforts have resulted in an average reduction in their collective ecological footprint by 35 per cent (up from 29 per cent recorded six months earlier), demonstrating the success of OzGREEN programs at harnessing personal capacity for change.

OzGREEN programs have won multiple awards. Most recently that included the Australian Museum's 2007 Eureka Prize for Environmental Sustainability Education which recognises excellence in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs for environmental sustainability education. Further the January edition of the(sydney)magazine included OzGREEN's chief executive, Sue Lennox, in a list of Sydney's 100 most influential people as a result of the effectiveness of her work in educating young people about environmental values.

WHAT'S AHEAD

OzGREEN's growth strategy is simple: to double its size every year. The goal may seem profoundly ambitious, but so are the forces that drive it: the need for immediate and effective action in our society to improve how we manage our environment before it really is too late.

To this end, it seeks to apply the transformative learning techniques and success of its long-running Youth LEAD program to its more recently devised adult and corporate programs. It is also looking to establish programs specifically designed to engage indigenous communities and extend the scope of its highly successful WaterSavers primary schools program to include climate change (ClimateSavers).