



A TRAVELLERS' GUIDE TO ECOCENTRES

Building and Growing Places for Reconnecting People to the Environment

Adventures to a Sustainable Future

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Methodology of the Project

This guide is a synthesis of the shared learnings of the Port Phillip EcoCentre, Iramoo and CERES, a collaboration guided by Pat Armstrong and Brian Sharpley. We also sought the assistance of other ecocentres; exploring their issues and needs, and the history of how they formed and developed.

The methodology to develop this guide involved:

- A series of facilitated workshops to allow experienced ecocentres (Port Phillip EcoCentre, Iramoo and CERES) to collaboratively reflect on the key success factors, challenges and lessons learned
- Research to document the histories of these three pioneering centres
- A literature review and research into other ecocentres
- Action research into collaboration between ecocentres through a collaborative practice pilot
- Two stakeholder roundtables to identify issues and help shape the content and style of the guide
- Synthesis of key principles, success factors and lessons learned

About the Ecocentres That Developed This Guide

Port Phillip EcoCentre

St Kilda Botanic Gardens, Melbourne

www.ecocentre.com

Ph: (03) 9534 067

Email: info@ecocentre.com



The Port Phillip EcoCentre (PPEC) is a not-for-profit, community-managed, environment group, supported by the City of Port Phillip. The PPEC works with the community to improve the environment and community wellbeing through experiential education, collaborative action, advocacy, demonstrating eco-living practices and providing a place to meet and share ideas and knowledge. It provides a base for a diversity of affiliate groups to build local networks and facilitate partnerships for practical projects and programs. The PPEC acknowledges the traditional owners of this region, the Boon Wurrung of the Kulin Nation.

Iramoo Sustainable Community Centre

Victoria University St Albans Campus, Melbourne

www.iramoo.org

Ph: (03) 9919 2815

Email: engage@iramoo.org



Iramoo is the Woiworung Aboriginal name for Melbourne and, in particular, its natural ecosystem – the great wildflower grassland plains that once formed a circle from Diamond Creek to Keilor to Werribee and

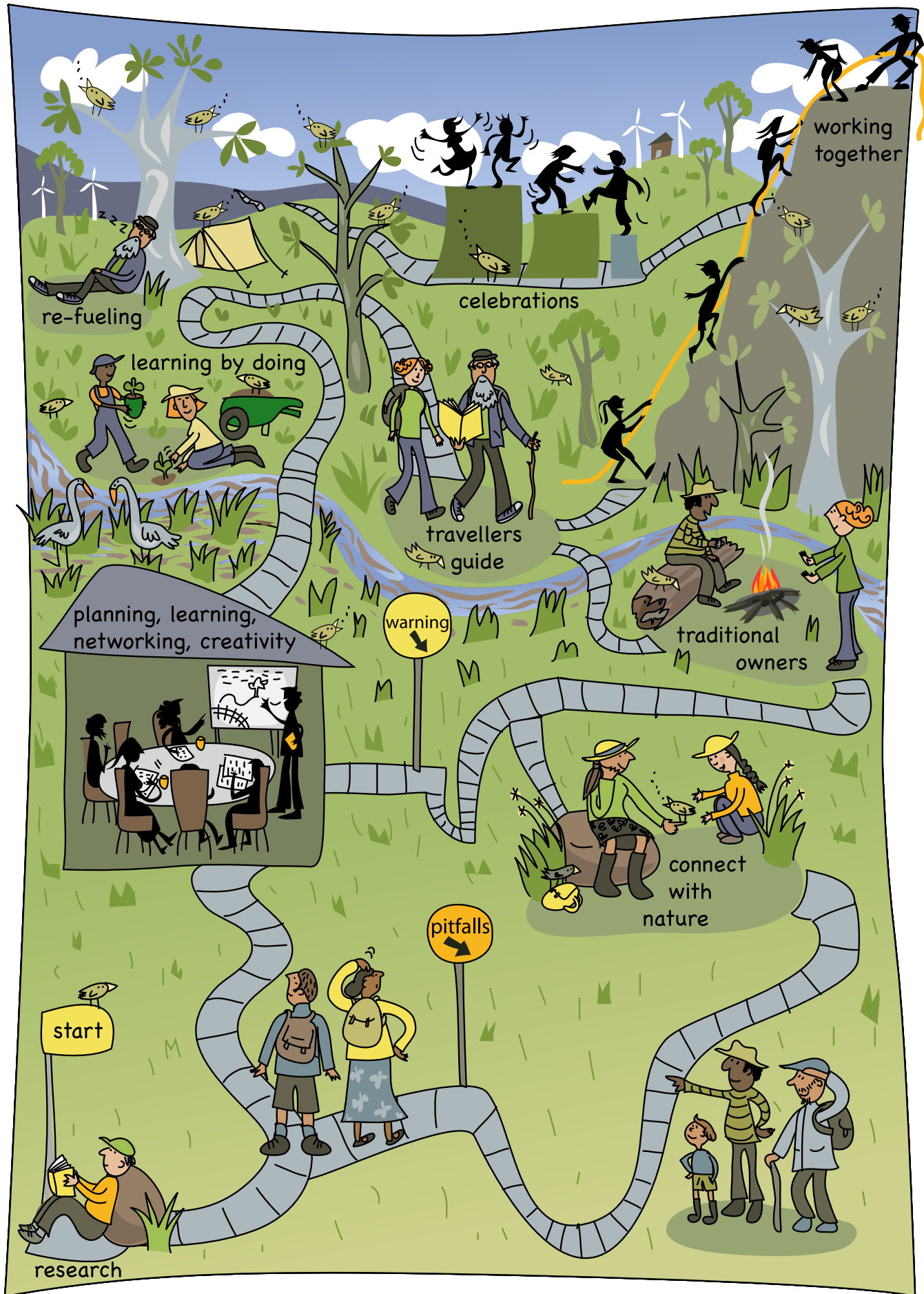
down to Geelong. Iramoo uses the name with formal permission of the Kulin Nations Cultural Heritage Association. Iramoo Sustainable Community Centre, currently sited on Victoria University's St Albans campus, comprises several hectares of land with unique features, facilities and resources. These, together with programs that have evolved over a decade, bring an understanding of sustainable living to the community of Melbourne's West, including the staff and students of Victoria University.

CERES Community Environment Park

Cnr Roberts and Stewart Streets
Brunswick East, Victoria
Phone: (03) 9387 2609
www.ceres.org.au



CERES (the Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies, pronounced 'series') is located on 4.5 hectares (10 acres) on the banks of the Merri Creek, in East Brunswick, close to the centre of Melbourne. CERES runs on renewable energy, is a 55 tonne carbon sink, conserves and recycles its water and waste, grows organic food and teaches diverse audiences about more just and environmentally friendly ways of living. It is the most visited community environmental centre in Australia, known for being a pioneer of community arts, experiential education and sustainable urban agriculture and for demonstrating innovative and achievable solutions to pressing environmental and social issues. CERES provide consultancy services for the development of ecocentres.



working together

celebrations

re-fueling

learning by doing

travellers guide

planning, learning, networking, creativity

warning

traditional owners

connect with nature

pitfalls

start

research

CHAPTER 1.

1. Master Map

The *Guide* was developed by a team made up of researchers, evaluators and practitioners from three established ecocentres in Melbourne, Victoria.

We used the metaphor of a traveller's guide for the book to reinforce the notion that the development of an ecocentre is a journey in which you will discover new and better ways of seeing the world, new ways of doing things and many delights along the way. Just as travelling has its highs and lows, the journey of an ecocentre can also have challenges – crises, disappointments, issues and problems. This *Guide* provides tips and suggestions for how to either avoid or overcome these hazards. Enjoy the journey.

The Kids from Merrijig Primary School



“The school was visiting Melbourne and wanted to do a coastal activity on a Saturday afternoon, so they booked into our Coast walk activity. It was winter and cold, but the kids still came. We gave them some hot soup, which we had made beforehand, and then gave them some indoor activities associated with the walk.

When we took them out on the breakwater, the skies cleared and it was all quite pleasant, but, best of all, we saw a few penguins.



This was an example of ‘happenstance’, of making the most of the opportunity and responding to the needs of the school. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, only 250,000 people in Victoria contribute to an environmental event or activity. This means that millions have not done any of these things. We need to be able to deliver when people are around, rather than when it suits us.”

(Story by Neil Blake, Port Phillip EcoCentre. This story exemplifies the beautiful moments that can arise from being responsive, adaptable and proactive.)

THE TRAVELLERS' GUIDE BOOKMARKS

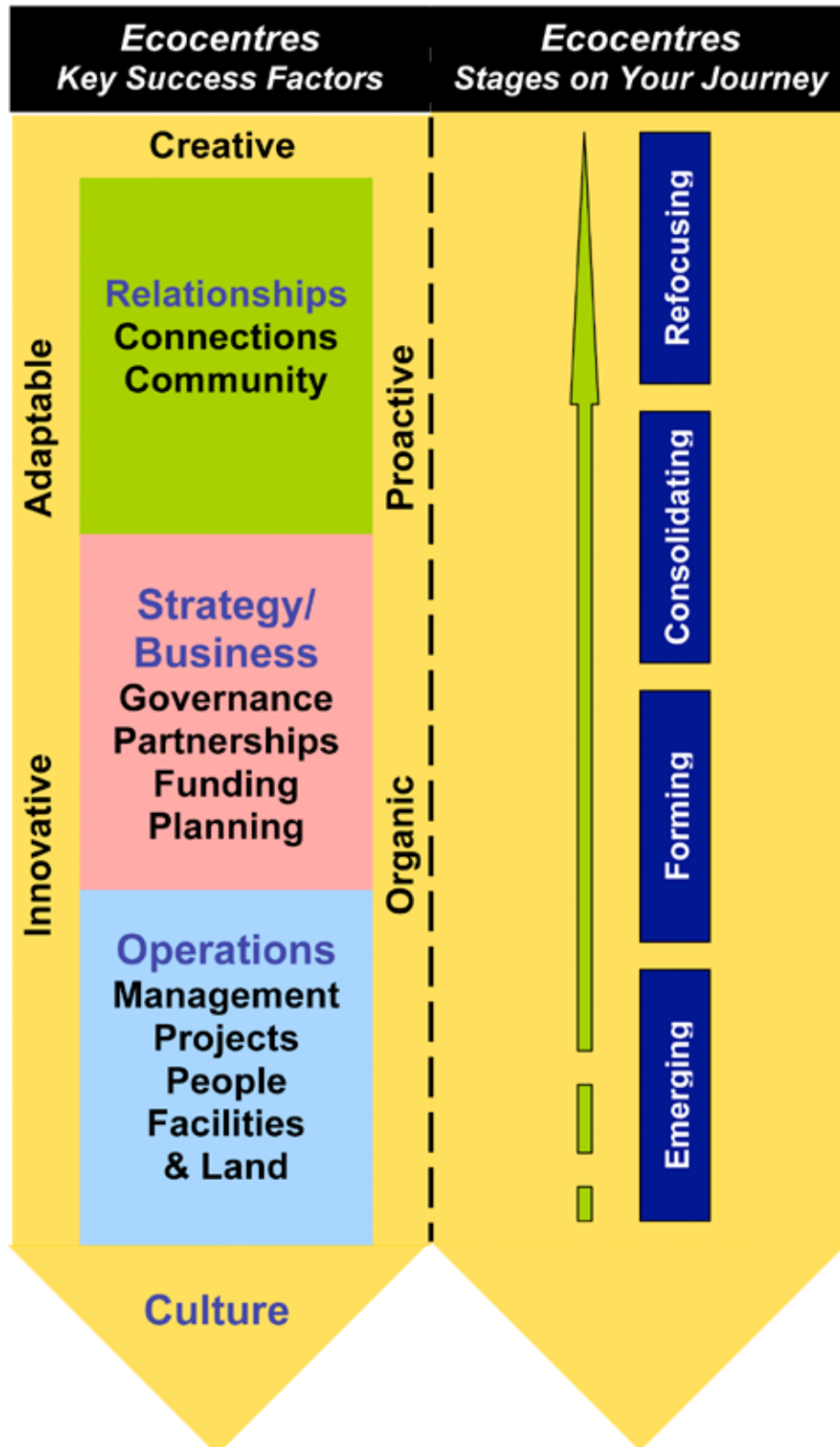
Bookmark 1.



Bookmark 2.

Cut out these two bookmarks and use them in the Travellers' Guide.

Note that there is no simple definition of an ecocentre, as each centre will vary according to its local community.





CHAPTER 2.

2. Introduction

Freddy

Freddy, an old Maltese gardener in the Southern European tradition, had several garden plots at CERES which provided vegetables for his family. In those days, people were only allowed to have one plot, but Freddy "... kept popping up in other plots in other names. Freddy and his friend Vince, from 8 years old, were growing food for their families from blocks of limestone. They knew how to garden. They were wonderful gardeners."

At this time, people in the cities were becoming interested in gardening and permaculture. One day, Eric sent Freddy off to a talk by an 'expert' gardener. Freddy was not impressed with all these fancy ideas. To him there is only one simple solution – "You work, work, work."

Eric believes that there are so many people, like Freddy, at CERES with precious knowledge that we need to draw out and record so that we can share it all with others.

(Story by Eric Bottomley, CERES. This story reinforces the idea of nurturing collective wisdom.)

2.1 What's In It for You?

Whether you are just getting started or continuing to sustain and grow an established ecocentre, this Guide will provide you with inspirational stories, tips and tools for success developed by experienced ecocentres. The Guide isn't a prescriptive checklist of things one must do, but a resource to help you get started and to help you along your journey, a resource for you to dip into when contemplating new ideas or reflecting on your progress. You can jump in at any part of the Guide, but even if you are at an advanced stage in the development of your centre, it's worth reflecting on the earlier stages along your journey, to make sure you haven't missed anything.



CERES tiling craft workshop

There will likely be pitfalls on your journey, but with this guide in your 'pack', the trail may be less bumpy. We've found that it's quite an adventure to create an ecocentre, but an enormously rewarding one. We hope your adventure will be easier and enriched by having the Travellers' Guide and knowing that others have travelled the road before.

2.2 How This Guide Came About

The *Guide* grew out of a strong desire to support and connect community based ecocentres. We knew that what we were doing at the Port Phillip EcoCentre, CERES and Iramoo ecocentres, among others, was helping to build healthy sustainable communities. Yet, there continues to be many challenges in forming and growing these centres. We also knew there was much to gain from ecocentres collaborating. How could we become better at what we do, work more with others, provide leadership and bring ecocentres together?

We'd been receiving a growing number of requests for support from other emerging ecocentres, and undergoing a growth in our own demands and complexity. We felt our best response was to collaboratively reflect on our journey so far and to think about our futures as ecocentres and how we could develop in the future.

By getting together and sharing our experiences, we discovered we had a lot in common, but we each had our own unique stories, closely knit to the different communities and environments from which we had grown. We'd all nearly 'fallen off our bike' on numerous occasions, but had all navigated our way through these pitfalls and each time emerged with some form of evolution in our organisation; a step in growth and richness. As facilitators of learning and behaviour change, we too needed to learn and change, and we have learnt a lot from each other. Working together and growing a network of ecocentres will assist us all to do our work even better.

2.3 Types of Ecocentres

We have observed that there are a number of ways that ecocentres can develop:

- A group of local people in the community bands together and develops a centre either independently or in partnership with another organisation, such as a university or local council. (This is the most common type of ecocentre and includes Port Phillip EcoCentre, Iramoo and CERES.)
- A local council sets up an ecocentre on council land. Funding comes, at least initially, from the council or through user pays. Later on, the staff at the centre may apply for additional funding through grants. (An example of this type is Edendale Farm in the Shire of Nillumbik.)
- A neighbourhood house, which had previously run community programs, now includes sustainability programs. (An example of this type is Jika Jika Community Centre.)
- An environmental education centre transforms into an ecocentre, expanding beyond school and adult education programs.
- A school expands its sustainability programs to develop an ecocentre.
- An environmental group develops an ecocentre. Examples of such groups could include:
 - A community farm, garden or park
 - A Climate Action Group
 - A Landcare group, which had previously worked mainly on biodiversity

Obviously, all ecocentres are different and will develop along their own unique path. However, we believe that the features, success factors, issues and principles identified in this *Guide* will be common to all ecocentres at some point in their development, irrespective of their origin, governance structure or focus. Staff from a number of other ecocentres have provided feedback that this is the case.

2.4 Ecocentres as Sites of Learning and Behaviour Change

Ecocentres can be very effective at motivating people to change towards living and working more sustainably, if staff understand and apply knowledge of the key factors that bring about learning and behaviour change. While the understanding of this is far from perfect, there is sufficient knowledge available to optimise the chances that learning and change will happen. It turns out that ecocentres, in the ways that are described in this *Guide*, have in-built factors that optimise these chances.

Changing people to act more sustainably involves a lot more than providing information. Ecocentres have come to understand this, by moving beyond information boards, leaflets and static demonstrations. Ecocentres incubate change by building linkages between people into networks of shared concern, trust and exchange of expertise. These are key factors in motivating people to learn and change, whether they are just beginning to engage with sustainability issues or wanting to move on to the next step.

“We can link together programs that support behaviour change in a few [people ... so that they] also encourage others to change via personal and social connections.”

McKenzie-Mohr, 2000

Staff at many ecocentres understand that, to get change, there has to be a culture of non-judgemental, helpful and supportive learning, and triggering moments that are prompted by those with some sort of personal relationship with the person on the brink of choosing to make a change.

People attending ecocentres report on the value they get from having places with:

- broadly shared values
- hands-on workshops and explorations
- mutual support and encouragement from others on the same journey of discovery and change
- advice offered in non-confrontational and non-technical ways.

People at ecocentres receive significant value from the ongoing nature of ecocentres, because often change takes time to flow through from intention to action. They also gain from the local and regional context in which ecocentres are embedded and which can more easily give rise to appropriately shaped solutions. In addition, ecocentres have the capacity to allow levels of practical

tinkering and invention that are outside the scope of most other agencies and organisations.

In summary, ecocentres are able to bring together the key personal, interpersonal, social, technical, practical, ethical and persistence factors that studies of learning and change tell us are needed to get effective change. For a more detailed look at learning and behaviour change models and how they relate to ecocentres, please refer to **Tool 4** (Page 54).

People are much more receptive in their own environments and when messages come from their peers [so ...]

- Target people who are already connected to each other through social networks (ie. employers, community groups).
- Spend time with people / groups in their territory. Listen for what they value first; invite them into your project.

Castlemaine 500 Project, 2009

2.5 Learning-based Change Stories

Through the Port Phillip EcoCentre's (PPEC) Eco School Partnership program, we work in partnership with whole school communities in a setting where we are all learners and teachers. Together we:

- identify opportunities for improvement through auditing current practice and ecological footprinting
- imagine improvements to help shape the future
- connect with nature to nourish enthusiasm and inspire imagination
- collaboratively design, build and grow practical projects

Elwood College

Students, teachers, parents, PPEC staff and volunteers have worked together to: create a vision and plan for a sustainable school through the AuSSI Vic framework; designed and built productive gardens; conducted water audits and obtained \$100,000 in funding for water saving projects; and improved local natural habitats through community planting days.

PPEC has also worked with Elwood College to deliver *Tomorrow's Leaders for Sustainability* – a program that helps young people understand and appreciate the key principles and issues of sustainability, while also gaining the knowledge and skills to become leaders in their chosen career. Students put their new skills into action through



Elwood College students on work experience with the Port Phillip EcoCentre

Graduates have commented:

"It's fun, really beneficial, I would love to do it again, it's inspired us to start a green team at school and a school eco-centre".

"I feel like I can do anything and change people's opinions on global warming."

"It gives you a huge understanding and empowerment."

"It builds community in class."

group projects either within the school or in the wider community. Achievements are shared and celebrated through a presentation and graduation event.

Through this partnership between the PPEC and Elwood College students, parents and teachers have become involved in community events including the Climate Change Human Sign, PPEC festivals, community gardens, and online social networking to communicate sustainability events and activities.

Port Phillip Urban Fresh Food Network (PPUFFN) Forum

The Port Phillip Urban Fresh Food Network (PPUFFN) runs quarterly public forums to promote local food, making the transition to a more sustainable food system. Local residents of all ages are invited to discuss and try out new ways to access fresh food locally. These experiential forums have involved developing a vision for sustainable food systems in Port Phillip, food swaps, cooking, eating, workshops, presentations and the development of action groups who work on projects to help people get involved in growing and sharing fresh food.



Wendy of the Port Phillip EcoCentre,
PPUFFN Coordinator

A local restaurateur was inspired to completely transform purchasing practices to locally sourced food after an experiential activity at a PPUFFN forum involving eating an imported jelly bean and contemplating all the jobs involved in its production. Media articles and mini-documentaries have helped to celebrate and share these stories. PPUFFN is connecting with the emerging Transitions Towns group in Port Phillip.

A Story from Iramoo – Seedlings for Schools

An early project at Iramoo was growing local native plants for school gardens. Our ranger had the idea of offering schools boxes of seedlings at a reduced rate so that they could sell them on at school fund-raisers, in the place of chocolates or other less healthy alternatives. This in turn led to a renewed interest in local native plants, and schools wanting Iramoo to work with their staff and students to develop local indigenous gardens. Ecocentres are about finding win-win solutions that benefit communities, the environment and help economically to support the centre.



CHAPTER 3.

3. What We Learnt From the Pioneer Travellers

Port Phillip EcoCentre Strategic Planning

“To develop a strategic plan the EcoCentre brought in an external facilitator, Pat Armstrong, who used Guide Beside approaches and tools. A full day workshop with EcoCentre staff and volunteers, the committee of management, affiliated groups and representatives from the local community, including residents and council staff, enabled us to develop a shared vision and goals.

Using an external facilitator was of great value, providing process, a fresh perspective and a neutral person who is not attached to particular people, ideas or agendas.”

Story told by Caroline Packham Port Phillip Ecocentre. This reflective story shows the power, benefits and costs of strategic planning and the changing nature of the planning process itself. You can read more of this story on page 98.



The accumulated ‘wisdom’ from the ecocentre pioneers is included below to help identify some of the issues and challenges around setting up ecocentres, but also to highlight the enormous commitment by and dedication from key individuals in each of the centres.

3.1 About Ecocentres

What is an Ecocentre?

Just like sustainability, there is no simple definition of an ecocentre, as each will vary with its local community. However, we did learn from the three ecocentres that they:

- are grassroots organisations that evolved out of local environmental, place-based sustainability issues. They are, as a result, complex and context based.
- exhibit many similarities (such as local empowerment, self reliance, community and

networking), but differ because of the local issues that are their foci. The ecocentres have benefited and grown through networking with each other and the sharing of ideas and strategies.

- share key purposes (such as developing community, promoting sustainable living, educating for sustainability, reconnecting people with the environment), although they are achieved in different ways (varying approaches towards innovation, advocacy and program delivery).
- have a lot in common in terms of their:
 - pathways of development
 - major issues and challenges
 - many overarching strategies to deal with problems and issues
 - vary in the scale and diversity of their activities. They have common themes, but have differences

The Nature of Ecocentres

We learnt that ecocentres are complex in nature, as they operate and persist through multiple activities, and also deal with multiple strands/disciplines.

We were not surprised to learn that all the ecocentres have been innovative. Some interpretations of this include:

- Changing people's respectful relationship with natural environment
- Quadruple bottom line approach
- Locally relevant projects, such as creek restoration
- Social programs, such as the community gardens at CERES
- Doing things differently to mainstream ... the key point has been building people's relationship with the environment and continually flying the 'flag' so that 'environment matters' i.e. keep environment in people's minds ...

We found that sharing between the ecocentres expands their resource base, tapping into the knowledge and experience of other centres, to reflect on progress and talk through and generate new ideas with others. Collaboration provides support, inspiration to keep going and access to tools and resources developed by others. This is particularly important for staff at smaller ecocentres.



*"Sustainability is like love.
We can't define it, but we all
know what it is."*

(Peter Newman – Western
Australian State Sustainability
Strategy)

*"Ecocentres bring people
together, push boundaries,
invent sustainable solutions,
and sign people up."*

(Colin Hocking, Iramoo)

*"An ecocentre is a community
place that is a repository of
local knowledge and ideas and
provides resources for people
with passion and who want
to achieve positive sustainable
futures – a pushbike with
wheels pumped ready for
someone to use"*

(Neil Blake, Port Phillip)

Connecting With Traditional Owners and Indigenous Cultures

Every ecocentre develops in individual ways that fit its particular circumstances. This applies to relationships with the traditional owners of the land within which an ecocentre is located, and the range of indigenous cultures and people that might become associated with the ecocentre. Each of the three participating ecocentres has strong positive relationships with traditional owners and there are consistent trends running through these relationships.

At the heart of these relationships is essentially what lies at the heart of ecocentres themselves; reconnecting with one another and with the land. We need to do this in ways that promote ongoing, positive relationships and in ways that reverse our negative environmental impacts. Traditional owners have knowledge and experience of the land and know the stories of connection with the land that go back eons, beyond European presence. In a way, ecocentre participants and traditional owners are on parallel journeys to rediscover and renew ways in which we can live positively and sustainably with one another and with the land.

In practical terms, for ecocentres this translates into the following:

- Creating special places or spaces that acknowledge the ongoing association of traditional owners with the land on which the ecocentre is located
- Sharing or participating in practical projects that allow traditional owners and ecocentre people to get to know one another better, build shared understanding and increase trust
- Basing actions for reconciliation on what is possible and beneficial to everyone, rather than on romantic notions which assume that complicated histories and experiences can be easily untangled, just because people would like them to be
- Inventing positive ways that diverse views can be drawn on to help everyone reduce their environmental impacts and live in more sustainable ways.

We need to invent new, less material and more fulfilling lifestyles filled with the new stories that honour our past, reconcile our differences and help imagine what these new lifestyles will be. We can also incorporate new technologies that can help build strong relationships with one another and with the land.



Iramoo Aboriginal Rock



Port Phillip EcoCentre BBQ



CERES Aboriginal Education Program

The St Kilda Indigenous Heritage Trail

“Forging productive relationships with the local Indigenous community is central to our aim of a common future, but it takes time to build trust. Our approach was to help local Elders with the various land management strategies and development proposals they have to deal with. By delivering tangible support, we show we have their interests at heart; and we learn a lot in the bargain.”



Boon Wurrung Elder, Carolyn Briggs leading the trail walk

The fact that only a small percentage of modern ‘Australians’ have ever actually met an Indigenous person is a fundamental hurdle. So we set out to provide the wider community with a positive introduction to Indigenous people and culture. The Boon Wurrung Elders welcome and lead our celebrations and share their knowledge of caring for country and connecting with the environment through involvement in the PPEC education programs.

In 2007, in consultation with Boon Wurrung Elders, we organised an indigenous heritage walk from West Beach to the Ngargee Tree at St Kilda Junction. The tree is a beautiful, old River Red Gum; the oldest living thing in St Kilda. We had an indigenous tour guide, accompanied by the President of the St Kilda Historical Society and a local naturalist, who all took turns to speak along the way.

(Story told by Neil Blake from Port Phillip EcoCentre. This story captures the joy of working with local communities.)

The Blue Tongue Lizard in the Path



“At Iramoo we have an idea that if you return native vegetation and other natural features of the environment to an area then the animals will eventually return as well. This was illustrated when we connected together the downpipes of the buildings to catch the run-off and create wetlands around the buildings. Along with planting of shrubs, the water attracted blue wrens to take up residence.

Later, with more planting of a diversity of wildflowers, we found that a young Blue Tongue Lizard had taken up residence in a hole next to one of the paths, right beside the toilets.”

(Story told by Colin Hocking. The story highlights how ecocentres are about valuing native plants and animals, and finding ways to re-establish our local connections with wild-life.)

3.2 Stages in the Development of an Ecocentre

We believe that there are four overlapping stages in the development of an ecocentre. Even if you are at an advanced stage in the development of your centre, it's worth reflecting on the earlier stages along your journey, to make sure haven't missed anything. These stages are as follows:



Emerging

In this stage, a group of people start meeting to investigate the possibility of setting up an ecocentre. They may investigate a possible site, they may visit other sites or speak with people in other ecocentres, they look at possible partnerships, they may start looking around for possible sources of funding, they start planning and they may even set up governance structures and incorporate.

Forming

In this stage, the group may have secured a site and possibly a building, they may have some seed funding, they start to plan buildings (or to retrofit an existing building), they start to develop partnerships, and they start to implement programs, projects and management systems.

Consolidating

In this stage, the group will be fairly well established with a building, land, sources of funding, education programs, one or more workable projects and paid or voluntary staff. However, in this stage, the group will start to reflect on how they are going and to embark on some serious strategic planning and reviewing of their programs and management and governance systems.

Refocusing/Reinventing

In this stage, the ecocentre may recognise that current systems are not working and that they will need to review and develop new systems. Often this recognition will be precipitated by a financial or management challenge / crisis. In order to survive, the ecocentre may have to make some hard decisions – to either return to core business or to reinvent itself/metamorphose into something larger or different. In the second of the two alternatives, there will be the need for stronger governance through a Committee of Management or a Board, sound financial management, accountable work teams and effective partnerships.

This model is summarised in the matrix in **Table 1**.

Tool 2 in the Appendices gives a more detailed version of this matrix. You could use the two matrices to identify where you are currently in the development of your ecocentre and to track your progress over time.

Table 1. Stages Along the Way on Your Journey as an Ecocentre

	EMERGING	FORMING	CONSOLIDATING	REFOCUSING/ REINVENTING
RELATIONSHIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies possible key stakeholders Identifies needs of core community interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops relationships with key stakeholders Gains support from key community interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consolidates key relationships Widens community engagement and recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversifies relationships Builds on widespread recognition & support
CULTURE Generic	Creative	Innovative	Adaptable/Responsive	Proactive Organic
CULTURE Stage specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows the culture to emerge and nurtures key generic cultural attributes Values diverse ideas and ways of contributing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops and defines the culture Identifies and acknowledges generic cultural attributes as these emerge Resilience - Identifies ways to address external negative views of sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consolidates and reviews the culture Resilience • Identifies ways to address possible internal and external issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revisits & adjusts the culture in expanded & diversified identity / operations Resilience • Identifies ways to address any financial and management crises
STRATEGY/ BUSINESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates/develops/discovers/ invents an initial identity Develops governance and management structures Develops first draft business plan, strategic plan and action plan Seeks funding and resources Investigates partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarifies and promotes identity Obtains funding and other core resources Refines governance and management structures Reviews strategic plan, business plan and action plan Develops new partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews and adjusts identity Maintains direction Obtains long-term funding and resources Prepares 3–5 year rolling strategic plan and business plan Builds partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extends/reformulates identity Forms Board with business skills Obtains more resources for governance and management Reviews and re-sets strategic & business plans Reviews and rebuilds partnerships
OPERATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigates possible start up management structures and programs Locates place/possible places Investigates and develops future 'flagship' programs and projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes operations at preferred place Establishes management and recruits staff and volunteers Reviews 'flagship' programs Develops first future operational plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops management systems for staff and volunteers Obtains larger grants Manages demand in growing complexity Expands and refines centre facilities and operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manages expansion & specialisation e.g. work teams Integrates new operations into revised structures Offers set-up consultancy services

3.3 Ten Important Tips for Each Stage of Your Journey

The *Travellers' Guide* was developed from our collective experiences in establishing and developing ecocentres. Below is a summary of our thoughts about what we see as important for each stage in the development of ecocentres. In Stage 1. Emerging, we have listed a number of suggestions under ten key headings, linking these, where relevant, to key **Tools** provided in this *Guide*. The tips listed for the other three stages are not as detailed as those in Stage 1. Emerging, as they build on the tips in Stage 1.

As mentioned earlier, you may be at a fairly advanced stage in your journey, but we suggest that you read the tips for each stage, just in case you have missed something along the way. We hope these tips will provide you with some guidance for your own unique journey, regardless of where your centre is at the moment.

Stage 1. Emerging

1. Working Group

Form a working group with passionate, committed people with strong local networks and which meets regularly. Establish effective meeting procedures.

2. Local Community Involvement

Investigate ways of involving your local community and establish mechanisms for listening to and tapping into the needs and interests of the local community. Involve volunteers in planning and the centre's projects and programs.

3. Market Research

Conduct market research into the need for an ecocentre, using a range of methods – surveys, interviews, focus groups etc.

4. Other Ecocentres

Visit or make contact with other ecocentres – consider joining an existing network of ecocentres or forming a new one (Refer to **Tool 15** in the Toolbox for a summary of Victorian, interstate and overseas ecocentres.) We have learnt the importance of learning from others; unity is strength.

5. An Effective Organisation

Start to develop an effective organisation by understanding the legal, social and ethical responsibilities of establishing an organisation in the 21st century, including: maintaining good records; understanding your financial responsibilities; understanding your duty of care towards staff and clients; establishing clearly defined organisational structures; articulating a vision and clear goals and making 'the main thing the main thing'; putting into place systems to show achievements and whether goals are being met (evaluation).

As a start, develop a draft/working business plan, with a clear vision, purpose and financial plan, plus a draft strategic plan that includes some or all of the following:

- Vision, mission, goals, objectives and possible strategies – consider aligning these with those of your local council (Refer to **Tool 6**.)
- Budget
- Target audiences and other stakeholders (This might include local schools, community groups, local indigenous group, local environmental groups and your local council.)
- Plan to obtain land, building, other facilities, program funding and core funding (administration and overheads)
- Plan for engaging the local community
- Plan for displays and education programs (Refer to **Tool 10**.)
- Sponsorship and fundraising plan
- Communications and marketing plan (Establish ways of promoting your successful programs to the local and wider communities and celebrating your successes. This is often poorly done by organisations. Also consider investigating your ‘brand’¹)
- Outcomes – short-term and mid-term
- Evaluation plan
- Risk assessment and Occupational Health and Safety Plan and procedures (Refer to WMAA document²)
- Suitable insurance – consider Public Liability, Professional Indemnity and Directors and Officers’ Liability
- Staff and volunteer recruitment procedures, including appropriate checks – Police or Working with Children Cards
- Staff and volunteer induction procedures (Refer to **Tool 9**.)

6. Governance Structure, Incorporation and Taxation

Develop a suitable governance structure for your centre – Committee of Management, Board, etc, in accordance with legal requirements (Refer to **Tool 4**.).

Consider setting up your centre as an appropriate legal entity (e.g. incorporation) and obtaining Australian Tax Office endorsement as a Deductible Gift Recipient and Income Tax Exempt Certification – this can take some time to achieve. (Refer to **Tool 4**.).

7. Partnerships

Explore and start to develop possible partnerships, especially with your local council.

¹ Brand is “The intangible sum of a product’s attributes: its name, packaging, and price, its history, its reputation, and the way it’s advertised.” (David Ogilvy)

² WMAA, 2009, Health and Safety Guidelines for Waste and Resource Recovery Educators in Victoria.

8. Funding and Resources

Enact your plan to obtain land, building, other facilities, project funding and core funding (administration and overheads). This is critical and can take some time. One council officer reported spending 12 months just to obtain suitable land and a building.

Gain the funds to operate effectively – aim for a three year plus operational budget (buildings, services, programs). It is also important: to know where to source relevant funds; to look ahead to future funding; to learn how to write good submissions and conduct presentations; and to structure your programs to realistically reflect the available funds.

9. Collaborative Programs and Projects

Consider collaborative programs with like-minded organisations. Learning with others can be a very powerful and successful way of achieving outcomes; limited resources can be better utilised and you can grow the expertise of your staff.

10. Flagship Programs and Projects

Identify 'flagship' programs and projects as your point of difference from other centres; the special thing(s) that will help you to attract staff and volunteers and promote your centre to partners, sponsors and the community in the future (e.g. Grasslands Restoration Project as the centre is next to a fantastic, native grassland that is home to a small population of an endangered legless lizard.)

Take time to promote and celebrate your achievements

Stage 2. Forming

1. Review your draft business plan and strategic plan, adding an annual action plan.
2. Establish governance and management structures, if not already established earlier, and terms of employment for paid and volunteer staff. If funding becomes available, recruit paid staff and start to involve volunteers.
3. Continue to look for opportunities to build and grow meaningful partnerships with your local council, and local environment, education, research and community groups.
4. Seek and secure land and possibly a building to retrofit, investigate possible sources of additional funding and apply for these funds.
5. Learn as much as you can about education for sustainability and encourage staff to continue to learn and grow, establish ways of finding out about professional learning opportunities and encourage staff to attend, and promote professional reading and staff discussions.
6. Develop projects and education programs, ensuring that these are adequately resourced. As funding allows, commence retrofitting an existing building or commence building a new centre, develop and build trails, interpretive displays and signage.

7. Develop suitable promotional materials – brochures, signage, website etc.
8. Hold community events and courses that will promote your ecocentre and continue to engage your local community.
9. Establish ways that allow creative ideas to be seeded and to grow in the organisation, be open to new ideas and ways of doing things, and be on the lookout for new opportunities.
10. Build evaluation and ongoing review into all your programs and projects.

Take time to promote and celebrate your achievements

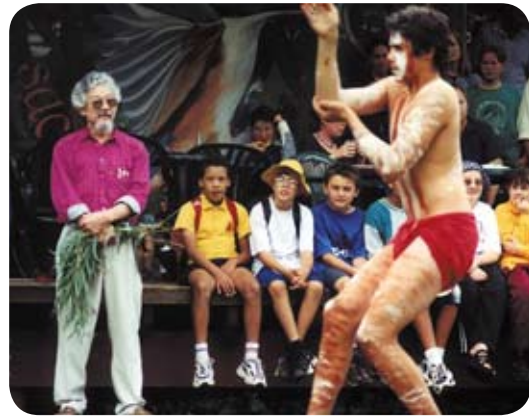
Stage 3. Consolidating

1. Conduct a thorough review of: your business, strategic, communication and marketing and action plans; the organisational structure; all your education programs and projects; and culture of your ecocentre. You may need to bring in an external facilitator to do this. However, be careful that you don't lose the essence of your ecocentre; what makes it so special.
2. Consider employing specialist staff in such areas as grant/proposal writing, communication, marketing, engineering, science, education and business management.
3. Continue to strengthen and build key partnerships, including collaborative programs and projects with research centres and other ecocentres.
4. Continue to hold community events and courses to promote your ecocentre and engage your local community.
5. Use evaluation to review and upgrade your programs and projects.
6. Maintain your ecocentre's buildings, trails, interpretive displays and signage.
7. Invest in strategies to prevent 'burnout' of key staff – e.g. mentor system, professional development, time off to network with other professionals.
8. Develop strategies for attracting and working with volunteers.
9. If required, upgrade the standard of your promotional materials – brochures, signage, website, using professional designers and IT support.
10. Develop a strategy to promote your programs and projects and to publish the results of these at conferences, in sustainability/environmental education journals and magazines, and on your website.

Take time to promote and celebrate your achievements

Stage 4. Refocusing/Reinventing

1. Conduct a regular review of your business, strategic and action plans and organisational management systems to ensure the continuing relevance of your centre to the community and its long-term financial viability.
2. Continue to use evaluation to review and upgrade your programs and projects. You may also need at this stage to invest time and resources in a process to seriously review the 'brand' and future direction of your centre. You may need to choose between two possible courses of action:
 - identify your core business and refocus on that
 - reinvent and possibly expand your ecocentre. (If you take this course, you may need to develop improved business and management systems, as well as new or modified programs and projects.)
3. Review and, if necessary, modify your governance body to include some members with key business skills, such as management, finance and marketing.
4. Review your staff organisational structure and consider modifying this to 'work teams' or 'cells' with clear plans and budgets, making the work teams financially accountable for their work area.
5. Seriously consider employing specialist staff in key business related areas, such as accountancy and business development.
6. Consider offering consultancy to assist other ecocentres which are at earlier stages of development.
7. Continue to hold community events and courses to promote your ecocentre and engage your local community.
8. Subject to funding, upgrade your ecocentre's buildings, trails, interpretive displays and signage.
9. Continue to improve the quality of your promotional materials – brochures, website –and modify according to any changes in direction and focus.
10. Continue to promote your programs and projects and to publish the results of these at conferences, in sustainability/environmental education journals and magazines and on your website.



Indigenous dancing at CERES

Take time to promote and celebrate your achievements

3.4 Ecocentres – Some Key Success Factors

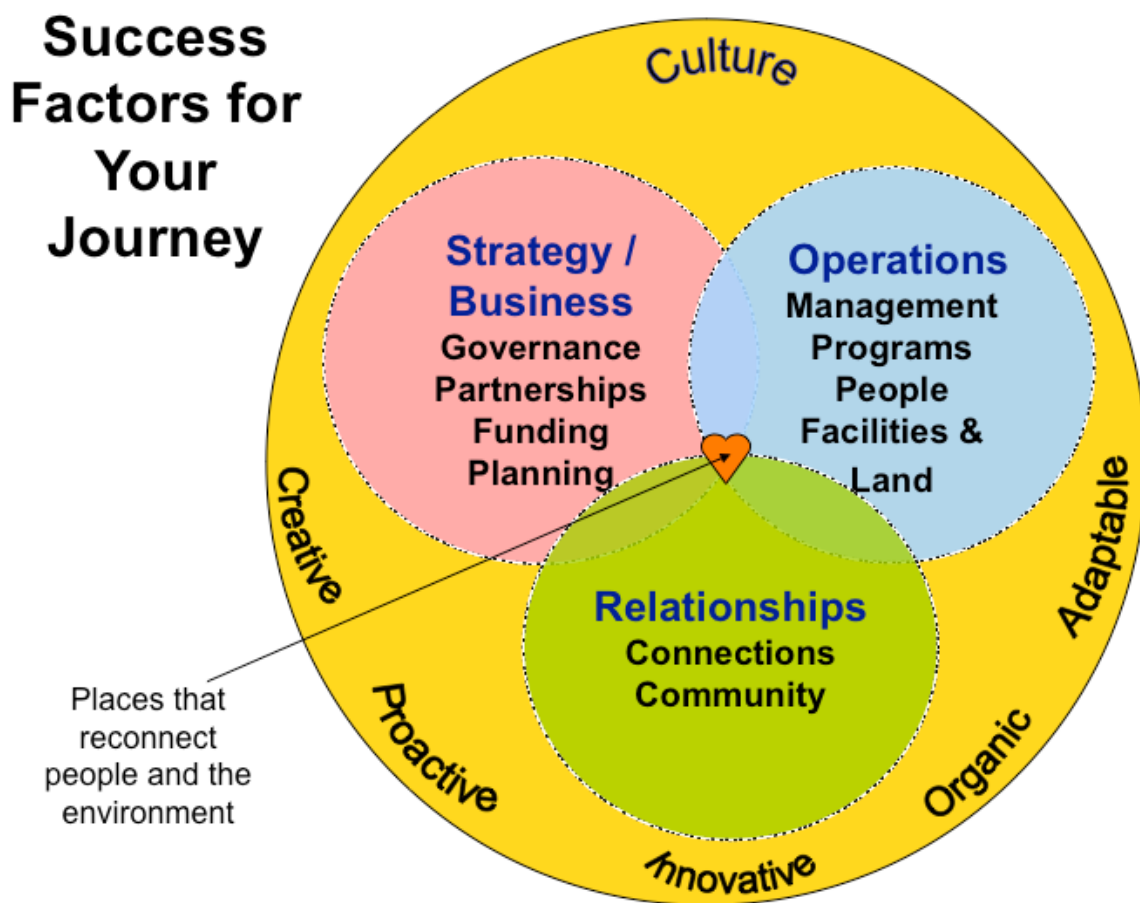


Figure 1. Success Factors on Your Journey

Relationships factors include building and nurturing engagement and commitment from the local community and creating a space that reconnects the community with each other and the local environment at the same time.

Culture factors are the special ways that ‘we do things in this place’. They include: being creative in structures, projects and programs; being innovative; adapting to changing circumstances; looking for and making the most of opportunities that arise (proactive); allowing the organisation to be organic and to evolve in response to the changing needs of the community; and, in relationships, being inclusive, open, sharing, caring and collaborative.

Strategy/Business factors include the business fundamentals, such as having an effective governance structure, building strong and lasting partnerships, obtaining adequate funding and developing workable strategies and plans.

Operations factors include effective management practices, developing and implementing relevant and dynamic programs (this includes education programs) and projects, managing staff and volunteers, creating inspiring facilities and looking after the land and the local environment.

Key Success Factors

A. Relationships

1. Connections

- Having a range of sustainability features, such as community gardens
- Being accessible to people, with a wide range of experiences, interests and backgrounds
- Having existing and potential interest points (e.g. an old landfill site or garden)
- Having a specific ecological attribute (e.g. creek, grasslands, gardens)
- Having diverse land use and features (e.g. plant nurseries, vegetable gardens)
- Having clear relationships values such as being inclusive, open, sharing, caring and collaborative (See Culture)

2. Community

- Involving a base of key 'signed up' and committed community people and retaining flexibility, as sometimes people turn up at the right time
- Involving a diverse community with a range of ideas and skills and backgrounds
- Fostering community ownership and involvement in governance and stewardship of the land
- Supporting local democracy in decision making
- Having a local, regional and global outlook
- Working with the enthusiasms of the community, while recognising and 'mining' the energy that aligns with the centre's purposes
- Building strong connections with strands of the local communities and building on these connections

B. Culture

3. Creative

- Fostering creativity in all aspects of the organisation's operations, projects and programs

4. Innovative

- Being at the 'cutting edge', being willing to try new ways of doing things working collaboratively with research groups and keeping up to date with developments and funding

5. Adaptable/Responsive

- Keeping a balance between achieving practical outcomes and keeping abreast of emerging issues. This means keeping a focus on practical outcomes, while still being responsive to emerging issues.
- Recognising that it takes a long time and sometimes dogged persistence to put an ecocentre on any sort of ongoing footing

- Balancing a multiplicity of factors such as:
- Normalising sustainability in the community
- Working with governments, but not dominated by governments
- Keeping a developmental edge
- Balancing ‘dreamers and doers’
- Being patient and persistent. (Setting up and maintaining ecocentres requires a huge commitment in time. It requires determination and a ‘call to duty’ of a few individuals. It is more than a job and often goes beyond a job description. It also takes time to gain community acceptance and to mainstream sustainability.)

6. Proactive

- Being alert and responsive to new opportunities for programs projects, partnerships and engagement by the local community

7. Organic

- Planning strategically, but also being adaptive to new/changing situations. (This requires combining strategic planning with complex, organic, reflective practice.)

... it takes a long time and dogged persistence to put an ecocentre on any sort of on-going footing – rigorous planning is essential from the outset to allow for responsive adaptability. Never lose sight of your vision and values.”

(Lisa Walton, Edendale, Shire of Nillumbik)

C. Strategy/Business

8. Governance/decision making

- Having a governance³ structure, with documentation, constitution, incorporated organisation (or equivalent status) and with charity status. This governance structure is supportive, inclusive, responsive and with some level of community ownership (e.g. involvement in future planning, inclusion in decision-making, participation in projects and programs. With council operated facilities, the governance structure should clearly define the operating relationship with Council with respect to decision-making, financial processes and accounting channels, accountability, reporting and budget / financial.)
- Having independence and security of tenure of facilities and land
- Being eclectic and open, but with well defined core and sustainability objectives

³ “Governance is the structure of relationships that bring out organisational coherence, authorise policies, plans and decisions, and account for their probity, responsiveness and cost-effectiveness ... Management is achieving intended outcomes through the allocation of responsibility, resources, and monitoring their efficiency and effectiveness.”

Source: Gallagher, 2001, p 2 Quoted in http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/publications/meeting_the_challenges/1.htm

9. Partnerships

- Developing key partnerships and supporters (e.g. local council, traditional owners and indigenous groups, universities and research groups, schools and education systems, outside groups and complementary organisations)
- Having support from key stakeholders
- Working smarter and collaborating more with local community groups, other ecocentres, local governments and businesses.
- Being able to manage multiple partnerships. However, partnerships are time and labour intensive, requiring attention and a high skill set – the more partners you have, the more resources and time are needed to manage these partnerships.
- Building a robust relationship with your local council (common purposes, shared projects, funding arrangements, connections with the local community. With council operated facilities, it may also mean building internal capacity.)

10. Funding

- Having sound and clear financial processes and accounting channels and systems
- Having on-going funding sources, including some for coordination/base activities
- Having diverse income sources (Note that with council operated facilities, local governments are more restricted in the range of grant funding from external sources for which they can apply.)

11. Planning

- Having a clear vision and clarity of purpose
- Developing a business plan, mid-term and long-term strategic plan and an annual action implementation plan (The business plan and the action plans should align/link to the strategic plans.)
- Having a clear marketing and communication plan
- Having processes in place to review and evaluate the effectiveness of programs (Program development and evaluation should be linked to the strategic plan.)

The Kingfisher

One day about 17 years ago, Eric was teaching a class in the CERES African village, standing in for the usual African teacher, who was ill. Eric and the children heard a thud outside the room. When they went outside to investigate, they found a small lump of feathers beneath the window. It was a kingfisher. As Eric picked it up, it shook its head and dug its claws into Eric's wrist. "It hung onto my wrist. I walked



around with my hunting kingfisher. The kids were wide eyed and agog. A Kingfisher in dirty old Merri Creek country. And here was a kingfisher. A few minutes later, the bird cleared its head and flew off. This story captured CERES imagination and we started the return of the kingfisher festival."

No one had heard of a kingfisher at CERES before. In recognition of this wonderful sighting, CERES commenced an annual festival called 'The Return of the Kingfisher'.

The bird's return seems to have followed the creek restoration activities of the Merri Creek Management Committee and other plantings. Eric says that people like to think romantically of CERES as being symbolised by the Kingfisher, but it is, paradoxically, a solitary animal. Eric thinks that a more appropriate animal would be the sulphur crested cockatoo, as it is found in groups, is opportunistic, all the birds in the group look after each other, and there appears to be a herd mentality. To Eric, the sulphur crested cockatoo symbolises CERES' stewardship of the land and "people coming together, sharing knowledge and tapping into ancient wisdom."

(Story told by Eric Bottomley, CERES. This story emphasises the role of stewardship for ecocentres.)

D. Operations

12. Management

- Having sound management practices and processes, including site management
- Establishing a collaborative, transformative and innovative culture (See Culture)
- Being open and inclusive

13. Programs and Projects

- Having a wide range of innovative and imaginative programs and projects that match demand and respond to local needs
- Applying Quadruple Bottom Line (QBL) approaches to programs and projects – environmental, social, economic and governance or ethical (to ensure good governance, values and behaviour)

14. People

- Having high quality staff (paid and volunteer) who are inventive, collaborative, committed, risk-takers, willing to take on challenges, persistent and resilient. (Ecocentres have staff with a range of skills and experiences, across different disciplines and often with multiple perspectives. This allows small organisations to do big things through synergies, teamwork and shared resources. Strategic planning should incorporate staff recruitment, retention and rewards to ensure that the right staff are hired from the outset and stay with the centre. This should also include up-skilling and training.)
- Demonstrating effective leadership at many levels
- Recognising when new combinations of skills are required, as this may require bringing in new people with the required combinations of skills (e.g. shifting beyond environmentalism to community sustainability may involve bringing people in with new skills, expertise and with fresh perspectives.)
- Having some staff from the local community

15. Facilities and Land

- Having a relevant, meaningful, accessible and feel good space
- Allowing for continuity, including continuous tenure for at least 15 years
- Having control of the land

The Sick Duck

“One day, we were all in a strategic planning session, with 14 of us sitting around tables when a boy brought in a sick duck. We just had to stop the meeting while one of us helped the boy with the sick duck. We needed to win the confidence of the community by being responsive rather than reactive.”

(Story told by Neil Blake, Port Phillip EcoCentre. To Neil the story stresses that staff need to be responsive to the needs of the local community.)



The 15-Year Bridge

"It took fifteen years, from the initial idea to construction, for a bridge to connect the university campus, the local community and the wildlife reserve. At the time of the initial proposal, there was little interest in community engagement from what is now Melbourne Water, and limited interest from the University and the Municipal Council in connecting with the wildlife park and local community. Serious discussions with Vic Urban and Melbourne Water proved fruitless and the project was let go. But following many years of activity in and around the grasslands, attitudes, relationships and interests changed. Suddenly the bridge appeared. Somehow over 15 years, enough of the ideas and presence here have got into the communication channels ... we've seen quite a few wished-for things arriving after we've given up. We'll put a plan out there and things sometimes arrive, even though we don't know how it's going to happen".

But following many years of activity in and around the grasslands, attitudes, relationships and interests changed. Suddenly the bridge appeared. Somehow over 15 years, enough of the ideas and presence here have got into the communication channels ... we've seen quite a few wished-for things arriving after we've given up. We'll put a plan out there and things sometimes arrive, even though we don't know how it's going to happen".

(Story told by Colin Hocking, Iramoo. This story is an example of the patience and persistence required by staff and the often the time required to turn dreams into reality.)



3.5 Principles/Organising Elements of Ecocentres

The research team found it very difficult to define an ecocentre. We have instead developed a set of principles or organising elements that we believe make up the essence of what ecocentres are about. These principles/organising elements are:

A Sense of Place

- a **meeting place** open to people with environmental interests, concerns and/or expertise
- a **physical space in a particular location**
(Each location may have a particular ecological feature(s) - in an urban or rural setting, which at first is not valued by the community, but which may then become more valued through the work of the ecocentre, e.g. creek at CERES, the native grasslands at Iramoo, the urban ecology at Port Phillip)
- a **place for reconnecting people with the environment** in a social setting

Ecocentres are human-scale hubs and rich places for ecoliving, strong, sustainable, nature connected communities.

(Colin Hocking, Iramoo)

Sustainability

- considering **environmental, social and cultural aspects of sustainability** AT THE SAME TIME –demonstrating and working out problems and issues in a **collaborative** way

- advocating and promoting **ecologically sustainable living and work practices**
- having **education for sustainability** as a core principle and pedagogy

Focus on Local Community

- valuing and welcoming **local knowledge and ideas**, and welcoming **diversity**
- focusing on **local and regional issues and projects, working in local communities** and **linking local action with global perspectives**

Ecocentres are community hubs that foster living sustainably and connect people through social activities and networks to the environment.

(Colin Hocking, Iramoo)

Diverse Approaches That Respond to Community Needs

- fostering **learning, behaviour change and capacity building**, all of which are consistent with best practice **learning-based change** principles and approaches
- being **open / inclusive / sharing** in a way that **reconnects** people, giving them the opportunity to join with other people and learn together
- being involved in **PRACTICAL PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS** that help bring together learning, exploring, practising, inventing, celebrating and human capacity building in a collaborating community of learners
- being where the **culture embodies the agreed values**
- demonstrating **leadership**, being at the **leading edge** and practising effective **team work**
- being a **demonstration site** with information and resources – the one-stop shop for living sustainably

The Sausage Rolls

“In the early days at CERES, there were only three of us doing the teaching and we had very little money. The café had just been built, but there was not enough money to install a new stove. Someone found an old stove in a hard rubbish collection and connected it up in the café. The stove worked well, but the door would not stay up, so we had to prop it up with a broom handle



We became very enterprising and decided to sell hot sausage rolls to the students in the programs, so I persuaded my daughters to make large batches of sausage rolls. Before a program commenced, we would take orders from the students and, at the appropriate time, someone would put the sausage rolls in the stove. We designed the programs so that the rolls would not burn – at about the half-way point one of us would pop into the café and turn the sausage rolls. When the program was over, we would then deliver the perfectly browned sausage rolls to the students. This enterprise made us \$2,000 a year, but it was a hard way to make money.”

(Story told by Eric Bottomley, CERES. This story demonstrates the need for ecocentres to be resourceful, enterprising and adaptable.)

3.6 Key Issues and Challenges (Warning Signs)



This section gives some suggested ideas, based on the experience of the three ecocentres, for how they addressed issues and challenges in each of the four stages of development of an ecocentre. The term ‘supporting body’ is used in this section to describe an organisation which might own the land and/or building used by the ecocentre.

1. Emerging

Issue/Challenge	Examples of Responses by Experienced Ecocentres
1. Difficulty in defining the purpose that aligns to the interests of the supporting body and community interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Obtained funding to communicate the value and purposes of the site• Put on events / hold discussions to engage with supporting body and community• Developed name and communications material (pamphlet, website etc)• Focused on community building and fostering relationships – e.g. a ‘friends’ group• Developed links with Indigenous groups• Developed shared goals or align goals with those of the supporting body
2. Obtaining a physical base	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assessed various options, made recommendations and submitted proposals to appropriate body (e.g. council)

Issue/Challenge	Examples of Responses by Experienced Ecocentres
3. Securing land – getting it protected & obtaining custody	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built political allies & stakeholder support • Recognised and took advantage of opportunities – e.g. special Commonwealth legislation for assisted land protection • Applied advocacy/activist skills – research, publicity and communications, negotiations, strategic planning
4. Lack of resources to grow physical space and programs in order to become a useful place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed program grant applications and conducted ongoing research to keep the concept moving • Used salvaged furniture and other resources • Developed school and adult education programs, linked to some extent with supporting body and community interests • Built relationship with Indigenous organisations and people
5. Difficulty for the supporting body to embrace Education for Sustainability: i.e. learning about the environment, in the environment and for the environment (The difference between the theoretical and the practical)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognised the right moments to push for recognition and resources • Developed goals and programs that align with the policies and strategies of the supporting body • Developed program partnerships
6. Developing a clear vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formed a Community Working Group, with support from the supporting body and meet regularly • Conducted a visioning session with stakeholders • Invited ideas from local community groups • Conducted surveys of stakeholders to gather ideas
7. Developing an organisational structure, policy and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed task teams, research and visited other ecocentres • Used a consensus approach to decision-making
8. Securing ongoing support from local Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented future goals (based around Council corporate objectives) and reported on progress
9. Building wider support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a website and promotional material
10. Setting up the centre as a legal entity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established the centre as either an Incorporated Association or other appropriate legal entity • Liaised with other local groups for the centre to be an ‘umbrella’ organisation, enabling it to apply for Deductible Gift Recipient Status and Income Tax Exempt Certification
11. Establishing credibility and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed showcase projects (e.g. PPEC set up the Westgate Park frog habitat project with three-year funding from Holden via Landcare) • Developed project plans (e.g. PPEC developed an EcoHouse project concept plan, which was presented to and endorsed by their Council, with subsequent State government funds and committee) • Be creative (e.g. Iramoo had difficulty in becoming a University recognised activity centre, so they re-defined their purpose as a community engagement centre with research and education capacity) • Developed a ‘brand’ and a communication and marketing plan

Issue/Challenge	Examples of Responses by Experienced Ecocentres
12. Mixed interest from Council or supporting body in having a field study resource/outdoor learning space – no connection with local land; environment is not seen as a priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secured funds to manage land • Linked to research output, if a university • Learned to take their time, to move slowly • Built support with people from other areas (e.g. Iramoo built support with areas / faculties of the university and some involved in the community) • Linked to existing community initiatives
13. Obtaining finances and grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applied for funding from sponsors, grants and philanthropic groups (e.g. Iramoo successfully applied for funding for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - field station development - facilities and student research - community building)
14. Political tensions and conflicts – major challenge of re-structure and related upheavals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a better understanding of supporting institutions (e.g. university, local council, community), the networks, the relationships – finding the common ground/common interest) • Let go of anger (useful book – In the Tiger's Mouth)
15. Difficulties of building community connection / engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tried different methods of community engagement • Found events to interest community leaders – target/meet needs • Created positive futures

2. Forming

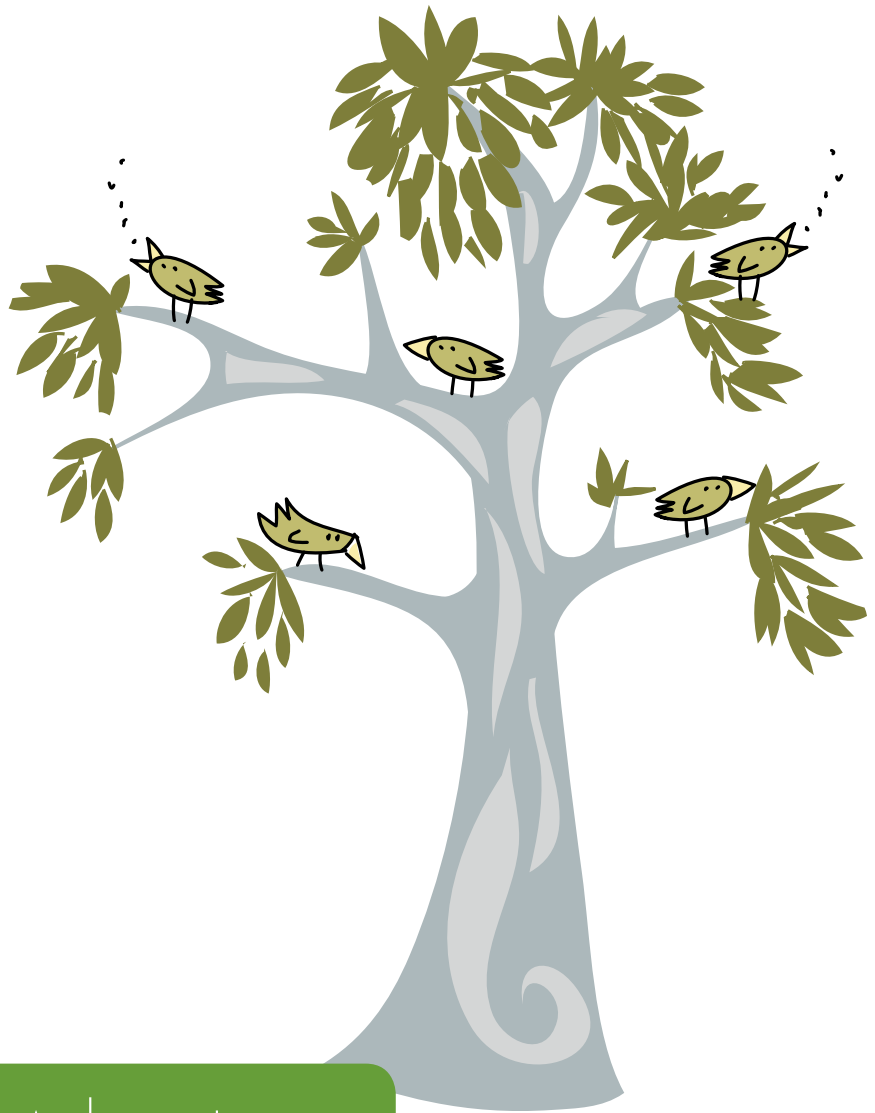
Issue/Challenge	Examples of Responses by Experienced Centres
1. Maintaining an effective committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruited members from the community and affiliate groups • Conducted meetings using effective meeting practices (e.g. established clear meeting agendas and minutes, start and finish on time, show respect for participants)
2. Resourcing delivery of complex project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared a budget to employ staff to manage programs (e.g. PPEC employed a part-time project officer to convene the Eco-house Working Group, seek funds and liaise with the building architect, suppliers and funding bodies)
3. Expanding community reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established education programs • Mentored fledgling groups • Broadened community programs (e.g. PPEC achieved this through food security and humanity gardens and the “Love the Bay” project)
4. Building community credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfilled an environmental advocacy role • Maintained links with existing and active community groups • Built a relationship with the local indigenous community, through practical support (e.g. PPEC helped the local indigenous community respond to archaeological assessments and cultural heritage management plans.) • Sought and delivered partnership programs and projects

Issue/Challenge	Examples of Responses by Experienced Centres
5. Achieving short- and long-term financial survival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built income generating programs (e.g. iconic programs such as grasslands & biodiversity education) • Developed financial management processes • Developed a business case for new programs – new ways of attracting interest and value from council or supporting body
6. Accommodating organisational growth (as there are more demands on limited staff)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated staff and committee time to fund raising • Recruited new skilled people wherever possible, with existing staff providing invaluable support (Iramoo call this latter group the ‘grey greenies’) • Coordinated staff and volunteers with a notice board, on which any new ideas / projects are posted prior to putting into action • Developed a succession plan for key staff
7. Managing, growing and coordinating partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicated well • Worked on joint programs • Have a coordinator for each programs • Developed strategic plans around partners & for each partner
8. Retaining identity and ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintained relationships with key people from supporting body • Developed programs and projects that help define the purposes of the centre, the land & facilities (e.g. Iramoo’s grasslands restoration project) • Identified benefits in terms of interest to supporting body and other partners and collaborators (e.g. especially to the local council)
9. Tension between community, biodiversity and the supporting body (identifying core business and balancing related multiple purposes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used a win-win approach (e.g. Iramoo’s Green Web project – refer to Tool 10 Sample Community Project) • Attempted to solve multiple needs for multiple users
10. Identifying programs and audiences – expanding iconic programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted market research (using Les Robinson¹ approaches and public relations students) • Conducted action/on-ground research/engagement
11. Overall coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopted clear lines of communication • Developed a planned, coordinated approach • Allowed procedures to develop organically as needs change – in order to keep balance

3. Consolidating and Leading

Issue/Challenge	Examples of Responses by Experienced Centres
1. Staff retention and burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced staff mentored less experienced staff, creating a learning ground culture. • Supported training, professional development, networking, collaborations and career development • Encouraged planning, reflection, celebrations and team building • Encouraged staff to take annual leave (and not let it accumulate) • Allowed time for staff to 'connect with nature'
2. Consensual approach and financial management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a cellular management model. (CERES found that it was very time consuming to talk to everyone about everything. To manage this, they set up a cellular management model, with each cell having its own budget and area manager – there are currently 16 such groups. Some cells are designed to make money e.g. the café, nursery, education, while some cells are designed to spend money e.g. site maintenance and infrastructure development.) • Set up detailed financial management system. (CERES found that by developing this cellular management model, finances are much better organised now than in the past. This detailed financial planning involves monthly accruals. If a section/cell is more than \$3,000 over budget, the area manager must go to the committee with a plan to recover. If they do not recover, they risk being shut down.) • Developed a Board of Management. (The CERES Board of Management is relatively new. It is made up of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the team leader from each of the 16 cells of activity– all team leaders have on-ground experience - committee of management - community representatives - local council representatives)
3. Creating a creative and opportunistic culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Captured opportunities at the forefront of change
4. Getting a balance of perspectives for decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the Committee/Board of Management level, had experts/people with mix of backgrounds in sustainability and local community as well as in business/marketing/finance
5. Accountability of staff, not knowing what's going on.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed clear lines of communication • Developed a culture that values accountability (with matching behaviours, symbols and systems. A good reference for this is <i>Walking the Talk</i>)
6. How to manage multiple sites and multiple partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considered legal agreements (However, CERES found that managing multiple partners and building partnerships also requires loyalty and trust.)

Issue/Challenge	Examples of Responses by Experienced Centres
7. Maintaining relationships during growth periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a cellular management model. However, people still may only know people in their own team and related teams, but not get to know everyone. This is the nature of large organisations. • Conducted whole of organisation planning days and social functions to allow people to get to know those in other teams. (CERES has a 'grand assembly' for everyone once every three years to review their vision. It is too expensive to do this more often with the large number of staff.)
8. Coordination between cells and teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held an annual assembly of work areas – managers/team leaders get together to build links and check what is happening across the groups. • Developed organisational management systems e.g. Viable Systems Model (refer Tool 7)
9. Dependency on government funding, having too narrow an economic base, and hence being financially vulnerable. (Reliance on grants is risky, time consuming and might not always be successful. Furthermore, there are often significant delays in receiving government funding, making cash flow very problematic.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigated ways of generating business on site – e.g. café, nurseries, school student visits, special environmental courses and shop. (CERES set up business arms, with 75% of total income now generated through on-site business.) • Explored consultancy services, e.g. home energy audits, garden advisory services, consultancies for other ecocentres



Adversity to Advantage



“The CERES staff had long recognised that they had three key adverse features about their site – mud from the clay cover over the landfill, the once dirty Merri Creek and the powerlines. However, the staff used these features as ingredients for making money. They used the mud in a student activity to make mud bricks for the African village; the creek was used for a student activity to study macro invertebrates; and the powerlines were integrated into a student activity to measure and map electromagnetic radiation.”

(Story by Eric Bottomley, CERES. In this story Eric explains how every locality has unique features which could be seen as adversities, but he suggests that operators of ecocentres should learn to make good use of these.)

CHAPTER 4.

4. The Journey

The three ecocentres in this project found collaboration to be of great value. We found that collaborative programs enabled us to learn with others and allowed us to ‘refuel, repair and stock up supplies’. We all need to keep learning and changing, so that we too can facilitate learning and change within our own organisation and with the community with whom we work.

Professional development links you with other people, extending your networks, builds your own skills and confidence, and gives you tools and resources. Bringing in external facilitators to help with your planning, allows you to reflect on progress, identify gaps and opportunities, fix things that aren’t working, provides experiential learning, team building and new tools, and refreshes your vision and planning.



4.1 Professional Development and Networks

Professional development not only provides new skills and tools, but also helps refresh valuable personnel, helping them to avoid burnout, giving them the space to learn and connect with other networks – this can be a very worthwhile investment in resources and time.

The following groups provide valuable professional development:

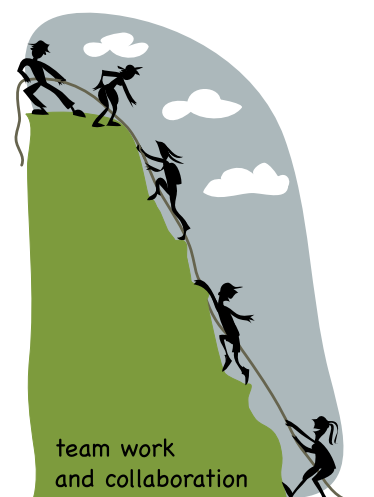
Professional Development

Victorian Association for Environmental Education (VAEE)

VAEE provides ongoing professional learning, networking opportunities and updates on news, events and resources for sustainability educators, which are based on collaborative and transformative practice. The Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) is the national professional organisation for sustainability educators.

<http://www.vaee.vic.edu.au/>

<http://www.aaee.org.au/>



Guide Beside

The Guide Beside is a professional learning program, delivered through VAEE. In essence, *The Guide Beside* is new generation professional development for sustainability educators, using best practice collaborative and transformative approaches for learning and change for sustainability. The four key interlocking themes that form the basis of *Guide Beside* professional development are: Facilitating Learning-based Change; Strategic Planning; Evaluation; and Building Partnership. These themes are the result of extensive consultation and over four years of focused action research with experienced practitioners across a wide range of sectors and organisations, including ecocentres. Senior staff at Iramoo have played a major role in the development and delivery of *The Guide Beside* Program.

<http://www.vaee.vic.edu.au/Projects/guidebeside%20info.htm>

Toolbox for Change

Led by Greening Australia, The Toolbox for Environmental Change forum is an annual event that showcases practical and innovative models for effective environmental and sustainability programs. It provides models for schools to take action and be part of the solution.

<http://www.greeningaustralia.org.au>

Networking

Allowing time to connect with local, as well as regional networks helps to build partnerships, start collaborations and engage with the community through other organisations and groups. Connecting with your local council can help you identify local forums and networking events.

4.2 Rest, Connect, Reflect

Connecting with traditional owners, nature, your team and other people can help you refuel and be re-inspired. Reflecting together is valuable in sharing your learnings and shaping future directions.

4.3 Bringing in New Skills and External Facilitators and Mentors

Bringing in new skills, approaches and perspectives through either in-kind assistance, volunteers, collaborative projects or external facilitators can provide a valuable boost to an ecocentre's capacity to change and develop new plans and innovations.

Refer to **Tool 7** which provides a case study from the Port Phillip Ecocentre Soft Systems Methodology and **Tool 8** which provides the strategic planning processes and plan used by Iramoo.

4.4 Celebrate and Evaluate

Celebrating achievements along the way helps you to reflect on your progress and energises all those involved. Celebrations also provide an opportunity to promote achievements, build relationships and engage partners in your activities. This can help win continued support from your participants and partners.

Evaluation frameworks are best developed at the planning phase. Evaluation helps to recognise and document achievements, identify unexpected benefits and outcomes and inform improvement. Evaluation enhances reflective practice and can help form an action research approach, so that you can continually improve what you are doing. If you don't evaluate what you are doing, how can you be sure you are making a difference? Documenting outcomes also assists in maintaining support and funding of your activities, and can help shape future directions. Working with external evaluators is valuable in bringing in expertise, a different perspective and an independent opinion.

4.5 Collaborating Along the Way

Learning from Collaboration

Ecocentres are meeting places of multiple interests. Their business is to build partnerships, to do what is not happening and fill in the gaps. Collaborating and partnering between ecocentres, therefore, is an important component of their core business.

Networking between ecocentres is usually the starting point for collaboration; it is where ideas are hatched. Collaborative activities help build upon and extend pre-existing shared interests. Specific collaborations, however, arise out of more general networking and other types of partnering and shared connections (personal, strategic, professional, programs).

Collaborations usually have fuzzy starting points. It is not always clear how the collaboration will work. It requires an openness of discussion where possible ideas and directions are considered.

Participating ecocentres often perceive multiple needs in the collaboration, and what will work in an overlapping and shared milieu needs to be determined. Thus, collaborative programs can develop in different ways for the participating ecocentres.

Principles of Collaboration

Good collaborative programs:

- are usually slow to build and may have multiple outcomes for the partners
- are based on identifying and clarifying common purpose and needs
- require time for participants to meet, discuss and reflect
- require supportive funding to be built into the program costs, especially at the planning stage
- often evolve out of personal relationships that are based on shared values, outlook and wider purpose. Openness in discussion and trust in decision-making is essential.
- require leadership roles around knowledge of strategic and practical 'how to'
- involve continual and evolving strategies and actions as well as shared reflective practice

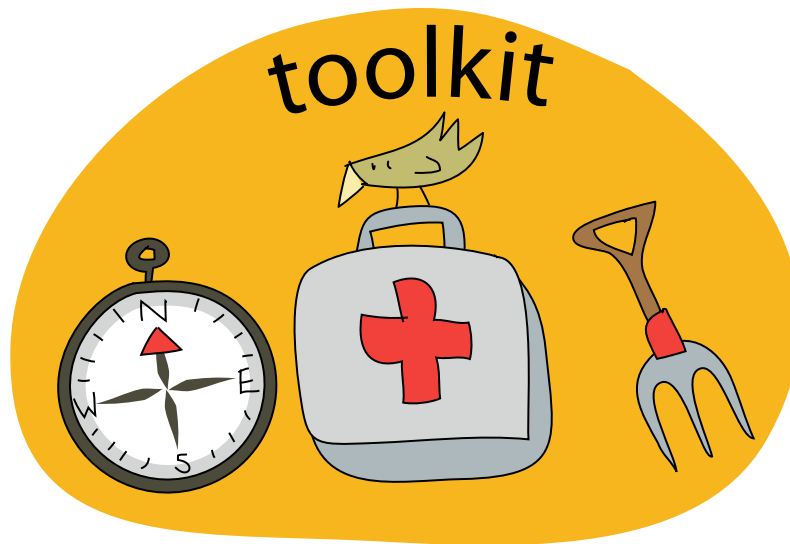
Values of Collaboration

Collaborative practices:

- help keep ecocentres going and growing
- help new ecocentres to establish how they operate and what they can do
- are good ways of developing something new
- help clarify ways of making inroads in communities
- can be of value to ecocentres in establishing and developing specific strands in their strategic direction and activities, as well as helping shape overall strategic directions
- help deliver deep sustainability learning practices and actions in community groups and individuals

CHAPTER 5.

5 Tools to Bring on the Journey



Like all good travellers, you will need to a well equipped toolkit for your journey. The following tools were selected to help you build this toolkit:

1. A Checklist for Your Successful Journey
2. Matrix for the Stages in the Development of an Ecocentre
3. Ecocentres as Sites of Learning and Behaviour Change
4. Ecocentre Governance Structures
5. Soft System Methodology
6. Sample Strategic Planning Process and Plan
7. Sample Strategic Project Plan
8. Sample Community Project
9. Iramoo Induction Checklist
10. Designing Displays and Education Programs
11. Snapshots of Ecocentres
12. Travellers' Stories (Case Studies)
13. Glossary
14. Useful References
15. Web-based Ecocentres Review

The Indigenous Dance Group



“An indigenous dance group from Arnhem Land had come down to Melbourne after the Black Saturday bushfires. The 20 people in the group were on a special trip to Melbourne as part of a healing mission to provide support for the Victorian community. One of our volunteers had met the group while they were dancing on St Kilda beach. Unbelievably, while they were dancing a shark came up to the shore. This was the first sighting of shark at that beach in over 28 years. The volunteer invited the group back to the ecocentre and, that night, they saw themselves on television on the SBS news for the first time. Those kinds of moments are really inspirational and just come out of the blue.”

(Story told by Neil Blake, Port Phillip EcoCentre. This story highlights the special moments that come through being responsive.)

Tool 1. A Checklist for Your Successful Journey

Use the following list of success factors as a checklist for your journey as an ecocentre. This is quite an extensive list. Don't be too discouraged if you don't tick all the boxes at the moment. All centres are different, have different needs and are at different stages on their journey. Use this list as an 'ideal' set to work towards.

Another way to use the list is to sort the items in the following way:

- ✓ – we are doing this now
- S – we would like to do this in the short-term
- L – we would like to do this in the long-term
- ✗ – not relevant to our centre now or in the long-term

You could then group all the short-term actions and the long-term actions and then use the two lists to develop an action plan for future development.

A. Relationships

1. Connections

- ☐ Having a range of sustainability features, such as community gardens
- ☐ Being accessible to people with a wide range of experiences, interests and backgrounds
- ☐ Having existing and potential interest points (e.g. an old landfill site or garden)
- ☐ Having a specific ecological attribute (e.g. creek, grasslands, gardens)
- ☐ Having diverse land use and features (e.g. plant nurseries, vegetable gardens)
- ☐ Having clear relationships values such as being inclusive, open, sharing, caring and collaborative (See Culture)

2. Community

- ☐ Involving a base of key 'signed up' and committed community people and retaining flexibility, as sometimes people turn up at the right time
- ☐ Involving a diverse community with a range of ideas and skills and backgrounds
- ☐ Having community ownership and involvement in governance and stewardship of the land
- ☐ Supporting local democracy in decision-making
- ☐ Having a local, regional and global outlook
- ☐ Working with the enthusiasms of the community, while recognising and 'mining' the energy that aligns with the centre's purposes
- ☐ Building strong connections with strands of the local communities and building on these connections

B. Culture

3. Creative

- ☐ Fostering creativity in all aspects of the organisation's operations, projects and programs

4. Innovative

- ☐ Being at the 'cutting edge', being willing to try new ways of doing things, working collaboratively with research groups and keeping up to date with developments and funding

5. Adaptable/Responsive

- ☐ Keeping a balance between achieving practical outcomes and keeping abreast of emerging issues. This means keeping a focus on practical outcomes, while still being responsive to emerging issues.
- ☐ Recognising that it takes a long time and sometimes dogged persistence to put an ecocentre on any sort of ongoing footing

- ☐ Balancing a multiplicity of factors such as:
 - Normalising sustainability in the community
 - Working with governments, but not dominated by governments
 - Keeping a developmental edge
 - Balancing ‘dreamers and doers’
- ☐ Being patient and persistent

6. Proactive

- ☐ Being alert and responsive to new opportunities for projects, partnerships and engagement by the local community

7. Organic

- ☐ Planning strategically, but also being adaptive to new/changing situations

C. Strategy / Business

8. Governance/Decision-making

- ☐ Having a governance structure, with documentation, constitution, incorporated organisation (or equivalent status) and with charity status. This governance structure is supportive, inclusive, responsive and with some level of community ownership.
- ☐ Having independence and ‘ownership’ of facilities and land
- ☐ Being eclectic and open, but with well defined core and sustainability objectives

9. Partnerships

- ☐ Developing key partnerships and supporters e.g. local council, traditional owners and indigenous groups, universities and research groups, schools and education systems, outside groups and complementary organisations
- ☐ Having support from key stakeholders
- ☐ Working smarter and collaborating more with local community groups, other ecocentres, local governments and businesses
- ☐ Being able to manage multiple partnerships.
- ☐ Building a robust relationship with your local council (common purposes, shared projects, funding arrangements, connections with the local community)

10. Funding

- ☐ Having sound and clear financial processes and accounting channels and systems
- ☐ Having on-going funding sources, including some for coordination/base activities
- ☐ Having diverse income sources

11. Planning

- ☐ Having a clear vision and clarity of purpose
- ☐ Developing a business plan, mid-term and long-term strategic plan and an annual action/implementation plan
- ☐ Having a clear marketing and communication plan
- ☐ Having processes in place to review and evaluate the effectiveness of programs

D. Operations

12. Management

- ☐ Having sound management practices and processes, including site management
- ☐ Establishing a collaborative, transformative and innovative culture (See Culture)
- ☐ Being open and inclusive

13. Programs and Projects

- ☐ Having a wide range of innovative and imaginative programs and projects that match demand and respond to local needs
- ☐ Applying Quadruple Bottom Line (QBL) approaches to programs and projects

14. People

- ☐ Having high quality staff (paid and volunteer) who are inventive, collaborative, committed, risk-takers, willing to take on challenges, persistent and resilient
- ☐ Demonstrating effective leadership at many levels
- ☐ Recognising when new combinations of skills are required, as this may require bringing in new people with the required combinations of skills
- ☐ Having some staff from the local community

15. Facilities and Land

- ☐ Having a relevant, meaningful, accessible and feel good space
- ☐ Allowing for continuity, including continuous tenure for at least 15 years
- ☐ Having control of the land

Tool 2. Matrix for the Stages in the Development of an Ecocentre

You could use this tool to map where you are along your journey as an ecocentre.

	Emerging	Forming	Consolidating	Refocusing/ Reinventing
Relationships - Connections - Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The working group/committee of management identifies the need of the community for an ecocentre. They may also consider how to engage and gain commitment from the community. They identify possible key stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They invite community groups to contribute to the planning of the new centre. They develop relationships with key stakeholders. They gain support from key community interests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They actively encourage community groups to contribute to the on-going development of the centre. They consolidate key relationships. They widen community engagement & recognition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Their actions and activities are valued by their local community and other ecocentres. They diversify relationships. They build on widespread recognition & support.
Culture (Generic)	Creative	Innovative	Adaptable/Responsive	Proactive
Culture (Stage specific) - Creative - Innovative - Adaptable /responsive - Proactive - Organic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They explore what could be key values of the centre. They allow the culture to emerge & nurture key generic cultural attributes. They value diverse ideas and ways of contributing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They develop a culture that values sustainability (when the local community may not consider 'sustainability' as the norm). They encourage and acknowledge creativity in the design of building/facilities/displays and programs. They initiate new programs. They learn to be alert to opportunities and to respond to these opportunities as resources allow. They develop and define the culture and identify and acknowledge generic cultural attributes as these emerge. Resilience – they identify ways to address external negative views of sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They maintain a culture that values 'sustainability'. They recognise and acknowledge creativity in business development and building effective partnerships. They continue to initiate new programs. They adopt a process of reviewing and evaluating programs and projects. They set aside resources (time and funding) for business development. Their strategic plan describes key values of the centre. They consolidate & review their stated culture. Resilience – they identify ways to address possible internal issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They continue to remain at the forefront of change, even with widespread change in the community. They value creativity in systems, strategic and conceptual thinking. They revisit and clarify their key values. Leaders' behaviour reinforces key values. They revisit and adjust the culture in expanded and diversified identity/operations. Resilience – they identify ways to address financial and management crises.
	Creative	Innovative	Adaptable/Responsive	Proactive
Culture (Generic)	Organic	Organic	Organic	Organic

	Emerging	Forming	Consolidating	Refocusing/ Reinventing
Strategy/ Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Governance - Partnerships - Funding - Planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A working group from one or more community groups starts to meet to create/develop/discover/invent an initial identity. • A committee of management is formed to clarify the identity and future directions for the ecocentre. • They consider how to obtain sufficient resources (land, buildings, materials, good staff and volunteers). They apply for this funding and resources. • They establish governance structures, and set up as an appropriate legal entity and apply for Deductible Gift Recipient Status and Income Tax Exempt Certification. • They develop a draft business plan and strategic plan. • They investigate possible partnerships. • They identify 'flagship' projects and programs to help attract staff and volunteers and promote the centre to partners, sponsors and the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The committee of management clarifies the identity and future directions for the ecocentre. • They apply for and obtain funding for management costs and projects through sponsorship, grants and philanthropic grants. • They refine their strategic plans and review their business plans. • They review the governance and management structures. • They start to form partnerships with other local groups, in particular their local council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They review and adjust their identity. • The committee of management looks at improved governance systems. • They have clarity of purpose. • They continue to build worthwhile partnerships. • They seek and obtain funding for their long-term security. • They invest more time in strategic planning and may bring in outside consultants to facilitate this planning. • They develop a 3-5 year rolling strategic plan and business plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A point may come when an ecocentre experiences a financial or management crisis. The centre will need to either identify its core business and focus on that or reinvent its identity (i.e. undergo metamorphosis – to become more self-reliant, and with more specialised tasks). • A Committee of Management/Board may be reformed with additional members who have a range of business skills to provide good governance. • They set up processes to achieve a consensual approach and good financial management. • They obtain adequate funding (as they need to commit more and more resources to management, governance and maintenance). • They obtain funds from a diversity of funding streams. • They review and re-set strategic and business plans. • They review and rebuild partnerships.

	Emerging	Forming	Consolidating	Refocusing/ Reinventing
Operations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management - Projects - Staff - Facilities and land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The committee of management may investigate other ecocentres to find out about projects, issues, management and staffing structures. • They investigate and develop flagship projects. • They may start to identify a possible location for a centre. • They investigate possible start up management structures & projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They develop a basic management structure and continue to develop some 'flagship' programs and projects. • They establish management structures and engage staff in either paid or voluntary capacity. • They obtain a place for an ecocentre and commence to redesign or reconfigure the building and grounds. • They develop their first future operational plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They develop more sophisticated management structures to manage staff and volunteers. • They learn to manage demand and growth in complexity. • The building(s) and grounds model innovative and cutting-edge approaches to living sustainably and they may develop outreach programs. • They may obtain large grants and have to set up systems to manage these grants. • They expand and refine centre facilities and operations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They set up structures and processes to manage expansion of their functions to cope with increasing complexity (partnerships, staff, sites). • They may need to manage multiple sites. • They integrate new operations into revised structures. • They may offer consultancy services to other ecocentres and organisations.

Tool 3. Ecocentres as Sites for Learning and Behaviour Change

There are key ways in which ecocentres align strongly with what we know about how to get people to learn effectively and change to act more sustainably. This is perhaps not surprising, because the prime purpose of ecocentres is to bring about exactly the types of learning and change that research and models aspire to describe. In addition, ecocentres that have been operating successfully for some time might be expected to have evolved and honed increasingly better approaches that result in effective learning and change.

Key practices that ecocentres use are those required for long-lasting change, beyond awareness raising, knowledge delivery and the development of technological capacity. Additional elements identified from research and models include:

- **active engagement** (being able to see oneself as capable of making the change)
- **triggering moments** (being reminded in personally meaningful contexts to act on intentions)
- **social support and expectation** (what friends/neighbours/peer groups/communities of practice are doing and in what ways they support an individual's actions).

Each of these elements draws on personal relationships with trusted others. For example, the Community Based Social Marketing (CBSM) model, championed by Doug McKenzie-Mohr (see <http://www.cbsm.com>), uses research-based approaches from social marketing to bring about community changes in response to particular environmental/social issues. According to CBSM (McKenzie-Mohr 2000):

“... people's uptake [of the desired community behaviour] is heavily dependent on identity/ self perception and values sets. The major influence on our behaviour is not the media, but rather our contact with other people – especially family, friends, colleagues; otherwise known as social diffusion ...”

According to McKenzie-Mohr (2000), facilitated interventions to prompt change, mediated through strategies such as gaining commitment, modelling, creating or reinforcing norms and social diffusion, are all dependent at their core on the interaction of individuals in a community:

- **Commitment** - an individual pledges to another (who is meaningful/credible to us) to undertake an activity
- **Modelling** - when we observe the action of others (who are meaningful/credible to us)
- **Norms** - people interact and develop guidelines for their behaviour (within a group where the social interactions are meaningful)
- **Prompts** - reminders about a particular behaviour
- **Social diffusion** - when people pass on information to one another (who are meaningful/credible to one another) regarding their experiences with new activities.

Each of these elements can be identified in the operations and practices of ecocentres – it is even likely that the up-welling of interest in, and aspirations for, the establishment of more ecocentres is because of the conditions they provide for people to learn and change for sustainability in the ways described in the model above.

This theme of individual and social interaction affecting behaviour is reiterated in other community-based learning and change programs. For example, Riedy et al. (2004) found in their evaluation of a large scale program aimed at changing electricity usage patterns in households across Melbourne:

“[The] factors [that influence household behaviour towards electricity use] reflect the interaction between past experiences, socially established norms and expectations, present living conditions and social contexts. They represent long standing and deeply held convictions and understandings that play out in behaviour. It was evident from this research that participants would not easily modify strongly embedded socio-cultural behaviour.”

Drawing on parallel analysis of research and practical experience from social change programs and public relations, Robinson and Glanznig (2003) outline two behaviour change models, at difference scales of analysis, that have relevance for programs that have as one of their objectives to change people’s behaviour to reduce environmental impacts. Each of these models can be seen to be applicable for the ways that ecocentres help to foster change, and the interactions that occur. These models are:

Stages of Change (Transtheoretical) Model

This model assumes that people act intentionally, according to their perception of the balance of costs and benefits in a decision. The model suggests that we pass through a sequence of four stages as we adopt voluntary changes in our lives:



According to Robinson and Glanznig (2003) the ‘ecology of change’ can be much more complicated than this, but at the scale of large populations, this is a widely used and accepted theoretical model.

Diffusion of Innovation Model

Diffusion of Innovations theory, popularised by Everett Rogers, envisages change as being like a wave that progressively passes through society. Rogers’ model looks at the way innovations (idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by its audience) are taken up in a discrete group. According to Robinson and Glanznig (2003):

“Diffusion researchers found that, for any given behaviour, an audience could be broken down into five segments, based on their propensity to accept the new idea or behaviour. Adoption begins with visionary, imaginative innovators, then attracts experimental early adopters, and eventually sweeps in majority audiences (early majority and late majority), with laggards holding out to the bitter end.”

Robinson and Glanznig (2003) outline what they consider to be key elements of an effective change program:

- **Visions and Norms** (I wish)
- **Understanding Why** (I know)
- **Skills** (I can)
- **Convenient Systems** (It's easy)
- **Trusted Others** (I'm not alone)
- **Change Moments** (It's low risk and fun)
- **Reinforcement** (That was great).

Robinson (2005) develops this into four key stages and, within these stages, seven 'doors' through which participants in change programs need to progress, to try out making changes in behaviour, and consolidate these as lasting changes:

1. PREDISPOSING FACTORS

- Using role models or visionary images to promote a common purpose

2. ENABLING FACTORS

- Using credible voices to promote the benefits of the actions
- Providing opportunities to observe, experiment and learn by doing
- Ensuring convenient products and services [are] available to support the action

3. TRIGGERING FACTORS

- Using social interactions with credible, trusted peers to encourage trial of the behaviour
- Creating out-of-ordinary-life times and places where all these elements come together

4. TRIALLING

- Trying the behaviour out – experiencing what works and what doesn't, and how the behaviour feels and fits with one's values and the practicalities of life

5. SATISFYING FACTORS

- Making sure the practice is inherently satisfying
- Celebrating and rewarding the successes

How the operations of ecocentres align with learning-based behaviour change is summarised by Darnton et al. (2006):

“Behaviours are complex and non-linear ... interventions should combine multiple types of instruments in a ‘package’ of measures ... Different audiences behave differently, and require targeted and/or tailored interventions ... Devolving responsibility for policy development and delivery to local bodies ... can help ensure their suitability and can also help to build their legitimacy. The audience for change intervention should not be regarded as a passive

target whose behaviour is to be changed, but as ‘actors’ at the heart of the change process ... Ideally, a total partnership working approach should be adopted in which change partners are involved from the start in defining and redefining the problem through a continuous cycle of action and reflection, from which learning and innovation will result.”

Ecocentre approaches also align well with the five key elements of learning for sustainability (sometimes referred to as education for sustainability or EfS) identified by the Australian Institute for Research in Education for Sustainability (ARIES) (Hunting and Tilbury 2006):

- Visioning (imagining a better future)
- Critical thinking and reflection
- Participation in decision making
- Partnerships
- Systemic thinking

A comprehensive project to develop professional learning for facilitators of community-based sustainability programs in Victoria, through the Victorian Association for Environmental Education, has derived a simplified behaviour change model based on the available research, and action learning based in the experiences of over a hundred sustainability facilitators. This model is summarised in the following diagram (Hocking, Ray and Day 2006b):

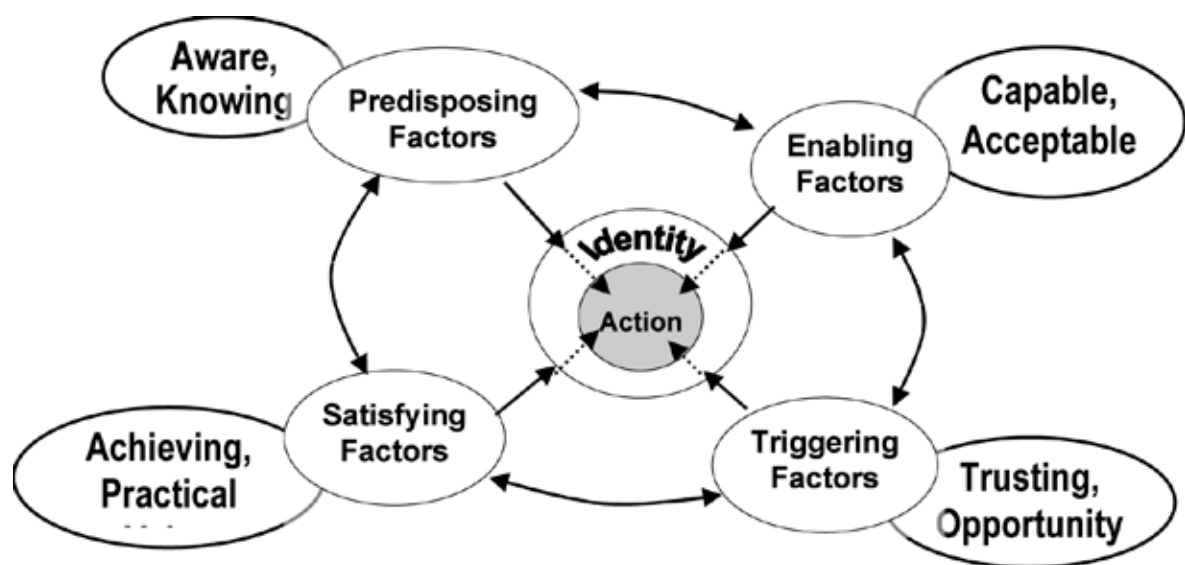


Figure 2. A Simplified Behaviour Change Model

According to this synthesis of models and ideas, individual and social identity mediate between our technological and social knowledge and capacities and our tendency for action.

Being able to shift our sense of who we are, and what is normalised as acceptable and meaningful behaviour, is what lies at the heart of our propensity for action. Mapped against this model, ecocentres can be clearly seen to operate at the social and individual level of ‘local neighbourhood’ membership and identity, to help re-frame what is locally normal in relation to environmental outlooks and action, and at the same time to provide the knowledge, skills and support that were also needed for change to occur.

Put more simply, effectively operating ecocentres are places that people, with an interest in more sustainable living, can meet to share ideas and strategies for adjusting their lives to be more sustainable and less environmentally destructive. In doing so, people are able to construct new senses of identity that resist external pressures for doing nothing, or denying there is a need to act, or making excuses that acting is too difficult. Ecocentres are, at heart, places of mutual support, encouragement, practical advice and reinforcement for actions taken, in the face of wider public inertia.

Iramoo Community Garden

“The idea of a community vegetable garden at Iramoo started around eight years ago, as part of a Sustainability Street project. A small vegetable garden was built as part of a larger local indigenous plant garden. This was abandoned after a few years, as volunteers who were interested eventually moved on, but by this time the soil had been improved with compost. As new volunteers turned up, a few continued cultivating the garden, and with lots of vegetable waste coming from St Albans campus canteens, more compost was added. Eventually, a critical mass of volunteers became interested enough to try larger scale gardening. Iramoo now has a full-sized vegetable garden, and interest continues to grow. There are plans to sell the produce to students on the campus, invite them to get involved and put the earnings back into the garden. The horticulture students from the Nicholson Street campus of the University also use the gardens as a part-time training ground.”

(Story told by Colin Hocking. The story demonstrates how persistence can lead to the establishment of a critical mass of people that can then lead to involvement of other additional groups and project take-off.)

Tool 4. Ecocentre Governance Structures

Laying the Foundations

Successful community-based activities effectively involve people, planning, and resources. Your ability to attract and manage all of the above will be enhanced by an agreed organisational structure which:

- identifies aims
- clarifies who will do what
- sets out decision-making processes and how any disputes, or physical and/or financial risks to participants will be managed.

At the very least, your members should discuss, agree on and write down the purpose of the group. An informal club or association structure may be adequate for groups whose aims and activities are relatively simple. However, groups intending to play an ongoing, longer-term role in the wider community should consider becoming an Incorporated Association. While this requires certain regulatory obligations to be met, it gives your group a separate legal identity, confirms 'not-for-profit' status and provides transparent processes for organisational decision-making and accountability. All of these things are important to your community profile and ability to attract people and resources. As an incorporated association, you are also able to apply for and obtain suitable insurance for public liability and professional indemnity. You may also want to consider Directors and Officers' Indemnity insurance. (Seek advice from an insurance broker.)

In Victoria, 'not-for-profit' organisations, such as ecocentres, can apply to become a legal entity by registering as either an Incorporated Association with Department of Consumer Affairs or with Australian Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC) as a public company that is limited by guarantee. (Check the ASIC website for the difference between the two: <http://www.asic.gov.au/asic/asic.nsf/byheadline/Registering+not-for-profit+or+charitable+organisations?openDocument>.)

The following steps to incorporate are detailed at <http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au>. The steps are:

Step 1

The association must hold a meeting of which all members are given at least 21 days notice.

Step 2

At this meeting, a majority of votes cast by members, whether personally or by proxy (if proxies are allowed), must:

- a authorise a particular person to incorporate the association. This person must be at least 18 years old and reside in the State of Victoria.
- b approve a proposed statement of purposes
- c approve proposed rules that comply with the Act or approve the adoption of the model rules.

Step 3

The person authorised to apply for incorporation must complete and lodge with the Registrar:

- a the Application for Association Incorporation form (PDF|50KB) together with the prescribed fee
- b a copy of the proposed statement of purposes
- c a copy of the proposed rules of the association (unless adopting the Model Rules unmodified, in which case a copy of the rules is not required) The rules must contain the matters specified in the Schedule to the Act.
- d copies of any trusts that may affect the association
- e the application fee (for the current fee, see Fees and Forms)

Australian Tax Office Provisions

Your ability to raise project funding will be significantly increased if your organisation has Australian Tax Office endorsement as a Deductible Gift Recipient and has Income Tax Exempt Certification. These are important prerequisites for project funding proposals submitted to philanthropic trusts.

The first step towards achieving Deductible Gift Recipient Status is to seek listing on the Environment Australia (EA) Register of Environmental Organisations.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/about/tax/reo/guidelines/pubs/reo-guide-2008.pdf>

One of the criteria required for EA listing is a minimum of 50 financial members. Once registered, your organisation can seek endorsement by the Australian Tax Office as an Income Tax Exempt Charity and Deductible Gift Recipient.

For further information visit the [Australian Tax Office page for non-profit organisations](#). The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) has additional requirements for non-profit organisations seeking exemption from income tax. Visit www.ato.gov.au

Tool 5. Soft System Methodology

Port Phillip EcoCentre's Experience with Soft System Methodology

While we had developed a renewed focus through the development of our strategic plan, we found ourselves in a situation where we were feeling overwhelmed by our rapid growth, by the complexity of what we were doing and the number of people we were dealing with. We were getting busier and more diverse without a corresponding growth in our team of staff and volunteers. This prompted us to seek an external facilitator from the Systemic Development Institute (SDI), with the aim of introducing Systems approaches to complement our other planning activities. SDI have developed their systems methodologies through decades of experiential learning approaches to community led natural resource management and sustainable agriculture. Systems approaches are designed to help manage so-called 'wicked issues' – to appreciate and accommodate complexity, contingency, uncertainty and contestability.

Systems approaches should prevent decision makers from rushing into poorly thought-out solutions based on preconceived ideas about an assumed problem. They have the three key features of inter-relatedness, wholeness and surprise, and aim to bring about improvement in areas of social concern by activating in the people involved in the situation a learning cycle which is ideally never-ending. Systems here are conceived of as holistic 'ideal types' of certain aspects of the complex situation, rather than as actual accounts of it - it is taken as given that no objective and complete account of a problem situation can be provided.

Soft Systems Methodologies (SSM) are best employed as a means of organising our thoughts about problem situations, rather than as a way of describing, in a real sense, portions of reality, and are primarily concerned with what should be done, rather than how it should be done, which is the focus of Hard systems thinking. In SSM the how becomes a focus only after consensus is reached on what should be done. While SSM is a learning methodology, hard systems employ an optimizing approach. In SSM, ways forward (Improvements) are decided upon in terms of: Relevance (To those involved), Cultural feasibility (constraints that must be met), and Systemic desirability (Essential systems thinking that must not be violated)

So what did this involve at the EcoCentre?

We went through a process of conversation mapping. Starting with a trigger question, we all put our thoughts onto paper, talking as we went, with no limit to this ever expanding conversation map - a free flowing 'mess of thoughts and ideas' stemming from our trigger question. We continued until we had exhausted our thinking. Within this mess – a rich picture of the situation - we found some key themes. We then developed conceptual models describing the steps we could take to achieve our desired transformations within these themes. We've found that the tools of SSM helped us to clarify what felt like an overwhelming situation. The learning process brought us together as a team to creatively think through how we could transform our problematic situation into solutions for change. Working with an external facilitator helped provide guidance, tools and a fresh perspective, and we have since tried out other systems tools within our team, which has led us to adopt the Viable Systems Model to better manage our organisation. This experience has also built up our team connections, and begun to transform the culture of our organisation.

Wikipedia provides an introduction the Viable Systems Model, and an introduction to Soft Systems Methodology.

Tool 6. Sample Strategic Planning Process and Plan

Iramoo Strategic Planning Process for 2009

The following is a brief description of the processes and outcomes leading to the development of a strategic planning table for Iramoo Sustainable Community Centre for 2009. It is hoped that this example will help other ecocentres to frame and document their own strategic planning processes.

Day 1. Strategic Planning

On the afternoon of Wednesday December 17th 2008, the Iramoo staff and key friends and stakeholders got together to look at our key directions and areas of action for 2009. We began by brainstorming individually what we thought were the key areas we needed to plan around, and then worked together to prioritise these. The following ideas came out of this process:

Some Key Headline Ideas:

- We need to develop BETTER WAYS TO BALANCE PRACTICAL ON-GROUND OUTCOMES & MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS = Organisation e.g. half day project team per week/fortnight; Resources = focused grants based on shared agreement of what we want; Skilled volunteers
- Iramoo needs to be an ADVOCATE FOR NATURE & ENVIRONMENT IN THE WESTERN SUBURBS – aligned with VU mission & values – whether they do this well or not + direct integration with indigenous culture & knowledge & environment / grasslands – expressed strongly through Moondani Balluk
- Need a COMMUNICATIONS PLAN – with common overview & key strands – community, schools, etc BUT DETAILED DEVELOPMENT SHOULD NOT GET IN THE WAY OF GETTING A START WITH SIGNS – 2009 the year of the SIGN = start up SIGNAGE PLAN
- Iramoo is TRYING TO DO TWO DIFFICULT THINGS TOGETHER – RESTORE GRASSLANDS (difficult) and ENGAGE PEOPLE for enviro (difficult) – SO WE NEED TO SET CLEAR 3 yr PLANS & ALSO REVISIT THESE in 3 yrs – or sooner if elements need changing earlier
- Need a HALF DAY ON WEEKEND TOGETHER TO PLAN REVEGETATION STRATEGY & WHO CAN DO WHAT in Wildlife Park especially
- Vision/Mission common/shared elements/words:
 - Engaging with people, connecting people together = Growing Grasslands, Connecting Communities
 - Community education – giving people resources, skills, showing them how
 - Passionate & infectious to get change
 - Relationships & networks
 - Diversity of people & diversity of nature
 - a welcoming open place where people become part of the journey to rediscover nature and ways of living sustainably in the west ... and a place where legless lizards and other native plants & animals survive and continue into the future
 - kicking ass for grassland conservation & sustainability

Activities That Led To The Above:

Activity 1: what is the centre about – personal perspectives, what are we trying to do here, what have you observed

Activity 2: what is good & what is not going well

Summary: trying to do two difficult things together – restore grasslands (difficult) and engage people for enviro (difficult) So we need to set clear plans 3 yr & also revisit these in 3 yrs

Activity 3: how is iramoo travelling?

Activity 4: achievements, improvements & interesting

Coming out of the above process, the following key areas were chosen for development, through a process of prioritising and lumping together:

Activity 5: key areas of interest – what are the major groupings

Specific Definable Areas

- Wildlife Park & Grassland Management & Development
- Iramoo GreenWeb Hub
- Greater GreenWeb – including grassland remnant engagement
- Plant Nursery, Horticultural Facilities, Seed Orchard
- Community Gardens & Food

Across All Areas

- Art/Performance/Culture
- Volunteer base /Capacity Building
- Education Programs
- School/AuSSI/Community
- Green = Biodiversity
- Brown = Water, Waste, Energy
- EcoLiving Centre
- Need eventually to sort through what process is needed for this to ‘take over’ some of the projects and operations of Iramoo Sustainable Community Centre

Day 2. Strategic Planning

A modified version of this list was taken into Day 2 of the strategic planning process. Small groups were assigned to each specific item to develop further. For each item on the list, a draft set of mid-term goals, specific targets and major actions was identified. Also key projects that related to these goals, targets and actions were identified. This draft list was brought back to the whole group for comment and ratification towards the end of Day 2 of Strategic Planning.

Out of this process came the following strategic planning table for 2009 – and this is what has been used to help inform the overall direction of Iramoo in 2009.

Targets & Goals for Iramoo Sustainability Community Centre for 2009

- modified from Strategic Planning Afternoon Wed 17/12/08 – CH 3/2/09

Area	Draft Goals CH	Draft Targets	Major Actions	Key Projects
Land Management – Wildlife Park	Move into a more active phase with work on wildlife reserves and volunteer work	Eradicate Serrated Tussock from T1 & T2	Habitat hectare analysis and application for funding through Brimbank	Habitat hectare project – assess & obtain funding
		Half day revegetation attacks – how many?		
	Develop & implement a more comprehensive management & research plan for the Wildlife Park	Link T1 & T2 – through rotunda area	Develop rotunda ‘precinct’ & connections with walking trail	Iramoo Lakes Hub – including Wildlife Park entrance
		Finalise walking trail & activity nodes plan CH		
	Get first major engagement of wider communities with wildlife park	Develop coordinated research via one or more weekend planning sessions CH	TSN funding for next stage of Wildlife Reserve & Nursery	
		Complete first stage of Rotunda garden		
	Develop a longer term (3-5 yr) plan for wildlife park development & viability	Re-render rotunda to reduce vandalism CH		
		Launch rotunda & garden CH		

Area	Draft Goals CH	Draft Targets	Major Actions	Key Projects
Nursery & Horticulture	Build the plant nursery & associated horticulture into a self-funding enterprise through plant sales & contributions to projects Widen volunteer base of participation in nursery & associated horticulture	Complete nursery expansion	Complete nursery expansion & Community Water Grant obligations Seedlings for Schools – consolidate, promote, diversify, expand Promote and diversify base of wholesale & retail nursery sales	Iramoo Lakes Hub Nursery Extension Seed Orchard Consolidation
		Install tanks to make self-sufficient for water		
		Launch water self-sufficiency – maybe link to community education in water CH		
		Double plant sale numbers through combination of schools, community & wholesale		
		Develop nursery placement position supported by Brett Lane & Associates CH		
GreenWeb	Consolidate information about & plans for GreenWeb & get buy in from key partners Achieve start-up actions for linking disparate groups together through GreenWeb	Create & publish a shared map / pamphlet agreed to by all partners	Shared pamphlet Community Support Fund Grant application Vision for Werribee Plains application Local Government Sustainability Accord fund application	GreenWeb Iramoo Lakes Hub
		Get a grant for actions at each of the hubs & tying these together		
		Include revegetation & arts/digital storytelling in GreenWeb grants & activities		
Community & capacity building	Consolidate base of experienced volunteer support & find ways to link at least some new volunteers to this Widen base & diversity of volunteers, across different activities & across skills base needed in the variety of major projects	Recruit new skilled volunteers in each of the areas: Community gardens Revegetation GreenWeb – community spirit	Volunteer recruitment strategy to increase number & diversity	Community Garden GreenWeb PV bulk purchase
		Get vests sorted & recruitment plan linked to existing volunteers (CH)		
		Keep Climate Action / PV purchase group running around Group needs – maybe a base for practical action for climate change CH		

Area	Draft Goals CH	Draft Targets	Major Actions	Key Projects
Education Biodiversity Other (need to consider school & community split also)	Develop a coordinated approach to education, across school and community	AuSSI – hub organised through Iramoo	Consolidate key composition & roles for west AuSSI hub	AuSSI west hub
		AuSSI – 4-5 schools signed up with sponsorship for core module		Strategic Partnerships project – funded by Dept Education
	Establish Iramoo as a coordinating hub of AuSSI in the west	Strategic Partnerships Program curriculum development delivered & used to enhance AuSSI CH	Build involvement & service to schools through links with LiWC in Engineering & Science, and the Access & Success team	Scenescape project
	Build education programs towards being self-funding	Zoo to Iramoo up & running with at least 10 shared excursion groups	Build on Zoo to Iramoo agreement	
		Community sessions around energy/climate, water, waterwise gardens & waste identified, advertised & run coordinated with partners CH	Partnership delivery of funded/ cost recovery waste, water, energy & biodiversity workshops	
		Develop Scenescape project including community & schools engagement, materials & resources – need to develop further	Build profile of community programs through climate change issues	
Lakes Hub revegetation creek crossing signage Wildlife Park entrance (outside & inside) bike path borders education discovery trail	Develop Lakes Hub as a visible example of what Iramoo is doing with and for local / regional communities	Develop an integrated plan for the various parts of the hub, including timelines for development over 2009 – and link to wider plan for lakes	Consolidate Lakes Hub as a key, integrated project for Iramoo – across revegetation, education, community engagement & building volunteer capacity	Joint projects with Brimbank around lakes
	Use Lakes Hub as a focus for raising the profile of Iramoo and GreenWeb	Plan for integration of school & community education programs into Hub development		GreenWeb – Lakes hub
	Lake Hub facilities become key features of Iramoo school & community education programs	Develop grant applications for revegetation & community engagement that help build the hub CH		
		Put on a significant event to launch or otherwise recognise the hub – perhaps as part of a grant		

Area	Draft Goals CH	Draft Targets	Major Actions	Key Projects
Community Gardens	Build the Community Garden into a viable and attractive venue for volunteers, wider community and related specialist projects. Use community garden as a way of attracting visitors on weekends	Finish infrastructure for community garden	Community Garden building, planting, harvesting Launch / Invitations to participate	Fence, garden beds & paths
		Develop community participation – at least 10 new volunteers from two different community groups		
		Link to/incorporate development of aboriginal food, herbs & health garden CH		
Communications	Improve focus, co-ordination and content of communications to project a consistent overall message, as well as targeted messages for key audiences Use review of vision and development of mission to clarify the shared understanding of what Iramoo is about & heading towards, by all key stakeholders	Develop an overall communications plan, by June, with over-arching themes, and details in 3 key areas: - Schools - Volunteers - Wider community	Clarify new/revised vision & mission statements Publicise these and activities of Iramoo through website, pamphlets & other communications	Scenescape project – web & community education materials
		Develop Mission statement & review Vision, based on workshop ideas & further discussion (CH)		
		Develop specific tools for communication & engagement – website, GreenWeb hub pamphlet, Wildlife Park pamphlet		

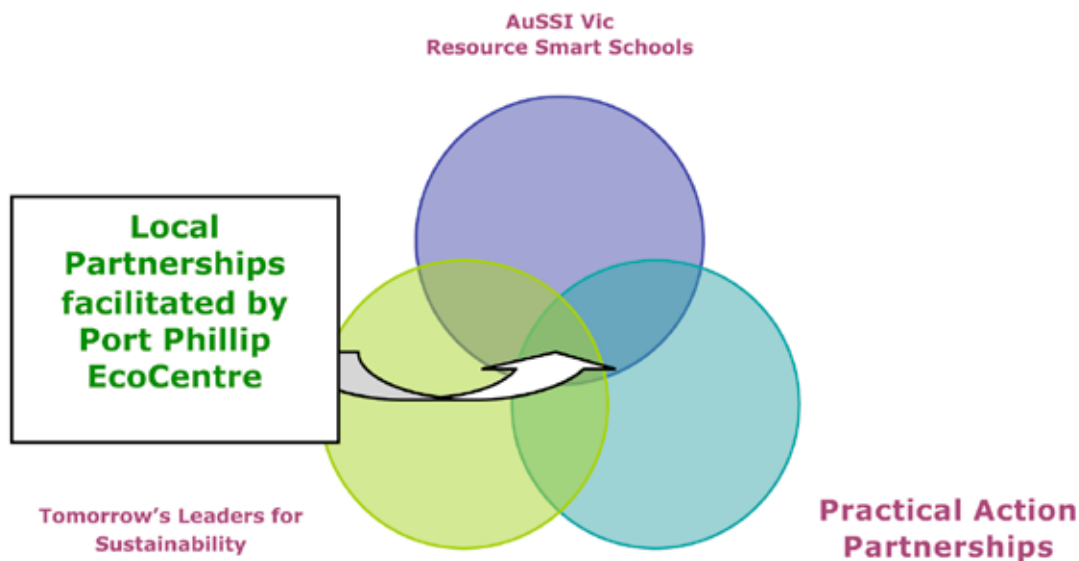
Area	Draft Goals CH	Draft Targets	Major Actions	Key Projects
Finance & New Grants	Develop a system to clarify and track financial accounting for major activity areas	Grow Iramoo income to be at least 75% self sustaining, across the board, by the end of the year CH	Draw up a table of key incomes & expenditures for each of the major activity areas	All major projects & activity areas
	Grow funding base towards being self-sustaining in each of the major activity areas	Overall income from grants in excess of \$350,000	Develop methods for tracking incomes & expenditures for each major activity area against financial forecasts	
		Develop a viable income stream for Wildlife Park & other reserves from offset money CH		
		Develop financial accounting (holdings, income, expenditure) around the key activities of the centre (CH)		
	Increase grants base across a wider range of funding opportunities	Draft grant ideas & develop approaches to - VicHealth - Community Support Fund - Caring for Country - Local Sustainability Accord - Vision for Werribee Plains		
EcoLiving Centre project	See separate table	See separate table		

Tool 7. Sample Strategic Project Plan

Port Phillip EcoCentre: Education for Sustainability in Schools Strategic Plan 2008-2011: Leaders for Sustainability

Vision	A local network of healthy, sustainable school communities connected to the Port Phillip EcoCentre, local council, other environmental service providers, business partners and the local community.
Mission	Our mission is to create a connected, healthy, sustainable community. We do this by working with the school community and other local partners to take collaborative action for sustainability through: strategic planning; practical action and projects; behaviour change; leadership and local school and community networks and celebrations. We embrace indigenous culture and community and value inclusiveness, sharing, and learning together.
Goals	STRATEGIES
Sustain Program Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide ongoing training and networking opportunities for facilitators - Maintain sustainable funding models - Develop School Partnerships
Build Community Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish local knowledge base and project opportunities - Host community and school forums and workshops on a range of topics - Recruit local sponsors, volunteers and in-kind support - Involve 5 partners with 5 schools by mid 2009 - Work together (school and community) on planning and practical projects
Locally Delivered Aussi Vic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 schools signed up to program each year - Develop a localised tool box and partnerships by 2009 - To have experienced trained facilitators that are connected to community by end of 2008
Celebrations And Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To have an annual schools festival (awards, kids teaching kids, indigenous links) - To have a teacher network by early 2009 that will grow into a teacher Community of Practice
Facilitate Best Practice Youth Leadership Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involve and engage Youth in Project Design - Sign up 5 schools per year to the Tomorrow's Leaders for Sustainability program commencing in 2009

Education for Sustainability: a Model for Local Partnerships



AuSSI Vic – Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative – Resource Smart Schools

AuSSI Vic facilitates whole school strategic planning for sustainability and provides professional development for all staff. This strategic approach integrates practical action with the curriculum and local community. Schools that have participated in this program have become leading tangible models for sustainable living and learning and have influenced their broader communities through projects beyond the school grounds.

Tomorrow's Leaders for Sustainability

Tomorrow's Leaders for Sustainability (TLfS) is a new initiative that helps young people understand and appreciate the key principles and issues of sustainability, while also gaining the knowledge and skills to become leaders in their chosen career. The program's training in sustainability leadership is based on an holistic and interactive approach to learning that respects the student's prior experience, knowledge and skills.

The objective is to help young people understand the world around them, while also helping them develop the ability to think for themselves, communicate their thoughts and feelings, act on their own beliefs and help others act in an ethical and socially responsible way. The end result will be a group of young scientists, engineers, farmers, business people and others with a shared vision and the knowledge and skills to change their own daily actions and to lead their chosen industries onto a more sustainable future.

For more information refer to – www.leadersforsustainability.com

Practical Action Partnerships

Through this program the Port Phillip EcoCentre works in partnership with school communities on practical action for sustainability. Delivering tangible and significant improvements in on-site infrastructure and landscapes to improve environmental performance, this program provides a means to learn by doing in a setting where we are all learners and teachers. This approach connects community, builds resources, connects participants with nature; inspires imagination and enables action and behaviour change.

School Engagement Schedule

2008	Total no of Schools	2009	Total no of Schools	2010	Total no of Schools	2011	Total no of Schools
AuSSI Vic 5 new schools	5	AuSSI Vic 5 new schools	10	AuSSI Vic 5 new schools	15	AuSSI Vic 5 new schools	20
Practical Action Partnerships 5 schools	5	Practical Action Partnerships 5 schools	10	Practical Action Partnerships 5 schools	15	Practical Action Partnerships 5 schools	20
		Tomorrow's Leaders for Sustainability 5 schools	5	Tomorrow's Leaders for Sustainability 5 schools	10	Tomorrow's Leaders for Sustainability 5 schools	15
Ongoing support and networking is provided through a Teacher Sustainable Schools Network commencing in 2009. A program goal is for this network to grow into a Community of Practice over time.				As capacity of the school communities and Teacher Community of Practice builds, each school needs less support from external facilitators, i.e. Port Phillip EcoCentre and other service providers.			

Pathway for Schools



Ongoing Support through the Port Phillip Sustainable Schools Network

Tool 8. Sample Community Project

Iramoo~Albion GreenWeb Open Space Ring Project – A Case Study in Partnership Building

*“Creating Connections With Communities & Land Through Healthy Open Space” -
by Linking Natural Places & Developing New Relationships*

Dr Colin Hocking, Coordinator of Iramoo Sustainable Community Centre

The Setting

Iramoo Sustainable Community Centre (ISCC) (and its predecessors) has been established at St Albans campus of Victoria University for over 10 years. Iramoo started as a point of contact and education centre for those interested in protecting and rejuvenating the threatened wildflower grassland remnants in the area. Out of this work came the realisation that most people in the surrounding communities are not connected with native plants and animals, and therefore not engaging in the protection and repair of their habitats. More widely than this, people are not very engaged with environmental issues and actions in general – hence the transformation into Iramoo Sustainable Community Centre (SCC). Through scarcity of water and concerns about climate change, people’s interest and attention is turning, but the pace of engagement and change is very slow. The rate of volunteering overall in Brimbank Municipality is very low. It is clear that new approaches are needed to connect people with environmental sustainability issues and actions, including the protection and re-connection of our local biodiversity.

The Concept

To identify and re-define the ring of open space that lies at the heart of Brimbank City Council, in outer Western Melbourne, so that it is used for multiple purposes: to connect communities of people, to provide habitat corridors for native animals and plants, to promote healthy, sustainable living, and to highlight the rich history and culture that pervades the region.

Partnership Goals

To find and build on linkages and shared interests between different community groups and representatives, so that the issues of healthy, connected, sustainable places are addressed.

Key Issues

Wildflower grassland biodiversity is still in decline, despite being now listed federally as ‘critically endangered’. At base, the majority of people’s interest in and concern for biodiversity is paper thin. We need new ways to engage them and we need to employ the latest understandings of learning based behaviour change to get them involved and committed.

Health and wellbeing is now high on the state and federal agenda, around issues such as obesity and diabetes. St Albans campus of Victoria University, in association with Western Hospital, is about

to become a major centre for the study and control of diabetes. Staff and students at VU St Albans campus research and study health and well-being, and are inclined towards outdoor recreation as way of producing both physical and mental health.

Transport is emerging as a key issue for the outer suburbs – both for travelling to work and to shopping centres, and as a way of getting to pleasant places to undertake recreation. In the future, with increasing oil prices and increased fuel prices due to carbon taxes, people will need to find ways to recreate more locally. There is a need to invent destinations for recreation, with a degree of ‘eventfulness’ and purpose. These can have the added benefit of generating economic activity for the region.

Outer suburbs, including the west of Melbourne, are undergoing rapid change, including skyrocketing population growth and new types of housing. At the same time, there are more refugees from a wider variety of backgrounds coming into these suburbs. There is a need to act to ensure that these communities are strong and resilient, and the best way to do this is to connect people in these communities together out of common or shared interest.

Key Opportunities

There are overlapping interests and opportunities in creating open space linkages, and hubs of interest and activity in the vicinity of these open space areas, that solve or contribute to transport, recreation, health, biodiversity and cultural connection.

The open space ring that forms the basis of the GreenWeb is a continuous stretch of parkland that connects the older and newer communities, environmental and cultural assets, and helps tell the story of what the outer west is about to newcomers.

The GreenWeb also connects to, and loops off, the planned (and partly built) Kororoit Creek Trail that will eventually run from Upper Melton, through Brimbank and Hobson’s Bay municipalities, to the sea at Altona. Other radial shared bike and walking paths run off the GreenWeb ring in many directions – enhancing its capacity to act as a destination.

Key Stakeholders

Started initially by Iramoo SCC, and its associated community groups, Friends of Iramoo, Brimbank Bicycle Users Group, Friends of Kororoit Creek, etc.

Picked up eventually by Brimbank City Council Urban Design Unit, and coordinated with the Open Space Strategy and the Shared Bike and Walking Trail Strategy group. Also now linking with the Community Plan for Brimbank, and with linkages to Melton Shire Council Environment Team

Linking with the various older and newer community groups in the region, including Cairnlea Residents’ Association, Sunshine Residents’ Association, St Albans Community Centre, Friends of the Black Powder Mill (preserving the history of the now removed Albion Explosives Factory Site), Bullum Bullum Aboriginal Reserve, Kororoit Creek Project, and Brimbank Hunt Club Community Arts Centre.

Has the potential to build participation and engagement by at least five secondary colleges and eight primary schools dotted along or, in the vicinity of, the open space.

Needs and Interests of the Major Players

The key stakeholders have a variety of very different interests: environmental, social, historical, recreational, health-oriented, economic. However, all groups have an interest in what the other groups are able to offer, and see these other interests as at least benign, if not complementary to their own.

The various departments in Brimbank and Melton Councils also have a wide variety of interests in the open space ring. The work done in the formation of the GreenWeb concept has assisted the Councils to communicate internally – because there is a simple, clear concept into which they can infuse their own perspectives. This (along with a lot of ground work) has helped get the GreenWeb ring concept on the various Council strategies and plans.

The Common Ground Idea

The GreenWeb Open Space Ring concept is a large enough and clear enough concept to draw in and involve a wide range of stakeholders with diverse interests. The GreenWeb concept has not just fallen out of the sky. It has taken many years of knowing local issues and people, and forming relationships, before such a concept can come into existence with the resonance needed to drive it forward.

The Benefits to Each Player of this Idea

The benefits are many and varied, but they are all linked and able to be linked in people's minds: open space, health, environmental connection, community connection, historical and cultural understanding – all made explicit by the specific facilities, resources, knowledge and relationships that currently exist across the various facets of the GreenWeb.

How the Concept is Being Communicated

The GreenWeb concept is being raised at each of the community forums on open space, shared bike and walking paths, community planning, food security, etc. For the first stage of the project, the focus is two fold:

1. ensuring that the shared bike and walking path trails are fully mapped out and incorporated into the Council plans – this infrastructure is fundamental to the GreenWeb concept
2. developing five key hubs of activity around the GreenWeb that will bring in the diverse interests: Iramoo EcoLiving Centre & Lakes Hub; Isabella Williams Urban Park Development Hub; Bullum Bullum Aboriginal Reserve Hub; Black Powder Mill Hub; and Brimbank Community Arts Centre (old Hunt Club) Hub. Each of these facilities will help develop aspects of the GreenWeb and will promote the GreenWeb as a whole.

The GreenWeb concept is also being communicated more broadly via the Kororoit Creek project, through each of the participating institutions and community groups, and via Victoria University and its associates.

Current Status – Where we are now

The GreenWeb appears on the draft Bicycle and Walking Trail Plan (open for consultation) and is consistent with the Open Space & Playgrounds Strategy. Recently it has been put forward as a possible development in the Community Plan 'Imagine Brimbank'. The concept has been endorsed by the Brimbank Agenda 21 Advisory Committee, and has been supported as a concept by the Mayor of Brimbank. The entire length of the ring has been ridden around, and photographically documented. Brimbank Open Space group has taken on the task of developing maps and a more detailed description to take them forward to a full meeting of Council for endorsement. Once this happens, a consultative committee will be formed of all interested community groups, resident representatives and businesses, in association with the two participating councils.

Tool 9. Iramoo Induction Checklist

- ☐ Welcome and introduction to other Iramoo staff and team members
- ☐ Team member introduces themselves
- ☐ Overview of Iramoo and its objectives
- ☐ Overview of Iramoo's community programs - volunteers, students, work for the dole
- ☐ Discussion about regular activities and projects at Iramoo
 - ☐ Discuss how the team member will be involved at Iramoo
 - ☐ Regular schedule of activities
 - ☐ Special project or specific role
 - ☐ Appropriate training will be provided as required
- ☐ Discuss level of involvement
 - ☐ Days of the week – normally Wednesday and Thursday each week, last Saturday of the month
 - ☐ Hours – normally 10am to 3pm
 - ☐ Which Iramoo staff the team member is going to be working with
 - ☐ Inform Iramoo if the team member cannot attend as planned
 - ☐ Team member to sign in appropriate attendance folders
- ☐ Iramoo Sustainable Community Centre orientation tour – Green Lab (kitchen, tea & coffee, sign-in folder, lockers), recycling bin, seedling nursery, worm farm, toilets, Moondani Balluk, Discovery Centre, tool shed, seed-bank, Sustainability Street garden, compost area, Reconciliation Rocks, seed orchard, wetland, Iramoo Wildlife Park, Pimelea Grassland Reserve, Featherheads Grassland Reserve, university cafeterias.

- ☐ Team Member Welcome Pack
 - ☐ Iramoo Team Member Information Booklet
 - ☐ Map detailing the layout of Iramoo
 - ☐ Complete Iramoo Membership Form and VU photo-release form
- ☐ Discuss expectations & guidelines for behaviour
 - ☐ Team member's rights & responsibilities
 - ☐ Be tolerant, understanding & considerate of all other Iramoo team members
 - ☐ At all times, must act in a non-discriminatory & culturally sensitive manner
 - ☐ Harassment of any kind will not be tolerated
 - ☐ Procedures for team member's complaints or disputes
 - ☐ Encourage team member's feedback, ideas & suggestions
 - ☐ While at Iramoo, please adhere to sustainable living practices – recycling, composting, minimising water & energy consumption
 - ☐ Designated smoking area outside Green Lab – strictly no smoking in all other areas
 - ☐ Team member should not attend if under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
 - ☐ Follow designated work procedures and the responsible use of Iramoo's equipment
 - ☐ Help keep all the areas around Iramoo clean & tidy
 - ☐ Hygiene standards for equipment & clothing to minimise weed dispersal
- ☐ Occupational Health, Safety & Welfare (OHS&W)
 - ☐ Duty of Care to the individual, other Iramoo team members & Victoria University
 - ☐ Team members covered by Victoria University's public liability insurance policy
 - ☐ Location of an up-to-date copy of Iramoo's OHS&W Manual
 - ☐ Emergency procedure – team member's emergency contact details
 - ☐ First aid - location of first aid kits; identify qualified first aid personnel
 - ☐ Team members must bring own medication for asthma, allergies or other ailments
 - ☐ Compulsory to complete an incident/accident report form
 - ☐ Discuss possible hazards & risks
 - ☐ Fire procedure & location of fire extinguishers – designated evacuation area
 - ☐ Snakes & snake bites – identification & behaviour; handling an encounter; wear long pants, thick socks & sturdy footwear
 - ☐ Syringes – Do not touch; inform Iramoo staff where located
 - ☐ Physical exertion – warm-up & stretch; work at own pace; know personal limits
 - ☐ Walking – watch for hazards on the ground, slippery rocks
 - ☐ Correct lifting techniques – bending from the knees; ask for help

- ☐ Protection from the sun – use supplied sunscreen; wear a hat & long sleeves
- ☐ Dehydration – bring own drink bottle; drink lots of water; volunteer activities are cancelled on days forecast to be 35oC & over
- ☐ Hypothermia – on cold &/or wet days dress warmly; bring a change of clothing
- ☐ Be extra safety conscious when working with electrical equipment, power tools &/or pesticides
- ☐ Only use electrical equipment & power tools per the operating instructions
- ☐ Volunteers require training before they can use Glyphosate (Round-up) herbicide – wear gloves; don't inhale fumes; don't use in windy conditions; don't spill; keep swabbing kits inside a bucket; wash hands thoroughly after use
- ☐ Any other question, issues or matters of interest or concern?

Date of induction & orientation:

Name of staff person who conducted the induction:.....

Signature of staff person who conducted the induction:

I, (team member's name), confirm that the above induction & orientation items has been discussed with me and that I understood all of these points. I also agree to be involved at Iramoo in the manner expected.

Team Member's signature:

Tool 10. Designing Displays and Education Programs

Displays

The number of rooms available in an ecocentre will vary considerably – from a single small room, one large room or many rooms in one building to many rooms in several buildings. Most of the rooms will have to be multipurpose, although some may be set aside for special purposes, such as the CERES Low Energy House. Any displays will, therefore, need to be around the perimeter of the room to allow for maximum use of the floor space by visitors and/or staff and volunteers. Some displays can be stored in cupboards or storerooms and brought out when the programs are to be delivered. If you provide seating in a room, then stackable chairs and tables might be the answer to give greater flexibility. Children are usually quite happy to sit on the floor for short periods.

When you are designing your displays, think about creating a plan to give a coordinated approach, reflecting the unique style of your centre. When planning your displays, consider the following:

- Identify all the possible uses for each room. Decide which rooms will be used for education purposes.
- If possible, map possible pathways for visitors to your centre. Design your displays so that they follow these pathways in a logical way.
- Decide on the main message and sub-messages for each of your displays
- Make sure that your displays complement and reinforce the messages of your education programs
- Decide on a style and colour scheme for your displays
- Aim to have your displays clear, exciting, colourful and appealing to all ages
- Plan your displays, using your style and colour scheme
- Try to keep any words in a display to a minimum; using photos, drawings and real objects where possible. If your displays will be used by young children, try to have any lettering run horizontally (not vertically) and use lower case (not upper case) lettering.
- Think creatively, try 3 dimensional displays, using sound effects if possible
- Try to have some displays interactive, requiring some action/response by the visitor. (The CERES Low Energy House has a wonderful interactive display where people can measure the temperature in the roof cavity of a model house for several different forms of insulation.)
- Ensure that all your displays are safe and that all electrical and plumbing work is undertaken and checked by qualified tradesmen
- Make sure that all information in your displays is accurate and updated when required
- Try to build your displays so that they will not need frequent maintenance. If displays are damaged, repair them quickly.

- If your centre is new and you don't have much money for displays, consider starting small, using resources (posters, models, DVDs) provided by environmental government departments and agencies and environmental companies. Be prepared to improvise and use commonly available materials to build simple, but original displays. Invite volunteers with artistic and building skills to help you.

Education Programs

General

If running education programs at your centre, it is recommended that you develop the following:

- **a strategic plan and business plan** for the education programs (What you are aiming to achieve and how)
- **a promotion and engagement strategy** (how you are going to promote your programs and engage people)
- **a system to manage photo/video permission**
- **a booking system** that records the booking details of each group booking at your centre, preferably electronically, and which provides timely written or emailed confirmation to the group, plus details about your centre and the relevant education program
- **written program notes**, stored electronically and in a centrally located folder
- **a system to evaluate the education programs** (this could include monitoring teacher evaluation forms, follow-up phone calls to the school, developing case studies or even an independent evaluation of your programs)
- **a risk management assessment and a counter disaster plan**, displayed prominently in every room at your centre (this should have the telephone numbers of key emergency services)
- **a safety procedures manual**, clearly labeled and in a central location
- **appropriate and regularly maintained safety equipment**, such as fire extinguishers and residual current devices for electrical appliances
- **an approved first aid kit**, centrally located; with staff required to undertake regular first aid training from a registered first aid training organisation
- **an injury record folder**, clearly labeled and in a central location
- **clear signage** for entry to the education rooms and exits for each room
- a staff or volunteer **induction and training program**, including obtaining relevant working with children permission/certification (e.g. Victorian Working with Children Cards).

The Entrance and Other Facilities

It is recommended that the entrance to your centre and to education rooms creates a sense of excitement and anticipation for visitors. For example, the Gould League once had an education room called the Giant Compost Bin. This room was a large scale model of the inside of a compost bin, complete with giant pieces of fruit and vegetables, giant compost creatures, a sound / light

show and an entrance built to simulate an Invisible Shrinking Machine.

Ensure that your centre has adequate toilet facilities, wheelchair access and first aid/safety equipment as appropriate.

Written Materials

All written materials should be easy to read, illustrated and with practical tips for actions at school, home and work.

School-based materials can be in either in hard-copy format or downloadable from your website.

Materials to be forwarded to schools should include:

- general information about your centre
- sample permission forms
- dress requirements of visitors to your centre (e.g. closed shoes, hats, coats, etc.). Children should wear name tags.
- supervision expectations (e.g. A class teacher/suitable adult should accompany each class at all times when in your centre. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has guidelines on its website for the ratio of teachers to students on excursions.)
- safety information, especially for hot, wet or cold days, and behaviour expectations
- an outline of the activities that will be completed at the centre, plus activities for students to complete before and after the visit to your centre
- links of the program to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS)
- a list of up-to-date contacts and useful books, CD ROMs, video and websites
- a teacher's evaluation form to complete and return to you after the school visit

Developing School Programs

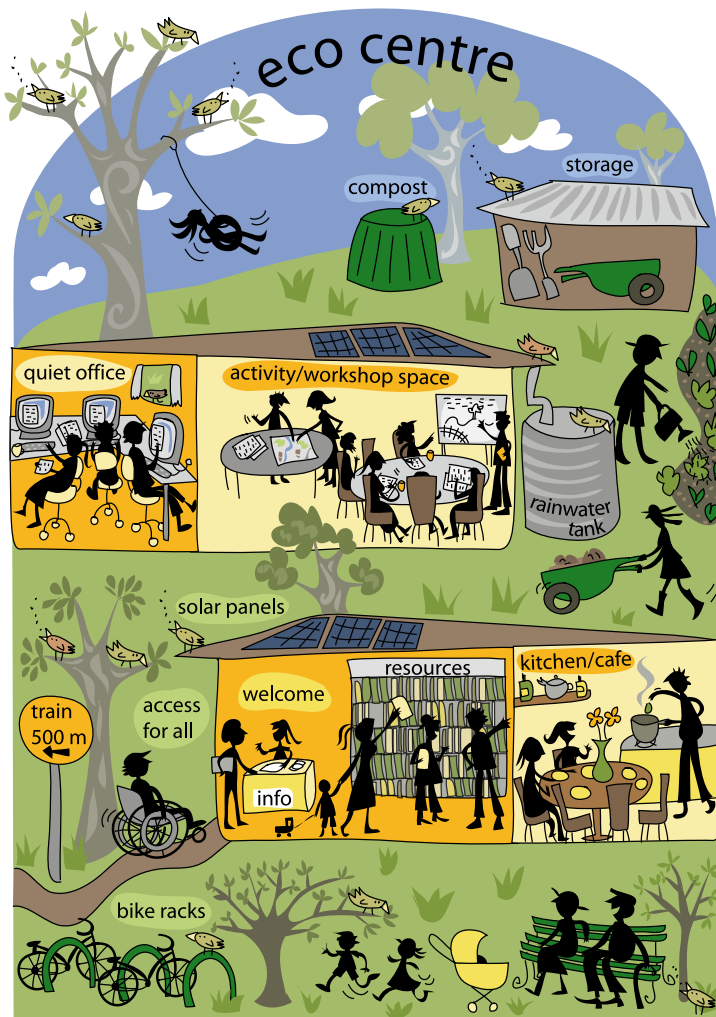
When developing education programs for school groups, consider the following:

1. Start with VELS. Identify learning outcomes for the students that are appropriate to the level of the children and consistent with the topic of your program. Try to select outcomes for a range of Domains and Dimensions.
2. Plan the overall program, including welcome, induction, introduction, activities, tours and toilet and other breaks.
3. Develop creative, fun and interesting activities that will help the students achieve the learning outcomes
4. Think up an appealing title for the program (not too long)

5. Develop a lesson plan for each program, with the **Content** (the knowledge and understandings) and **Process** (how they will learn – music, games, tours, questioning) and the **Timing** for each activity. Pilot the program with a few groups and, when you are happy with the content and process, document the program so that others can use it as well.
6. Compile a checklist of all the equipment needed for a program. Label boxes of equipment for each activity. Try to keep all the equipment for a particular program in a single location to make it easier to collect before the program.
7. When working with children, remember that children learn in different ways, so use a variety of activities, use humour wherever possible, involve the children and build on what they know, rather than give them all the same stock program.
8. Provide opportunities for hands-on/experiential learning – this will be engaging, enjoyable and more likely to have a lasting impact on behaviour change – through learning by doing.
9. Conduct a risk assessment of any activity and implement occupational health and safety procedures in accordance with relevant statutory requirements and your duty of care obligations. Regularly discuss occupational health and safety with your team and participants; this may include a site check and briefing at the start of programs.

Adapted from Armstrong P. (1999). *Guidelines for Developing Waste Wise Education Centres in Victoria (Draft)*. EcoRecycle Victoria.

Tool 11. Snapshot of Ecocentres



1. Port Phillip EcoCentre

Snapshot October 2009

www.ecocentre.com

Port Phillip EcoCentre (PPEC) is a not-for-profit community-managed environment group, supported by the City of Port Phillip. It provides base for a diversity of affiliate groups and is a social hub, building local networks and facilitating partnerships, practical projects and programs across the inner south-eastern Melbourne region. PPEC works with the community to improve the environment and community wellbeing through experiential education, collaborative action, advocacy, demonstrating eco-living practices and providing a place to meet and share ideas and knowledge. PPEC acknowledges the traditional owners of this region, the Boon Wurrung of the Kulin Nation.



Resources and Programs

Affiliate Groups

PPEC affiliation is open to not-for-profit groups who are engaged in environmental projects and / or community-building programs. Entitlements to PPEC affiliates include free access to meeting space, equipment, and mentoring and support services from PPEC staff. The diversity of affiliate groups provides opportunities for the community to engage in a range of local projects and activities, and expands the support and knowledge base for PPEC programs. This taps into local knowledge, community and volunteer participation and creates an atmosphere where participants are both learning and teaching.

Volunteer Program

Volunteer participation provides essential support to all PPEC activities. Volunteer participation expands their skills, knowledge base and networks.

Tours and Open Door

Guided and self guided tours of PPEC's Eco-house are available to individuals and groups. Key features of the EcoHouse, ranging from inexpensive 'do it yourself' options to more expensive installations, include:

- Solar panels and energy efficient appliances
- Passive heating and cooling
- Non-toxic, recycled and local materials
- Rainwater tanks and water efficient fittings
- Onsite black and grey water recycling through a worm, wetland and soil trench system
- Community productive garden, compost and indigenous garden
- Sustainable living practices

School Programs

PPEC works in partnership with local school communities and other local partners on: strategic planning; collaborative practical action and projects; behaviour change; leadership and local school and community networks and celebrations. Boon Wurrung elders lead the annual school awards and harvest festival, and, through school programs, share their knowledge of the land and caring for country. A Teacher Environment Network builds relationships between schools and provides professional learning.

CarbonCut

CarbonCut is a water and energy reduction program targeted at local low-income residents. The program aims to recruit and train leaders from the local community to deliver free household retrofits



and behaviour change support. Team members include local residents from diverse cultural backgrounds, providing language translation and links to non-English speaking communities. The program is supported by community groups and local welfare agencies already connected to low income residents.

Port Phillip Food Security Forum and Community Gardens

The Port Phillip Urban Fresh Food Network (PPUFFN) runs quarterly public forums to share knowledge and discuss ways in which we can increase local food production, making the transition to a more sustainable food system. Several action groups are working on projects to help people get involved in growing and sharing fresh food. PPEC assists local groups to design, build and care for productive gardens through designing, building and gardening together.

Blue Hat

The Blue Hat program aims to raise awareness of the relationship between a healthy mind and a responsible healthy community, resulting in a more sustainable environment. The program explores and celebrates ways to achieve happiness, contentment and connection through:

- Active, creative community involvement in urban living
- Expressing feelings and feeling connected through creativity, nature, and gardening
- Art therapy, chanting, meditation, spoken word

BayKeeper

The Port Phillip Baykeeper program provides an education and advocacy role to promote stewardship of Port Phillip Bay. The program works with schools, community groups and individuals, government agencies and businesses to better understand, appreciate and protect Port Phillip Bay (aka Nairm). Activities include eco-tours, environmental surveys, representation on Community Stakeholder Groups, public presentations and forums, research and preparation of educational materials.

Artists in Residence

The Arts are a key to creating dialogue and cultural change within the wider community. PPEC Artists-in-Residence engage people in the topic of sustainability and to encourage a new generation of environmental artists. This provides a community base for artists to explore their artistic practice of an environmental nature.

Indigenous Community Relationships and Projects

Social justice is a cornerstone of sustainability; establishing positive links with the indigenous communities is one of our primary goals. PPEC provides a venue for local indigenous community celebrations and events, and supports local elders with the various land management strategies and development proposals they have to deal with. They actively promote respect for indigenous cultural values through our events and education program.



Workshops, Forums and Action Groups

PPEC provides a meaningful learning space for community workshops and forums and supports and provides a meeting space for local action groups.

Future Directions

PPEC is currently developing its planning and business management systems to enhance viability and enable the expansion and development programs. They are aiming to integrate with the emerging Transitions Towns group, and further develop community leadership and learning based change programs. While 'climate change' and carbon reduction' have assumed primacy over other issues, PPEC is committed to maintaining tangible engagement with community-based programs for local biodiversity protection. Developing more effective communications strategies and media (such as video production) are seen as vital tools to achieve our goals.

2. Edendale Farm Community Environment Centre

A council owned and managed ecocentre

Gastons Road

Eltham VIC 3095

Phone: (03) 9433 3711

Email: edendale@nillumbik.vic.gov.au

http://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/Page/Page.asp?Page_Id=198&h=1

This snapshot was developed through an interview with Lisa Walton, Edendale Project Officer.



Resources and Programs

Edendale Farm Community Environment Centre (Edendale) is a 7.3 hectare site in Eltham, Victoria. It is funded and managed by Nillumbik Council. The site incorporates farm animals, a nursery, demonstration gardens and a community education centre. Edendale demonstrates sustainable farming practices as well as delivering an Environmental Education Excursions program for schools. Edendale is educating and transforming the community, and, through its projects, builds the capacity of council to implement and promote Ecologically Sustainable Development. Edendale has been a successful environmental education centre since 1994 and currently identifies with being at the 'forming' stage in its development as an ecocentre.

Key Success Factors

- Fostering community engagement and ownership from the outset
- Rigorous planning and allowing for responsive adaptability
- Maintaining vision and values, and regularly reviewing the strategic plan
- Applying quadruple bottom line – incorporating an ethical responsibility pillar into approaches to ensure good governance, values and behaviour

- Council funding to support: secure tenure; capital works; site maintenance; and staff (coordinator, project officer, administration, team leaders, education officers)
- Continuity and commitment in staff (The Edendale Farm Coordinator has worked at Edendale for over 6 years.)
- Substantial volunteer activity
- Using market research to maintain community relevance
- Development of a business plan and financial processes and accounting channels within council to maintain financial sustainability of enterprises, operations and services.
- Succession planning, not doing too many things, and working together to share the load
- Including staff recruitment, retention, professional development, mentoring and reward in strategic planning
- Building collaborative relationships across council
- Having a wide range of innovative and imaginative projects that match demand and respond to local needs



Key Issues and Challenges

1. Planning

The Master Plan provides a framework for developing Edendale into an ecocentre. At the same time, while it is important to have strategic vision and plans, Edendale has experienced the need to be able to respond to new ideas, the community and funding opportunities as they emerge, which support the overall Master Plan vision.

2. Continuity in Council

70% of councillors changed during the development of the Master plan – continuity and commitment from Edendale staff helped to keep the vision for Edendale moving forward.

3. Governance

Although local community engagement in the development of the Edendale Master Plan was a key success factor in this planning stage, the benefit of having a community-based advisory group wasn't maintained through to the early stages of implementing the Master Plan. When Lisa Walton began as the Project Officer at Edendale, she recognised straight away that governance needed to involve community. *“Community engagement to ensure community ownership is essential from the start. But, to ensure that it is effective you must first define the governance relationship between the ecocentre and Council”.*

4. Funding

Council requires matching funding for projects, and the range of external grant funding opportunities is more restricted when applying as a Local Government Agency. Lisa Walton advises *“it’s critical to integrate projects and site development with Council’s capital expenditure budget and synchronise this with grant opportunities. You need to include a robust, long-term operational budget (buildings, services, programs, staffing) in your early financial planning – not just your budget to establish the facility. It won’t run on nothing.”*

Future Directions

- Continued implementation of the Master Plan for Edendale with particular emphasis on those facilities and services shown by market research to be highly desirable, such as the provision of a café
- Involving community in governance
- Accommodating community groups and integrating them with Edendale
- Developing a Financial Business Plan for Edendale that informs the most effective implementation of the Master Plan and provides a framework for the long-term financial sustainability of the centre.
- Building capacity and collaboration within Council to assist with the implementation of the Master Plan and optimise the benefit for the community.

3. Manly Environment Centre

A council managed ecocentre

41 Belgrave Street, Manly, NSW, Australia

Phone: (02) 9976 2842

Email: mec@manly.nsw.gov.au

www.mec.org.au

Development

In the late 1980s, the intense pressure of development, tourism and pollution resulted in a huge groundswell of concern from the local Manly community. This translated into a unique form of positive action when this group sought to work with the Manly Council towards their common goals.

Manly Council’s Community Environment Committee recognised the importance of resourcing community education on environmental issues and obtained local corporate sponsorship for a small shop front in Manly’s retail area. With Judy Reizes as the driving force, along with members of the community, the Manly Environment Centre (MEC), which opened in March 1991, was staffed entirely by volunteers for the first 12 months. Council now supports three full time staff to coordinate the centre and organise projects, networks, action groups, events and festivals. Many of the activities based at the centre are run by volunteers.

Resources and Programs

The MEC shopfront venue offers an extensive resource library with access to information and resources on sustainable living, environmental education and local biodiversity. An information desk supported by a wonderful and welcoming full time information officer, provides face to face support. The centre acts as a local hub, supporting people, projects and programs.

While the centre itself does not act as a demonstration eco-living centre, several local residents involved in the centre open their houses for tours, promoted through the centre. Iconic local species including the penguins and weedy sea dragon are central to many of the centre's activities and action groups. A food co-op adjoining the centre's shopfront is run by volunteers, and attracts people to the centre. A core activity of MEC is organising several annual community festivals, linking biodiversity, sustainable living and the arts.

Key Success Factors

The centre attributes its long term success to the dedication of its founder and current day coordinator, Judy Rezie, and the ongoing support from Manly Council. This continuity in people and funding have allowed for the development of relationships, networks and projects that are on-going, rather than short-term, start-stop projects. The centre, while delivering council goals, has been independent in its daily activity, allowing for community driven initiatives.

Future Directions

MEC is moving into facilitating youth leadership training and youth action groups.

4. The Macarthur Centre for Sustainable Living

A centre managed through a community and Botanic Gardens partnership

1 Mount Annan Drive Mount Annan NSW 2567

Phone: (02) 4647 9828

Email: info@mcsl.org.au

www.mcsl.org.au

Development

The Botanic Gardens Trust had plans to develop a centre for urban horticulture at the Mount Annan Botanic Gardens. There was interest in the local community to develop an ecocentre, inspired by CERES Community Environment Park in Brunswick, Victoria. Rather than pursue separate projects, a partnership was formed to realize both of these overlapping visions. This new group, with support from three local councils, obtained \$3 million in funding from the Australian Government's Sustainable Regions Program to develop the Macarthur site. This project began in 2005.

The site is a 5 hectare section of the Mount Annan Botanic Gardens at the gateway to the gardens. Physical features include: a café (not in operation); conference centre; office; a cottage for information displays and volunteers and productive gardens. The buildings and gardens demonstrate state of the art sustainable design and practice. The land is owned by the Mount Annan Botanic Gardens and leased by the Macarthur Sustainable Living Centre group.

Resources and Programs

- Volunteers maintain the productive gardens and help coordinate tours and activities.
- A self guided tour brochure and information displays are available to visitors.
- A Community Greening Officer employed by the Botanic Gardens and Department of Housing operates from the centre, coordinating school programs.
- Disability groups use the gardens for activities.
- Various groups use the conference centre.
- Local universities use the site for field work, supporting projects

Key Success Factors

- Community ownership from the outset
- Clear management structures - A Board of Management was developed at the very beginning, with equal representation from the two partnering groups – the local residents and the Botanic Gardens Trust.
- The common ground between the groups formed the concept for the centre and successfully attracted substantial funding to develop the site.
- The group engaged CERES to advise and support their early development.
- Volunteers continue to play a key role in keeping the ecocentre going.

Key Issues and Challenges

- Key people coordinating and driving the vision forward resigned and the original vision was lost.
- There was no funding for operating the site in the original grant, or any other arrangements for operational personnel and budgets (coordination and site maintenance).
- Local businesses have expressed interest in projects, but without a funded coordinator, projects have not yet come to fruition.
- The interruption in funding and change in people led to a need for the group to re-form.

Future Directions

Macarthur Sustainable Living Centre is a place that is bursting with potential. The group is currently aiming to obtain funding for coordination and site maintenance, so that projects, programs and activities can grow. Local council involvement and partnerships are currently being pursued.

5. CERES Community Environment Park

Snapshot October 2009

www.ceres.org.au

CERES (the Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies, pronounced 'series') is located on 4.5 hectares (10 acres) on the banks of the Merri Creek, in East Brunswick, close to the centre of Melbourne. CERES runs on renewable energy, is a 55 tonne carbon sink, conserves and recycles its water and waste, grows organic food and teaches diverse audiences about more just and environmentally friendly ways of living. What makes the CERES concept particularly compelling is that sustainability initiatives are located in a participatory social setting which, over time, has created a village-like environment, made up of a melting pot of different audiences.



It is the most visited community environmental centre in Australia, known for being a pioneer of community arts, experiential education, sustainable urban agriculture and for demonstrating innovative and achievable solutions to pressing environmental and social issues. CERES, which has been in existence 25 years, employs 200 people (equivalent to 60 full time positions). It is an incorporated Not for Profit organisation governed by a Committee of Management. CERES has been created for community by community and is an available model for communities all over the world. Projects, programs, action groups and events at CERES are extensive and best explored through their website.

Enterprises

The CERES café, nursery, organic farm and market are exciting models of sustainable and social enterprise. Along with festivals and education programs, CERES aims to teach and inspire – creating a rich tapestry of experience, as well as providing services to the community and income to support further CERES projects. CERES is also host to a range of independently managed site groups and volunteers who enrich the community landscape and provide diverse opportunities for participation.

Education

CERES leads statewide delivery of the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI Vic), and has an extensive experiential learning program for primary, secondary, and tertiary students, business, government and community.

Consultancy

CERES provides consultancy services, including ecocentre design, planning and development.

Future Directions

The CERES Centre:

- A new visitor centre of local, national and international significance where people can engage in a vast array of activities
- An inclusive forum for business, government and community sectors to turn ideas into practical solution for sustainable and equitable living
- A think tank and centre for leadership and creativity in research, innovation and practice

6. Iramoo Sustainable Community Centre

Snapshot as of October 2009

www.iramoo.org

Iramoo Sustainable Community Centre (Iramoo) is the Woiworung Aboriginal name for Melbourne, and in particular its natural ecosystem – the great wildflower grassland plains that once formed a circle from Diamond Creek to Keilor to Werribee and down to Geelong. Iramoo uses the name with formal permission of the Kulin Nations Cultural Heritage Association.

Iramoo, currently sited on Victoria University's St Albans campus, is several hectares of land with unique features, facilities and resources. These, together with programs that have evolved over a decade, bring an understanding of sustainable living to the community of Melbourne's West, including the staff and students of Victoria University (VU).

Iramoo infrastructure comprises an office block and seminar room, with links to the Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic Unit, a green laboratory, an education discovery centre, an indigenous native plant nursery with large water tanks making it self-sufficient for water, a seed orchard, a community vegetable garden, a tool and machinery shed, a special site for reconciliation ceremonies, a sheltered barbeque area and dance pit and toilet facilities. These are all located next to a 35 hectare Wildlife Park with endangered plant and animal species, a series of spring-fed lakes, and at the intersection of the older and newer communities of Melbourne's outer West.

Iramoo is a meeting place for like-minded people interested in environmental, social and cultural well-being, and who want to make a difference.

Iramoo and its predecessors has, over the past twelve years, raised the profile of, and expertise for, environmental protection in the Melbourne's West, and has fostered both understanding and concrete action to conserve threatened species, effectively manage open space for humans and other species, and minimise negative impacts on the environment through water, waste and energy usage.

People working at Iramoo include a ranger and education officer, a grounds and programs officer, a plant nursery coordinator and a community sustainability officer. They also have involvement from the Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic Unit staff.

Several community groups use Iramoo as a meeting place. These include the Friends of Iramoo, the Brimbank Friends Networking Group, the Maribyrnong Local Indigenous Network and the Brimbank Bicycle Users Group.

A wide range of volunteers give their time to assist the staff in the projects and programs facilitated by Iramoo.

The University uses Iramoo as a place to teach and supervise post-graduate students in research and coursework, specific subjects and coursework for undergraduate students across a range of disciplines including Ecology, Community Development, Pre-service Education, Social Psychology, Public Relations, Media & Communications and Civil Engineering. Iramoo is also used by staff and students of vocational education (e.g. TAFE) and further education (e.g. disability and work for the dole) to undertake practical training. Iramoo is a key on-campus facility for the delivery of the VU Learning in Work and Community (LiWC) commitment, across a range of courses – assisting VU students from a range of courses to complete their required 25% LiWC course component. Iramoo also acts as a place to introduce primary and secondary students in the region to the key sustainability issues across water, waste, energy (including climate change) and biodiversity, and consider what actions can be taken to offset negative impacts. Recently VU has organised to act as a hub for coordinated delivery of the state-wide Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI) program across the western Melbourne region.

Future Directions

Two key future directions for Iramoo are to lead partnerships to build the Iramoo EcoLiving Centre, and to develop the Iramoo~Albion GreenWeb.

1. Iramoo EcoLiving Centre

The Iramoo EcoLiving Centre will be built over the next two years, with funding from the Victorian Sustainability Fund EcoLiving Centres grants and labour from Victoria University Building Industries apprentices and trainers. It will be a home-style centre, located on Brimbank Council land at the new spring-fed lakes of St Albans-Cairnlea. The building will be based on a house re-located from nearby, with an elegant newer-style extension.

The centre will be built and retrofitted to the highest energy, water, waste and biodiversity standards of sustainability and serve as a demonstration facility, meeting place, training venue and living example of how we can all live in more satisfying and environmentally responsible ways. The Centre will have a community-based Board of Management and be supported through a partnership between Brimbank City Council, Victoria University and other key agencies and community groups.

2. Iramoo~Albion GreenWeb

The Iramoo~Albion GreenWeb is an 18 km ring of open space that runs from the Iramoo-Cairnlea Lakes, down Jones Creek, where it connects with the open space corridor running west along Kororoit Creek, as far as Isabella Williams Reserve, and returns to its origins via the open space along the powerline easement and road easement that runs from Burnside back to Station Road and on past the north of Cairnlea

At multiple points within this open space ring are important historical, cultural and natural features. These include significant aboriginal sites, special places representing post-settlement history, arts and culture, enjoyable natural features and places to relax, breathe and reconnect with nature. From the planned 18 km bicycle and walking path circuit, there is potential for other open space corridors and paths to radiate out, down Kororoit Creek towards Sunshine, upwards towards Caroline Springs, north along Station Street to Keilor, and east from Cairnlea Lakes towards Brimbank Park, via the powerline easement that runs to the east.

The central purpose of the ring and its connections is to provide a focus and destination for those using open space for recreation and relaxation. This destination and events hub will highlight, and invite residents to engage with and explore, the depth and extent of culture, history, wildlife and enjoyable places that lie currently as hidden gems across the West. The key purposes of the GreenWeb are to:

- connect diverse communities of people
- protect natural habitat & provide corridors for native animals & plants
- promote healthy sustainable living and address the high levels of diabetes and obesity in Melbourne's West
- highlight and celebrate the rich history and culture that pervades the region

7. Canberra Environment and Sustainability Centre

<http://www.ecoaction.com.au/index.php>

Thanks to Centre Director Robin Tenant-Wood for her time in compiling these notes.

Mission: To support the community of Canberra and the South East region in the advancement of the principles of ecological sustainability and environmental protection through knowledge, education, information and practical application. Our Mission, along with all projects developed and implemented by the Centre are underpinned by the Earth Charter_

Development

The Canberra Environment and Sustainability Resource Centre was established in 1974, under the name of the ACT Environment Centre. It changed its name to the Canberra and South East Region Environment Centre (CASEREC) in 1976. The aim of the Centre was to provide a focal point for the growing environment movement in the capital and surrounding region by being an umbrella organisation for the large number of diverse environment groups in the region. The Centre occupied the premises between Kingsley and Childers Streets from 1978 to the start of 2007. In March 2007, the Centre moved into a demountable on campus at the Australian National University, next to the National Museum to make way for the ANU Exchange development in the whole City West precinct.

In summary, the Centre has been in operation in one form or other for over 35 years – in 1984 it became the ACT Environment Centre:

- as an amenities and resource hub for small environment groups
- for continuation of the long-term major library and resource centre with environmental themes

The Centre is on Australian National University (ANU) land – it was shifted to the current site in 2007, in a new, large portable available after the reconstruction of Mt Stromlo observatory.

Some of the original participating groups are still with the Centre, others have gone with the ACT Conservation Council and some have grown into independent groups in their own right.

The current Director took over in 2005 when the Centre was going through a ‘transition’ stage. The centre has picked up some of the newer sustainability agendas and also has a strong focus in providing environmental connection and practical environmental projects for ANU students. There is a strong contingent of Masters Degree students undertaking minor projects with the centre.

Resources, Programs and Future Directions

The centre has developed a range of vegetable gardens, a bicycle fixing business (combination of paid and volunteer staff) and bike repair courses for students (many overseas students come to build their own function bike out of all the spare parts). A popular feature has been the demonstration balcony garden – which was developed first by a group of students, has a lot of visitors and forms the basis for an occasional workshop.

Many of the projects are standard with specific community cohorts; e.g. waste (including audits), water, permaculture. Some of these focus on projects with some of the lower socio-economic groups in Canberra. The Centre is involved in the delivery of AuSSI (Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative) and has both excursion and incursion programs around vegetable gardens and urban biodiversity. Some projects also cross discipline boundaries, including health and community renewal.

Issues, Challenges and Key Success Factors

- There is a need to respond to the community perceptions of the environment.
- People want to be engaged with environmental issues and actions, but there is a need for the Centre to be careful about the level of activism it is involved with.
- It is important to have some key, central projects that help define the Centre and provide a sense of continuity and purpose.
- It is important, and an ongoing issue, to keep going financially and to keep capable staff.
- It is important to partner and collaborate with other groups in projects, programs and to be there to provide information and skills.
- Every project at the Centre has to have both environmental and social sustainability dimensions.

Governance and Financing

Governance of the centre is by an elected Board of Management. Key ANU people are on the board and ANU financially supports part of the Director’s position.

The strategic planning process is cyclic and layered, with plans for: 1 year, 2 years, 5 years and 10 years

The staffing varies between 3-4 days per week, and is mostly on a short term basis, but this goes up and down with the size of projects.

8. Northey Street City Farm

<http://www.northeastcityfarm.org.au/>

Northey Street City Farm is a non-profit community organisation situated on four hectares of land on the banks of Brisbane's Breakfast Creek in Windsor. The land is owned by Brisbane City Council.

Mission: To create a working model of a cooperative, community based urban permaculture farm which demonstrates, promotes, educates and advocates for environmental and economic sustainability in a healthy, diverse and supportive community.

Development

The farm was established in 1994 after major floods had destroyed some of the houses along Breakfast Creek, with the site becoming weed infested. The site was slowly taken over by a volunteer group of city farmers and subsequently formalised in an agreement with Brisbane Council. Since then, more than 1500 exotic and native fruit trees, bushfood plants, shrubs and ground covers have been planted. All planting at the farm is seen as an opportunity to learn about permaculture design and to create a lush inner city oasis.

Resources and Programs

The farm has been developed for people to enjoy and participate, using the principles of permaculture. It is also intended to be a demonstration site where people of all ages can learn through practical, hands on experience. The farm has individual gardening plots as well as training programs and an Edible Landscapes Nursery. Courses and workshops include organic gardening, permaculture, cooking and construction. In addition to formal certificate level permaculture courses, Northey Street offers a wide range of short courses including bee keeping, bamboo harvesting and building, keeping chickens in your back yard, therapeutic gardening, cooking for health and vitality, planning, planting and maintaining vegetable gardens, cob oven building, propagation and seed saving, composting and worm farming, introduction to permaculture, tanks and grey water, designing a permaculture treescape, managing pests and diseases, caring for trees, sustainable housing and renewable energy, growing and using herbs, preserving the surplus, and weaving with natural fibres.

Northey Street Organic Market operates out of the car park next to the City Farm fortnightly and sells fresh fruit and vegetables. Northey Street Cafe offers tasty cakes and delicious tea, coffee and chai – significantly, the cost of food is whatever you can afford. Celebrations include solstice and equinox celebrations, festivals and special events.

Key Success Factors

Northery Street City Farm is a good example of turning a disused area of land to good purpose, for the benefit of the community and their understanding of, and capacity to act for, environmental sustainability. Key success factors include:

- Building a sense of shared purpose and capacity for action over time
- Patience and persistence
- A strong underlying set of values
- Ongoing support from the local council
- Finding income streams that are consistent with the purposes and values of those that help support and run the centre

Key Issues and Challenges

A key issue is balancing the positive aspects of involvement by a diversity of interest groups, while at the same time maintaining coherence as a centre. This has been addressed by compiling a Policy and Procedure Manual – see below. For example, *“A team looks after a key element of The Farm’s activities, or a logical collection of these. Groups, sub-committees or individual coordinators look after specific operational activities, although these all belong to a broader team and are formed or disbanded through that team.”* The open structure of the farm sometimes invites vandalism, but this is countered to some extent by using mostly recycled materials, having some areas that are made secure and allowing homeless people to sleep on-site. Another challenge is finding secure streams of funding that help underwrite administrative costs – a lot of the administrative work of the farm is still done by volunteers, even though the organisation is growing in size and complexity.

Governance

Northey Street Farm is an incorporated group, governed by an elected Committee of Management. The Management Committee has financial and legal accountability for the Farm and oversees overall planning and reporting. The Farm operates on a non-hierarchical flat structure, empowering teams, groups and enterprises, while at the same time, acknowledging the ultimate financial and legal accountability of the Management Committee. With a grant from Brisbane City Council, a Policies and Procedures Manual has been compiled and made available on-line at <http://www.nscf.org.au/manual/> .

Funding

Funding is from a variety of sources and organised through Enterprises and Project Teams. Budgets for each of these are developed with assistance from the Finance Team. One key source of baseline funding is through membership fees. Anyone who recognises and respects The Farm's fundamental principles and subscribes to the Statement of beliefs is welcome to become a member. Members are entitled to benefits, as outlined on the membership form. These may change, especially to provide extra benefits during promotional periods. The membership fees as of 2009 are:

- concession (health care card) \$15
- adult \$30
- family \$40
- organisation \$60

Five-year memberships are also offered, at a discount

Strategic Planning

The Farm operates long-term through a five-year plan (required by Brisbane City Council for leasing and funding, as well as their own sustainability) that contains specific goals for the next financial year and general goals for the remaining years. Copies of the Five-Year Plan are available from the office. Financial decisions are streamlined through an annual budgeting process. The preference for decision-making is for it to occur through consensus, unless otherwise stated in the Constitution or broadly agreed to. Within team and enterprise meetings, there is scope to establish related processes, (e.g., consensus-minus-one). This is at the discretion of these teams.

Future Directions

The new program of sustainable living workshops include, for example (Sep – Dec 2009):

- solar cooking
- keeping chooks
- growing healthy vegies
- bee keeping
- growing and using bamboo
- weaving
- re-tasking discarded urban “rubbish”
- cob oven building
- vegan and vegetarian cooking

Tool 12. Travellers' Stories (Case Studies)

This section contains inspiring case studies of the three pioneer travellers. The stories below describe the history of each centre, the challenges they each experienced on their journey, some advice to fellow travellers and some of the colorful characters who were involved along the way

The key learnings from these case studies were:

- It takes time, persistence and entrepreneurship
- Diversity in activity and income source builds resilience
- Programs, enjoyable space and activity attract and engage community
- Organisational management needs to develop with growth
- You can't do it alone.



1. The Port Phillip EcoCentre Story

The Port Phillip EcoCentre (PPEC) is a place where environmental solutions are hatched and nurtured. The PPEC is a not-for-profit community-managed environment group, supported by the City of Port Phillip. The PPEC provides a base for a number of affiliate groups involved in a range of activities that promote biodiversity and community action.

Early Days

The 1980s saw increased community action to protect and improve nature in the city. Although inner urban areas were highly modified, their coastal foreshores had pockets of natural habitat that supported resident and migratory bush birds; and St Kilda had discovered a resident penguin colony. Employed with St Kilda Council Parks Department since 1985, by the mid 1990s, I'd been a long-term volunteer member of the St Kilda Penguin Study and helped to set up several community environment groups. I'd also met some interesting individuals... like the quirky couple who bred ladybirds in an East St Kilda flat; and a young up-and-coming South Melbourne Mayor named John Thwaites.

Community action to protect the penguins, plant trees, and improve local habitats grew apace with awareness of national issues such as farmland salinity and threats to the Daintree Rainforest and the proposal to dam Tasmania's Franklin River. Encouraged by their respective Councils, residents in Port Melbourne and St Kilda formed groups to protect and improve local habitats, creating momentum to establish a community indigenous plants nursery.

After Victorian municipal councils were amalgamated in the mid 90s (quite a contentious move at the time!), there were several redundant Council-owned facilities in the City of Port Phillip (formerly the cities of Port Melbourne, South Melbourne and St Kilda). I had the idea that one of these buildings could be used as a place where all the different environmental groups in the municipality could share a common space and benefit from exposure to each other's activities and audiences. At first, this took off like the proverbial lead balloon, but with the corporatisation of Council, and the need to win the hearts of a doubting community, the scene was set for fresh ideas.

Emerging Stage (1998 – 2003)

In February 1998, the City of Port Phillip (CoPP) convened a community working group to explore the concept of a local environmental hub something like CERES, or Scienceworks. The general idea was that it would support community initiatives and help to promote Council environment strategies. The working group was supported by Annie Bateman, the CoPP Waste Minimisation Officer; and was chaired by Leo Teller, a local resident and retired professor who had spent much of his life working around the world with UNESCO. This was a case of drawing on the collective wisdom of people with an extraordinary range of experience and expertise.



Over the following year, the group (around 10 people) met regularly to work out their aims and next steps. They developed a website (even before they'd investigated options for a physical space). Some early discussions worked through philosophical conundrums, such as - Should the kitchen cupboards have locks on them? What kind of sponsors would be acceptable? After a time, Annie felt the need to reduce her workload and the support role was handed to me. After looking at five council-owned buildings, and ranking them in terms of public accessibility, state of repair, and proximity to other attractions and community hubs, we settled on a rather non-descript house in St Kilda Botanical Gardens. The recycled house served as an office space for a Council Parks' team and was also used for meetings by Earthcare St Kilda. The house was approved for use as an Ecocentre in mid 1999. Coincidentally, Earthcare were looking to transform the building into an EcoHouse. They had approached Peter Ho, an architect, and several other design specialists to run a series of community workshops on how to change the building to demonstrate sustainable design. It was time to 'walk the talk'!

After around 12 months, Earthcare had an EcoHouse Masterplan, and raised some initial funds to employ a part-time EcoHouse Project Coordinator. Meanwhile, the PPEC had been working on establishing a viable organisational structure, including achieving 'Deductible Gift Recipient' status with the Australian Tax Office. This enabled receipt of tax deductible donations and is a key criterion required by philanthropic trusts when considering funding submissions. The quest to achieve this status was a defining factor in the organisational evolution of the



PPEC. To achieve GDR status, we had to look beyond the municipal boundary and adopt an umbrella structure with at least five affiliated groups taken from more than two local government areas. We had to look beyond the City boundary.

Deductible Gift Recipient status also meant that the PPEC was well structured to secure and manage the financial aspects of the EcoHouse project. This included employing Peter Barker as EcoHouse Project Coordinator, an excellent choice. The EcoHouse Masterplan won support from CoPP and this paved the way for a substantial state government contribution. The initial commitments from local and state government greatly assisted the task of attracting further support from corporate donors, philanthropic trusts and suppliers of sustainable building products.

We'd also invested time in building links and mentoring local groups. We felt it important to have more than one 'flagship' project. We built good relationships with Landcare, who facilitated major sponsorship from Holden for a frog habitat project at Westgate Park. Landcare was looking for a local project for Holden and approached us for our local knowledge. We were able to connect them with Friends of Westgate Park (an PPEC affiliate group), resulting in major funding for the park over three years. This project also involved St Kilda Indigenous Nursery Cooperative (SKINC – another affiliate) as the source of plants; and gave us an opportunity to develop and run activities for primary schools, drawing on the local knowledge of SKINC and the Friends of Westgate Park.

To summarise, our early years were spent looking inward, sorting out organisational structure, but also getting runs on the board with practical projects with strategic partners: City of Port Phillip, Earthcare, Landcare, Holden, SKINC, and Friends of Westgate Park. We'd also established a public fund for tax deductible status, raising money from a range of sources for the EcoHouse project and managing the design and construction phase of that project. The EcoHouse was launched on World Environment Day 2003, over five years since the idea was first conceived.

Around this time, there were major changes in our relationship with the St Kilda Botanical Gardens – the fences separating the PPEC from the gardens were pulled down, vegetable gardens were built and managed as a community garden, and a gate installed to take pedestrian traffic to and from Acland Street directly past our front door.

We also started to run eco-fairs with various activities on a Saturday once a month during spring and summer. These were moderately successful, but it became obvious that we needed a volunteer coordinator to help manage all the people who wanted to get involved. We've found that people who offer wholehearted support will move on after a few months. We lacked the capacity to have a constant stream of activities that were attractive and interesting, while at the same time to let them know that they were valued. Volunteer coordination is labour-intensive, requiring a dedicated person in the role.

Forming Stage (2003 – 2007)

The Landcare connection subsequently facilitated Quicksilver Boardriders' sponsorship of a coast care day at St Kilda Harbour for World Environment Day 2004. This was another partnership with Earthcare, who were long-term protectors of the St Kilda Penguin colony. This was a one-off, one-day event, but it was important in demonstrating the PPEC's capacity to develop community and corporate partnerships. In the same year, we coordinated production and distribution of a book on Indigenous Plants of the Sandbelt. Book sales have provided regular, albeit modest income ever since.

Clearly at this stage, a number of things were very critical to the success of the PPEC: the Committee; having local knowledge and contacts; planning; raising money from a diversity of sources; building partnerships; having major corporate sponsors, such as Holden; and having the support of our local government, the City of Port Phillip. In addition, the value of having someone in the team with long-term hands-on experience in local community environment action should not be overlooked.

By 2004, we'd commenced education activities at Westgate Park, but with the practical completion of the EcoHouse retrofit, we had more time to start developing a broader education program. Our positive relationship with Holden resulted in them sponsoring a part-time Education Officer position. We were able to expand to a full-time role with state government funding. This step was a critical milestone in our evolution, as it provided an opportunity to recruit a dynamic new team member.

For a host of reasons, it was important to advertise widely and ensure we employed the best possible person available. The alternative approach, to select someone from our immediate network, might have left everyone relaxed and comfortable, but we needed to do better than that ... and we did! We were lucky enough to recruit Caroline Packham, who brings exceptional skills, creativity and commitment to the role. Of equal importance is her diverse network of colleagues who otherwise might not have heard about us, let alone get involved.

We've been very fortunate during the forming years in having recruited people with real passion and commitment, such as Peter Barker (EcoHouse Project Coordinator), Pyrou Chung and Julia Muniandy (early part-time Education Officers). They've contributed greatly to our growth and do great things in their new roles. Hopefully, their experience with us has helped them to grow too! Part of our role is to support other groups and individuals on their journey to do good things for the community and environment.

Consolidating Stage (2007+)

You can have grand plans and cash to splash, but ultimately it's the people who are the glue that make it happen. We've been really lucky to have Wendy Van Dort involved over a couple of years, initially as a volunteer, but now employed on a range of community garden and food security projects. People working in the garden provide a natural point of contact for curious passers-by. It's excellent



to have friendly people like Wendy in the garden, as she has such a good understanding of what we do and why.

Similarly, our CarbonCut program (energy-efficient retrofits and advice for low income households) has been blessed with some inspirational young people (Jill Robinson, Lisa Siciliano and Michelle Yang). Our team members are the face of the PPEC in the community and they shine a positive light wherever they go.

This year, we found excellent volunteer coordinators: George the 'Golden Greek' who came to us about three or four months ago after visiting the City of Port Phillip's website; and Waltraud, a milliner whose focus has shifted from what's on peoples' heads to what's in them! Waltraud and George are reliable, always personable, interested, enthusiastic and committed to spending two days a week each in a job-sharing role to coordinate the many volunteers. They make a great team.

Over the past few years, we've become better at strategic planning and also found great staff. Find the personalities who complement each other. Just like in rock 'n' roll bands.

"There's the 'rhythm players', like me, who just keep strumming away, whereas an 'instrumentalist' will do something that's a bit more flamboyant. It's up to the group to not play over each other, allowing each other to be heard and to be effective in what you do. And then you have 'lead singers', the front people, the creative ones. You have to make sure that the 'lead singers' are not overriding each other. You also have to make sure that the 'rhythm makers' are not too loud for the 'lead singers'; otherwise it will end up as a mess. The 'lead singers' need to know their craft, to have the personality, to be in the spotlight and to be able to cope with the pressure."

Ultimately, sustaining viable ecosystems for future generations is about social justice. We're working hard at bringing sustainability and indigenous issues together. I help the local indigenous group with their land management strategies, archaeological assessments and cultural heritage management plans, as they don't have all the necessary resources to deal with the paperwork. Offering our services for free and sticking to that commitment has helped to build trust with the Boon Wurrung Elders; and they work with us now on school programs. Trust is a big, big thing.

"By offering our services for free has helped to build trust with the Boon Wurrung group. They have finally been able to respond to archaeological assessments and cultural heritage management plans. Many things have grown out of this building of trust. For example, in 2007, we developed the St Kilda Indigenous Heritage Trail, which goes from the ngargee tree to the beach. This trail combines ecology, history and changes to the landscape. The Boonwurrung elders are now working with us on school programs. If only we could all stop wasting energy and other resources, the money saved could be used to help with indigenous social and health issues."

There's only so much that any one person or organisation can do and ultimately our focus is to create awareness, and build skills to nurture positive collaborations towards lasting outcomes. Over all, I think it is really about people and timing. We are now finding that people are coming in from the community saying that they need to start doing all the things that we have been talking about at the PPEC all these years. The community appears to be catching up with what we're on about And, in some cases, are even further ahead!

Neil's Advice to Fellow Travellers

Ecocentres:

- are multifaceted and full of surprises
- are places where inspirational things happen
- need to be responsive and reactive
- need to be open and accessible; wanting to help people on their journey
- connect and support people with good will and intentions
- have presence in and provide a service to the community. However, it is challenging and demanding to maintain that presence and service.
- need to be accommodating. i.e. need to be where people are
- meet the needs of the community and visitors for environmental experiences
- need staff who to want to do this work. They need to be passionate, committed to do this work now and to continue to do this work.
- provide opportunities for employment for environmental professionals and volunteers
- need to be business-like, as they need funding and sponsorship

Neil Blake, Port Phillip EcoCentre

Port Phillip EcoCentre Strategic Planning

To develop a strategic plan, the Port Phillip EcoCentre (PPEC) brought in an external facilitator, Pat Armstrong, who used Guide Beside approaches and tools. She ran a full-day workshop with PPEC, staff, volunteers, the Committee of Management, affiliated groups and representatives from the local community, including residents and council staff and enabled us to develop a shared vision and goals. Using an external facilitator was of great value, providing process, a fresh perspective and a neutral person not attached to particular people, ideas or agendas.

The PPEC coordinator and education manager have since been trained in strategic planning, through the Guide Beside professional learning program. This gave us the skills, tools and access to advice and support, to further develop our organisational strategic plan, to develop project area strategic plans, and skills to review our plans on an ongoing basis. This process brought us all together as a community with a shared vision, avoiding fragmented projects driven by individuals. It helped us develop a culture of planning in our organisation and engage our community. It inspired us – helping us to feel a part of something larger and more effective than the individual projects we all busied ourselves with. The plan as well as the process brought our team together – inspiring new projects and helped us avoid taking on projects that didn't fit with our overall direction or would be too much for us to cope with.

Having a clear vision has helped us: communicate in a concise way what it is we are trying to do; plan for effective action; engage community; attract service delivery contracts and funding; and develop a culture of planning, research, reflection and evaluation. We have found that we need our planning to evolve as new opportunities arise, so we can remain interesting to the community and innovative.

Along the journey of developing a culture of planning, we have become more robust and effective as an organisation: growing our partnerships and programs; and moving away from ad-hoc projects driven by individuals with risky financing. We have also lost people through this change. These were people who added great value to what we were doing, but, at the same time, did not value planning and partnerships, but had more individual agendas. We have learnt along the way that is normal for some people to resist change, or even to leave, through this process of organisational change and growth. Learning that this is normal helped sustain those driving the change and accept the criticism.

Caroline Packham, Port Phillip EcoCentre Education Manager

2. The Iramoo Sustainable Community Centre Story

(As told by Colin Hocking in an interview with Pat Armstrong and recorded by Caroline Packham)

It's about persistence, it's about hope, it's about letting go, it's about never giving up, it's about holding on to the notion, it's about projecting into the future, it's about connecting to the land, it's about serendipity, it's about things happening after you've given up hope. We don't ultimately know what sustainable living looks like ... Ecocentres are places to try those things out"

Dr Colin Hocking, Iramoo

Iramoo was the Woiworung language name given by first inhabitants of the region, the Kulin Nations, to the great grassy plains that once encircled what is now Melbourne. Iramoo also meant a meeting place between tribes. The name Iramoo is used with permission from the Kulin Nations Cultural Heritage Organisation.

Early Forming (the 1990s)

In the mid 1980s an investigation into post-secondary education revealed an astonishing imbalance between Western and Eastern Melbourne. The West of Melbourne, being home to approximately one third of Melbourne's population, produced only 6% of post-secondary students. The East, with two thirds of Melbourne's population, produced 94% of post-secondary students. In an attempt to draw more of the



West into post-secondary education, the Western Institute was established in St Albans in 1989. This was to become the home of Iramoo.

Dr Colin Hocking, an early pioneer and present day coordinator of Iramoo, was attracted to the Western Institute by its TAFE sector status and environment department. He feels his presence at the site for nearly 20 years has had a lot to do with Iramoo's survival and success. *"I know this place pretty well, which is why this has survived ..."*

In Iramoo's early days, student field work through the Western Institute environment program led to the discovery of the Iramoo grasslands and the presence of the endangered legless lizard. The quick slithering of a creature over Colin's foot (which he at first mistook for a snake) was later revealed through many years of surveys to belong to the world's largest population of the legless lizard. The grasslands and the legless lizard became the focus of Colin's research and so this place, as a biodiversity field study site, grew in activity and national significance. A five year campaign involving several submissions and two Senate Committee hearings, led to protection of the site as a wildlife reserve, with 37 hectares of land, and \$1 million in funding. *"That really got us started"*. A Ranger position and education programs for schools were developed, *"teaching people about their local environment ... collecting together all of the local and regional people who had a passion for conservation and biodiversity – a difficult thing to do"*. The aim was to turn people's views towards valuing biodiversity. *"Slowly, over time, there was a realisation that this type of education wasn't going to do it"*. Iramoo education programs started with the notion that *"if we educate people, they're going to turn up ... We now know that's not true"*.

In the mid 1990s, a shift began in the approach of connecting people with biodiversity. Opportunity knocked and free demountable buildings were passed into the hands of the Iramoo pioneers. One of these buildings became, and still is, a dedicated Aboriginal Centre. A volleyball court that had "never seen a game" became the site for an Indigenous nursery, thanks to the Student Union and a 'Work for the Dole' team. Parks Victoria provided project funding, and construction materials were scrounged and donated. By the late 1990s, through a process of creation and connection, activities had grown, with wildflower festivals and 'Reconciliation Rocks' events: *"The kind of stuff that happens with all these Ecocentres, you're trying to find who has relevance to sustainable living, who fits."*

As Iramoo blossomed through activity, development, people and programs, crisis struck.

"A wonderful guy worked on our education programs. We'd built up the area of schools. Then our big crisis. Every Ecocentre has a crisis. He got very ill. Our programs were built around him. He was wonderful, but he couldn't continue working here. A lot of what we were doing here fell apart. Some serious stress. This was really the crisis time. I was at the point: maybe it's time to give this away! It's too hard. It's affecting me and my family. It was a real total struggle. Money dropped. We had projects going without people able to deliver them properly. Other people came in and helped a bit. What I found interesting was that I actually decided this place would move forward without me pushing it to the nth degree ... I was trying to frame this and people said 'this is too hard. How are you going to do this?' ... then I heard Yunupingu on the radio."

The Gove peninsula was being abandoned by mining corporations without rehabilitation or compensation. Yunupingu's story of connection to the land, of caring for country, struck a chord with Colin and his connection to the grasslands of western Melbourne. It became clearer for Colin how disconnected the urban community surrounding Iramoo was from nature, from caring for the environment. Colin explains hearing Yunupingu's story,

"Yunupingu said 'we'll take it back'. Why take it back, they've trashed it. Why don't you just leave it with them or the government?"

'Well this is something non-aboriginal people don't understand. 'This is our land no matter what state it's in, we're connected to this land and we'll protect it, what ever it takes.' One has commitment to land no matter what state it's in. That was for me a very difficult thing without getting personally damaged, for people who don't see the world that way. The crisis for me was I found myself in a paddock full of grass that no one was really interested in".

The lack of commitment to the grasslands continued to be an issue for Colin and Iramoo for some years. Over time though, the initial vision of connecting people with caring for the land, the lizards and the waterways started to fall into place. *"People somehow arrived to support it. It was still very hard work. But somehow there was a momentum here."*



Consolidating (2000 – 2009)

The collapse of the education program in the late 1990s was an important lesson for Iramoo.

"It's easy to get committed to a place like this. It's dangerous. We have to stay within what's possible for us to do here. Everyone who is a staff member here goes through that. Sorting out what the level of commitment is ... it's always more than a job and needs to balance with your capacity to move things".

Strategic planning became very important in clarifying what Iramoo was trying to do, and what they were going to prioritise. Colin withdrew from his involvement in large biodiversity projects across the region to focus on moving Iramoo forward. *"I disassociated myself from campaigns around grasslands."*

A temporary negative was the consequent reduction in networking. Emerging from this narrowed focus on Iramoo, Colin began to develop with co-workers the *Guide Beside*, a series of training workshops developed to explore facilitating Education for Sustainability, strategic planning, partnership building and evaluation. *"I felt as though I had put a boundary around what I could and what I couldn't do...we were transforming from environmental education about biodiversity to Education for Sustainability".* This was a challenging transformation for Iramoo. Colin explains where they had come from and where they were heading, *"The community should turn up and help. Where are they? What's wrong with them? They're uncommitted, they're environmental vandals. That's not how to engage community about sustainability".* Subsequently, Iramoo began to develop new projects that would capture what the new type of Education for Sustainability was – aiming to balance being at the forefront with working with people where they are at.

“Ecocentres try to project ourselves into the future, where we’re connected with one another and people are living sustainably, that’s a really difficult thing to do. We’re a long way from it ... We don’t ultimately know what sustainable living looks like ... Ecocentres are places to try those things out”.

Colin's Advice to Fellow Travellers

“It takes a long time, working to connect a lot of different people together. It takes being committed, but being able to be committed in a way that’s not unhealthy. We can do it a lot better by strategically planning with where people are at. All of the Education for Sustainability and Guide Beside principles arose out of this place for me, and are applied back in ... and then the other part is you will have crises. You are sitting on the edge ... there are some people who have an interest in Education for Sustainability. It’s never really a solid proposition. Maybe it will be one day when we get to twenty percent of people actively engaged in seeking sustainable lifestyles. The tipping point will be when these places become really robust. At the moment they are not. You go to CERES and it looks really simple. But behind the scenes it isn’t.

Ecocentres are vulnerable to untoward things that happen. Every ecocentre has the same story, because of their tenuous level of support. Hopefully, this project will help. Look up this book. We’re in a crisis. And there’s a whole section of what to do in a crisis. Everyone else has been through this. It’s acknowledgment of that. Maybe the advice is ‘gently persist’. Find where the level is. All the work you’ve been doing before will arrive back in new forms if you persist”

3. The CERES Story

(As told by Eric Bottomley in an interview with Pat Armstrong and recorded by Caroline Packham)

“It’s about people and environment, the ecology ... It’s a sacred site that people can feel and belong to”

(Eric Bottomley, CERES)

CERES (the Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies, pronounced ‘series’) is an internationally recognised model of a sustainable society located in Melbourne, Australia. CERES shares its name with the Roman Goddess for agriculture.

Emerging (the 1970s)

In the early 1970s Professor Chris Ryan from RMIT returned from visiting a centre for alternative technology in Wales. On his return he was enthused about setting up a similar centre in Melbourne. A group of academics, educators and others started to plan a community and technology project in Brunswick, with the aim of linking it with RMIT to create a field site for students to get involved with community initiatives. A garden project in Brunswick High School was the first of many community projects to come, and one of the catalysts in forming CERES.

Eric Bottomley has led education and community initiatives at CERES for 20 years. As a local secondary school teacher, he began to involve students in CERES from its very early days. He recalls people saying *“students did strange projects up at this place in Coburg.”*

Through this early connection, Eric made the leap into CERES and became, and still is, one of the key players in forming and growing what is, today, one of Australia’s most inspiring and thriving ecocentres. Eric describes the early forming being driven by:

“local people, some outside thinking, pushed along by environmental and social changes. The gestation period is interesting, these centres all seem to take several years to get off the ground, everyone wants to get going, but you can’t avoid the gestation, probing and testing and thinking; what would eventuate? You don’t have all the answers at the start, or the money, just the general idea. Which valley you will walk up? You just don’t know ... CERES developed as a concept and not much further for about four years.”

Activity in the early days was strong enough to interest Brunswick council, and a landfill site (formerly a bluestone quarry) was set aside and would later become the home of CERES. In 1982, a short-term lease was signed and the site renamed as an Environment Centre. *“That’s how it started off, quietly moving along in fits and spurts.”* This support from the local council remains very important to the viability of CERES.

There was strong interest from these pioneers in creating agricultural activities in the city, and so the name CERES, the Roman goddess of agriculture, came about. The early farm with its pigs, donkeys and geese was hailed by school children who came along to education programs as *“better than the zoo ... The kids herded the goats, escaped from the pigs ... they were so close to animals ...”*

Indigenous planting, garden plots and animals *“... introduced farming to the city, you could catch the tram to milk the goat ... be a fisherman in the morning, a farmer in the evening and a philosopher at night. People flourished through the many aspects of life. They could have the rural experience without having much money ... without the bush block or hobby farm they could have a collectivised rural experience in the city.”*

The connections with nature, agriculture and people were blossoming at CERES. Eric explains –

“People can do a lot working together. People haven’t done a lot trying to fly as individuals, strapping wings on their backs, but working together, with different people, we can build a plane and fly.”

Early Forming (the 1980's)

Eric recalls what CERES was like in the early 1980s –

“It was a quiet place with a few buildings ... there was hardly a sign, you could walk through and not know what you'd walked through. There was a lot of charm and potential. We tried to invent new programs and get infrastructure in place.”



The hope was that by growing the education programs, more people would become involved in CERES. This vision was realised, thanks to the inventiveness of staff and to funding from government departments: Community and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education. CERES staff were masters of making the most of difficult situations, making the most of the mud – at times literally – a muddy spot of the park became the home of the mud brick making program.

Consolidating (the 1990s)

Through the education programs, CERES moved over a 10 year period from about 4,000 student visitors per year up to about 60,000 student visitors per year.

“The world was getting more interested in environmental things, global warming, urban issues ... we'd positioned ourselves for the times. It was a great advantage having 10 acres on which we could develop interesting projects ... We had outdoor space and real life projects, orchards, nurseries. We made use of these real projects and did education around them. That became our approach in the 90s.”



There was a very strong focus on triple bottom line for CERES: environmental, social and economic.

“It was also about trying to create some employment and job opportunities for people. It was all about developing a self-reliant model, a governance system for community, to welcome people from other lands and other cultures. That openness and inclusiveness was a very strong thing for CERES.”

This was reflected in the education programs; Indigenous and African programs were developed and delivered by the local community. “Community Aid Abroad set up the African village, because there was space here.” Education expanded to include Indonesian and Indian programs. This fitted well with social and cultural curriculum needs of schools and so was a viable business, although still dependent on supporting funding.

Since the mid 1990s, CERES has diversified in many ways and has become a general visitor’s centre. This was prompted by a sudden loss in funding to the education programs due to a change in State Government leadership *“a very serious threat to us ... desperate times, we were very fortunate to survive that. We’ve toughened up in the struggle.”* CERES’ strength lay in being enterprising and entrepreneurial.

Action to survive had to be taken very quickly. Federal grants servicing the unemployed provided opportunity. An energy project connecting solar panels and wind generators to the grid and the café were developed.

“Job skills programs were very popular at the time ... the saviors of CERES in that period ... but I did two full-time jobs. I’d go home exhausted every night ... It made us think about how do you make a profit?”

The café appeared. That became a new development. It didn’t make any money at first, but it moved things along. It brought visitors in. The bike paths got developed along the creek. For the first time ever we had a gate to the creek ... Those simple little engineering things that linked us to the creek. The new CERES grew out of these changes going on in the area, the greening of Brunswick: the Friends of Merri Creek came into being and the nursery was set up. It didn’t make any money for many years. But the businesses needed that gestation period.”

By the late 1990s, a produce market was running two a days a week, and the nursery had moved into proper commercial operation with a change in approach and ownership.

“These commercial arms grew out of that very dark, mid 90s period ... A lot of other organisations who were still dependent on government grants disappeared ... Our experiences in those earlier days prepared us for that. We had a number of different ways to draw in revenue; we had diversity. If we’d have been mono-cultural, we would have disappeared. There was always something here in the diversity to respond to the changing environment.”



Refocusing (2000 to present)

As diversity in activities and business developed, so too did the management structure of CERES.

“It started off as a home spun management committee. Overtime, we realised we needed much more specialised advice. Sometimes we’d have a lawyer or an academic – this was hard to mix with the committee – but outside experience in business or law, would raise the level of discussion. We call it a Board of Management now, a higher level of governance. A committee member is linked to a particular activity on site. We try to link the committee to something that is going on. So we have informed decisions going on”.

The education programs have grown significantly, alongside other large projects, driving CERES forward. Income generating activities include education, the café, the nursery, the market and capital works. The management structure has developed into 15 work areas, with each area responsible and accountable for its activity and viability.

“CERES has fused together the governance and the management. All of the original team leaders have a place on the Board. People say that’s strange. Do you go and vote a pay rise to yourself? Staff are always a minority on the Board and it’s really useful, real activities are explained. Otherwise the Board would find it very difficult to get their head around all the different activities going on. Other Board members, external to CERES, can be more objective and add insights from the outside. There are three area managers who have been with CERES since the early days and a staff representative on the Board of 15 or 16 people. We need the Board to make sure systems are in place and senior management has to make sure it’s implemented. ... We have a very experienced senior accountant, who has been very influential. Money flow needs to be channeled properly.”

Thanks to a benefactor, a \$6 million convention centre is being developed with a venue, offices and community rooms. The funding for this “*new castle on the hill*”, Eric puts down to serendipity.

“If you have people starting to put money in, other people can’t resist ... like a bonfire, someone lights the bonfire, people want to add to it, if you’ve got a match people try to blow it out. It’s critical mass. But there are so many hazards to get there.”



CERES strives to maintain a community feeling amongst the new high budget development. Eric explains –

“The peasants in the field and the king on the hill. Whenever we have community projects, major investment goes into one project. We look at how the benefits of that project filter out to others not making money, so it moves forward as a system.”

CERES has also strived to maintain a natural ruggedness in the grounds so “*Mum and Dad can sit down and have a coffee and children can run and play and investigate ... it’s not chrome plated, keep on the path; this is a place where you go off the path.*”

Connection to the natural environment and caring for the land is and always has been important to CERES. Eric explains –

“It’s a sacred site; that people can feel and belong to. ... The space at CERES requires us to be stewards of the environment ... Every hectare you’ve got gives you another set of opportunities to do things ... When you’ve got space you can build up diversity, the more diversity you’ve got, the more you can build up resilience. Another aspect of space is, space for space, to have a few hectares when you can relax and enjoy and play with children ... People flock into a space that has some attraction to it. When that happens you’re recreating community and society. And oh my goodness we need that ... In relationships, people learn together and play together and we recreate community”.

CERES is now providing support to other groups around Australia who are starting up ecocentres.

Eric’s Advice to Fellow Travellers

“Be prepared for long delays at the start. It’s seldom going to be easy in the beginning: the technical, social and environmental issues. You need land and space, what political support can you get. Support from council is really important. People from the community.

Establish some governance systems – to allow decisions to be made clearly and firmly and allow people to have their view. A local democratic system needs to be in place. You need maintenance of projects. How do we do all that maintenance? Where’s the regular money going to come from once the grants are finished? How do we widen and deepen the support with local government? Without Brunswick Council and Moreland Council’s support, we wouldn’t have come this far.



Tool 13. Glossary

Action Plan

An action plan is a plan for future action and includes, at least, the tasks to be taken, the person who is to undertake the task and due date and time frame. Action plans can be short-term (as for a small, short-time framed project or annual) or longer term (e.g. 3-5 years).

Behaviour Change

Behaviour change simply means that a person changes the way they do something. A example of behaviour change in sustainability would be a person catching a train to work instead of driving to work.

Two useful websites:

www.cbsm.org.au (Community-based Social Marketing)

<http://www.enablingchange.com.au/> (Enabling Change – check the 7 Doors Model for designing a behaviour change program)

Business Plan

A business plan articulates the future directions of an organisation and helps them to keep on track. The website, listed below, the essential components of a business plan as:

- “executive summary – a one–page overview written after your business plan is finalised
- introduction – explains the purpose and objectives of going into business
- marketing analysis – looks at the industry you are entering and how you fit in
- marketing plan – your marketing strategy
- operations plan – how you’ll set up the business, i.e. structure, location, regulations
- management plan – how you’ll manage your business
- financial plan – how you’ll finance your business, costing and financial projections.”

Useful website: [http://www.business.gov.au/Business+Entry+Point/How-to+guides/](http://www.business.gov.au/Business+Entry+Point/How-to+guides/Thinking+of+starting+a+business/How+do+I+write+a+business+plan.htm)

[Thinking+of+starting+a+business/How+do+I+write+a+business+plan.htm](http://www.business.gov.au/Business+Entry+Point/How-to+guides/Thinking+of+starting+a+business/How+do+I+write+a+business+plan.htm). This website has business plan guides and templates, plus contacts details for free advice from a Business Enterprise Centre.

Capacity Building

Capacity building occurs when individuals, organisations or community groups increase their abilities and resources to bring about change through building the five essential capitals – human, social, environmental (natural), financial and asset (physical)

(Source: <http://www.rirdc.gov.au/capacitybuilding/about.html>)

Communications and Marketing Plan

A communications and marketing plan outlines what, when, who and how you wish to communicate about an organisation and how it wishes to market it (identifying and meeting the needs of your stakeholders). A communication plan should include communication goals, background, key stakeholders (Internal, external, key influencers/peak bodies), potential issues, marketing analysis, key messages, strategies (timing, target groups, tools/tactics, key messages and actions). A marketing plan should include market research, market strategies and goals, market targets and monitoring.

Useful website: <http://www.business.gov.au/Business+Entry+Point/How-to+guides/Thinking+of+starting+a+business/What+planning+tools+can+help+me/Marketing+plan+guides.htm>

Community Engagement

“Community engagement is ... a planned process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by geographic location, special interest, or affiliation or identity to address issues affecting their well-being.”

(Source: Queensland Department of Emergency Services (2001). Charter for community engagement, Community Engagement Unit, Strategic and Executive Services, Queensland Department of Emergency Services)

In the case of community-based Ecocentres, there is also an informal, unplanned, yet key element to community engagement. An open and accessible community-based organisation will receive unsolicited and ad hoc approaches and comments from its members and the general public. Ultimately, these approaches can be an important consideration in organisational direction-setting.

Useful website: <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/DSE/wcmn203.nsf/childdocs/-0B996EB412EAB883CA2570360014F01A-6BC40C338B25036ECA257036001555F2?open>

Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR)

“A DGR is an organisation that is entitled to receive income tax deductible gifts. All DGRs have to be endorsed by the Tax Office, unless they are listed by name in the income tax law.

There are two types of endorsement:

- where an organisation is endorsed as a DGR in its own right, or
- where an organisation is endorsed as a DGR for a fund, authority or institution that it operates.

For the second type, only gifts to the fund, authority or institution are tax deductible.”

(Source: <http://www.ato.gov.au/nonprofit/content.asp?doc=/content/34228.htm>)

Education for Sustainability

“Education for Sustainability includes many of the features of environmental education but with a stronger human focus, recognising the fundamental human rights and social justice are just as essential to sustainable development as environmental sustainability.”

(Source: Gough & Sharpley 2005)

Useful websites: <http://www.aries.mq.edu.au/> (Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability) and <http://www.environment.gov.au/> (Department of Environment, Water Heritage and the Arts)

Evaluation Plan

An evaluation plan is a document that describes a systematic method of collecting information to make informed judgements about the value of an organisation's products, programs or services and communicating this to appropriate stakeholders, resulting in continuous improvement.

(Source: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/community/projecteval041110.pdf>)

Governance

Simply speaking, governance is to put in place measures and structures that ensure the smooth and transparent running and control of an organisation.

(Source: <http://www.alstom.com/home/investors/glossary/43423.EN.php?languageId=EN&dir=/home/investors/glossary/>)

A fuller definition is: "Governance is the structure of relationships that bring out organisational coherence, authorise policies, plans and decisions, and account for their probity, responsiveness and cost-effectiveness."

Source: Gallagher, 2001, p 2 Quoted in http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/publications/meeting_the_challenges/1.htm

Incorporation

Incorporation is a voluntary process in which community group can apply to become a distinct legal entity.

Useful websites: <http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/CA256EB5000644CE/page/Associations+Clubs+&+Fundraising-Incorporated+Associations-About+incorporated+associations?OpenDocument&l=05-Associations+Clubs+%26+Fundraising~&2=20-Incorporated+Associations~&3=010-About+incorporated+associations~>

Learning-based Change

Learning-based change is a voluntary and long-lasting change in the behaviour of an individual, through life-long learning for sustainability. With regard to environmental sustainability "... learning-based change for environmental sustainability is the development of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and aspirations leading to changed behaviour in support of environmental sustainability."

(Source: [http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/2BDA5FDE21AB1A19CA25709100119B24/\\$File/content-v-6.pdf](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/2BDA5FDE21AB1A19CA25709100119B24/$File/content-v-6.pdf))

Management

Management is about “... achieving intended outcomes through the allocation of responsibility, resources, and monitoring their efficiency and effectiveness.”

(Source: Gallagher, 2001, p 2, quoted in: http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/publications/meeting_the_challenges/1.htm)

Occupational Health and Safety Action Plan

An Occupational Health and Safety Action Plan is a systematic, clear and logical approach to document the Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) processes of an organisation, and help keep track of all the things that need to be completed.

Useful website: http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/resources/file/ebf84e09a477f12/Comm_Safety_Action_Plan.pdf (Sample Occupational Health and Safety Action plan for the Community Services Sector)

Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is the overall process of ‘risk assessment’ and ‘risk evaluation’.

(Source: WMAA, 2009)

Soft System Methodology

Soft System Methodology (SSM) in simple terms is a planning and learning approach to management. A fuller definition is “an approach to organisational process modeling and it can be used both for general problem solving and in the management of change. The primary use of SSM is in the analysis of complex situations where there are divergent views about the definition of the problem”. SSM is a means of organising our thoughts about problem situations and aims to bring about change through a learning cycle which is ideally never ending.

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft_systems_methodology)

Stakeholder

Stakeholders are all the individuals and groups who are directly involved with a project or program.

Strategic Plan

A strategic plan is a forward thinking and systematic document to help an organisation achieve its vision, mission, goals and objectives, and allocate resources.

Supporting Body

A supporting body is a group that may provide resources (e.g. financial support, land, buildings, staff) to an organisation. Such groups could include local governments and universities.

Sustainability

“Sustainability is the quest for a sustainable society: one that can persist over generations without destroying the social and life supporting systems that current and future generations (and all other species on Earth) depend on.”

(Source: Gough & Sharpley, 2005)

Useful website: <http://www.environment.gov.au/esd/index.html>

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of current and future generations, while not affecting the natural systems on which all living things depend.

Useful Website: <http://www.environment.gov.au/esd/index.html>

Target Audiences

Individuals and groups that receive and respond to the programs, projects or services of an organisation. This might include local schools, pre-schools, tertiary education bodies, community groups, indigenous groups, environmental groups and businesses.

For other terms relating to education for sustainability, please refer to Gough & Sharpley (2005).

Tool 14. Useful References

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Tool 15. Web-based Ecocentres Review

A web search was conducted during the period September to November 2008 to identify and map organisations that have the characteristics of ecocentres. The mapping focused on the following:

1. Centre's focus on sustainability issues, local issues/needs
2. Focus on community activities
3. Sustainability education programs
4. Be demonstration centre for sustainable living and sustainable behaviours
5. Places and spaces for experiential learning

The following table summarises information reviewed on websites relating to the above criteria, and provides weblinks to further explore these centres.

Table 2. Mapping Focus Australian Ecocentres

Name	Location	Local Issues and needs	Community Activities	Education Programs	Demonstration building & site	Experiential learning
Victoria						
Koonwarra Sustainable Community Centre Provides a resource centre for use by individuals, community and commercial groups for meetings, workshops, seminars, outdoor activities, community events and environmental and educational pursuits.	http://koonwarra.vic.au/community-groups/kssc “The Old School” Koala Drive Koonwarra Victoria 3954 Ph: (03) 5664 2461 Email: ksscinc@bigpond.com	Koonwarra has a local community focus.	Recreational areas include a large sports oval with cricket pitch; a play area and picnic area, frog pond, bush cooking pit, berry and vegetable gardens. A community office provides computer, fax and internet facilities.	The centre is now beginning to concentrate on running workshops and sessions aimed at helping students, young people, farmers and the community in general with a range of sustainability initiatives.	Old Koonwarra School has been reformed into the Koonwarra Sustainable Communities Centre and models sustainable living.	Meeting rooms, workshops and outdoor learning. Koonwarra is the administrator of waste management initiatives within the community.
Peppertree farm Bendigo PepperGreen Farm is a community horticulture, environmental and heritage park currently under development.	http://www.accessemployment.com.au/peppergreen/index.aspx 40 - 44 Thunder St North Bendigo Victoria, Australia	PepperGreen Farm will forge a relationship between people otherwise seen as facing barriers to employment, and the community. Development plans include organic market gardens, water-wise and energy-wise education and a Chinese market garden and brick-making kiln, and development of tourism.	A community hub is being developed involving people with a disability in supported employment activities e.g. development and operation of the farm for the benefit of the community. Opportunities also exist for volunteers and students to gain work experience and training while making a worthwhile contribution to benefit the community.	As a community resource, PepperGreen Farm will provide educational demonstrations of sustainable horticultural, environmental, water and energy techniques practiced in an urban environment. Waterwise, energy wise and Chinese heritage education programs.	Energy and arts park; productive and indigenous gardens; sustainable water management systems.	Workshops and hands-on learning through farming, biodiversity and water activities.

Name	Location	Local issues and needs	Community Activities	Education Programs	Demonstration building & site	Experiential learning
Mount Alexander Sustainability Group This groups initial focus is on reducing carbon emissions through improving energy efficiency and increasing the supply of renewable energy in the local area.	www.masg.org.au 233 Barker St PO Box 104, Castlemaine VIC 3450 Ph: 5470 6978 Email: info@masg.org.au	The group has over 500 local members – residents, businesses and, schools - local people taking action to combat climate change.	Current community projects include: Carbon reduction action groups Renewable energy Solar display home Local food production	School programs have been focused on practical action e.g. Challenge to Change and worm farming.	Low energy solar display home and food forests.	Practical projects link volunteer, community and school participation
Queensland						
SPIRAL A community hub where members of the community are assisted to develop community-based initiatives including, co-operatives, campaigns and ethical business.	www.spiral.org.au http://www.justiceproducts.org.au/ Justice Products Building 192 Boundary Street West End Brisbane, Queensland, Australia Ph: (07) 3844 7733	Spiral provides assistance to other community organisations developing local-global frameworks.	Through empowering people to apply principles of justice and sustainability in their choices and actions, community education processes are a part of all SPIRAL activities. Community gardens Fairtrade shop Community enterprises	Spiral develops community education resources which highlight the connections between economic globalisation and problems in the local community. Schools link with fair-trade.	Sustainable design incorporated into building renovations – tours available.	Action based initiatives provide for experiential learning.
Kumbartcho Sanctuary	www.kumbartcho.org.au 15 Bunya Pine Court Eatons Hill QLD 4037 Ph: 07 3264 3953	Many community links and sponsors	Community Nursery Various community events and activities Community workshops – sustainable living and saving money, biodiversity and food production. Weed watch project	Secondary and tertiary students participate as volunteers in the community nursery and other activities. Work for the dole placements. Free workshops offered throughout year	The Bunya Sanctuary Community Environmental Centre, as it was formally known, was opened in 1999. Inside it houses environmental education tools such as local creek simulations using fish tanks and native aquatic animals, posters and brochures on local environmental issues, a conference area and kitchen facilities.	Parks, wetlands, walks, nursery.

Name	Location	Local issues and needs	Community Activities	Education Programs	Demonstration building & site	Experiential learning
Northey St City Farm This centre is a non-profit community organisation situated on four hectares of land.	http://www.northeystreetcityfarm.org.au Corner of Northey and Victoria Streets, Windsor (Brisbane) QLD 4030, Ph: (07) 3857 8775 Email: nnorthey@bigpond.net.au	The farm has been developed for people to enjoy and participate in using the principles of permaculture. It aims to create a working model of a cooperative, community based urban permaculture farm which demonstrates, promotes, educates and advocates for environmental and economic sustainability in a healthy, diverse and supportive community	Organic Market Farm tours Festivals	Permaculture design certificates Community Workshops School programs	It is intended to be a demonstration site where people of all ages can learn through practical, hands on experience.	Farm setting is used for hands on workshops.
Osprey House Environmental Centre This centre is owned by council and operated by volunteers.	www.ospreyhouse.asn.au Dohles Rocks Road Griffin QLD 4503 ph: 07 3886 4463	This centre has a local focus – connecting visitors with the natural environment and sharing information on protecting the environment.	Bird watching, gardens and composting, picnic areas, displays, brochures, litter surveys.	School programs The Moreton Bay Regional Council provides an education program for schools. The program includes many topical presentations that cover a variety of environmental issues in the local area.	Osprey House was designed to help with Queensland's climate by keeping it naturally cooler with the use of a high ceiling, window louvres, both high and low, to assist air-flow and wide covered verandas for shade. Other features include: Rainwater tanks, worm farm, recycling and solar electricity generation.	Trail walks, bird watching, plaque rubs, worm farms and sustainable living.

Name	Location	Local issues and needs	Community Activities	Education Programs	Demonstration building & site	Experiential learning
Tasmania						
The Huon Valley Environment Centre This centre is a not-for-profit, volunteer based organisation that aims to provide the general public with access to information and educational materials on environmental issues / concerns.	http://www.huon.org.au/ 3/17 Wilmot Rd Huonville, Tasmania. 7109 Australia. Ph: 03 6264 1286 Email: centre@huon.org	This centre aims to: ~ encourage, support, promote and model community participation strategies ~ promote and model non discriminatory practices in all areas including age, gender, race, culture, religion and education	Offers environmental and social activities. Provides a resource and meeting centre for environmental groups whose focus aligns with the established values and aims.	Community workshops and school programs	An eco-shop that sells eco products e.g. 'no sweat' soccer balls and shoes, recycled paper products, 'no sweat' clothing hand printed with local designs, wilderness cards, diaries and calendars Provides information about local, national and international environmental issues	Community workshop space, a campaign office, library, and gardens.
Sustainable Living Tasmania This centre is a community resource and education centre working to provide a direct, local, realistic and accessible contribution to the protection and restoration of the natural environment, and the development of homes and cities for a sustainable future	http://www.tasmanianenvironmentcentre.org.au/ 2nd floor, 191 Liverpool St Hobart TAS 7000 Ph: (03) 6234 5566	Office and administrative support for groups engaged in environmental care work. A free sustainable living information service Community action groups.	Seminars, forums and workshops are held regularly. Community gardens provide arable land to unit dwellers, unemployed, school and landcare groups and others with limited land resources; and opportunities to share knowledge, practical skills, tools, seeds and produce. Tasmania's annual Sustainable Living Expo	Information service Resource library Book Shop Teacher and student and workshops	Sustainable Living Tasmania is working to establish an urban site to demonstrate sustainable living, similar to the 'CERES' site in Melbourne. The centre aims to be an inspirational model for: sustainability; ecological integrity; social equity; cultural richness; and community participation.	Practical workshops and tours to highlight urban sustainability issues including energy efficiency, water conservation, transport and backyard biodiversity.

Name	Location	Local issues and needs	Community Activities	Education Programs	Demonstration building & site	Experiential learning
South Australia						
Urban Ecology Australia Inc This centre is a non-profit, community-based organisation, promoting people-and-nature-friendly urban settlements.	www.urbanecology.org.au 105 Sturt Street, Adelaide, Australia 5000 Ph: 08 8212 6760 Email: urbanec@urbanecology.org.au	Lobbying for attitudes and policy change at all levels of government and industry. Campaigns for renewable energy, bioregional planning, traffic free environments, and ecological development generally. Community participation program.	Regular Site tours of Christie Walk, an urban eco-city development. Independent information, referral and advisory services are available for business, industry and government and the general public.	Short courses for schools, community groups and professional organisations.	Christie Walk demonstrates a medium density housing estate with many sustainable design and community enhancing features.	Ecological regeneration projects through urban/rural links.
Western Australia						
Denmark Community Environment Centre WA	http://members.westnet.com.au/enviro/ Website under maintenance.					
Naragebup The first purpose built environment centre in Western Australia. A valuable community resource, it is a community built, community run, non-profit organisation open to the public	www.naragebup.org.au 49 Safety Bay Rd Peron, WA Ph: 08 9591 3077 Email: rec@naragebup.org.au	This centre is managed by community for the local community.	Volunteer program Marine Care Gardening groups Construction and Maintenance	Schools catered for with curriculum based programs and resource kits. Holiday programs 'Quality Living' courses for adults on range of topics from worm farming and organic gardening through to green purchasing and sustainable living.	Envirotech building and large, organic community gardens Water wise gardens Wetlands Eco playground 450 seat amphitheatre Renewable Energy Centre	WA Endangered Marine Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre Dune ecology trail Bush tucker walk

Name	Location	Local Issues and needs	Community Activities	Education Programs	Demonstration building & site	Experiential learning
New South Wales						
Macarthur Centre for Sustainable Living This centre is a non profit, community driven organisation, that exists to inspire, initiate and support sustainability, conservation and environmental education..	www.mcsl.org.au 1 Mount Annan Drive Mount Annan NSW 2567 Phone: (02) 4647 9828 Email: info@mcsl.org.au	The centre provides an ongoing meeting place and centre for learning for all members of the Macarthur community and beyond.	Local volunteers participate in developing the site, in particular the gardens.	School programs and programs for people with disabilities are coordinated through the site.	The Centre has been developed to demonstrate innovative sustainable practice, features include: Purpose built office, café and conference room demonstrating sustainable design Productive gardens Stormwater collection and treatment Onsite waste water treatment	Participation in maintaining and developing the centre provides experiential learning opportunities. The centre is planning to expand its programs.
Manly Environment centre This centre aims to act as an advocate, research and resource centre – an environmental educator to enable and encourage broad community involvement and goodwill in protecting Manly's unique environment.	http://www.mec.org.au/ 41 Belgrave Street, Manly, Sydney, Australia Ph: +61 2 9976 2842 Email: mec@manly.nsw.gov.au	The shop front resource and information centre provides a drop in service to local residents, students, teachers, researchers, NGOs, agencies, businesses and educators. The centre supports local action groups and facilitates partnerships.	Ocean walks, Eco-art, energy programs, meeting space and resource library.	School programs link students and companies with projects that improve the local natural environment.	The centre links people with houses and buildings that demonstrate sustainable living.	Nature based programs connect people with the environment.
Woy Woy Environment Centre / Peninsula Environment Group	www.peg.org.au 267 Blackwall Road, Woy Woy Ph: (02) 4342 6589 Email: zainem@optusnet.com.au	The centre has a local focus and is the home for the Peninsula Environment Group, and local bushcare and landcare groups.	The centre provides practical information on sustainable living and outdoor activities, links to local groups and services and has a library. Weekly talks and action groups are based at the centre e.g. LETS Local Exchange and Trading System.	Supports local action groups linking with local schools e.g. through school gardening groups.	The centre is housed in a heritage listed church that is currently being retrofitted to improve its environmental performance. Gardens are also being developed.	Practical action e.g. school gardens provides experiential learning opportunities.

Table 3: Mapping Focus International Ecocentre

Name	Location	Local Issues and needs	Community Activities	Educational Programs	Demonstration building	Experiential learning
United Kingdom						
Transition Towns - Totnes	Totnes, UK http://totnes.transitionnetwork.org/	Totnes is the UK's first Transition Initiative, that is, a community in a process of imagining and creating a future that addresses the twin challenges of diminishing oil and gas supplies and climate change, and creates the kind of community that we would all want to be part of. Totnes has developed a local currency, the Totnes pound.	At present there are 10 groups and about 20 projects on the go, plus a wide range of events and workshops. Groups: Building & Housing Economics & Livelihoods Education Energy Food Health & Wellbeing Heart & Soul Local Government The Arts Transport Admin & Support	School Programs: Transition Tales are visions of a positive future world. "The future enters into us, in order to transform itself in us, long before it happens", Rilke	Demonstration buildings are under development.	All projects and programs are based on community action.
Plymouth University Centre for Sustainable Futures The CSF aims to put Sustainability at the centre of the thinking and doing of the University and also the wider national and international community.	Plymouth University, UK http://csf.plymouth.ac.uk/	Community is one of the four foci of CSF's work and partnerships with regional and local communities in pursuit of sustainable lifestyles.	Research and development work around community-university partnerships Conferences and workshops.	Undergraduate and post graduate programs. The CSF sustainability wiki, a collection of information inputted by academics and students alike regarding the issue of sustainability within the university and the wider region		Undergraduate and graduate programs
The Eden Project	Cornwall, UK http://www.edenproject.com/		Exhibits, events, workshops and educational programs to remind people what nature gives to us and to help people to learn how to look after it in return.	School, university and community programs	Extensive habitats – global garden	

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Germany						
ufaFabrik id22:experimentcity ufaFabrik Berlin International Center for Culture and Ecology	Viktoriast. 10-18 12105 Berlin / Tempelhof http://www.ufafabrik.de	Culture, Sustainable Development and Community Activities of the 30 residents and over 160 co-workers are based on the vision of a meaningful integration of the areas of living and working with culture, creativity and community.	Workshops and events are held...for relaxation and conversation ...for active recreational activities for kids, youth and adults ...for civic and social engagement ...for international encounters and artistic experiments ...for festivals, conventions, world music, and multimedia events ...for sustainable development and ecological demonstrations ...for creative confessions, gastronomy and hospitality	School and community workshop and programs including an urban children's farm.	Through a variety of Ecology Projects from the green roofs to the rain water system and decentral energy production , the grounds of the ufaFabrik remain a green oasis within the metropolis. Seminars, tours and workshops are offered on a regular basis for interested visitors.	The farm, gardens and creative workspaces are used for action based learning
Scandinavia						
SEKOM – Helensborg – Association of Swedish Eco- Communities	http://www.sekom.nu	As the eco-municipality model spread to various cities and towns throughout Sweden, a network was created as a way of providing support and assistance to cities and towns undertaking ecological community planning. The organisation was formalised in 1995 and took on the name “Sveriges Ekokommuner” (SEkom).	Example municipalities with community activities and programs include’: Robertsfors Vaxjo – fossil fuel free			

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Copenhagen Agenda 21 Centres	http://www.miljoc.kk.dk/dbb2db62-798b-4862-88dd-3ecc7271d418.W5Doc	Several centres have been established in Copenhagen and districts: In order to foster local participation and ownership of the local Agenda 21 efforts and activities in the central districts, local Agenda 21 centres have been set up in five central districts in Copenhagen: Sundbyøster, Bispebjerg, Inner Nørrebro, Vesterbro and Valby. In addition, there are three satellites in Outer Nørrebro, Østerbro and Kongens Enghave.	The centres must support and develop the existing local environmental projects and initiatives by enhancing the opportunities for each and every citizen to act in an environmentally conscious manner and also by instilling and promoting such behaviour via existing and new networks in housing organisations, associations, the business community, schools and institutions.			
USA						
Open Road of New York	Open Road of New York 346 East 9th Street New York, NY 10003 (212) 260-1896 http://www.playgrounddesign.blogspot.com/	Open Road of New York was founded in 1990 to work with children, teenagers, and adults on outdoor environmental projects. They work long term with individual young people, public schools, nonprofit and small business partners, and community volunteers to design, develop, and manage public gardens, playgrounds, parks, and compost systems.	Open Road was created to develop programs and environments with and for young people that promote community, independence and self respect. They develop these programs in partnership with neighborhood groups in need of new natural, educational, and recreational environments. These new environments create new bonds between people of all ages, who unite to establish a living community resource.	Open Road currently hosts a variety of free programs at their home base, Open Road Park. Programs include a drop-in afterschool program, Saturday family programs, classes, workshops, and tours. Teams of Open Road staff, youth, Dept. of Ed. teachers, students and partner groups develop curriculum on participatory design, urban water systems, compost, mapping, and other fields.		Tours of the site form a part of the programs offered

Name	Location	Local Issues and needs	Community Activities	Educational Programs	Demonstration building	Experiential learning
Canada						
Everdale – Organic Farm and Environmental Learning Centre	http://www.everdale.org/ P.O. Box 29 Hillsburgh, ON N0B 1Z0 Canada Ph: 519-855-4859 E-mail: info@everdale.org	Its purpose is to teach sustainable living practices and operate an exemplary organic farm.	Everdale aims to form co-operative relations with local citizens, both farmers and food-consumers, contributing to the local community.	Everdale offers a variety of hands-on educational experiences: farm apprenticeships; weekend courses and workshops; school programs (matched to provincial curriculum K-8) Educational tours for the public	It encompasses a working organic farm, mixed livestock, a model home, classroom, forests and meadows. It boasts demonstration models of operating, sustainable technologies.	The Everdale classroom is a fifty-acre property. The teachers are specialists in the areas of straw bale construction, solar and wind systems, farming, and eco-landscaping.
Earthwalk Eco Education Centre	http://www.ecoearthwalk.ca/	Earthwalk is an eco educational resource center that is a result of over a decade of accumulative learning and sharing at our 5 acre eco farm near Colborne, Ontario.	The local community and volunteers participate in centre activities.	The educational program features workshops, seminars, courses, and hands-on volunteer opportunities in sustainable living, natural health, healthy homes, green construction, environmental action, conservation, planetary survival and related themes.	The centre is a hobby farm, with both the farm and buildings demonstrating sustainable design and living.	The farm and development of new projects provides for experiential learning.
Brazil						
EcoCentro, IPA, IPEC	Brasilia www.ecocentro.org	Through the dedication of community members, students, adventurers and volunteers working together, Ecocentro IPEC has become one of the most important reference centers for sustainable living in Latin America, demonstrating that another future is possible.	The Ecoversidade campus serves as a model-in-progress for sustainable, community-oriented living. Most food is grown onsite and local farmers are supported through projects.	Ecological design, building and permaculture courses.	Ecocentro IPEC presents practical solutions with over 15 ecological buildings, composting toilets, water treatment system, ecological gardens, food forests, and renewable energy systems.	Courses and volunteer placement provide hands on learning experiences.

Name	Location	Local Issues and needs	Community Activities	Educational Programs	Demonstration building	Experiential learning
OPA - Salvador OPA is a non-profit organization based in the city of Salvador, capital of Bahia, in the northeastern coast of Brazil.	Salvador, Bahia, Brasil www.opabrasil.org	OPA believes in the infusion of art and permaculture as means of creating skills and solutions towards a sustainable future, empowering people and their communities.	Circus arts Energy retrofits Veggie oil conversion projects	School and youth programs Eg. Ecosurfistas Surfing and permaculture courses School garden programs A circus group educates through circus arts and physical theatre with at-risk youth.	OPA is in the process of establishing a centre in Salvador to demonstrate innovative urban permaculture models and function as a multi-purpose art space that creates strategies and incentive for positive change towards a better future.	Programs combine environmental themes, sport and arts in the environment