

# INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

*This new regular feature is an opportunity to share everyday practices from quality early learning programs which promote inspiring learning experiences for young children.*



## Lorne kindergarten at the top of sustainability education

Lorne Kindergarten may be small but it likes to aim high when it comes to engaging and educating children and their families about science and sustainability.

Such lofty aspirations have paid off in the two years since the kindergarten introduced its unique, award-winning *Junior Earthlings* sustainability and science program.

Developed by the kindergarten's educators, Michelle Danks and Alyce Stribling, in collaboration with the voluntary parent committee, the program brings together key scientific and sustainability concepts under one interactive, fun umbrella.

"Our goal is to actively engage the children in learning about the three core branches of science – natural, social and formal – to ensure their understanding of sustainability is much broader than simply recycling, tree planting and managing water," explains Michelle.

"The program seeks to instil lifelong sustainability skills underpinned by comprehensive scientific knowledge of the natural world.

"It focuses on embedding sustainable practices in all our programs and involving educators, children and families, which supports the development of lifelong attitudes and values in relation to caring for our environment," Michelle says.

Examples of how the kindergarten has embedded sustainability in its activities include:

- actively sorting rubbish for recycling and food scraps for composting
- undertaking long-term, soil-based biodegradability experiments to illustrate how materials break down
- encouraging children to become 'energy savers' by turning lights off
- reminding each other to be water wise by turning off taps and tipping water play troughs onto the garden after play
- instilling 'reduce, re-use and recycle' behavioural concepts by reusing posters, paper, boxes, cylinders, cardboard and other materials donated by local businesses, or sourced during the kindergarten's annual trip to Bayswater's Resource Rescue service
- propagating, planting and caring for shrubs, herbs and vegetables

- learning 'paddock to plate' techniques by using produce from family vegetable gardens and eggs from the kindergarten's resident chickens to make soups, healthy cakes and other dishes
- using sustainable toys purchased from opportunity shops, swapped between other services or donated by local families
- making ethical purchasing decisions, including sustainably sourced timber products, and
- ensuring teachers role model sustainable practices.

"Little eyes watch our every move, so showing strong leadership and environmental awareness is vital to engendering long-term sustainable behaviour in our children," says fellow educator Alyce.

The children also learn scientific concepts in various ways. For example:

- recycling initiatives provide lessons in chemistry and biodegradability
- rockpool rambles teach them about oceanography, ecology and palaeontology
- feeding food scraps to resident animals focuses on biology and nutrition

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- indigenous stories present topography, geography and cultural science concepts, and
- water play tests the theories of celebrated physicists.

Introduced in 2014, the program proved so successful in its first 12 months that it was recognised in Sustainability Victoria's 2015 ResourceSmart Education Awards, winning the prestigious Early Childhood Service of the Year Award.

With more than 180 entries from some 100 education services across Victoria, the award places Lorne Kindergarten at the top when it comes to exceptional environmental awareness and education projects.

"We knew we were on to something very special with this program but to be recognised on a statewide level has been exhilarating and vindicating," Alyce says.

"In fact, we were overwhelmed that a small regional kindergarten could make such giant waves in the sustainability sector."

The kindergarten has continued to build on the *Junior Earthlings* program throughout 2015 by transforming a disused space into a practical bush learning space.

Featuring a produce garden, this 'wild space' enables children to explore the natural environment while practicing the various sustainability and science concepts they've been learning about.

The year ahead will see more work undertaken to enhance the *Junior Earthlings* program and further develop the wild space. Plans include planting indigenous species, fruit trees and other edible produce, and establishing a bush tucker garden.

"We will also be working toward being the first kindergarten to achieve Sustainability Victoria's five-star rating," says Michelle.

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