

Sustainable Schools and Communities 2001



Final report

November 2001





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Cover photo

Indigenous gardens in school grounds create tranquil, easy maintenance settings which students enjoy using for lunch, study and passive recreation at Mercy Community College in Coburg.

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1. Introduction

Funding for the Sustainable Schools and Communities Project from the Darebin and Moreland City Councils enabled eleven schools in Melbourne's northern suburbs to be involved in a project to plan to establish or further develop indigenous gardens in participating school's grounds.

The project has provided and will continue to offer opportunities to develop local knowledge about the indigenous biodiversity of the Merri Creek catchment.

2. Project outline

The project commenced on the 1st October 2000 and was completed on the 30th September 2001. Participating schools for each of the local government areas were:

City of Darebin (\$6000 contribution)	City of Moreland (\$5000 contribution)
<i>Bell Primary School</i>	<i>Mercy Secondary College</i>
<i>Preston Primary School</i>	<i>Moomba Park Primary School</i>
<i>Lakeside Secondary College</i>	<i>Moreland City College</i>
<i>Northcote High School</i>	<i>Fawkner Primary School</i>
<i>Wales Street Primary School</i>	<i>Brunswick South Primary School</i>
<i>Holy Spirit Primary School</i>	

Each of the eleven schools were visited twice. During the visits members of Merri Creek Management Committee's staff photographed the school grounds and discussed planning an indigenous garden with school representatives and assessed the potential for indigenous plantings.

A draft manual *Planning indigenous gardens for schools* was prepared for school visits which contained three separate parts. After visits were completed, final revisions were made and manuals distributed to schools comprising three parts as follows:

- *Planning indigenous gardens for schools – Achieving an indigenous garden*
- *Planning indigenous gardens for schools – Fundraising Toolkit*
- *Planning indigenous gardens for schools – Living Classroom*

The manual is in three separate parts to allow for easy handling by different committees, groups etc. (A copy of the manual is provided for council as an attachment to this report.)

3. Methodology

Recruitment

Schools were approached with whom MCMC had a prior relationship and the opportunity was also taken to approach and recruit other schools (listed above). Seven primary schools and five secondary schools participated.

Workshop

A professional development workshop was a specific component of the project indicated in MCMC's grant application to councils. In planning the event, it was agreed to hold the workshop at Bell Primary School in Preston where attendees could explore some planning issues regarding indigenous gardens on site. Invitations to attend the workshop to discuss indigenous gardens and fundraising were then extended (Appendix B).

The response was so poor that a second opportunity was offered (Appendix C). However, second workshop dates also received a very weak response. It was finally decided that another type of arrangement was needed. After discussions with schools, MCMC offered each school an 'individual workshop' opportunity (as opposed to a 'group workshop' opportunity) at their own school. This style of workshop was enthusiastically accepted.

School visits

In the initial grant application MCMC intended to send one staff member to each school to prepare a plant list appropriate for that school. After the review of the professional development workshop each school visit was expanded to include the following:

- A meeting at each school between key contact school representatives (which often included the principal) and two MCMC staff (Angela Foley and Sal Collyer).
- A joint review of Sustainable Schools and Communities draft manual *Planning indigenous gardens for schools*
- A discussion about the school's interest in developing an indigenous garden
- A tour of the school grounds
- Selection of school sites and discussion about their potential
- Photographs of the selected sites
- Preparation of a site assessment and draft plant list

School visits took up to two hours.

Site assessments and plant lists

Site assessments and plant lists were prepared for each school using a master assessment information sheet (see Appendix D).

Plant lists were prepared in keeping with individual school's objectives. For example, one school was keen to create a visual buffer between the school and its neighbours and is now planning a garden comprising indigenous trees and shrubs. In contrast, another school was also keen to create a barrier between the school grounds and the fence but required low grasses to meet their need for maximum visibility and supervision of children.

In other cases schools were keen to create wind breaks, develop visually aesthetic attributes and, in a major redevelopment of grounds, one school is keen to reduce heat affects on a particular a building by replacing a large expanse of bitumen with a garden. All these schools are now aware of their indigenous options.

Manual development

To maximise the benefit of individual meetings with schools the final manual was deferred until school visits were completed. The copy taken to schools was therefore a working master draft. This draft comprised three separate booklets:

- *Planning indigenous gardens for schools – Achieving an indigenous garden*
- *Planning indigenous gardens for schools – Fundraising Toolkit*
- *Planning indigenous gardens for schools – Living Classroom*

This meant there was a 'draft' manual to take to schools to use as a discussion point and to indicate the materials participating schools would receive. It also ensured that relevant information obtained during school visits could be included in the final version. Important amendments to the manual included customisation to school's objectives regarding indigenous gardens such as energy, health or educational priorities.

The final manual was pitched at a level of very high relevance to schools including the addition of extra photographs taken from the participating schools

Total package given to schools

The total package given to schools comprised:

- Individual plant list and site assessment for up to four areas in a school's grounds,
- Set of photographs of school ground sites for which plant lists were prepared,
- One copy of MCMC's *Stream Life*, and
- A manual comprising three parts as described above.

4. Outcomes

- Eleven schools in the Merri Creek catchment (six in the City of Darebin and five in the City of Moreland) are prepared to undertake significant development towards achieving indigenous gardens in their school grounds.
- MCMC has been able to develop its planning and planting expertise for application in the context of school grounds.
- Positive advancement of the idea that you can work towards the preservation of Merri Creek and its flora and fauna right in your own backyard/school grounds.
- Assembly of constructive information about successfully achieving an indigenous garden through planning, fundraising and integration with student learning.
- A three part manual was produced and distributed to eleven schools.
- The feasibility of creating indigenous gardens in the school context has been discussed in detail with representatives from eleven schools.
- Eleven schools are currently considering plans for on-site indigenous garden development; at least half have indicated firm intentions to be ready for an autumn planning in 2002.
- Options for MCMC's potential involvement in future plantings with participating schools were explored.
- Greater interest in Merri Creek catchment's biodiversity has been stimulated.
- Greater understanding of the concept of living in a catchment area has been discussed.
- The development of the manual has sparked interest from other schools including those from outside the Merri Creek catchment.

5. Conclusions

The Sustainable Schools and Communities Project has been a very positive overall experience.

Review of professional development workshop

The greatest difficulty during the project was the conduct of the professional development workshop. Review of this project element was undertaken in light of poor responses from schools to invitations. Resolution of this problem was extremely successful with regard to quality project delivery although it required more hours of MCMC staff in individual school meetings. The decision to conduct more detailed individual visits to each school only enhanced the goals of the project by allowing greater depth of interaction with each school. This then fostered a more focused approach to the development of the project materials and ensured a deeper understanding of school's actual needs during the preparation and design of plant lists.

School visits

The school visits themselves were greatly appreciated by school representatives and facilitated opportunities to discuss **other** school's needs and objectives. Discussions with Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative and Westgarth Primary School Sharing information about other school's experiences helped to stimulate new ideas about school grounds for some schools and allowed for greater articulation of the pro-indigenous arguments.

These meetings fostered stronger relationship between MCMC and schools which may aid school's steps in the development of indigenous gardens in the future.

6. Budget

Six City of Darebin schools	\$1,000 each	=	\$6,000
Five City of Moreland schools	\$1,000 each	=	\$5,000

Tasks	Costs
1. Recruitment	\$924
2. Coordination	\$4050
3. School liaison	\$900
4. School visits (meetings, site assessments, plant selection lists)	\$1980
5. Manual (research, writing, photographs, assembly and printing)	\$3260
Total project costs	\$11,114
Total council contributions	\$11,000

Appendix A:

School recruitment form

Appendix B:

Workshop invitation

Appendix C:

Letter regarding rescheduling of workshop

Appendix D:

Sample school site assessment sheet