

SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS NETWORK JOURNAL

A photograph of two young children in school uniforms. The child on the right is a girl with dark hair, wearing a white shirt and a dark blue vest, smiling and looking towards the camera. The child on the left is a boy with light brown hair, wearing a dark blue plaid shirt, looking towards the girl. They are standing in a greenhouse or conservatory, surrounded by various green plants and trees. The background shows a red wall and white structural elements.

International Grammar School Sydney

Daisy Ross
Arlian Ecker
Gecko Environment Council
Georgia Liussi

SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS NETWORK JOURNAL

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Cover courtesy of International Grammar School

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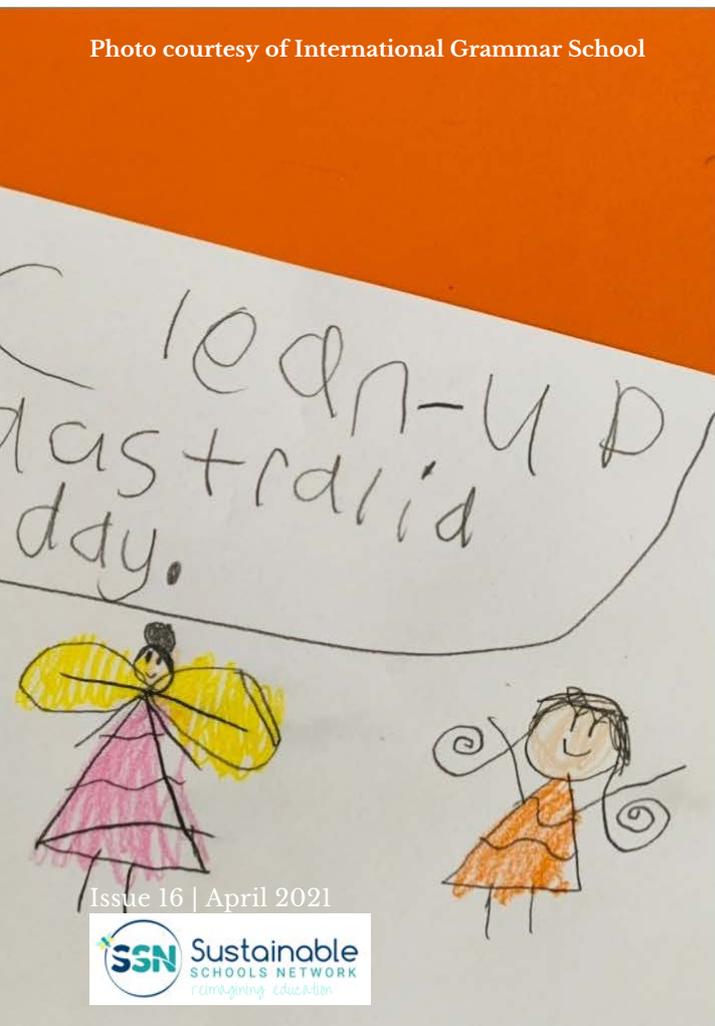
The SSN Journal is designed and created to share stories of how schools, teachers, organisations, students and parents educate for sustainability. This is not a 'how to' guide rather a collection of case studies aimed at inspiring action and inviting you to learn from others. Some people featured are just getting started, whilst others have been at this for a long time. We share these different perspectives to demonstrate the importance of the lived experience and the value of every point in the journey.

TO SHARE YOUR STORY

We invite your questions and contributions. Email us at info@ssn.org.au to share your story or to ask Dr. Ali a question. We are always looking for stories to share, so please don't hesitate to email us: info@ssn.org.au

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to Indigenous Elders past, present and emerging.

Photo courtesy of International Grammar School

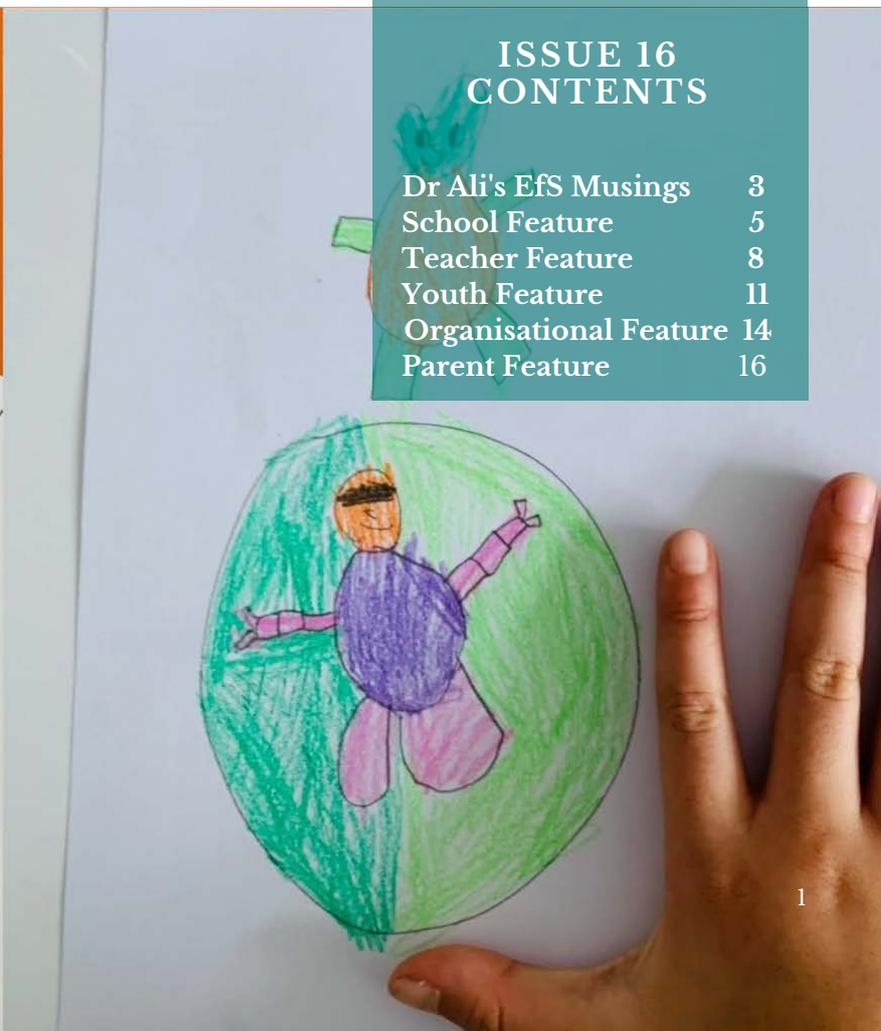


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SSN UPDATE

Chief Steward, Katie Norman and Managing Editor, Paty Lee

As most of you now know the SSN officially wound up as a charity on 31 March 2021. So, this will be our final issue of the SSN Journal as a registered Australian charity.

Although it is disappointing that the 2021 Sustainability Symposium will not go ahead, we would like to thank All Saints Anglican School for supporting the initiative and for their ongoing enthusiasm for Education for Sustainability (EfS).

It has been a pleasure working with all SSN board members and volunteers as we collectively worked towards achieving our purpose. Fortunately, we know most of you will continue to do this work in your professional spaces within and external to the education sector. Thank you!!!

This is not the end of the SSN, rather a shift in structure... It would have been ideal to keep moving forward as a charity, however we were not immune to the effects of COVID and suffered significant personnel and financial losses. However, there is now an opportunity to adapt and utilise alternative, socially responsible organisational structures

to move forward.

As the Director of the SSN, I (Katie) commit to ensuring the resources created when the SSN was a charity remain available to all stakeholders as the organisational model changes. The sense of responsibility that led me to create the SSN in partnership has not changed. I remain driven by the same values and mission to educate and connect school communities to imagine a sustainable future as ever before.

To educate for sustainability we need to be flexible and adapt. We need to be mindful of both the natural and the social environments within which we exist. It is important to question and to heal and to always put one foot in front of the other - even if sometimes that doesn't happen as quickly as we hope it would...

Now is the time for regeneration. To that end I invite you to participate in that process. Please feel to reach out if you have questions or would like to contribute to the change process the SSN is experiencing... Your input is welcome: info@ssn.org.au



The SSN website & social media pages will remain a resource available to schools communities, including access to all SSN Journals and reports ensuring you are informed and connected....

Issue 16 | April 2021



DR. ALI SAMMEL'S EFS MUSINGS

Is it possible to incorporate sustainability into your daily classroom practice?

Sustainability education, as I envision it, is part of a growing body of work that advocates for systemic change, encouraging teachers to grasp possibilities of divergent approaches towards teaching and learning, shifting educational conversations towards a more interconnected way of thinking and acting. In this way, sustainability education directly challenges the ways dominant Western thought (humanism) has restricted our beliefs, assumptions and practices.

This is the era to imagine new ways of learning and teaching that better support students and the planet in the 21st century. Citizens of today and the future need to be exposed to pedagogies that promote attention to their inner world by reflecting on their thoughts, assumptions and actions.

Sustainability education does not present 'the answer', as there is no one answer to the complex problems the Earth is now facing in the Anthropocene. Rather it calls attention to the problems we now face due to what has historically been considered 'natural' or 'normal'.

Challenging these 'truths' will take more than just evidence-based knowledge. This understanding cannot solely consist of theoretical, fact-based, insights (head knowledge), but must include first-hand experiences (embodied knowledge) with connecting with the natural surroundings

that we have evolved alongside. So, the question becomes, what can teachers do, on a daily basis, to offer gentle experiences with nature? In what ways can natural spaces become a co-teacher? I propose a few things teachers can do to strengthen connections.

- Get involved. As Margaret Mead advises: *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*
- Work collectively. Ask questions and promote the agendas you believe in.
- Understand the platforms of the people you vote for and continue to actively promote what you believe, in whatever way you can.
- At a school level, promote everyday ways students can see themselves as nature rather than just living their life alongside nature. This relational pedagogy advocates for students to explore how their lives are intertwined and embedded with, and mutually dependent on, their local green spaces.

Countries with the highest PISA results have students outside interacting with the local green spaces within the school grounds. Students demonstrate higher attention, focus, resilience, connection and lower anxiety levels, just by going outside!



DR. ALI SAMMEL'S Efs MUSINGS

Conduct a few lessons per week outside in any green space in, around or near the school grounds. It is recommended that a familiar greenspace is chosen, a place where students are invited to breathe and practice mindfulness. This is not just about changing the location of the teaching, but more importantly, the process.

It is important that while students are in this greenspace learning the subject content, they are not expected to do anything but focus on listening and becoming familiar with their surroundings, appreciating the structures of nature and exploring the ways they are deeply interconnected.

As you teach your content, link to the trees, animals etc. and ask, *“What perspective would this individual have? What might they see? How might they experience the same wind that blows around you?”*

Give students a chance to take an interest in, and build capacities to notice their natural environment in all its subtle details. This heightened awareness of place allows students to perceive shifts within the surroundings, showing how a place is dynamic, always changing.

Once students recognise this, they can observe what those changes are and infer why those changes have occurred. This ability to pick up on the subtle changes of a place promotes a deeper connection to that place and encourages them to wonder and ask questions. It can inspire students to ask the question, *“What else don't we know?”*

Using experiential learning is important as children have to be aware of, appreciate or

have a connection towards the Earth before they can really be asked to 'save it.'

Finally, if you cannot provide experiential learning of going outside, there is another important pedagogy that you can do every day. For me, sustainability education is ultimately about experiencing, practicing and learning compassion, kindness, gentleness and forgiveness.

We need to learn what this means for our own lives before we can really understand how to genuinely offer them to all of the life that we interact with while bringing about the changes we want to see in the world.

I offer a practice that I do every day, as a way of promoting 'being the change':

- What 3 things could you do each day to show yourself compassion, kindness, gentleness, forgiveness?
- What 3 things could you do each day to show another human compassion, kindness, gentleness, forgiveness?
- What 3 things could you do each day to show a more-than-human animal, or plant compassion, kindness, gentleness, forgiveness?
- What 3 things could you do each day to show the ecosystem compassion, kindness, gentleness, forgiveness?

If all students learned how to do this - what a different world it would be. If coming-to-know is inseparable from coming-to-being, then it is imperative that students are exposed to alternative concepts, philosophies, words, and gestures that nurture neural networks to develop more compassion and connection to themselves and everything else on this amazing planet.



International Grammar School Sydney (IGS) is a unique independent, coeducational secular school in Sydney's CBD offering quality teaching and an extraordinary bilingual education from Preschool to Year 12. IGS is working towards reducing their ecological footprint by establishing and maintaining sustainable practices, quickly becoming a leader in sustainability education.

"Unity through Diversity is our motto and our five core values – diversity, personal achievement, connectedness, vibrancy and authenticity – are at the heart of who we are and what we do," Principal Shauna Colnan has said.

Sustainable Futures is one of three aspirations of the IGS strategic plan, 'Into the World 2016-2021', along with Limitless Learning and Empowered Students. With this in mind, IGS Sustainable Futures Club – a student-led movement to improve environmental sustainability at IGS – was launched in 2017. By 2018, the school had developed a Sustainability Framework that strived to make the school's campus, activities and events sustainable.

The SSN first spoke with IGS Geography and Commerce teacher Carmelo Fedele in November 2020 about his passion for teaching and his interest in sustainability. That same year, Carmelo was appointed as IGS Head of Sustainability.

Commenting on the new role, Ms Colnan said, *"Following our staff conference, I was struck by the strong rise in our collective commitment to sustainability. The sense of urgency for us to step up as guardians for now of IGS was palpable. The shock and the sense of loss in the wake of the summer's wildfires was the song beneath the words. We were reeling. A tipping point had been reached."*

The IGS Sustainable Futures vision is to become a lighthouse school for sustainability. Their mission: to make meaningful progress toward greater sustainability in the areas of waste, energy, biodiversity, water, activism and resources.

"IGS believes in using the Earth's finite resources as wisely as it can and is continually monitoring and evaluating our operations and efforts."

Carmelo adds, *"We have high expectations and ambitious goals; however, we recognise that we can't do everything at once. That's why the concept of 'meaningful progress' is important. We just need to take one step at a time."*

SCHOOL FEATURE

In March 2021, IGS was awarded the Eco-Schools Bronze Award for achievement in Education for Sustainable Development and improving the environmental performance of the school and the wider community.

Eco-Schools is a school-based sustainability education framework operating in 60+ countries globally. To achieve an award from Eco-Schools, IGS students were required to conduct an environmental review and a baseline survey, whilst demonstrating measurable progress in at least one of the Eco-Schools themes.

“I am very proud of all the students in Sustainable Futures who have contributed their time, energy and care for the planet,” says Carmelo. *“I am also very grateful to the parents for their advice, expertise and contributions to our community, and for support from the Principal for her amazing leadership, for the cooperation of the leadership team, the Board and the broader IGS community.”*

The Sustainable Futures Club has developed an environmental review to help quantify the school’s impact in terms of the seven Eco-Schools themes – biodiversity, fair go, energy and climate, lifestyles, litter and waste, waste and waterways, and water – all to generate action project ideas.

The IGS Action Plan records targets, timeframes, curriculum links and the evaluation of projects. A waste audit determined the baseline and for each initiative (usually student-led) a proposal is written, then sent for review and approval.

Carmelo says, *“From the beginning this was a student-led movement. We now have about 40 students involved in our Sustainable Futures Club. To go from four or five kids to forty in the space of six months is wonderful.”*

There are six appointed student leaders with specific roles and responsibilities such as the High-School Sustainability Portfolio Leader, Biodiversity, Waste, Energy and Activism Leaders. Together, students of all ages have cleaned the school’s surrounding areas and raised awareness.

As for the challenges encountered along the way, Carmelo says, *“We are taking the school community on the journey together, with consideration for their differing perspectives and their other commitments. We have ambitious plans, we are taking it one step at a time.”*



SCHOOL FEATURE

IGS is proud to be working on developing initiatives in the following areas, using student research:

- Waste
 - Understand and improve their waste management system by increasing recycling and composting
 - Continue to perform regular waste audits to monitor their progress
 - Build on their involvement with Clean Up Australia Day by hosting more local clean-ups and changing the culture around waste management.
- Energy
 - Participate in Earth Hour by turning their air conditioning off for a week
 - Reassess their energy providers based on exactly how they source energy
 - Implement energy efficiency measures to reduce their energy use
 - Consider alternative renewable energy sources.
- Biodiversity
 - Create a bush tucker garden on their roof to promote biodiversity and links to Indigenous heritage and culture
 - Implement broader greening projects across the school, particularly vertical gardens.
- Water
 - Understand their impact on local water quality through nearby storm water drains
 - Collaborate with Storm Water Shepherds to raise awareness of plastics and other toxins in oceans.
- Activism
 - Participate in student action on climate change events
 - Contact local MPs about action on climate change
 - Host events for sustainability documentaries and special guests.
- Resources
 - Write a new purchasing policy that incorporates the triple bottom line framework
 - Promote labelling of belongings to avoid wasting resources
 - Continue their "Rue Kelly" uniform and equipment swap-meet.

One of the most rewarding aspects of Carmelo's role has been, *"Witnessing students develop, not only in their awareness of sustainability but also in the authentic, real-world, problem-solving skills that they will need for their lives beyond school"*.

"We have had students go on to study marine biology because of a passion to save coral reefs; urban planning and architecture to improve biodiversity and liveability in our cities; and politics and international studies because they want to be thought leaders and changemakers for the future," says Carmelo.

What better measure of a school's mission to equip students to be world-ready, than the lives they lead beyond graduation? Congratulations IGS!

To learn more about IGS commitment to sustainability, visit:

<https://parents.igssyd.nsw.edu.au/hubs/sustainability>



Introducing Daisy Ross

Teachers have a significant and lifelong impact in our community. They inspire, motivate, challenge and support students and play a critical role in our societal ecosystem. Those who have been deeply influenced by an educator, know that teachers provide life skills and foster positive attitudes, empowering students to recognise and believe in the impact they can have on the world. Daisy Ross, Year 2 teacher at A.B. Paterson College, is one of those teachers.

Daisy believes that it was her experiences as a child, enabled by her parents, that truly made an impact on her own educational perspective. Her childhood memories include trips to the beach organised by her mother, who would always remind her family to collect and properly dispose of the rubbish they found along the beach.

Moreover, her dad would teach her and her siblings about the value of not wasting food during dinner, and she would learn from both of her parents to never discard anything until it had been repurposed within 'an inch of its life' – she adds: *“My parents gave us endless examples of ‘how to...’ or ‘why not try...’ and they remain incredibly resourceful and creative people. To this day, dad’s favourite nail bag is a ‘one-thousand-year-old’ ice-cream container and mum still has a knack for reviving pre-loved furniture and turning it into something spectacular.”*

During her childhood Daisy was encouraged to explore the outdoors, something that she is grateful for. It allowed her to learn to interact with the natural world while building a positive relationship with the elements. She explains, *“We weren’t just encouraged to play outside; we were told to. Every afternoon, after school, we would be outdoors, doing things like rummaging through dad’s shed for a more efficient tool to capture blue tongue lizards.”*

It was that encouragement - Daisy tells us - to keep busy and to use their imagination, that allowed her and her siblings to develop an adventurous spirit and curiosity for the world, which in turn helped her build her confidence to try new things. *“Being outdoors means you begin to build an appreciation for the elements. If it was raining, my brothers and I were out there. If it was roasting, we were rolling empty barrels down to the creek and building a raft,”* she recalls.

Today, as a teacher, Daisy believes that finding the right balance between digital literacy, outdoor learning and play, is essential in education. Embedding sustainability in education enables students to develop skills, knowledge, values and motivates them to contribute to their community.

One of Daisy’s first experiences in outdoor learning was partaking in a Kitchen Garden Program whilst working as a teacher at a play-based school. Her class was one of four that was in charge of growing food in the veggie patch, composting for the entire school, caring for resident chickens and cooking from the produce that was grown.

In doing this, she realised the value of having a hands-on approach when learning the process of sustainable living. Through this engagement with the outdoors, problem-solving skills, dexterity, innovative thinking and worldliness of students were improving.



“Sustainability is about creating habits that benefit our immediate and distant future. It is my hope that by building sustainable habits and actions that we may even reverse some of the environmental issues that our world currently faces.” Daisy Ross

Today, it is still the kids who bring the most inspiration to Daisy when planning activities for the garden. *“The enthusiasm you see when you pull-out the iPads in a classroom pales in comparison to the passion and sheer joy the students have for the outdoors. Witnessing those reactions quickly validate the reason for having our community garden and that makes it easy to work through the logistical challenges that come with running a garden in a big school.”* She adds *“the passion from the students and families at A.B. Paterson College is amazing. The inaugural stages of the project are now complete with six successful vegetable gardens up and running.”*

The challenges encountered in her path to sustainability have never undermined Daisy’s determination to encourage a hands-on approach in learning the process of sustainable living. She is certain that change starts with us. *“The change of attitude could be the difference between showing a child it’s ok to be negligent or how to be mindful and create change for the better. It seems like a pretty obvious choice for me, bearing in mind kids are the ones we will leave this planet to,”* she explains.

One of Daisy’s favourite projects includes the beautiful A.B. Paterson College community garden. Daisy also delivers a ‘nude food’ lunch initiative which she began early in her teaching career to reduce waste but encourage healthy eating. This has motivated students to ask their parents to make ethical choices in the food they send to school. Working in collaboration with another A.B. Paterson College teacher - Kerrie Moore, Daisy is also involved with the environmental club, The Planeteers. This group are combating waste by running initiatives such as the ‘10 Cents Campaign,’ where students and their families collect and place recyclable items in the separate recycling bins located in the Junior School playground.

Henceforward, Daisy sees herself learning more about ways to weave sustainable practices and environmentally ethical choices into everyday education. *“As teachers, we have an incredible opportunity to influence and encourage sustainable habits in children. I’d like to say that I am a pioneer in sustainable practise, but the truth is, I just try and do the best with what I’ve got and have a go where I can.”* In the next few years, Daisy looks forward to measuring her success based on the projects and practices her school adopts as they build their independence. *“You have to start somewhere,”* she says.



A.B. Paterson College students exploring the veggie garden

Thank you Ms Daisy Ross for inspiring the next generation of children by developing their skills and motivating them to contribute to their own wellbeing and that of their community and the planet!

T-shirts For Sale



WWW.SSN.ORG.AU

Arlian Ecker



"Plastic Free Boy" as he is better known, has been on a mission to save the world from plastic pollution from a young age. Today, he shares his inspiring journey with the SSN.

On his 11th birthday, while visiting a turtle rehabilitation centre, Arlian Ecker witnessed the release of three rehabilitated sea turtles back into the ocean. As he watched in awe, he wondered what had happened to them and why they had ended up in the rehabilitation centre.

Arlian soon discovered that these turtles had ingested plastic, which can rupture internal organs and cause intestinal blockages leaving turtles unable to feed. Furthermore resulting in starvation, excess buoyancy, stunting of growth and slow reproduction rates.

After learning more about the damages caused by plastic in marine life, Arlian decided to do something about it, *"I realised that all the other turtles in the ocean were not as lucky as the turtles in the hospital. The others could be floating around in the ocean and dying of hunger. I knew something had to be done. I asked my mum, what can I say that will make people care? And she suggested we tell the full story of the turtles, with me in front of the camera,"* says Arlian.

Deciding to tell the story of the turtles together, Arlian and his mum - Karin Ecker, a professional filmmaker who also shares Arlian's connection with the ocean, set on a journey to inspire others to protect it.

This is how the 'Plastic Free Boy' project was born. After eleven months, they had developed a 22-minute long film called 'Plastic Alarm' where Arlian invites other kids to join him and to use their voices to save the ocean from plastic pollution. Since 2017, Arlian, the 'Plastic Free Boy', has shared this inspiring and educational documentary in schools both locally & internationally, showcasing the problems and solutions of plastic pollution and encouraging kids to make a difference.

So, what does sustainability mean for Arlian? He defines sustainability as, *"The responsibility and actions to conserve natural resources and protect ecosystems with the aim to support the health of our environment now and in the future."* And he believes that being aware of our actions and the effects they have on the environment is essential in our road to becoming more sustainable.



“Small changes can have a big impact in the world; recycling, reusing items and avoiding single-use plastic make a huge difference.”

As the Clean Up Australia Day Youth Ambassador, Arlian is calling other kids to action to reduce or stop the use of single-use items such as straws, bags, cups and bottles. He engages school children with his mission of protecting the ocean and our waterways, by highlighting scientific facts such as information about microplastic and its effects on human health.

Arlian is determined to help school students to become global citizens of change, he adds, *“It is my passion to share this world with others and create the connection for them. Every second breath we take from the ocean. Our human survival depends on a healthy ocean ecosystem.”*

Arlian has been advocating for the environment from a very young age. This meant at times it was hard to be taken seriously, but with the support of his family, he persevered. *“I got to interview lots of marine scientists and speak with very inspiring humans such as world renown surfer David Rastovich. It was people like him and of course, my mum who made me feel like I could do it. With all these people behind me I feel really supported,”* he says.

Another challenge has been trying to persuade those who are against change. Before the single-use plastic bag was banned, Arlian felt like he was seen as a very ‘outside of the box thinker,’ but after the ban, it was easier for him to talk about the possibility to ban single-use plastic straws in his school canteen.

Today, more than 690,000 school children have watched Arlian’s documentary, and many more have watched his message about plastic pollution. He and his mum are now working on a new film titled ‘Plan B.’

“We filmed part of it over a year ago (2019 pre-Covid) when we travelled to the Great Barrier Reef. The film is about saving the Coral Reef and what we can do to protect and restore it.”

The new film explores the impact that rising temperatures have on coral and touches on issues such as coral bleaching and ocean acidification. He explains, *“In the film, I talk about the possible solutions to these problems; one of them, for example, is planting corals,”* he adds, *“In our film, we really want to show the dangers our reefs are facing and what everyone can do to become a part of the solution.”*

In the last four years, Arlian has been visiting schools around Australia to share his experience; educating and inspiring young people and children to empower themselves to create the future they want to live in.

- Arlian’s ‘top 5 solutions’ to reduce plastic:
1. Reduce your use of single-use plastic.
 2. Reuse the use of plastic straws, bottles, bags, cups.
 3. Encourage others like your family and friends to do the same.
 4. Buy in bulk.
 5. Buy fewer clothes.



During the time spent in schools, meeting thousands of kids, Arlian believes more than ever in the power of youth, he says, *“I have witnessed kids often feeling powerless about the issues they learn in school. I believe our youth can all learn that everyone matters and can make a difference, and even better, learn the steps to take! No matter how young you are or who you are, you can change the world. Surround yourself with people that support you to do something that you are passionate about and also benefits your own growth.”*

His documentary "Plastic Alarm" has educated students in Australia and overseas about plastic pollution.

As an inspirational speaker, Arlian has become an international sensation after his plenary speech at the 2019 Asia Pacific Cities Summit and Mayor's Forum. The same year, he received the Student Award from the NSW Department of Education for his commitment to teaching communities about plastic pollution and his achievement to create improvement in the school's waste management. Back in 2018, he was nominated for the NSW Green Globe Awards by the NSW Department of Environment.

Plastic Free Boy offers Primary and High-School incursions as an opportunity to embrace the cross-curriculum priority of sustainability, enable and empower students to make decisions and take actions that contribute to making a more sustainable society.

The presentation, which includes the 22-minute film 'Plastic Alarm', is available for schools and communities with the option for schools to raise funds to improve their waste management. Also available is a 2-hour lesson plan for teachers to use for Years 4-10 focused on a waste-free day and targeted to Australian Curriculum outcomes in English, Science, and Mathematics.

“Every time I've visited a school, after my presentation I can see the kids' eyes lighting up. They are engaged and understand why plastic is harmful; from that understanding comes the action! I feel that the way to educate the kids is from another kid who has educated himself, to spread the education and the message. I keep having parents tell me how activated their kids are after my presentation at their school, and how motivated they are to change the plastic pollution in their household”. Arlian Ecker.

For more information about Arlian Ecker – 'Plastic Free Boy' and learn how he can visit your school check out <https://plasticfreeboy.com/> or contact him at info@plasticfreeboy.com



In 1989, representatives from six local conservation groups envisioned themselves working for the care, protection and conservation of the natural environment and the improvement of the built environment so that it would become more ecologically sustainable. Today, the success of this project in preserving an invaluable mangrove reserve, led to a formal founding of the Gold Coast and Hinterland Environment Council – known today as Gecko Environment Council.

Gecko has grown into an effective organisation with the vision of supporting, "A vibrant Gold Coast community where people and animals, plants, water, air and earth all form a healthy, harmonious system."

Gecko's mission to 'actively promote, conserve and restore the natural environment and improve the sustainability of the built environment of the Gold Coast region in partnership with our member groups and the wider community,' reflects their firm commitment to the conservation and protection of our world's environment by educating and encouraging society to preserve ecological sustainability.

Anna Itkonen, President of Gecko Environment Council explains:

"While Gecko Environment Council firstly and foremostly works within environmental sustainability, the basis of all that we do lies in the understanding that sustainability is a multifaceted issue. Over the past 30 years, our operations have developed and changed a lot to respond to current issues and to adjust to changes in local, national and international situations and developments. We believe that long-term goals are achieved by a balanced and researched approach."

ORGANISATION FEATURE

In the thirty-two years since its foundation, Gecko (a volunteer-based, not-for-profit non-government, organisation) has celebrated many achievements and has also overcome some challenges. *“As a volunteer organisation, the long-term volunteers and personnel are always an issue. Nothing replaces a team with experience who know all the ins and outs,”* nevertheless - says Anna, *“If you look at those as challenges to overcome or opportunities to problem solve, it will put a more energetic spin on things,”* Anna explains.

The organisation is lucky enough to have a number of paid working opportunities and a core group of passionate, long-term volunteers whom Anna considers the absolute backbone of Gecko. Gecko’s members, volunteers and supporters have the primary focus on the protection of the local environment, encouraging a better understanding of the need to protect native flora and fauna and the ecosystems which support them.

Gecko’s Education Centre offers inspiring and educational school and holiday programs, environmentally themed public talks presented by leading experts in their fields, it also provides engaging and inspirational environmental education to both children and adults. The programs offer fun interactive learning activities and promote a sense of stewardship for the environment. GeckoEd has also interactive field excursions and programs for schools and the community, led by trained teachers using a ‘head, heart and hand’ approach. These activities are delivered in schools, to community groups and clubs within the Gold Coast’s beautiful environments, such as the forests, mountains, rivers, estuaries and dunes.

With so many projects, it is a bit hard to pick favourites, but Anna shares:

“My top three projects have to be School Sustainability Awards with the Sustainable Schools Network, brainstorming and creating a sustainability blog and all the children’s education programs and initiatives. I love writing, which explains the blog, and anything to do with igniting a passion in the next generation is just the best feeling!”

Part of Gecko’s plans for the future in terms of sustainability practices involves an increasing number of collaborations and partnerships. Ensuring a proactive approach to all the aspects of protection and preservation of the natural environment and building on the platforms which they have gained over the past three decades to ensure the organisation’s success.

Gecko Environment Council has a crucial role in helping to facilitate dialogue with civil society to help people live more sustainable lives. The organisation has led the charge in gathering like-minded individuals together for the common purpose of protecting the environment and working tirelessly to inspire, inform and involve.

The SSN is a proud partner of Gecko Environment Council and would like to take this opportunity to thank its members for their continuous support. To find out how you can get involved follow this link: <https://gecko.org.au/>



Introducing

Georgia Liussi

Georgia Liussi is a proud parent and a teacher from All Saints Anglican School. In this edition, the SSN explores Georgia's experience as a parent who is passionate about sustainability and as a teacher working to enable her students to construct a more sustainable, equitable, peaceful and meaningful future.



Georgia grew up on the Gold Coast and later attended the University of Technology, Sydney at the beautiful Kurung-gai campus in the leafy northern Sydney suburb of Lindfield and nestled on the edge of the Lane Cove National Park.

It was during her studies and after her experience living and working overseas that Georgia got her first insights into sustainability. For her, sustainability is about, *“The choices we make regarding the way we live now that won't compromise future generations. It is more than protecting the environment, sustainability is about fighting inequality, ending poverty and respecting the planet.”*

Feeling fortunate to have worked in a number of international schools throughout Europe Georgia's experiences allowed her to immerse in foreign cultures and gain valuable exposure to diverse teaching methodologies.

She shares, *“While I was studying, we did our third-year practicum in Thailand, teaching in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. This was eye opening for me and gave me a better understanding of inequalities and poverty around the world,”* and adds, *“Also, early in my teaching career I worked in a low socio-economic area on the outskirts of London.”*

While working at Marymount International School in Rome, Georgia had the opportunity to travel to Zambia, in East Africa, where she worked in local schools. Africa truly made a mark on her personal and professional life, *“My African experience was one of the highlights of my teaching career – the landscapes, the wildlife and the people. I fell in love. This experience also highlighted the inequalities in our world; I wanted to do more to eradicate poverty and help those less fortunate.”*

“Sustainability needs to start small – with each individual reflecting on our actions, rethinking the way we do things and choosing how we can change moving forward.”

Georgia admits that sometimes it is easy to get caught up in trying to solve the impossible therefore, she focuses on the possible and seeks to effectively enable meaningful social and environmental change.

After the arrival of her first daughter, Georgia and her family returned to Australia where she taught at Somerset College for eight years. During her time at Somerset College, she further developed her knowledge of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP).

The IB promotes international mindedness and aims to develop lifelong learners through the IB learner profile, *“Personally and professionally, I strived to become a better thinker, inquirer, communicator and risk-taker who is more caring, knowledgeable, open-minded, reflective, balanced and principled. The 10 learner profile attributes inspired me to follow my passions: fighting inequality, ending poverty and respecting the planet,”* she explains.



Georgia worked in Sydney for a few years where she became involved with a mentoring charity called RAISE, she adds, *“This experience taught me that we have a responsibility to help others – not just in far away, developing countries but sometimes living right around the corner.”*

Later on, Georgia and her family returned to the Gold Coast, where she started working at All Saints Anglican School. As a parent and a teacher, she strives to inspire her own kids and students to reflect, rethink and redesign their future with the belief that our youth have the opportunity to reshape the future by daring to reimagine it.

“If I can inspire them to reflect, I will have made a difference.”

Trying to promote the idea that sustainability is about more than only the environment is challenging, admits Georgia, *“I aim to lead by example and make a difference in my local community by volunteering with Orange Sky and local charity Havafeed.”* Georgia believes that connecting with like-minded parents, teachers, students and community members is crucial if we are to take action for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Likewise, focusing on her legacy as a parent and a teacher, Georgia has encouraged those around her to raise their voices, reminding them that everyone has the power to be change-makers.



Thank you Georgia for your efforts working towards equity and social justice for a better and more sustainable world!

The Sustainable Schools Network
aims to educate and connect
school communities to imagine
a sustainable future.



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