

Early Educator

ISSUE THREE

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BACKYARD IN A BOX

A New Approach to
Teaching Sustainability





In an age of extensive consumerism sustainability is sometimes a hard concept for people to grasp. Luckily, the same doesn't apply to children, who if given the chance, will dive

headfirst into sustainable projects and practises that combine learning, fun and pleasure.

In 2004 Kiri Combi from Sydney's northern beaches found she was having trouble training staff in her EcoPreschool centres to maintain the sustainable systems she had developed when establishing the innovative early childhood centres.

At the same time Kirri was keen to ensure that staff had the knowledge to pass on sustainable practices to children in a way that was educational, engaging and fun. But, how could they teach sustainable practises when the topic had almost entirely been overlooked by education systems at the time?

Kirri found that one of the most effective teaching methods she knew was learning through animals and plants. So, she began the process of establishing seven systems that acted as a road map for staff to the follow in their move towards embedding sustainability into educational programs. That solution was called Backyard in a Box.

In developing the seven systems, or boxes, that range from worm farming to organic gardening, Kiri said 'the important thing for me was to get the kids exposed to the natural world and begin them thinking about their impact and role in the health of the natural world.

And also to give them basic life-long survival skills, being able to grown your own food in order to feed yourself is pretty basic stuff and to me it had been entirely overlooked by the education system'.

The seven boxes include classroom resources and educator training on the topics of Resource Recycling, Worm Farming, Composting, Guinea Pigs, Chickens, Organic Gardening and Water Recycling.

While the boxes can be purchased in any order, when they are used together each of the three parts of the box stimulate ongoing action and education for sustainability.



Boxes contain educator guides, general resources, stimulus, game and vocabulary cards, training manual and instructional DVD, educator big book and child readers, sheets and flash cards. 'The most popular boxes are composting, worm farming and organic gardening, because not only are these three systems easy, they are also integral to one another. A service will usually already have one of these in place and then try to add on the next most obvious and useful system', Kiri said.

In Australia new national laws highlight sustainability as a compulsory and necessary part of a child's early learning experience. Sustainability has also recently been introduced as a new curriculum stand both in primary and secondary schools. The

concept of sustainability is also often misunderstood as Kiri notes, 'all too often in early child education centres I see sustainability express through infrastructure such as rain water tanks and solar panels as well as signs to switch off the lights.

Although, I acknowledge these as important, these things don't necessarily expose children to education for sustainable practice, nor do they equip teachers with knowledge and skills to develop programs to support sustainable practice that is responsive to the needs of the learners'.

Feedback from also education professionals has also been very positive in relation to enhancing their own knowledge about sustainability. Educators have also embraced the boxes with

pre-made learning experiences that can be tailored to the needs of the learners and also comply with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

Many city dwelling parents have also embraced Backyard in a Box. 'A lot of families live in city units so they can't keep animals or have large backyards so Backyard in a Box really give their kids the best of both worlds.' 'Children also love collecting eggs from the chick coup or pulling up the carrots and snipping the lettuce leaves for lunch', Kiri said.

While the future of sustainable practises in education looks bright Kiri did express some concerns that over regulation could creep into the system rather than relying on a common sense approach to growing vegetables or tending to animals.



But, this is not going to stop Kiri's plans to continue to build her approach to sustainability. 'I would like to see all children learning how to grow and cook their own food utilising the recycling systems set out in the Backyard in a Box series and for educators to be 100 percent committed to these practices', she said.

Kiri's popular educational programs continue to be rolled out and embraced across the country in early education and higher education learning centres. She is also working with registered training organisations who see the value in the resource. The next steps are to work with council owned childcare centres, the broader community, including home schooling, public and private schools and the retail and educational suppliers.

Backyard in a Box meets Unit of Competency requirements for a number of courses including, but not limited to:

- CHC 30113** – Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care
- BSBSUS301A** – Implement and monitor environmentally sustainable work practices
- CHC50113** – Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care
- CHCECE025** – Embed sustainable practices in service operation core
- CHCECE012** – Support children to connect with their world



Meet the Founder

EcoPreschools founder Kiri Combi developed the Backyard In A Box series. In 2003 Kiri began the process to establish her first EcoPreschool on Sydney's Northern Beaches which ignited her push for the introduction of sustainable practice in early childhood education.

Kiri was able to identify and develop a method of training educators to connect children with nature. Kiri is available to share her vision for sustainable practice in early childhood education with you at your earliest convenience. [Learn More.](#)

