

## **Educating for Sustainability in Early Childhood:**

By Deb Watson. November 2007.

As communities discuss and debate our Environment, I have become increasingly aware of the dilemmas being faced by Early Childhood practitioners as they consider; What is Education for Sustainability? What might this look like in an Early Childhood Service? and What can we do?

The fact is, these questions have no 'one size fits all' solution and have far reaching considerations for each Early Childhood Community.

NSWECEEN; an organisation established with a vision to support Early Childhood Services towards Sustainable practises; conducted the first Australian Early Childhood Education for Sustainability conference at Cockatoo Island Sydney in November this year.

One hundred and sixty participants from as far a field as US, NZ and many Australian States came together for one day to consider; The Future Begins with Early Childhood.

This small but increasingly expanding group of Early Childhood professionals were supported by the Sydney Environmental Educators Network (SEEN) in conducting the larger 3 day conference; The Future Begins Today.

As a result of this event it was evident that there is a growing interest and demand for strategies to embrace EfS in ECH. At present Qld, Victoria and NSW have all formed Networks that co operate under the Australian Association of Environmental Educators (AAEE) in an attempt to meet this need within ECH.

DECC has supported a number of initiatives in the sector including the seeding grant for NSWECEEN. Currently ECEEN is unfunded and operates on the voluntary contributions of it's members and offers a range of support services to the Early Childhood sector.

Education for Sustainability is about values and does have an opportunity to impact upon the community. We aim to foster life long learning skills that can be applied in many contexts of the young child and family's life. We consider the importance a curriculum will have as well as the many strategies possible within the functionality of the service. EfS is much more than just worm farms and compost bins, we recognise that an increasing number of people live in urban communities with limited access to natural worlds and their associated eco systems. But this does not mean we must construct lives without this contact. We wish to encourage children's recognition of our dependence upon the environment, to celebrate this connection and to consider ways each of us can "step lightly". In order to take small steps towards a shared vision we must first establish a vision of what is possible for each unique group.

If your service would like to explore these opportunities, you may contact us at

[www.eceen.org.au](http://www.eceen.org.au).