



THE GREENING PROGRAM: City of Hume

Natalia Valenzuela

The aim of the Greening program is to encourage community participation in the decision-making process regarding open space development—with a focus on maintaining areas of conservation and amenity values. My specific role is in engaging with members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD) and working in partnership with them in the organisation of greening activities.

Goals of the Greening program

- to support community participation in open space planning and the development of natural areas within Hume City.
- to provide passive recreation opportunities in natural environment setting.
- for CALD communities to enhance their understanding of the natural environment.
- for CALD communities to become involved in the decision-making process.
- community involvement in greening activities and other environmental initiatives such as waste reduction, energy-saving and water conservation.
- increased knowledge of the environment and environmental issues.
- tailoring programs to be responsive to the diverse cultural needs of the community.

Benefits

The program provides opportunities for greater understanding of the local environment and general environmental issues. Many communities enjoy taking part in environmental activities. In fact, some CALD members are keen to share their experiences of environmental issues—obtained from their countries of birth.

Methods to engaging the community

- educational activities—encouraging people to think and talk about issues like waterways, greenhouse effect, waste, litter, energy
- audio visual presentations
- face-to-face contacts
- planting
- festivals
- involving community centres, Migrant Resource Centre, Ethnic schools, ESL schools, TAFE

Promoting environmental issues to CALD communities

- making educational presentations visual/interactive.
- adding a social element to environmental activities.
- utilising ethnic media to promote environmental issues/events.
- using interpreters
- formal and informal meetings

Multicultural Planting Festival – a case study

The Multicultural Planting Festival is a great example of how one event can bring together people from different backgrounds and helped promote the message of environmental sustainability. The Festival is crucial in educating Hume's diverse communities on the importance of looking after the environment and on such issues as using water wisely, conserving energy, properly disposing of waste etc.

The Festival has numerous benefits.

- as the CALD communities help in the organisation of the event, a sense of ownership is created—the festival becomes 'their' event.
- environmental education can be resource and time intensive. Gathering participants together on the same day and promoting waste wise practices can be more effective. Nothing beats face-to-face communication.
- the Festival promotes the message of personal responsibility. If every person can do 'their bit' for the environment—with simple everyday things—then that person is contributing to creating a better environment today and into the future.
- with so many cultures represented, the festival is a showcase of Hume's diverse community groups. The message is: no matter your colour or creed, together we can make a difference.
- while the festival's focus is environmental, it is also social. It is an opportunity to meet new people, learn new things and try new foods (a festival highlight!).

Previous Festivals

Every year the Festival has seen increased participation especially among refugees, new arrivals and the general community.

- 1996 Grebes & Growling Grass Frog Festival
- 1997 Reeds and River Redgums Festival
- 1998 Black Shoulder Kite Festival
- 1999 Yabbies, Wrens and Ripples Festival
- 2000 Willie Wagtail Festival
- 2001 Dragonflies & Damselflies
- 2002 The Golden Head Weaving Warbler & Wetland Festival
- 2003 The Blue Tongue Lizard & Chocolate Lilies
- 2004 Blue Wrens, Bells & Devils

What Works in the Festival?

- we have the support of CALD communities all of whom volunteer.
- we ensure that the festival does not clash with any religious activities, national days and large sporting events in the area
- people come together and make new friends and connections
- people continually come and support the festival each year
- people have the opportunity to talk about their environmental experience of their own countries
- face to face approach and all staff are introduced on the day of the festival
- the Manager of City Environment is very supportive of the festival
- the community networks are very important
- allows the community to voice their views about the impact of the festival

What is not working in the Festival?

- communication by letter is not working, phone follow up and personal approach are required
- language barriers
- the staff need to be more sensitive when dealing with CALD communities from a cultural point of view
- the food tables have to be strategically set up to allow for cultural sensitivities.
- difficulties in engaging emerging and new communities.
- the environmental staff use technical jargon which is not easily understood by the communities
- barriers to participation due to lack of time
- the communities need to feel supported.
- more emphasis needs to be placed on general environmental awareness rather than specific restrictions such as littering and water restrictions
- don't understand the role of the Council

How will the festival grow/develop in the future?

- the festival is a good opportunity to work closely with CALD communities
- to raise awareness of the importance of the environment
- the opportunity to access a range of community groups
- great opportunity for the people to come together
- opportunities for sharing each others culture and develop a sense of ownership of the Festival
- allows communities to put down roots in the new country.
- the Festival will increase understanding of the environment within CALD communities as more people recognize the importance of the environment for future generations.

Natalia Valenzuela is Hume City Council's Environmental Community Development Officer. Since arriving in Australia as a refugee from El Salvador in 1987, she has attained a B.A in Community Development and a Diploma in Social Science and Women's Studies. She is also a health and financial counsellor and has a passion for creative community engagement.