

Enabling action for sustainability – the role of partnerships, stories and psychology.

Dr. Jodi-Anne M Smith,

Senior Research Fellow, School-Community Learning Partnerships for Sustainability.



How do we get people to commit to and make changes for sustainability?

How do we get people to reduce their GHG emissions to mitigate CC?

How do we get them to take action to adapt to predicted CC?

To keep GHG emissions to a level that provides a 50% chance that global average temperature will rise by less than 2^oC will require:

- Global emissions to peak in 2010
- Be reduced to 2000 levels by 2020
- Be less than half 2000 levels by 2050



The State of Victoria
Dept of Premier and
Cabinet 2008 p6

Educational approaches for sustainability

1) information and awareness raising

- brochures, adverts, events
- assumes knowledge = behaviour change

2) market, technology and regulatory

- laws, taxes, fines, levies, licences
- assumes laws and enforcement of them = behaviour change
- assumes financial incentive = behaviour change
- assumes technology = behaviour change
- assumes technology can be developed and widely implemented, ignores delays in production, distribution and adoption.



Educational approaches for sustainability

3) social (green) marketing

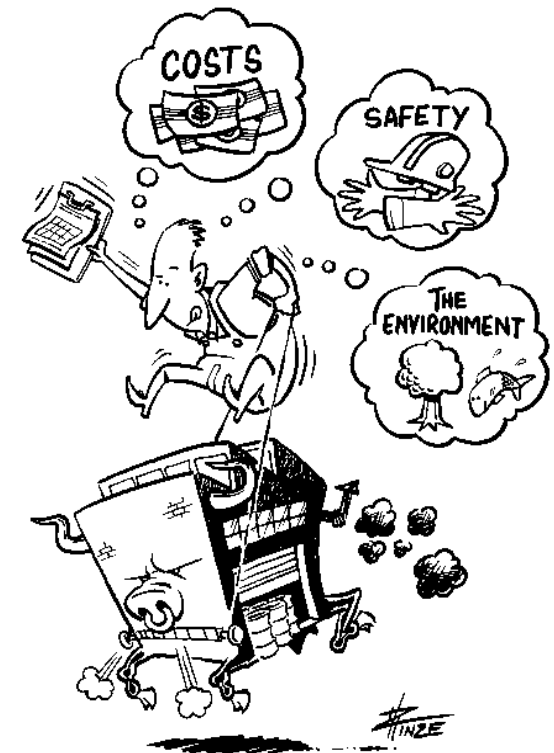
- adverts, sales approaches connecting sustainability with need states – sex, power, status and if don't change makes you feel ashamed, guilty, embarrassed
- assumes if make desirable = behaviour change

4) critical systems

- problem solving, complex system, remove barriers, build capacity, coach
- assumes capability to change = behaviour change

5) social learning

- groups, dialogue, share ideas, learn from each other, build community
- assumes if help learn, overcome isolation, overwhelm and helplessness = behaviour change



Current educational approaches can be **effective at obtaining small changes to behaviour**
eg: turning off lights, buying greener products

BUT we need significant changes to lifestyles to mitigate and adapt to CC.

We need people to:

- **consume less**
- **live more simply**
- **take action now ...**

How do we achieve that?



Behaviour change – why they change matters

- Extrinsic caring – behaviour change occurs to save money or get reputation (it's not about the environment)
- Extrinsic caring leads to **rebound effect**
 - Savings made from energy efficiency spent on more electronic gadgets or overseas holiday
 - Longer showers since water saving showerhead
 - Leave lights on for security since low watt globes
 - May stop these behaviours if they're no longer trendy
- Intrinsic caring – behaviour change occurs to help the environment, because I **value** the environment highly. I care.
- Intrinsic caring sees change as responsible, moral, not as sacrifice or punishment
- ***So we have to help people intrinsically care ...***

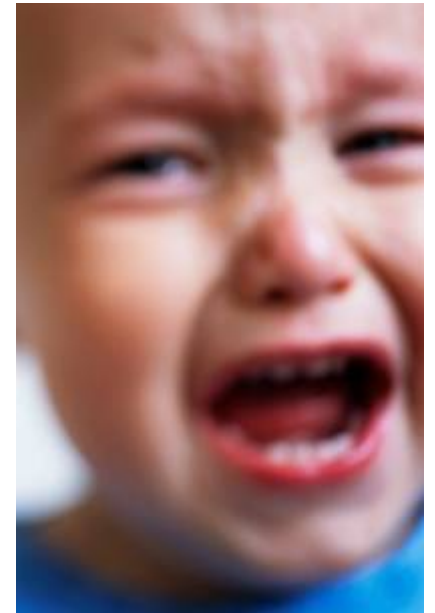


WWF 2008, Dwyer et al 1993

Defense mechanisms in response to CC

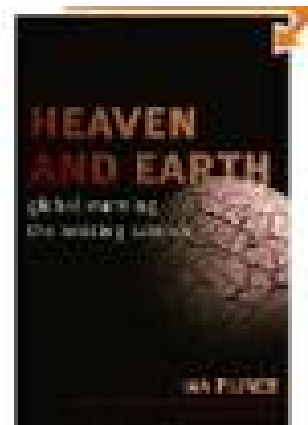
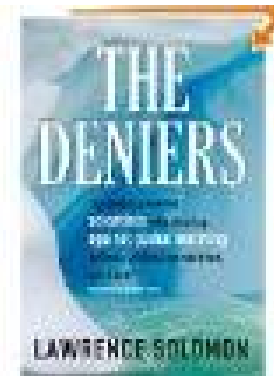
Australian Psychological Society (2008) report that in response to environmental threats and predictions of an uncertain future. People may feel:

- **anxious,**
- **scared,**
- **sad,**
- **depressed,**
- **numb,**
- **helpless and hopeless,**
- **frustrated** or
- **angry.**



Defense mechanisms in response to CC

- Sometimes, if the information is too unsettling, and the solutions seem too difficult, people can cope by:
- **minimising** (it's not that bad) or
- **denying** that there is a problem, or
- **avoiding** thinking about the problems. Focus on other things – celebrities, lost child, creating health and safety regulations in an attempt to feel safe and in control (Rust 2009)
- Being **sceptical** about the problems
- The caution expressed by climate change sceptics could be a form of denial, where it involves minimising the weight of scientific evidence/consensus on the subject. Or it could indicate that they perceive the risks of change to be greater than the risks of not changing, for themselves or their interests.



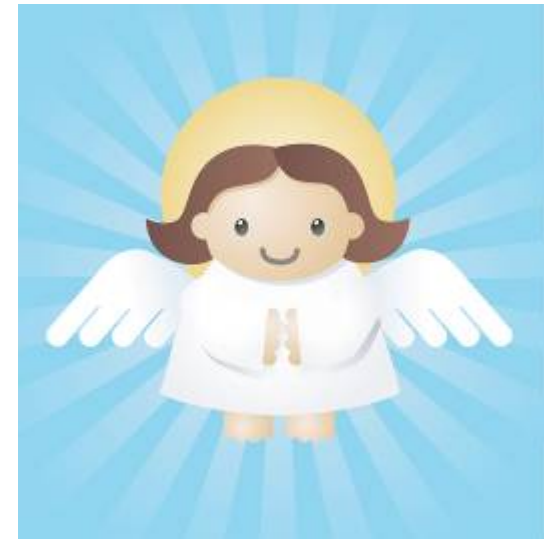
Defense mechanisms in response to CC cont:

Other common reactions are to become:

- **desensitized** to information about environmental problems. We tune out, thus minimizing our stress, and continuing with business as usual.
- **dependent on others** (i.e., by believing that the government or corporations will fix things, or that technology has all the answers),
- **resigned** ('if it happens, it happens'),
- **cynical** ('there's no way you can stop people from driving their cars everywhere – convenience is more important to most people than looking after the environment'), or
- **fed up** with the topic 'yeah – whatever'.

(Australian Psychological Society 2008)

- ***So we have to help people dissolve defence mechanisms and feel their despair***



Impact of despair and hopelessness

- Macy (2007 p105) “This terror is not the fear of nuclear weapons or other forms of mass annihilation so much as our fear of experiencing the fear. We are ***afraid that we might break apart or get stuck in despair if we open our eyes to the horrors.*** So the messages we tend to hear and to give are:
- *“Don’t talk to me about acid rain, or the arms race. There is nothing I can do about it. I have a family to support, a job to keep. If I were to take it all in and allow myself to think about it and feel it, I wouldn’t be able to function”.*
- ***So we have to help people out of overwhelm, despair and hopelessness ...***



Solastalgia (combination of Solace + Nostalgia)

- Solastalgia – **increasing emotional, psychological and physical illness** due to ‘the pain or distress caused by the loss of, or inability to derive, solace connected to the negatively perceived state of one’s home environment’ (Albrecht 2007 p98).
- Farmers illness due to stress of:
 - Seeing stock starving to death
 - Crops fail
 - Gardens and trees dying
- This is only going to get worse as CC impacts increase.
- ***So we have to help people cope with the pain and distress ...***



Farmer suicide rates 1 every 4 days due to drought

- Australian Divisions of General Practice chairman Tony Hobbs says high suicide rates among farmers are linked to the worsening drought.
- **"On average, one male Australian farmer is taking their lives every four days or so,"** he said.
- "Now that's actually based on some research that was done in 2003, and we anticipate that with this drought that is affecting a lot of rural Australia that the figures could possibly get worse, and that's why we want to intervene early."
- Dr Hobbs says the group is working with the national initiative Beyond Blue to ensure services are rolled out to tackle the problem.
- ***So we have to help build resilience in communities and have mental health support ...***



• <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200610/s1771783.htm> Oct 24 2006

Psychologist response to distress for environment

- Macy 2007 (p97) explains majority of society don't get distressed for environment, so if you do, YOU are seen as crazy!
- Psychologist will say your pain is not about the environment
- Transference from your past, symbolic
- Let it go, forget it, heal your past, take anti-depressants
- The number of prescriptions for **anti-depressants** [in Australia] is **12 million in a population of just 20 million**. (<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2005/s1401280.htm> 27 June 2005)
- 'World Health Organisation reports **depression** has reached epidemic proportions and is predicted to be the **second leading cause of death** by 2020' (Macy 2007 p18).
- *So we need to educate psychologists ...*
- *So we have to support people to feel and heal ...*



Addictions

- Many types of addictions - use of drugs, alcohol, shopping, eating, gambling, sex, work
- Used to avoid feelings, bury them inside
- Severe consequences:
 - Self harm and suicide
 - Eating disorders
 - Family breakdown
 - Crime
- Youth hopelessness in therapy sessions
 - “We may as well go down having a good time” client in 30s binge-drinker (Rust 2007 p10)
 - No motivation to address CC when given up hope
- ***So we need to help people develop healthy coping mechanisms***



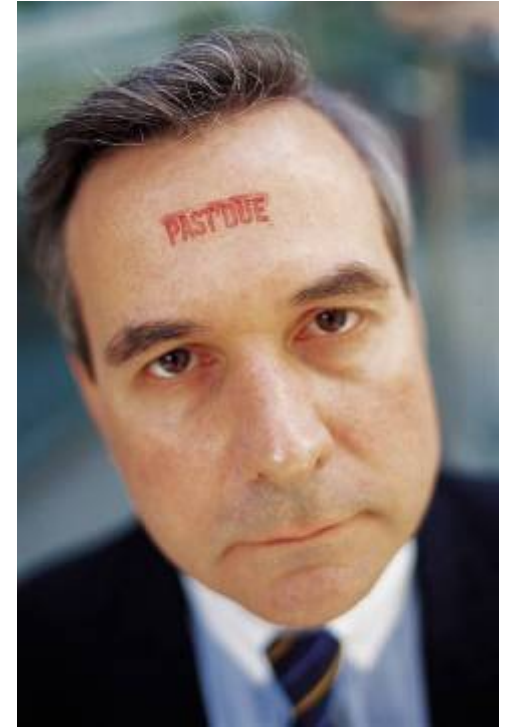
Consumerism

- Consumerism often occurs as a way to distract ourselves from the fact that we don't feel 'good enough or okay' inside
- We try to prove we're okay by:
 - being successful, getting power and status
 - having more possessions than others and
 - by keeping too busy to notice that we're not happy
- Shopping is another form of addiction
- We feel better temporarily, but after a while the novelty of the new 'product' wears off
- So we buy something else
- ***So we have to help people develop healthy self esteem ...***



Consumerism - the impact of the definition of success

- Consumerism also occurs due to our definition of success = money, possessions
- Sattman-Frese and Hill (2007 p103) 'Few of us seem able to look behind the smokescreen and realise that **working hard to afford these symbols of status and superfluous gadgets only deepens our state of exhaustion** (Durning, 1992), which, if not contained and healed, often leads to economic collapse, emotional breakdowns, the break-up of relationships, addictive behaviours, and psychosomatic illnesses.'
- If you are stressed and busy research shows you're less likely to behave in an environmentally friendly way even if you do care about the environment (Sattman-Frese and Hill 2007)
- ***So we need to help people redefine their definition for success ...***



Maslow Hierarchy of Needs

- **Physiological needs** – those required to sustain life eg: air, water, food, sleep
- **Safety needs** – free from physical and emotional harm, eg: living in a safe area, job security, financial reserves
- **Social needs** – friendship, belonging to a group, giving and receiving love
- **Esteem needs** – attain a degree of importance, eg: recognition, attention, social status, accomplishment, self respect
- **Self Actualisation needs** – reach one's full potential, eg: truth, justice, wisdom, meaning
- **So we have to help people fulfil their basic human needs ...**



“With job losses from corporate mergers and the decimation of health and welfare programs, life narrows down to immediate survival needs – and there is little time to learn about the fate of the world, or let it sink in. If a free hour is left at the end of the day, it’s easier to zone out in front of the television”
(Macy 2007 p97)

From ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness

- Macy (2007 p151) claims that people are moving towards an eco-self identity for 3 reasons
 - 1.the conventional small self, or ego-self, is being psychologically and spiritually **challenged by confrontation with the dangers of mass annihilation.**
 - 2.The second force working to dismantle the ego-self is a way of seeing that has arisen out of science. From living systems theory and systems cybernetics emerges a process **view of the self as inseparable from the web of relationships that sustain it.**
 - 3.The third force is the **resurgence in our time of nondualistic spiritualities.** Eg: Buddhism, Jewish Renewal Movement, Creation Spirituality in Christianity and Sufism in Islam, as well as the appreciation being given to the message of indigenous cultures.
- These developments are impinging on the self in ways that are helping it to break out of its old boundaries and definitions.



Ego-Consciousness to Eco-Consciousness

<i>Ego-self</i>	<i>Eco-self</i>
Satisfaction of personal needs	Satisfaction of communal needs
Separateness	Connectedness
Expansion and economic growth	Conservation and personal growth
Sense of self based on consuming and owning of goods and the attainment of power	Sense of self based on belonging and embodiment (energetic connection)
Focus on using people	Focus on being with people (relating)
Projection of disowned feelings	Reclaiming of disowned feelings

Sattman-Frese and Hill 2007 p43

Summary of solutions suggested by psychology

- Psychological approaches argue that to achieve large changes to people's lifestyles we need to:
 - Help people **heal past hurts** that lead to defense mechanisms and preoccupation with addictions
 - Help people **develop healthy self esteem** so that they don't define themselves by possessions and status which leads to consumerism
 - Help people **express their emotions and remove defense mechanisms** that inhibit caring for the environment. We need to help empower action
 - Help develop **intrinsic valuing** of the environment, self and others so voluntarily change behaviour
 - Help develop **strong connections with nature** so people care for it and don't hurt it
 - **Support and enable people** to improve their personal, social and environmental sustainability (meet basic human needs)



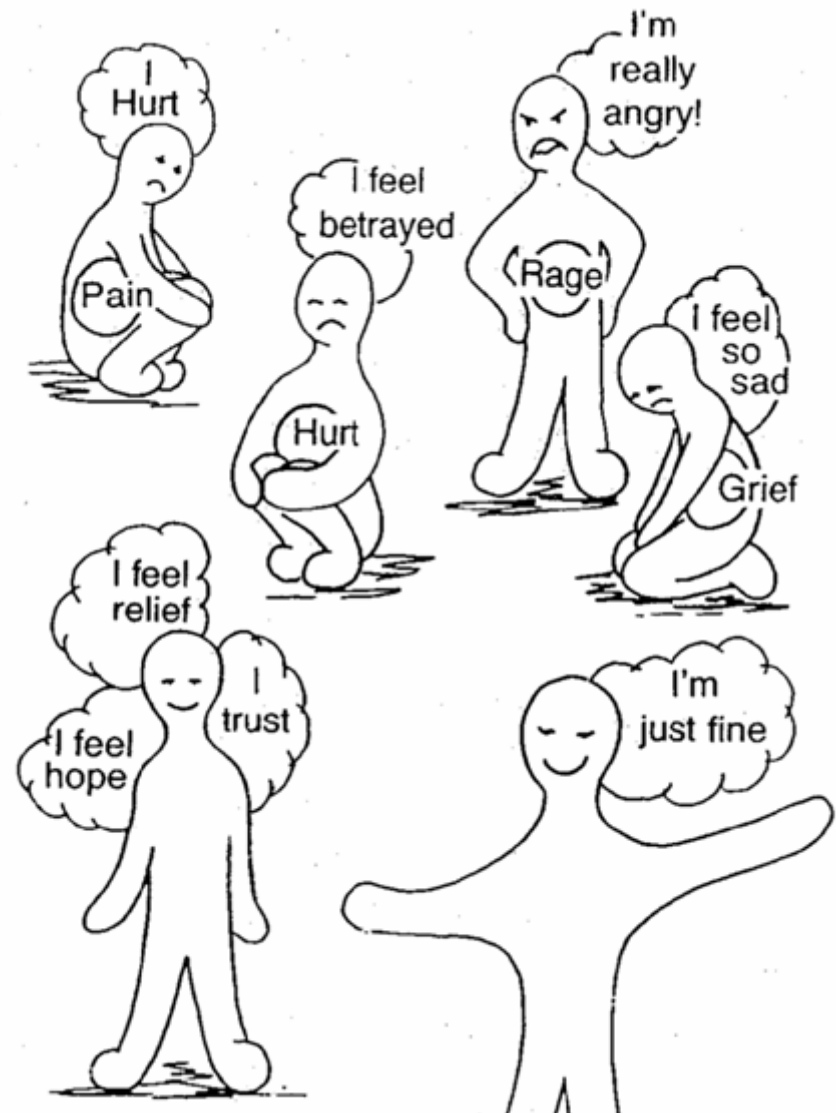
Educators can help people connect with nature

- Ways to achieve it
 - Time in nature (interpretivist) – feel enchantment, beauty, oneness, appreciation of nature, benefits of being in it eg: stress reduction, insights, peace
 - Gardening
 - Growing vegetables / fruit and preparing meals from it
 - time with children in nature
- But we still have to heal our hurts and defense mechanisms or these will undermine our intentions to act



Educators & Counsellors can support people to feel and heal

- Create safe space to express their concerns and emotions
- Create opportunities to plan what actions to take to help self, others and the environment
- Support them to take small, meaningful actions
- Result is enthusiasm and ongoing efforts on what is meaningful to them
- As people heal their self esteem improves and they often choose to live more simply as they redefine success to be a high quality of life and let go of defences, busyness, consumerism, etc



Educators can facilitate group processes for sustainability

- Educators can facilitate group processes for sustainability
- These help individuals to:
 - achieve **personal healing** as well as **sustainability goals**
 - **meet their human needs** – sense of belonging, overcome isolation / loneliness, freedom to act, expression of feelings
 - **share stories**, learn from each other,
 - **build capacity** to take action, **support** each other doing so, **celebrate** achievements
 - form **diverse partnerships** that build community resilience (Rust 2009)
- Ideally educators role model healthy personal and environmental sustainability functioning

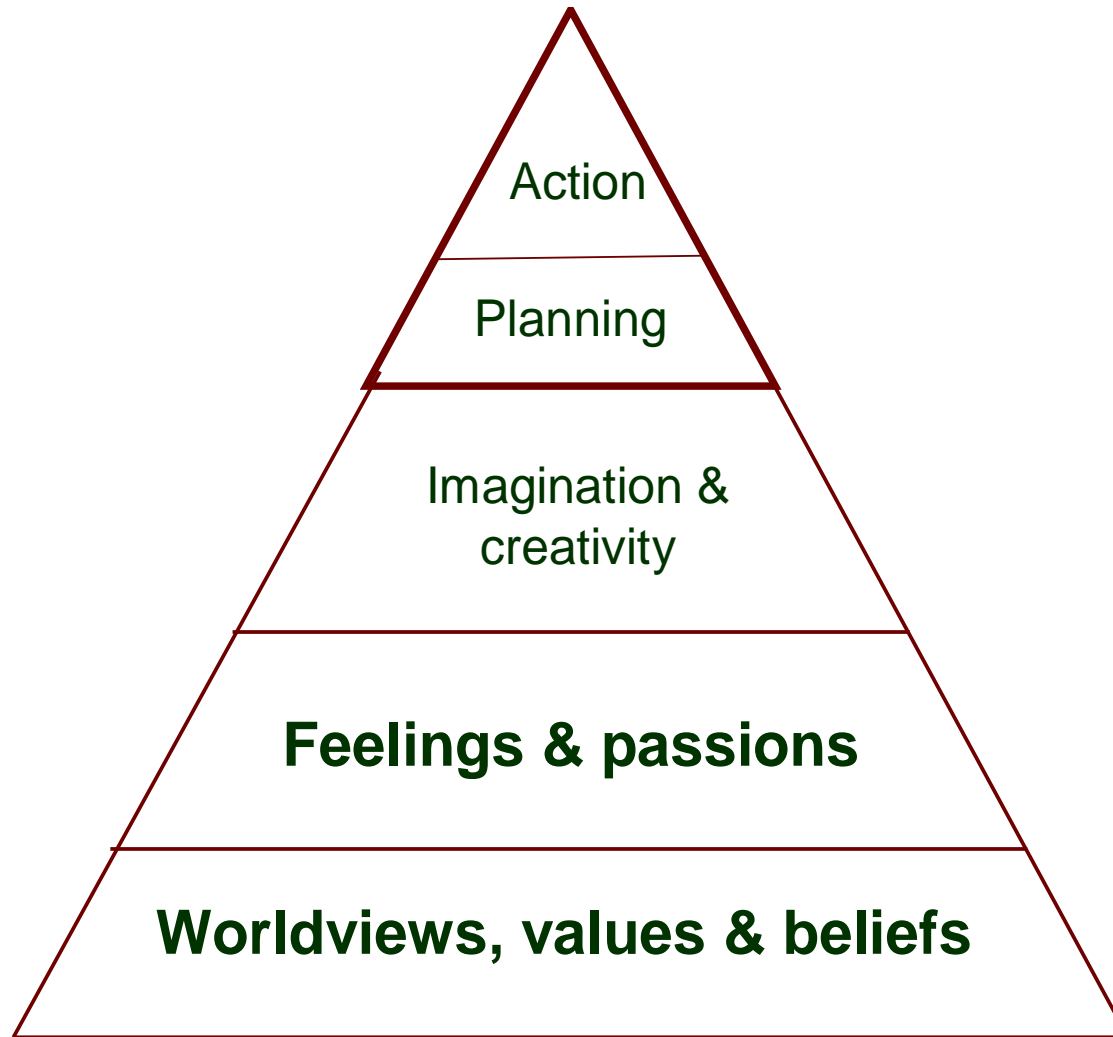


Group processes can do ...

- **Group activities to build personal sustainability**
– build self esteem, awareness of and ability to dissolve defense mechanisms, build social skills, emotional literacy, conscious parenting, problem solving
- **Group activities to build environmental sustainability** – community planning and projects eg: community CC action groups, vegie gardens, mass solar panel purchasing, tree planting, etc. PLUS support individuals to modify own practices
- **Group activities to build social/community sustainability** – to build sense of belonging, acceptance, pride of place eg: community planning and activities such as soup kitchens, breakfast clubs for kids, creation of community spaces, parenting clubs, art displays, celebrations, festivals, fundraisers



Support groups focus on all levels



Top two overemphasised

(Hill 2006 based on Herron, 1992)

Stuart Hill's recommended group process



- **Open a space** for participants to share their passions, interests, fears and hopes (use a go-round practice)
- **Allow a specific focus for that meeting to emerge**
- **Ask 'What have you already done towards making progress in this area?'**
 - Identifies what has already been done
 - Enables acknowledgement and celebration of achievements
 - Identifies present levels of understanding and competence
 - Opportunity for people with similar interests to connect
 - Creates a context where they're already thinking about next steps to take
- **Ask 'What is your next step to take?'**
 - Allows connections across group
 - Offers of support or requests for help
 - Process of community building
 - Due to clarity makes implementation more likely

Stuart Hill's recommended group process



- **Ask ‘What resources and supports are needed for you to actually do it?’ ‘What barriers may prevent you taking action? How can these be overcome?’**
 - Ideas for meeting needs and overcoming barriers
- **Emphasise need to choose small, meaningful projects** that individuals or small group can guarantee to carry through to completion
- **Emphasise need to publicly celebrate achievements**
 - Allows spread of actions as others may copy it
 - Gives sense of satisfaction
 - Provides energy and motivation to continue
- **Clarify actions to be taken, who will support whom**
- **Reframe actions as commitments** with specified outcomes and timeframes
- **Set date for next gathering** – where will review progress, celebrate achievements, identify barriers that affected anything not done and ways to overcome them

Another approach to group process – based on stories

- Educators help community representatives develop scenario stories for the future of their region
- Learning tool for understanding complexity of CCA
- Help community create vision and plan of action for CCA

Stages:

1. Engage community
2. Scenario mapping workshop
3. Develop scenario stories of the future
4. Distribute stories within the community
5. Discuss implications and strategies
6. Incorporate into relevant community and organisational strategic plans
7. Support implementation of CCA strategies – individual and community



Power of stories combined with scientific predictions

- Places scientific predictions of CC into a format which readers can relate to more clearly.
- For example the CSIRO (2004 p5) predict that in the Glenelg Hopkins Region of which Hamilton is a part there will be '**annual precipitation decreases likely (annual changes of +3 to -10% by 2030 and +10 to -25% by 2070)**'.
- In the Hamilton scenario stories the above statement is translated into:
 - different possible future climates and examples of what the Hamilton region would look like living under those climate conditions,
 - the challenges community members would be facing and how they may be responding.
 - refers to changes to specific streets, community facilities, buildings and farms.



Another approach – based on partnerships

- School-Community Learning Partnerships for Sustainability
- Schools partnering with their communities to undertake sustainability initiatives
- Diverse community members
 - Local Councils
 - Parents and grandparents
 - Local businesses
 - Local churches and community organisations
 - Student alumni
 - Farmers Markets
- Diverse activities
 - Vegetable gardens and cooking
 - Tree planting, walking trails and wetlands
 - Shaping community behaviours – plastic bags, mass purchase of solar panels



Sustainability support groups are occurring ...

- Learning communities
- Citizen Participation
- Deliberative Democracy
- Climate action groups
- Transition town movement
- Changing the dream symposium – Be the change
- Earth Circles
- Despair and Empowerment Workshops – the work that reconnects



Climate Action Groups

- Large numbers of groups being formed worldwide
- In early 2009, over 150 community based climate action groups and more than 500 people came together in Canberra to talk, debate, strategise and take action on climate change at Australia's Climate Action Summit.
- During the summit, the Community Climate Action Groups agreed on a particular campaign that they would advocate for (against Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, advocate for green jobs, 100% renewable energy by 2020, stabilisation at 300ppm CO₂)
- Now over 250 local climate action groups
<http://www.greenleft.org.au/2009/797/41067>



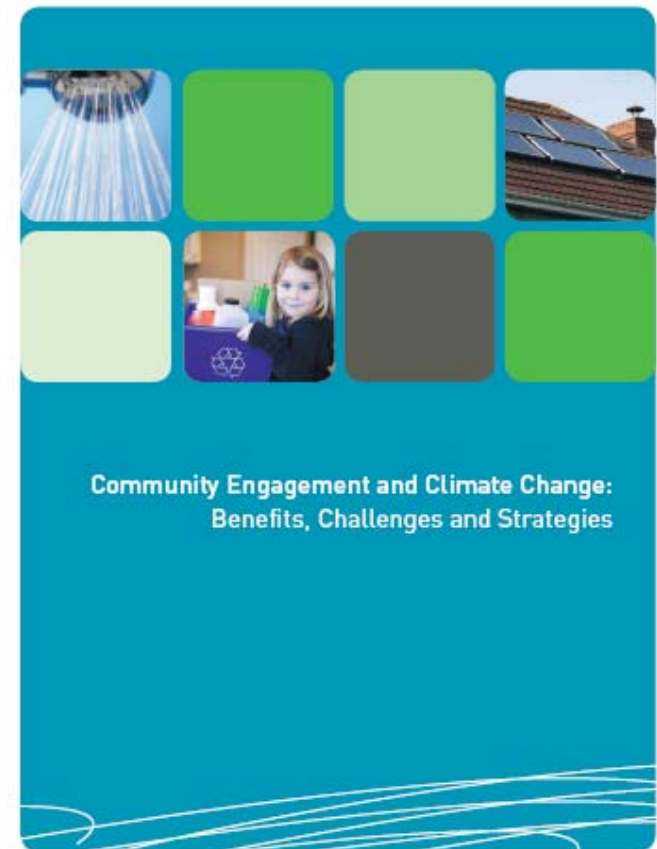
To build a diverse, participatory grassroots climate action movement; support the exchange of knowledge, skills and resources; implement the outcomes of national Climate Action Summits; and to facilitate major campaigns.



<http://www.foe.org.au/climate-justice/media/news-items/2009/australias-climate-action-summit/>

Recognition of role of climate action groups

- Vic Department of Planning and Community Development research recommended:
- ‘Support development and growth of **local community climate change organisations**, networks and capacities including through:
 - climate change/climate care grants, for both innovation initiatives and longer term infrastructure development and capacity building;
 - **climate change community engagement officers/brokers** in local governments and community organisations; and
 - practical, ongoing support to local climate change groups and organisations (eg. accommodation, IT infrastructure, administrative support)’.
- ‘**Develop and support a range of climate change action groups** organised around neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, sporting clubs, cultural organisations, health centres, neighbourhood houses etc’. (Fritze et al 2008 p4-5)



Conclusion

- Reviewed the many implications from psychology for educators, which suggest that if we can help people heal from their past hurts and gain healthy self esteem this can lead to a reduction in consumerism and addictive behaviours. It can lead to redefinition of success with people choosing to live more simply with a higher quality of life and sustainability.
- Looked at defense mechanisms inhibiting environmental action and how educators can help people cope with their sense of overwhelm and despair by creating safe spaces for people to feel and support each other to act on personal, social and environmental sustainability initiatives that are important to them
- Looked at various support group methods and existence of such groups
- For more information please contact me jodi-anne.smith@rmit.edu.au
- Thank you!

