

Davis Projects for Peace 2015  
"PLANTING THE SEEDS FOR PEACE"  
AUSTRALIA  
INTERNATIONAL HOUSE, UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG  
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## Section I

The aim of this project was to enhance youth understanding into the importance of sustainable produce as an integral facet of a healthy and happy lifestyle. It was our aim to address the prevalence of food insecurity in the Illawarra region through the education of different youth communities in the benefits of local, sustainable produce and through supplying these groups with the resources to make this a realistic and long lasting vision.

Our project did not require any ancillary fundraising efforts.

The success of this project can be measured in what has been learned and taken away from the information we have provided. I have seen people learn an incredible amount about things they were perhaps never interested in or appreciated in any way. We now have residents who are enthusiastic and motivated to learn more about not just gardening but the sustainability practices involved and who are excited to share what they have learned with others. Not only that, but these residents have shifted the way they think about their lifestyles; that food is not a constant nor a given in life but something that can easily be taken away by issues such as climate change if we don't preserve the sanctity of sustainable living. The project began in early 2015 with a number of information sessions from the local Wollongong Botanic Gardens. These were highly successful and informative sessions incorporating a strong practical element in order to engage residents in the issues we all face. One session that was particularly popular and relevant was a "bush medicine" workshop. We learnt about the properties of local plants and how they can be used to treat common ailments cheaply and effectively. This was a fantastic extension on gardening, which we originally anticipated being the focus of the project, as it related to the cultivation of a well rounded sustainable lifestyle.

We then collated all of the knowledge we gained about gardening and planting different fruits and vegetables into a booklet titled "Planting the Seeds for Peace". This booklet was written in a simple manner in order to target primary school aged children. It focussed not only on the practicalities of planting each vegetable but the importance of why we wanted to convey this information and how even primary school aged children can contribute to the solution. It taught them what time of the year to plant each vegetable and how to best care for them.

Our next step was to buy all of the resources we needed to carry out the practical element of the project. We wanted to focus on the planting of gardens but also on the sustainability aspect of growth, for example in seed propagation, water irrigation systems, weed matting and garden beds. We then ran some popular gardening workshops at international house where residents were encouraged to learn a variety of new skills in gardening and were able to make their own pot of herbs, vegetables or fruits for their own use. We also taught them how to best care for their pots and how to propagate seeds for further growth.

The next stage of this project was to visit local primary schools and teach them some skills. Unfortunately it is quite difficult to schedule a time to visit schools and we were not able to in this timeframe. Our first primary school visit will be next week to Gwynneville Public School. Gwynneville is a highly multicultural yet disadvantaged primary school in our local area and the students there will greatly benefit from the skills we teach them and the resources we provide them with. We are aiming to establish a number of garden beds around the school and teach the children how to set up water irrigation systems, weed mats and how to plant a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. We are also going to teach them about composting and worm farms and provide all of the resources to make this possible. Not only are we going to be leaving gardens at the school but we also aim to give students the opportunity to take some resources home with them, so that they can share what they learned with their families and implement this into their lifestyles.

Furthermore, on the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of October this year there will be a wellbeing festival held at the University of Wollongong. It aims to showcase and engage students in a variety of activities that are designed to increase overall wellbeing in their lives. As a part of this festival, International House will be presenting a gardening workshop where seedling planting and seed propagation will be at the forefront. As students often struggle with the realities of living away from home and lacking access to fresh, healthy and cheap fruits and vegetables we anticipate that this event will have a significant impact on the wider university community.

The biggest challenge we faced was being able to conduct all of the workshops we wanted to by the deadline date of project completion due to the schedules of outside groups we were working with. However as we believe this project holds such great value we will continue beyond the deadline in order to meet our goals. This project has a highly

sustainable nature. Not only have we provided University students and school children with the resources to make their own gardens but also an information booklet to teach them how to make their own in the future as well as providing a sustainability aspect in every stage of the project such as in the propagation of seeds. We hope that what we have all learned from this project will be shared with family and friends for years to come.

## **Section II**

It is our working definition that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of positive experiences and lifestyles. As academic Deborah Kirkwood has noted, "Food plays an important part in our lives, it requires time and energy to obtain and prepare. It is a ritual of family and communication. Food is a basic building block of life and health, a part of social interaction and a link to community".

Drawing from this notion of peace involving the presence of a positive lifestyle, we believe that this project contributes significantly to peace both in the short and long term. The student leader team at International House have certainly become educated into the *why* of this project; appreciating the need for sustainability in our community due to the prevalence of food insecurity. A major goal of this project was to increase understanding into how climate change has such wide reaching impacts such as the effect on food and the resulting issue of food insecurity. Through the workshops we conducted, residents of International House deeply understand this issue and became well equipped to share what they learned with others. In the short term, students will have the opportunity to plant their own gardens, and learn a little about the importance of growing your own produce. Although in the short term this may only seem like a fun activity or hobby it is our hope that in the long term, these students will really come to understand and appreciate the purpose of this project, particularly as the effects of climate change continue to permeate society. The cultivation of a positive lifestyle relies so heavily on self-efficacy and individual growth. Although issues of climate change and economic uncertainty in time will affect us all, it is our hope that students can become the cause of their own change through projects such as this where we are effectively planting the seeds for peace.

It is apparent that the interaction between residents learning about this issue and those participating in teaching others about this issue has a two-fold effect. For me, coming into this project I was in no way an expert in gardening and had very limited understanding of how to put what I wanted to convey into a practical project. I understood the issue and feel passionately about lifestyle changes being part of the solution to these wider issues such as climate change. Through this project I have been able to put my ideas of a sustainable lifestyle into practice. It has changed the way I think about the world in that such small lifestyle changes can really contribute to solutions to wider social issues such as food insecurity. Our aim for this project is for it to result in longstanding commitment to and involvement with our local community, which will allow for meaningful relationships to be nurtured in the years to come, and for knowledge to constantly grow. It is our hope that by educating local university and primary school students in the growth of sustainable produce that we will in some way be able to improve their lifestyles for years to come. We believe we have contributed to repairing social objectives such as the promotion of health and welfare, community development and education, which are some of the immense social dislocations caused by food scarcity.

"The societal conflicts created by food insecurity and the economic dislocations it causes are debilitating to our local communities causing strain and conflict. Our project aimed to repair such conflict thereby planting the seeds for peace".

- Emma Hart



Front cover of our gardening guide, "Planting the Seeds for Peace"

Student leaders pictured include Emma Hart, Courtney Gorman, Oscar Jeffreson and Brendon Hearnden

International House residents decorating their pots after a hands on gardening workshop



Bush medicine workshop held at International House