

PEIG Newsletter #2 / September 2008

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1- Introduction

Welcome to PEIG News, one vehicle for relationships in the PEIG. The sudden recent rise in membership (now at 82) has prompted this newsletter. Our intent is to provide a venue for information and opinion exchange among members. Our primary operating assumption is to be inclusive, within the normal APS parameters of politeness, relevance and responsiveness.

We solicit contributions roughly in these areas. Contributions could include suggestions for other areas of priority focus for PEIG. Please keep to 750 words max.

A first contribution appears below (3). It expresses the opinions of the author only.

2 – PEIG at the 2008 APS conference: Meeting Minutes

Environment Interest Group AGM Tuesday 23rd September, 2008

Present: Rob Curnow, Debra Rickwood, Jacquie Cranney, Joe Reser, Bev Ernst, Kathleen Bagot, Neil Welch, Karen Spehr, Susie Burke, Leslie, Juliet Summers

Apologies: Terry Bowles, Torrey Orton, Bob Rich, Rob Hall, Lyn Bender, Judith Homa

Welcome

Minutes from 2007 AGM. We guessed what these might have been, then passed them.

New Business

Conference theme: Karen acknowledged how fantastic it was to have the environment as such a strong theme at the conference.

Psychologists modeling change: Rob said he thinks a major item of business of the EIG should be psychologists modeling pro-environmental behaviour. What are psychologists doing? They need to change themselves first. We could help psychologists to become more aware. APS could play a role.

Karen asked if National Office has a sustainability officer. No. (or not yet...).

Action: Karen to work with Susie to write proposal for board for a sustainability officer at national office

Rob to work with Susie around developing a project to help psychologists develop more pro-environmental behaviours.

Teaching environmental psychology: Joe said we have to be teaching about the environment. Such a priority.

Action: Joe, Jacquie, Debra, and Paul (and co-opt Heather Gridley?) to work on ways of getting environmental psychology onto the curriculum.

National Convenor of EIG. Terry Bowles unable to continue as convenor of the group. Paul Saunders offered to be the convenor. Offer accepted. Thank you and welcome Paul.

Meeting closed

3 – Member assistance requested: Walking School Bus initiative

Ms Georgie Wellwood
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Dear News Editor,

I am leading Armidale primary schools to start a 'Walking School Bus' initiative for 2008 once a week then hopefully momentum will lead to 2 days a week for 2009.

The WSB idea has been developed in 42 countries around the world, including the state of Victoria in Australia. I am hoping to measure wellbeing for the students and was wondering **if you have any ideas how I can do that simply?**

22nd October is International Walk to School Day, and I am treating this initiative as an Environmental Intervention, hoping that parents will learn to trust children walking to school again under adult volunteer supervision.

Some background information on WSB –

22 October 2008 is the International Walk to School Day

§ 'Walking School Bus' program has occurred in 42 countries around the world in 2007.

- § Several adults enrolled in the Statement of Attainment in Learning for Sustainability at Armidale TAFE course will help design and implement the program with me
- § We anticipate a fun competition between the schools. One of the key aspects of motivational psychology is to engage people to enjoy social change so that it becomes part of their lives leading to durability of change in the long-term.
- § The state of Victoria has implemented the program since 2006. The Walking School Bus Program is a VicHealth initiative that has given communities an effective and easy way to get children walking to school again.
- § Walking to and from school gives children the opportunity to engage in regular physical activity. It is good for children, their parents, for the school and for the community.
- § The program has the added benefits of getting kids to exercise, learn about geography around them and saves parents a car trip.
- § The walking school bus is well supervised with an adult at the front and one at the back. It is also possible for a cart to be led for children to put in their bags.
- § Today 60 Victorian councils are running Walking School Bus programs.
- § At least 3200 primary school students from more than 200 primary schools use the Walking School Bus to get to and from school, with the help of 900 volunteers. The 'buses' have become a very positive part of school and community life and offer many health, environmental and safety benefits. They are a great way to get in the habit of a lifelong activity while children are young.
- § The Department of Education and the Department of Climate Change have a combined commitment to teach sustainability in Australian public schools.

BENEFITS of the Walking School Bus™

Many school communities around the world have started their own walking bus programs, which support increasing needs to change our travel choices. Each child who is part of a Walking School Bus™ is potentially one less vehicle on the road. This eases traffic congestion, increases safety and reduces pollution.

The benefits of the Walking School Bus™ reach the whole community and include:

- a safe and convenient way for children to travel to school;
- improvement of health and well being of children through walking and talking;
- an opportunity for children to learn road sense and traffic safety;
- reduction of traffic congestion around schools;
- contributing to a sustainable environment;
- opportunities for children and parents to develop friendships and a sense of place and community in their neighbourhood.

4) For EIG members information: Transition Towns from William Vorobioff

Transition Towns are a burgeoning phenomenon and may be worth running as a primer if that seems appropriate. The following is from a paper proposed for a conference, modified slightly for this context.

For more information - William Vorobioff wvorobioff@optusnet.com.au

Presentation

A 30 minute presentation on Transition Towns will provide an overview of the Transition Town movement, its genesis in the great challenges facing the global community, and its relevance to the mental, and indeed the whole future health of rural communities. Drawing on approaches from the Psychology of Change literature, Transition Towns aims to “uncork” people’s latent wisdom. By supporting people to find new purpose and meaning in their lives, the process builds resilience as well as contributing to their overall health in ways that become deeply rooted in the fabric of a community.

Background

In rural communities, many pressures and circumstances create fault lines and stressors that contribute to risk and exacerbate vulnerabilities. Whilst family, societal and economic pressures are well recognised, as are the impacts of withdrawal and centralising of government services and facilities, rural communities are also navigating newer uncharted waters. The forces of globalisation, along with ecological concerns exemplified by global warming, are triggering real fears regarding the effects of permanent changes to the environment, on the wellbeing of those who live and rely on the land, as well as those in surrounding towns.

A number of social and community-based development systems, such as Enterprise Facilitation, and the ABCD approach, build on the strengths of communities and the belief that the solutions lie with the members of communities. These approaches have demonstrated that given the right support, ideas coming from the bottom up, from within the communities themselves, can revitalise whole districts and contribute to their health, resilience, future development, and indeed, renaissance.

Transition Towns is the new and inspiring movement that focuses on developing solutions for the greatest challenges for the 21st century to our own and future generations - that of Climate Change and of resource depletion. Whatever people believe about the science of current climate scenarios, building resilient communities is a no-brainer.

Our work, while environmentally and sustainability driven, is based on the notion that all communities can grow and benefit by facing challenges collectively, since this provides an opportunity to rethink our values and ways of connecting in order to greatly improve the quality of life of all, perhaps especially at-risk individuals.

Rural communities will have their own solutions, along with great opportunities in utilising the multiplicity of existing skills and the potential within all individuals, working creatively and intelligently together. They are well placed to localise (and indeed to support city dwellers in the changes that all will inevitably face).

As Shumaker said “we cannot expect to raise the wind that will push us to a better world, but what we can do is hoist the sails to catch the wind when it does arrive”. We are about hoisting the sails. Right now, in all communities, there are people dreaming of ways to improve their lot. Transition Towns provides the means to transform those concerns and ideas into meaningful action.

William Vorobioff is a psychologist who has worked in private practice for over 20 years, working mostly on individual and relationship changes. He is the accidental convener of Transition Towns Newcastle. In an earlier life, he was an electrician, and worked as a professional diver around the world in the oil industry, before making a counter sea change and becoming a counsellor and a psychotherapist.

See also: www.transitiontowns.org/ Editor

5) Member assistance / interest request – Sharing tertiary ecopsych teaching

Thank you for the News letter. I do hope that I can find kindred souls in the group whose interest slants towards behaviour and psychology. When teaching environmental psychology at Monash University(Environmental Science) I found, understandably, a strong interceptive disposition into the problem as if it was an institutionalized matter rather than dealing with people 'personalities'. I changed the syllabus and developed an approach that cross-fertilized the behaviour and people involved with the 'problem'. Although this was a post-graduate Course I am using a like approach at RMIT with under-graduates. Perhaps you have someone in your group who is interested in what I am doing associated with environmental education. With Best Regards

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6) Information: Local

Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) www.dea.org.au

Judith Homa

Plus, an article from George Monbiot that a colleagues has passed on as a 'must read!'

<http://www.monbiot.com/archives/2008/08/05/coal-scuttled/>

Suzie Burke

Here's a mostly Victorian collection of sites – some will be replicated in other states esp. the government department ones like Sustainability Vic. Have a look.

<http://www.envict.org.au> - Environment Victoria is the peak **non-government, not-for-profit** environment organisation in Victoria.

<http://greenlivingpedia.org/> - "Welcome to **Greenlivingpedia**, a free resource for sharing information on green living, now and for the future. This is a **wiki**, so you can create and edit content to share information and collaborate with others on how we can lighten our footprint on the planet..."

<http://www.green-innovations.asn.au/>

www.sustainability.vic.gov.au

www.thebigswitch.org.au -

www.ata.org.au – "The ATA (Alternative Technology Association) is Australia's leading not-for-profit organisation, promoting sustainable technology and practice. The ATA provides services to

members who are actively walking the talk in their own homes by using good building design, conserving water and using renewable energy...”

Torrey Orton

7) Information : International

These are mostly various English language climate change sites for a quick visit to what’s happening OS – not merely things psychologists are doing. They may give you some ideas about other things to do, or be.

Here is the contact I have made with the ISDE. International Society of Doctors for the Environment.

www.isde.org

Judith Homa

www.arlingtoninstitute.org/tai/home-test - “The Arlington Institute is a 501(c)(3) non-profit research institute that specializes in thinking about global futures and trying to influence rapid, positive change. We encourage systemic, non-linear approaches to planning...”

www.energybulletin.net/ - “Mission Statement: [EnergyBulletin.net](http://www.energybulletin.net/) is a clearinghouse for information regarding the peak in global energy supply. We publish news, research and analysis

<http://transitionculture.org/about/>

www.transitiontowns.org/ “It all starts off when a small collection of motivated individuals within a community come together with a shared concern: *how can our community respond to the challenges of Peak Oil and Climate Change?*”

<http://www.worldchanging.com/>

Torrey Orton