

CREATING COASTAL LOVE WITH COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Community education plays a key role in the empowerment of people. The purpose of community education and development is to increase the capacity of individuals and groups of all ages through their actions, the capacity of communities, to improve their quality of life. Effective community education resources can provide organisations with a platform for information sharing and for breaking down barriers (real or perceived) between the “experts” and the local community.

Community engagement can have a range of possible objectives, depending on the context, including; informing, consulting, involving, collaborating with and empowering the community. Various consultation and community engagement techniques can be used to capture the community's views and ideas - from themed library workshops and school education sessions through to resource launch events.

The Griffith Centre for Coastal Management's Coastal Community Education Program (CCEP) has developed a number of successful community engagement tools (See Table 1) including a coastal plant pocket guide for the Gold Coast region and for the Northern Agricultural region of Western Australia, a 'Managing our Coastlines' book and a suite of 'Our Coast' information sheets. These engagement tools have been effective at raising awareness and providing an understanding of what is happening on our coastlines. With such a varied range of education resources available this paper will explore how valuable the above mentioned resources are to current users.

However, valuable community information often remains lost and underutilised by local community members and stakeholders. It is the dissemination of these community education resources, especially to a large and diverse region such as the Gold Coast that remains a challenge to resource developers.

COASTAL COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAM

Developed in 2001, the Coastal Community Engagement Program was developed to maximise community understanding of natural coastal processes and management strategies. Essentially, bridging the gap between coastal decision makers and other stakeholders, which is necessary for sustainable coastal management. Community awareness, education and involvement are valuable tools towards long-term sustainable coastal systems.

The program is primarily funded and delivered on behalf of Gold Coast City Council (GCCC) and incorporates four key projects: CoastEd, BeachCare, the Keep Australia Beautiful Clean Beaches Competition, and Beachology.

CoastEd

Formally commencing in 2001, CoastEd was a small program that targeted local schools. Today, the program has grown to four times its original size delivering education sessions to schools from the Gold Coast to Brisbane and Toowoomba, as well as University students and local community groups. The CoastEd program seeks to increase the capacity of the Gold Coast community to participate in coastal decision making by informing and educating on the importance of sustainable management of our coastal and environmental systems. CoastEd aims to provide valuable information and resources to schools and the community and increase the capacity of the Gold Coast community to participate in coastal decision making through increased awareness and participation.

BeachCare

Since 2006, BeachCare has provided an opportunity for community members to participate in caring for their local beach, while gaining important information and resources about coastal management and the future of Gold Coast beaches and foreshores.

BeachCare aims to expand the program to incorporate community groups involved in the management of all Gold Coast beaches and foreshores, be self-sufficient in terms of resources, to provide community groups with access to all equipment when required and develop the program into a leading community volunteer program, linking the north and south dunal corridor with active, community, coastal conservation.

When first established, BeachCare had three dune care sites. It has now grown substantially and the current BeachCare locations include Paradise Point, Runaway Bay, Harley Park, Mermaid Beach, Palm Beach, Currumbin Alley, North Kirra (x2) and Rainbow Bay.

Clean Beaches Competition

The Griffith Centre for Coastal Management has facilitated the Keep Australia Beautiful Clean Beaches Competition, on behalf of the Gold Coast City Council, for a number of years now and the program has seen an increase in the number of community and school groups nominating. In what was our most successful year, Tallebudgera Beach was successfully named Australia's Clean Beach in 2010.

Beachology

Developed during 2010 and the first activity held in September 2010, funded through the Australian Government's Envirofund Scheme, the Beachology Project teaches children (at a primary school level) what lives on and in the sand at the beach. The program explores the world under the sand through the use of microscopes and other field equipment, as well as a user's guide for the program so that teachers and parents alike can run the program activities. The program also has a strong focus on the value of sandy beach ecology and the threats associated with human impacts. On the back of a successful summer holiday program in 2010/11, the program is seeking further funding for the 2011/12 summer season.

THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Education is an increasingly popular method being used by many community, industry and government organisations to address issues of social and environmental concern. However, community education is much more than producing a brochure to tell people about the way

we think a problem can be resolved. Effective community education requires a good understanding of the issue of concern, being clear about whom we are trying to reach, knowing what behaviour we are trying to change, and investigating the best ways to make this happen.

Community engagement offers a tool for Councils to work in collaboration with their constituents to establish a vision that truly reflects the aspirations of both the Council and the community it serves. But perhaps most importantly, it provides Councils with the opportunity to reconnect with their communities, and to demonstrate a genuine commitment in the long-term which extends well beyond the life of the current planning and engagement process.

The purpose of community learning and development is to develop the capacity of individuals and groups of all ages through their actions, the capacity of communities, to improve their quality of life.

More resources that are accessible via the internet, particularly multimedia, is a common request of the CCEP staff at GCCM, especially from teachers who are limited by budgets and school requirements regarding the purchasing of resources and attendance of field trips. Orders for the Fotomedia produced “It’s all about sand” DVD are still received through GCCM, despite being technologically dated. This DVD is widely used by both schools and community members. Other CoastEd developed educational resources have also been popular and well-received within the Gold Coast community.

Results from a recent survey conducted by GCCM, concluded that the Gold Coast community found greater value in web-based education tools as well as books and guides. The survey also found that brochures and teacher/student resources were not seen as valuable engagement tools for the community. Brochures and especially teacher/student resources can be perceived as not value for money as they tend to become quickly outdated, for example Council’s Ready Set Teach program, developed in 2007, was outdated within 12-months due to a constantly changing education curriculum.

COASTAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Table 1 below outlines the wide range of coastal education resources available to the community through the Coastal Community Engagement Program.

Table 1: A list of current education resources developed by the Griffith Centre for Coastal Management’s Coastal Community Engagement Program.

Resource	Description	Type	Target audience
Beachology: User’s Guide	This guide is intended to provide carers with enough knowledge so they can comfortably lead beach ecology activities for their children or local community.	Guide Book	Parents, teachers, community group leaders.
Building Dunes for the Community and the Coast	In alignment with the management and coordination of the BeachCare program, the “how to” guide is a valuable resource for the sustainability of current and future self-sufficient BeachCare groups. The guide also has the potential to be adopted in other regions other than the Gold Coast	Guide book	BeachCare groups and volunteers
Coastal Plant Pocket Guide: Northern Agricultural Region, Western Australia	This booklet was published for the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council in Western Australia to help increase community awareness of some of the more common plants growing on the coastal strip	Guide book	Beachfront residents

	of WA's Northern Agricultural Region, between Guilderton and Kalbarri		
Coastal Plant Pocket Guide: The Gold Coast Region	This booklet is an introductory field guide to common coastal plant species that can be found along the Gold Coast coastline. The booklet was supported through the Australian Government's Envirofund Scheme	Guide book	Gold Coast beach users, community groups, students
CoastEd & BeachCare and Griffith Centre for Coastal Management Newsletters	Developed and distributed at least four times per year, these three informative newsletters reach a large number of people from all aspects of the coastal community	Newsletter	Centre affiliates and volunteers, Gold Coast community
CoastEd and BeachCare brochures	Our informative brochures promote our coastal engagement programs, pointing people to sources of additional information and contact details	Brochure	Community groups and schools
Facebook www.facebook.com/pages/griffith-centre-for-coastal-management/271213756223280 YouTube www.youtube.com/user/TheGCCM Twitter @CentreCoastMang	With approximately 50% of the Australian population using social media as a way to receive information, GCCM and the BeachCare and CoastEd programs have joined Facebook, Twitter and YouTube	Social media	Gold Coast community
Griffith Centre for Coastal Management public library http://equella.rcs.griffith.edu.au/research	A list of the most relevant studies completed by GCCM and other key stakeholders under the themes of beaches, creeks, Broadwater and offshore. Accessible by the general public the library will display a range of resources under all categories including full text, with abstracts or summaries	Online library	Gold Coast City Council staff, Gold Coast community
It's All About Sand/History of the Gold Coast	Developed in 2002, this CD-ROM contains video, PDF files, slide shows and flash presentations. The CD-ROM is intended as an educational resource to assist people to learn more about beaches and coastal management so that they are better able to participate in making decisions about the future of Gold Coast beaches	CD ROM/DVD	Teachers and students
Managing Our Coastlines	Currently in development with funding from the Griffith University's Community Partnership Fund. The aim of this book is to compile all the information gathered throughout the years by CoastEd and tailor it into a useful resource for both teachers and local community members	Book	Gold Coast community, teachers, secondary students
Our Coast information sheet series Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.	A range of information sheets on topics related to our coastline which forms a key component of Gold Coast City Council's Nature Conservation Strategy. Discovering our coast takes you on a seaside journey of our treasured natural coastal	Information sheets	Gold Coast community

	environments. Learn about mangroves, seagrasses, dunes, dugongs and much more. Caring for our coast looks at the many different ways in which our precious coastline is managed. This information sheet series details specific projects and highlights key coastal processes that shape our coastline		
Our Coast video series www.youtube.com/user/TheGCCM	The videos aim to raise awareness of the long history of coastal issues and their management on the Gold Coast and to raise awareness of the dynamic nature of this coastal environment within the community, using a medium that is easily consumable by the target audience over the internet	Multimedia	Gold Coast community
Ready Set Teach	Through funding provided by SEQ Catchments, a series of lesson plans related directly to the coastal environment were developed and included as part of the Gold Coast City Council's Ready Set Teach initiative. A lesson plan has been developed for each grade (1-12) and provides teacher information that includes core learning outcomes, a student activity and an assessment criterion	Teacher lesson plans	Teachers

DISSEMINATION OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES

People learn differently, so community education projects must consider a variety of methods in order to increase their effectiveness. The methods you use to educate your target group will depend on your objectives, who you are trying to reach and the resources you have available. The Coastal Community Education Program has been successful due to the methods which have been used to communicate with the local community. These have included:

- Newsletters to involve and inform – with the potential use of e-Newsletters to help track and monitor your community following and their interests
- Organising a launch to introduce, promote and set the tone for a particular project
- Conducting media activities including organising articles for publication in the local papers and developing a good relationship with media contacts
- Holding an industry night with displays, demonstrations and discussions around the project and its key issues
- Preparing and issuing of information sheets
- Putting up on-site signage and posters to promote resources
- Effective monitoring and evaluation of the projects and making sure you tell people about it
- Presentations to school groups, community library sessions, progress associations, resident action groups and more
- Exhibitions and displays at local community events/festivals
- Industry targeted presentations and seminars
- Community workshops

Marketing resources to a large community such as the Gold Coast certainly has its challenges. Valuable information often remains shelved and unavailable to local educators and community members. Many teachers have commented on the difficulties in sourcing

relevant, local information and the frustration of being passed through different departments when contacting Government authorities. The development of the internet has greatly enhanced the dissemination of information and the CCEP aims to provide a focal point for these local coastal issues.

THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION

We live in a fast-paced information society where the way we communicate is changing rapidly. Communication is instant through the use of internet and new media used through websites such as YouTube and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. So many aspects of how we are communicating are changing and new, but the underlying desire to know more about the coastal environment and how it is being cared for and managed effectively remains constant. As coastal managers we need to recognise that the way people access information can vary enormously. There are many benefits to continuing a face-to-face community engagement approach but an additional online approach to community engagement and resource dissemination would help to reach out to as many members of the community as possible.

TAKE HOME MESSAGE

- How we engage and communicate is changing
- Establish a good understanding of the issue of concern – Be a good listener
- Know your market – Who is your target audience
- “Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning” – *Bill Gates*

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