

How Sustainable Communities NPSP supports & encourages behaviour change

Modified from a workshop presented by Beth Mylius, Nadia McLaren and Rapsodie Barbour at the South Australian Food Convergence held in February 2010

We're actually doing something and we celebrate

One of our members met me along the street and said cheerfully 'Can you see my halo?' She had been to the city and back on a public bus for the first time. It was a great step forward for her. The next week she and her husband went to a dinner at the Town Hall by bus and that was the topic of conversation at their table for a large part of the evening!

These actions seem small – they need to be, but you keep going and change happens. One of our members was ridiculed by her family for 'joining a group like that'. One of the things she did was start to use a Bokashi bin for her food waste – and now several of her family members have bought them – even those who ridiculed her.

The Action Booklet gives people ideas of what they can do and it provides acknowledgement of the efforts people are already making, their good intentions for further changes and their new successes.

Once you have made one step you think about the next one. All the steps are manageable

Changing the way we do things is never easy. We adopt certain behaviours because they are easy or convenient or time saving. Some things we do we do out of habit without even thinking. We are all aware that some of our behaviours aren't healthy or sustainable, so it is worthwhile taking a moment to understand the sorts of thoughts and experiences we will inevitably go through when we set about trying to change a behaviour or adopt a new one. Below is an example of the processes of change we might go through if we decided to eat less meat or dairy but it can apply to any new behaviour and is based on **The Stages of Change Model** developed by Prochaska and DiClemente.

<p>Precontemplation</p>	<p>At this stage we have no awareness of the need to change a particular behavior and little or no awareness of how our behavior impacts on anything else.</p> <p>We may begin to hear information about certain issues which concern us such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peak oil and transporting food (food miles) Food wastage and excessive packaging Overconsumption & obesity Impact of cattle & sheep on the land Overfishing
<p>Contemplation</p>	<p>Once we have become aware of information that causes us to examine our own behavior and its impacts, we start to seek out information about what others have done or do to reduce these impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buying locally grown & in season food Buying only what we need and with minimal packaging & recyclable packaging Eating reasonable serving sizes Eating less meat and dairy Buying fish from sustainable stocks <p><i>Now we have information about the impact of cattle and sheep on the land and specific achievable behaviors that we can adopt to reduce that impact. Eg. eat less meat and dairy.</i></p>
<p>Preparation</p>	<p>Once we have information about the issues and the changes others are successfully making, we begin to identify what our goal will be – to identify the action which is likely to be most achievable and manageable for our lifestyle and unique situation.</p> <p>We set about gathering practical information that will help us to reach our goal successfully. We may need to gather new recipes, get more info on what’s in season, etc. We may set a date or a frequency to make our goal real and tangible. eg. eat one less serving of meat each week from next week.</p> <p><i>So now we have an awareness of the issue and our contribution to that issue. We have begun to gather meat and dairy free recipes and sought out the experiences of others who have reduced their consumption of meat and dairy – the benefits and the hurdles they faced.</i></p>

Action	<p>Now we are ready to begin. This is where we may discover challenges and benefits that we hadn't anticipated. This may require us to gather more specific or local information and make changes and trial the new behaviour again. Once we've started on a change, we may encounter times where it just can't happen – friends invite us over for a roast on the designated 'meat free' day. Don't despair try again next week. This time of action is about doing something and feeling good in the process – if the chosen goal turns out to be too difficult, don't despair try a different goal.</p> <p><i>We try out new dairy and meat free recipes and adjust the shopping list.</i></p>
Maintenance	<p>This is where we have successfully adopted the new behaviour and its become part of our normal lifestyle. Ideally it has been integrated into our regular daily routines.</p> <p><i>I enjoy my new ways of eating and now I am ready to tackle serving size!</i></p>

Sustainable Communities supports members in each of these stages - Sustainable Communities supports the community and members whether they are at the 'pre-contemplation' or 'maintenance' stage of change

1. For those who are unaware of the issues (**pre-contemplation**), Sustainable Communities provides information about food, water, waste, energy and transport and how we can adopt behaviours which will make us more resilient around our use of these resources in the face of climate change.

This is done by raising awareness and providing information at Public meetings and community forums. Those relating to food have included:

- How sustainable are our food choices?
- Peak food and local responses such as guerilla gardening
- All about soils.

We also have a website with Issues papers and Fact Sheets on energy, food, transport, waste and water; a brochure available at a number of venues, and articles and interviews in the local media.

2. For those **contemplating** how they can reduce their impact on the planet and **preparing** to get started, **Sustainable Communities provides** practical information on where to start.

Members share practical information with each other at locally formed community groups. They share their experiences and the benefits and challenges they face. These are generally held in people's homes and there are now 7 community groups who meet at least once a month. Community groups:

- Support and encourage members to reduce our use of resources in whatever way each person decides
- Provide information, link people with assistance, discuss options
- Hear about the actions of other members
- Build a cooperative neighbourhood and social relationships
- Celebrate people's achievements
- Members can also access the website and blog, Monthly Newsletter, coffees at Beth's place or phone and email communication.

Some of the activities community groups have engaged in relating to food include:

- Discussion of how to reduce use of meat and maintain a nutritious diet for children
- Sharing nutritious vegetarian recipes
- Sharing information about preserving food
- Information about preventing waste, especially fruit by sharing around the neighbourhood, using Urban Orchard and taking it to Community Food SA
- Permaculture skill share
- Information on building raised garden beds and materials used
- Using the Ethical Supermarket Shopping Guide
- Member Shops offering products that support our aims – all 7 shops do that in their own way. Eg Marden Health Food Shop, Fruita Bella, The Atrium, Keelan's Fuel and Fodder, the Quaker Shop and Styl!st Professional Tailors with discount offered to members

Community Groups and Member's events provide information and encouragement with a chance to learn from each other. One member's event focused on home gardening with a visit to the gardens of three members who were using grey water, worm farms, raised garden beds and/or urban permaculture.

3. Not all members come to the community groups with ideas for **actions** or activities for change. Some come for several months before they finally commit to an action and begin seeking practical information. They come because they like some aspect of the group – sharing produce or neighbourhood building. One member said 'This is a very important group for me. The only reason I feel I can keep coming is that I know you won't push me' and she has found ways to make changes – buying green power and a Bokashi bin for food waste . Groups generally begin by sharing any actions people have taken that month. There are always examples of what others are doing. At one of the member's events, *Feasting and Cooking on Low Footprint Food*, we shared recipes and tasted fabulous foods.

We are role models for each other

4. We all need support and encouragement to maintain our new behaviours and to set and reach new goals. Sustainable Communities is able to do that with the support of good networks and its excellent grass roots approach to getting our own houses in order while we tackle the bigger global issues before us.

Other activities undertaken by Sustainable Community Members include:

- *Reducing use of packaging*
- *Backyard gardening at home and in community groups*
- *Using the Ethical Supermarket Shopping Guide to assist our food purchasing*
- *Preserving the backyard harvest*
- *Sharing and exchanging our produce in community groups and with neighbours*
- *Installing rain water tanks and using grey water,*
- *Carrying out energy audits of homes and making manageable alterations for energy efficiency*

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