

## Aspley Special School – Kingfisher Centre

*From Little Things, Big Things Grow.*

Imagine you are teenagers with moderate intellectual and physical disabilities. You may be unable to speak or write your name, but you want to become valued contributing community members when you leave school.

Today, in the developed world, in an era of unprecedented waste of material resources, there is also a massive waste of available human resources, be they teenagers with disabilities or elderly citizens.

Today many businesses are capital-intensive, designed to minimise labour and based on non-renewable fossil fuels.

You and I on the other hand, run on renewable resources, but unlike machines, we use the same amount of food, renewable resources, whether we are working or not working.

So is there a simple way to join together wasted material resources with under-utilised human resources, in a way that doesn't cost the Earth?

This question faced the staff, students and parents at Aspley Special School in 1983.

Could we help make the paradigm shift from the present waste management of materials, to a more sustainable option, the waste minimisation of both human and material resources?

Could a very simple school community recycling scheme make Aspley Special School students, very special?

Well, we commenced recycling cans in 1983 and raised the princely sum of twenty-five dollars.

We continued to collect cans, which the students loved to crush, because it was something all of them could do.

The fact that they were learning to work safely, stay on task and cooperate, was just a bonus.

The students soon realised what they could do, not what they couldn't do, and to adapt the words of Paul Kelly: - *"From little things, big things grow."* It was time to take the big step forward.

We now accepted all types of genuine recyclables so long as the students were capable of sorting the materials. We produce so-called "waste" 24 hours a day: - therefore we accepted recyclables 24 hours a day. So "Don't throw it away. Throw it our way!"

In 1992 our vision became a reality. We built Kingfisher Centre at a cost of \$92 000. Our students' recycling activities generated half these funds.

93 teenagers and adults with disabilities, teaching staff and volunteers, now perform 423 hours work at the Centre each week. Kingfisher Centre now generates up to \$20 000 a year, and is the most comprehensive school community recycling station in the world.

Recycling funds have been used to solar heat the school's therapy pool and to build 2 shade houses, where the students' pot up 1000 native plants each week and a shed where refillable containers are sorted and stored.

During school semesters, the students and "at risk" high school students sort the recyclables. Past students volunteer at the Centre and are a wonderful example to our students.

On school days, the public who drop off their recyclables see the students' abilities, not their disabilities. This is a vital aspect of this initiative.

During school vacations our V.I.Ps, Volunteers In Partnership, retirees "recycled teenagers" become our labour-intensive workforce. Teamwork, the essential ingredient.

Students from Pre-school to University and students from Japan assist in these "hands-on" activities but are also exposed to the Centre's environmental education program which is based on the 3Rs:- **"REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE"** and the aim to show that a truly viable economy can only be achieved if we sustain the environment and have social cohesion.

The project has been taken on three lecture tours to Japan, (courtesy of the Science Education Foundation of Japan) to promote the Queensland Government's 3Rs curriculum and Kingfisher Centre's concepts. Japan has now produced its own 3Rs textbook.

In 1995 our project was chosen, as only one of eighteen global projects, for presentation at the United Nations First International Childrens' Conference on the Environment in the UK.

Eight hundred gifted children from ninety-one countries attended the conference. It was a memorable moment when a student from Aspley Special School, the only student with a disability, stood up in front of the huge audience and said, "I like recycling, and it's fun!"

Aspley Special School's recycling initiative for the past twenty-two years, has received support from all levels of government, the Education Department, school staff, the media and in particular, many very Special School students, their parents and friends in the community.

**Please REUSE this sheet by giving it to a friend who might value it.**