




Perfect Pitcher
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Citizen Scientist
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Kids and canopies *cooling the planet*

by *Catrina Luz Aniere and Joselyn Juraszek*

When young people were asked what they thought the big environmental issues were, they said they were anxious about climate change and that our cities are heating up. So, they came up with a plan to help.

The effects of climate change are taught in schools. Children know about the urban heat island effect and that some native animals are facing extinction. They also know that some metropolitan councils have only 10 per cent tree canopy and 60 per cent hard surfaces such as carparks, driveways and roads.

Young members of the not-for-profit youth environmental organisation Millennium Kids conducted a survey asking more than 500 fellow young people across the Perth metropolitan area about what they thought should be done to combat these issues. With help from non-for-profit tree planting organisation Trillion Trees, their response was to cool the planet by increasing a love of trees, increasing the tree canopy and protecting the ecosystems they support. And so, Green Lab was born.

The Green Lab Action Plan involves encouraging kids to get outdoors to learn about their local environment by embracing nature as a classroom. The Green Lab Challenge involves completing a series of modules and environmental-focused activities that can be completed in their own environment.

AND SO, IT BEGINS

The first Green Lab event, held in 2019, was a pilot two-day workshop at Lightning Swamp in the Perth suburb of Noranda for 120 students from local primary schools. Millennium Kids partnered with Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) and the City of

Bayswater to guide students and teachers from Bassendean, Weld Square, Hillcrest and West Morley primary schools through a Green Lab experience.

They explored the bushland site alongside scientists, artists, Indigenous custodians and citizen science facilitators, looking at the habitat and the pressure from the built environment that was encroaching on the bushland. Students looked for birds, checked out tracks and scats, and built a robot, which analysed soil. They discussed their learning and developed project plans and at the end of the two days the students pitched their ideas to the Mayor of City of Bayswater, Cr Dan Bull.

“Students developed an impressive understanding of modern sustainability challenges,” said Cr Bull. “They acknowledged the need to build roads and infrastructure but wanted to see this balanced with revegetation and retain as many trees as possible.”

“I heard about ideas for sustainability education initiatives, changes they would like to see to rules and policy, and revegetation projects. These are the change-leaders of our future, and it’s really encouraging to see primary school aged children thinking at this level.”

Opposite page

Main Through Green Lab, students develop an action plan for local bushland with support from mentors and the DBCA team.

Photos – DBCA/Millennium Kids



“They go on a journey of self-discovery, design solutions to real world problems, research, seek guidance and manage their project from conception to completion.”

After the two-day Millennium Kids event, the students developed their own Green Lab initiative in a local green space near their school to help the community understand the importance of canopy and the need to increase, protect and monitor tree cover in their local area.

The students were supported through the program by Millennium Kids and their citizen science team using the ‘Skills for Life’ approach, which allows mentors to support young people to explore, identify and address environmental issues and influence their communities through local, regional and international partnerships. They go on a journey of self-discovery, design solutions to real world problems, research, seek guidance and manage their project from conception to completion.

The Green Lab pilot was commended by the Public Health Advocacy Institute of Western Australia, winning a Local Government Policy Award.

THE GREEN WEB

As the threat of a novel coronavirus reached Australian shores in early 2020, a timely opportunity arrived from Curtin University which had an existing platform that would be a perfect fit to house the Green Lab Challenge online and continue

to build the vision of a cool city with tree-lined streets where wildlife has a place and bushland is truly protected.

The interactive online platform was launched by Professor Lyn Beazley in May 2020 and promoted to schools on World Environment Day in June.

The online portal is a central hub where young people complete modules created by Millennium Kids and stakeholders and features five projects developed by young members.

Participants learn about the big issues from citizen scientists, artists, historians, community stakeholders and cultural leaders and are inspired to make change using a series of citizen science and Humanities and Social Science (HASS) skill building activities, earning badges as they complete tasks.

GET INVOLVED

Green Labs are currently being developed in City of South Perth, Town of Victoria Park, City of Kalamunda and in the City of Melville with a three-year plan to create a connected corridor of Green Labs across the Perth metropolitan area.

To start a Green Lab or for more information visit millenniumkids.com.au.

Top left COVID-19 brought with it many opportunities for change. On World Environment Day, Green Lab Patron, Prof Lyn Beazley, launched an online partnership with Curtin University, taking Green Lab to the classroom through online resources and tutorials. Photo – Rae Fallon

Top The Millennium Kids Youth Board surveyed 500 young people who stated loss of urban canopy and deforestation were one of their major concerns in the Perth metropolitan area. Photo – Wayne O’Sullivan

Above Millennium Kids online.

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