
A GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE: A CASE STUDY OF 'THE GREEN GROUP' AT HORIZON SCHOOL, DUBAI

Theri Bailey (baileytt@emirates.net.ae)

Affiliation: Editor Wildlife Middle East News (www.wmenews.com)

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world.
In fact, it is the only thing that ever has".
Margaret Mead.*

In September 2006, I set up a Green Group, with like minded parents, at our children's school here in Dubai. None of our members are environmental experts, but we are driven by our desire to work in partnership with the staff of the school to ensure that our children learn to become better global citizens who know how to live more sustainably on this earth than does our own generation. Living in such a 'throw away' society as the UAE, which has one of the biggest ecological footprints in the world, seems to make our task even more important, if not a little daunting!

The objective of the Horizon School Green Group is as follows;
"To support the school's community (Pupils, Teachers, Parents, Management Team, Administrative Team and Shareholders) to;

1. learn about, delight in, value and care for the natural world.
2. understand environmental issues in order to strive towards solutions.
3. participate actively in the protection of the local and global environment."

This quote by David Suzuki sums up well our hope for engendering our children's understanding of the importance of our natural environment in their lives :

*"We are the Earth, through the plants and animals that nourish us.
We are the rains and the oceans that flow through our veins.
We are the breath of the forest of the land, and the
plants of the sea.....
Linked in a web of community, we are all interconnected."
David Suzuki from "The Declaration of Intterdependence".*

Listed below are some examples of projects that the Horizon Green Group has achieved and is continuing to support and encourage:

- **Environmental audit** of the school.
- Creation of an **Environmental Policy**. See the policy on the Horizon School website www.horizonschooldubai.com.
- Introduction of an annual whole school 6 week topic on an environmental theme to the **school curriculum**. In the past couple of years we have covered 'Water' and 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Repair'. Staff have enjoyed these topics and have done a huge amount in their classrooms with the topic culminating in exhibitions and assemblies for parents.
- Installation of **recycling bins** (paper and cardboard, plastics, aluminium) and a paper recycling system within the school.
- A **campaign** to reduce the amount of plastic waste generated by the children through drinking water bottles. Reusable metal water bottles were ordered and are now used by most children at the school. Currently we are participating in an aluminium can recycling campaign.
- Creation of an after school club called the '**Enviro-kids**' who have done practical projects such as make bird boxes out of recycled wood and planters out of recycled tyres.
- Assisting in projects to 'green' the outside area of the school. We have run a couple of '**planting**' days when all students from the school have brought in and planted annuals. We now aim to encourage the planting of more regional and drought resistant plant species.
- The publication of various '**Enviro-tips**' in the school's newsletter and '**Enviro-messages**' around the school.
- The creation of a '**Green Corner**' in the school library where students and teachers can readily find environmental books and access relevant bookmarked websites.
- Assisting with contacts and the arrangement of environmental **field trips** and **speakers**.
- **Celebration** of key environmental dates, such as UAE Environment day on the 4th February and World Animal Day on the 4th October.
- Initiation and coordination of a '**Second Hand Sale**'.
- **Fund raising and sponsorship** to support local and international environmental/ conservation projects. Currently we support the Emirates Environmental Group (www.eeg-uae.org) and we will be

fund-raising for the Yemeni Leopard Recovery Programme (www.yemenileopard.org) in the new school year.

In all our activities, whilst we are trying to address serious environmental issues, we always ensure that everything is done with a very large dose of FUN! In addition, our Green Group aims to be practical and realistic about what our Group and the school can achieve. After all, the members and staff are very busy people, so we do what we can and try not to beat ourselves up for not doing more!

Our Horizon Green Group would like to encourage parents and teachers from other schools to set up similar groups to our own and would be happy to share our ideas and experience. If you already have a school Green Group, then please share with us what you're up to.

Our Group would like to take this opportunity to thank the Horizon School management team and teaching staff for their continued enthusiasm, support and desire to work with us.