



## Great Start's Project Sunshine: Sharing the love with NZ!

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**Location:** Great Start, Taita.

**Theme:** Leading in and leaderful.

**As our previous story on Project Sunshine shows, creativity and play can be phenomenal aspects of growing local community. When we are having fun, others want to join in. Building on this approach, Great Start have started working with others to share the love of sunflowers, bees and community across the country.**

In 2010, Project Sunshine quickly found that growing sunflowers brought out the best in local people as much as it helped beautify parts of the community. Children became recognised as leaders and sunflowers became a catalyst for all sorts of things, including the development of a connection with a local beekeeper, Al Kilminster.

Al was keen to work with the Taita community in establishing a local beekeeping group. Project Sunshine linked Al with the gardening club kids and soon the children were learning about the importance of bees, and their current plight. The children also realised that sunflower planting could help other children to make their communities beautiful too, while building connections between people and bees to help ensure the survival of the bee population. As a result, the Bright Spot campaign has turned into Project Sunshine and this season (2011) it is going national!

To do that the gardening club kids needed a lot more seeds than those they have harvested from their own sunflowers so a connection was made with Eco Seeds. Eco Seeds supplied the original non-hybrid sunflower seeds for Project Sunshine which means these seeds are fertile and can be harvested to use again the following year allowing new communities to start their own sunflower projects without ongoing seed costs. The use of open pollinated, organic seed is particularly important to Project Sunshine because this ensures that the sunflower ecocycle can continue to

evolve naturally to local conditions, without the inclusion of artificially modified seed. It also means these sunflower seeds can be shared and passed on as they have been for hundreds of years.

The national Project Sunshine launch on July 2 2011 saw Taita garden club children joined by young people from all over New Zealand. These young New Zealanders were all participating in the 2011 United Nations Youth Model United Nations outreach programme, which is designed to promote the delegates as global citizens, encouraging them to give back to the community and to become involved to begin making changes.

This is exactly what Project Sunshine facilitates too. Project Sunshine's aim is to facilitate children's desire to live in beautiful spaces where a oneness between humans and the living world is recognised. In this case, the seeds are both a gift from the children of Taita to all children of Aotearoa New Zealand and an encouragement to them that they can be changemakers in their communities too. The launch started this off by giving all the UN youth delegates a 'Project Sunshine Pack' containing information about the initiative, facts on bees and sunflowers, a guide to growing a project in your own community, an invitation to feed back and stay connected, and two packets of sunflower seeds. One of these packets was supplied by Eco Seeds while the other contained second generation seeds harvested from the Great Start Children's Garden Club's own sunflowers. Each pack that goes out around NZ will contain some of Taita's very first harvested seeds and the hope is that every community that takes up the Project will in turn share their seeds.

Open pollination and sharing also reference the hopes Project Sunshine has for other communities: the idea is for a local leader to bring Project Sunshine to the attention of a local school, community group, sports club or neighbourhood group and work with their children, to support them in their ideas for mass plantings of sunflowers in their community. Not only to beautify, but also to highlight the plight of bee colonies in NZ and to foster stronger environmental and community connections and to have fun! How this happens will be different in different communities but it is the adult and organisational role to support and encourage the children's efforts, as they develop their leadership qualities and bring about both environmental and community transformation through the simple act of planting and growing, working together and having fun.

In this way, Project Sunshine also illustrates the beginnings of transformational community change. While planting sunflowers may be a simple act, it takes people to make it happen. Key people have been supported to bring Project Sunshine to life in Taita through Great Start. This support is since been coupled with an increase in community participation and connection that has led to a greater sense of control over the beautification of the physical environment as well greater understandings of environmental and community interconnections both within and beyond Taita. In this way, Project Sunshine can be understood as working across the four dimensions of transformational change. These quadrants of change: personal, relational, structural and cultural are discussed in relation to peace-building by Lederach and colleagues (2007) and illustrated below.



Project Sunshine supports and allows the personal value sets of the children to shine through and to lead the project. This support and these values have worked together to establish, renew and recreate relational ties and connections on a range of levels leading to a shift in the culture of the local community with regard to how children can be involved in Taita and how their efforts are respected and cared for. This is contributing to a growing culture of inclusion of all kinds of people within the community and even beginning to challenge assumed structures and systems in wider society. Simply by taking control of small plots of land that are not privately owned or maintained, communities can demonstrate their power in co-creating an environment with nature for themselves.

So now Project Sunshine is growing community in streets and back yards far from Taita, by inviting Aotearoa children to become leaders in their communities, and encouraging the adults around them to support them to blaze trails of brightness throughout neighbourhoods. It is hoped that by sharing the ideas behind Project Sunshine that other communities will also experience the simple but profound change that the Taita community experienced by supporting children to lead and to take pride and make a visible difference in their community, while having fun. In Taita, the children learnt a lot and the adults did too, and the learning and connecting continues as the group extends their ideas most weeks when they meet to work in the gardens near the Great Start house.

### Key learnings

- Notice what is working in your area – building on the strengths of an activity can lead to many local connections and extend the concept into new and unexpected places.
- Piggy back on other events. Linking the launch to the United Nations Youth Model United Nations outreach programme meant that Project Sunshine could gift seeds directly to children from all over the country. It also garnered the project national media attention.
- Allow all kinds of people, including children to contribute and to lead. We go further together and have more fun!
- Doing things creates a huge energy and sense of control over our environments, and our places in them.

### Key outcomes

- Sharing local learnings with others wanting to do similar things. Every area will do things a little differently but we don't have to continually reinvent the wheel.

- Growing leadership, generosity and pride amongst the children and wider community locally and further afield. Taita children are now aware that they have the potential to positively influence others far from Taita, and that their actions can be important enough to be shared in the national media as well. Other communities are also seeing that children can be significant sources of ideas, action and leadership.
- Wider sustenance for bees and growing community-environment connections across the land.

#### **Contact details**

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#### **Reference**

Lederach, J.P, Neufeld, R. and Culbertson, H. 2007. Reflective Peacebuilding: A planning, monitoring and learning toolkit. The Joan B Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies.

[http://www.crsprogramquality.org/storage/pubs/peacebuilding/reflective\\_peacebldg.pdf](http://www.crsprogramquality.org/storage/pubs/peacebuilding/reflective_peacebldg.pdf)

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