Making Friends for Urban Grasslands

Lessons learnt 2006-7
In the case of Central Creek Grasslands, urgent action (fencing) to stop degrading activities such as illegal vehicle access needed to be put in place. An evening meeting with residents was the main community liaison prior to fencing. The fence itself, installed in about 1998, became perhaps the most powerful communication tool about the value and preciousness of the grassland. Interpretation signage was installed to reinforce this message. Later high quality fencing, perimeter landscaping, pathways and notice board, installed in 2003 heighten the sense of the Grassland’s value to all passers-by. Temporary high fencing prevented building rubbish from a new housing development from damaging the grassland and making it unkempt looking.
Making Friends for Urban Grasslands Grant

This was a Natural Heritage Trust Grant Port Phillip & Westemport Catchment Management Authority Grant

The project’s objectives were to:
- increase awareness of Native Grassland conservation amongst neighbours of the two urban grasslands
- establish grassland revegetation in areas of degraded grassland, removing sources of weeds and increasing extent of habitat
- carry out intensive targeted weed eradication utilising post-ecological burn conditions to eradicate priority weed species in project areas
- initiate an eradication and detection program for Piptochaetium uroquenense at Central Creek Grassland
- determine the effectiveness of grassland management efforts by mapping the vegetation quality at Central Creek Grassland.

Making Friends for Urban Grasslands

Community engagement activities included
- plantings,
- illustrated talks inside
- field-based walk & talks,
- production of laminated displays
- production of a brochure in 5 languages including English

A bit of theory

Scott Bonar
Island Press 2007

This Book is available through
Andrew Isles Bookstore, Prahran
These two theories that are discussed in Bonar’s book can assist in predicting the Community Engagement actions that will have most impact. Several participants commented after this presentation that Maslow’s theory above has been extensively critiqued and variations, refinements and exceptions have been developed. Two references that follow this up are:

http://www.analytitech.com/mb021/motivation

*Management and change in Africa: A cross-cultural perspective* by Terence Jackson

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**Maslow’s heirachy of needs**


**Techniques of influence**

- Liking & similarity
- Authority
- Reciprocation
- Commitment & consistency
- Social Proof
- Scarcity
Scarcity

- People value things more when they are scarce

• Scott Bonar (2007) after Robert Cialdini (2001)

Reciprocation

- People have a strong urge to pay back or reciprocate when something is given to them.

• Scott Bonar (2007) after Robert Cialdini (2001)

Authority

- People will be more influenced by persons they perceive to be authorities on the subject

• Scott Bonar (2007) after Robert Cialdini (2001)
Liking & Similarity

- People are more willing to be influenced by people they like & know


Social Proof

- People are strongly influenced to like things other people like


Commitment & Consistency

- People have a strong urge to be consistent in what they say and do.

And here are some of the activities we did and which elements of the theories above appear relevant to their success (or otherwise!). The assessment of the project was provided in the seminar package.

Generally this group had to have their safety fears about snakes addressed prior to them being able to relax and be open to other experiences. They were then strongly focussed on ‘Social’ needs that were addressed with a picnic. They then seemed to become far more receptive to learning and talking about their surroundings and left the day strongly expressing how important the environment was and how this message needed to be more widely known. However, fatigue and soreness from an overlong walk in warm weather began to distract people later in the session.

All of the techniques of influence came in to play with the MCMC staff who conducted the activities.

These laminated displays are used in the community noticeboard at Central Creek Grassland, Reservoir and primarily aim to address residents safety concerns but also provide information to visitors for Esteem and Self-actualisation needs.
The planting days cater to social needs for several regular Friends of Merri Creek participants. For local residents, highlighting this aspect has been particularly effective, emphasising the activity as ‘family-friendly’.

The brochures used the faces of local women, in particular older women from several cultural backgrounds thus exploiting the techniques of influence ‘Liking & similarity’ and ‘Authority’. The women’s faces and stories also provided an example of ‘social-proof’ in that their participation in the brochure production sends a message that this is a valuable issue to devote time to.

Two evening walks were held. The first, in late winter, was poorly attended unsurprisingly as the dark and cold meant we had poorly catered for peoples physiological needs. The attendees were strongly committed to addressing Esteem and self-actualisation goals, sufficient to ignore their own discomfort. A late spring evening walk proved far more successful!