

KREATIVE KOALAS CASE STUDY

GERRINGONG PUBLIC SCHOOL WINNING THE WAR ON WASTE



Gerringong Public School and science teacher Sue Hassler catapulted themselves into the Kreative Koalas program with an unmatched enthusiasm to learn more about recycling and waste management. In doing so they not only won the award for best community project but were showcased on ABC's "War on Waste" in 2018.

The school combined their creative artwork, Captain Koala, with a TerraCycle Drop-off point and collected over 60,000 items for which the school received money they have directed back into their sustainability work. "We hope to inspire better knowledge of, and involvement in, recycling especially through the provision of this collection point for hard to recycle items such as toothbrushes, Nescafe coffee pods and pump dispensers," the school said.

During the Kreative Koalas journey, the school participated in a plastics audit and was astounded to collect 822 pieces of plastic including chip packets, snap-lock bags, clingwrap, foil and muesli bar wrappers. A second audit found an additional 494 pieces of plastic in the school's water easement. These plastics became the focus of the school's war on waste.

"I showed the students Mission Blue with Sylvia Earle, and then we talked about plastics; their break-down periods, where they come from and why they are a problem," Mrs Hassler said. "Then

we looked at their lunchboxes and how we could minimise plastics in them. We saw a huge change in lunchboxes and there is now a lot less clingwrap, for example, coming into the school."

Gerringong Public School then overhauled its bin system. Now waste is separated into paper, foil and hard plastics, Terracycle (chip and muesli bar packets) and landfill. "With a school of 430 kids we've gone from filling 21 landfill bins each week to four and they are usually only a quarter full," Mrs Hassler said.



[SUE HASSLER TALKS KREATIVE KOALAS \(CLICK TO WATCH\)](#)

The school has been very successful in educating and engaging their local community using Facebook, school newsletters and their local newspaper The Bugle with Captain Koala now becoming a community TerraCycle facility.

"There's no point in teaching literacy and numeracy if we've wrecked our environment in the meantime," Mrs Hassler said. "It becomes about starting independent action with nine and ten-year-olds and that's just gold for me. I've got kids who'll come to me and say, 'On the weekend, we picked up all these plastics on the beach' and I feel like they do get it and they're implementing it in their own lives and making a difference."

In 2018 Sue Hassler became the Kreative Koalas Ambassador and brought together the six local primary and secondary schools to create the Kiama Community of Schools (KCoS), helping Australians meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Initiatives of the KCoS include formulating a Sustainability Action Plan and holding Sustainability Days.

Kreative Koalas focus of collaborating with thought leaders who back the next generation of young people who are going to rethink the world and create a better future is something we can all be involved in and be proud of.

