

Recycle: It All Begins With YOUTH!

By Laura Kaplan

This past fall, the Ecology Center played a key role in an exciting new campaign to make part of Michigan a little bit greener. The Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission (GCMPC) launched a countywide recycling outreach campaign that relied on the Ecology Center to provide services for the area's K-12 classrooms. Between September and December 2006, 100 hands-on workshops were held in classrooms throughout the county. One of the main goals of GCMPC's campaign was to increase recycling rates, and they appealed to county residents with the slogan: "Recycle: It all begins with YOU!"

The Ecology Center was happy to take part in this effort – after all, it has been providing fun, age-appropriate environmental lessons to schools and youth groups in Ann Arbor and surrounding communities for decades. In recent years, the main focus has been on holding workshops that encourage solid waste reduction in Washtenaw County, so the Genesee program presented a unique opportunity to bring the program's resources and message to a new part of Michigan.



Schoolteachers had a number of workshops to choose from. One of our elementary programs gives students the opportunity to practice recycling by sorting real trash objects they would have in their own homes, and another program allows students to actually take part in the recycling process by turning old scrap papers into new sheets of paper. One workshop uses stories, songs, and play-dough to teach very young children what kinds of items they can recycle, and another program teaches students in high school to be savvy consumers and consider the environmental impacts of everyday products.

The Genesee County programs are now over and it's great to report that the response from teachers and students has been overwhelmingly positive. Several teachers voiced an intention to start recycling programs at their schools or in their classrooms and many were eager to invite us back for another visit next year. One

kindergarten teacher told us, "I think it was better than pretty much any presentation I have ever had done for my students. Whoever created it did a great job, and the presenter was excellent!" Another elementary teacher was so excited by our "Compostability!" workshop that she decided to start a classroom compost bin to carry the lesson forward throughout the school year. Even a high school student told her teacher that she learned a lot from one of our programs and actually thought it was fun!

By making recycling a part of children's lessons at school, we hope to encourage kids to take those lessons home and get their families recycling. A fourth-grader from Burton, Michigan, summed things up nicely in a letter to the Ecology Center: "Thank you for teaching us about pollution. I think I will recycle more now." And that is exactly how we hope to make a difference in Genesee County and beyond – one child, or one family, at a time.

For more information about recycling in Genesee County, visit www.gcmpc.org. To learn more about Environmental Education at the Ecology Center, including our classroom programs, visit www.ecocenter.org/education.shtml or call Laura at (734) 761-3186, ext. 111.



Laura Kaplan is the Ecology Center's Environmental Educator.