

## School nursery a national winner

Mirboo North Secondary College's (MNSC) innovative small scale nursery has been showcased on the national stage, announced joint winner of the Environment Minister's Award for a Cleaner Environment at the Banksia Sustainability Awards in Sydney.

The project was also a finalist in the Education and Sustainability category, joining 49 other finalists from 120 entries Australia wide.

Council financially supported Project Manager and MNSC teacher, Allen Riseley's, journey to Sydney through its 2015/2016 Councillor Discretionary Fund Program, where he said he was proud to be representing Gippsland.

"The benefits of this project are far more numerous and tangible than any other project I have seen in my 12 years in the field," Mr Riseley explained. "CEOs from large multinational businesses discussed a sustainable future and now the welfare of the environment is a central part of their business plan."

Mr Riseley was required to present a four minute, four slide snapshot of the project; a far cry from his 2,000 word submission including up to 20 pieces of supporting evidence such as photos, maps and documents.

"There was great interest in our tree project initiative and it would be great to see it offered to other schools," he said. "And to think this all started with a simple search for Environment Awards on Google!"

The innovative tree project at MNSC involves mass population tree production with the majority of the work done by students. The lunchtime Enviro Team of 15 students prepares trays with seeds from the South Gippsland Seed Bank. Members also do other tasks such as watering and sorting. When there are at least 30 seed trays ready with flourishing seedlings, students put them out on 10 old graphics tables where around 50 Year 7 students (five per table) tube out one tray of 50 seedlings per pair in 50 minutes. The Year 8 students then take their place and repeat the process. The result is that many tubes are prepared in a very short amount of time.

The record is 2800 trees in 100 minutes. The project only produces natives and has around 15 local species.

"The project has so many positive outcomes," Mr Riseley explained. "It earns money for the school and the students get a say in how it is spent. The students really feel they are contributing to the community and environment - they gain valuable propagation skills and enhance their teamwork and work ethic."

The project produces around 10,000 native trees per year, supplying 30,000 trees to 25 local landholders over the last three years, many of which the students planted.

The project currently has over 15,000 trees tubed out, which the team has managed to do in less than two days.

Cr James Fawcett said this project wouldn't be possible without the college's long standing dedication to leading the way in local sustainability.

"MNSC's Landcare Cadets program has been operating for 10 years, with five members taking part on an extra-curricular basis, then five years ago the school introduced a Community Breakout program for Year 9 students and all of a sudden there were six free periods available to dedicate to Landcare," he explained.

"This hands-on commitment puts the environment at the forefront of our next generation and gives students a unique insight into how to take the tree from seed to forest."

*Caption: Photo 1 - Alissa, Josh, Natalie, Allen Riseley, Brigit, Ashleigh and Jess with their Banksia Sustainability Award trophy.*

*Photo 2 - Leah with a finished tray of seedlings.*

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